

## COLAC SECONDARY COLLEGE

### PARENT DISPUTE POLICY

#### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to explain to the Colac Secondary College community how our school will approach disputes that may arise between parents in relation to decisions about a student's education.

#### SCOPE

Colac Secondary College acknowledges and welcomes all family structures and parenting arrangements, including (but not limited to) single parents, step-parents, same-sex parents, co-parents and informal carers. We also recognise that parents and carers play an invaluable role in a child's learning and wellbeing by being actively involved in school life.

While acknowledging that a range of people may be involved in providing care for students at our school, this policy only relates to disputes between a student's parents or persons with parental responsibility under a court order.

#### Informal Carers

Colac Secondary College understands that there may be families in our school community where students are being cared for by a relative or other adult, rather than their parents.

In these circumstances, in order to allow these carers to work with Colac Secondary College and make decisions about the student's education, we will request **written and signed documentation, stating the care arrangements for the child.**

Generally, an informal carer who has provided the school with this paperwork may make school-based decisions for the student and may access school information ordinarily provided to a parent.

#### POLICY

##### Decision-making and parental responsibility

Parental responsibility is defined as all of the duties, powers, responsibilities and authority, which, by law, parents have in relation to their children. Each parent of a child under 18 years of age has parental responsibility for his or her child unless this responsibility is varied by a court order or parenting plan. When a decision relates to a major long-term issue for a student, Colac Secondary College will generally seek to approach both parents, or those who have parental responsibility, in relation to that decision (where those parents are known to and are in contact with the school). For day-to-day decisions, Colac Secondary will generally approach the person with whom the student is living with or residing with on that day.

Parents can find more guidance on how the school will manage decision making for students in the Department's policy on 'Decision Making Responsibilities for Students'.

### **Family Law Act Orders and Care Arrangements**

Parents are responsible for providing Colac Secondary College with up-to-date information and documentation relating to:

- Family Law Act Orders
- parenting plans
- informal arrangements that are in place in respect of students at our school

It is not the responsibility of school staff to monitor or to enforce Family Law Act Orders (or other parenting or care arrangements) for students.

### **Intervention Orders**

Colac Secondary College understands that some families may have Family Violence Intervention Orders in place.

Parents are responsible for providing Colac Secondary College with up-to-date information and documentation relating to Intervention Orders and should contact the Principal, or delegate, to discuss how staff can best support students in these circumstances. Should your Intervention Order be changed or varied, it is important that you inform the Principal, or delegate, and provide any updated documentation.

Department policy states that breaches of Intervention Orders should be reported to Victoria Police.

### **Collection**

Colac Secondary College understands that Family Law Act Orders or parenting plans will often include arrangements about which parent is to spend time with the children, and when.

Generally, providing that both parents have shared parental responsibility, parents can collect their children from school. Whilst Colac Secondary College encourages parents to abide by Family Law Act Orders, school staff are not responsible for enforcing them.

If a dispute between parents over the collection of a student happens at Colac Secondary College, generally, we will:

- encourage the parents to resolve their dispute away from school
- encourage to parents to ensure the child's attendance at school is not compromised as a result of the dispute over collection
- where appropriate, move the student to a safe place away from the dispute
- ask the disputing parties to leave the school grounds if the dispute is causing disruption or concern to the child or any other members of the school community
- if the dispute cannot be resolved, Colac Secondary College may contact Victoria Police and/or Child Protection.

### **Visits during school hours**

We understand that there may occasionally be a reason why a parent or carer may want to speak to or see their child at school, during school hours.

If there is a particular pressing or unavoidable issue that cannot wait until the end of the school day, we ask that parents or carers call the school office to make the request to speak to or see their child during school hours.

We also ask that parents avoid arranging to visit their children at school wherever possible, as this can cause inappropriate disruptions to the school day.

All parents or carers who visit our school during school hours, other than during usual school pick up and drop off times, are required to sign in as a visitor at the school office.

### **Requests for information**

Parents are generally entitled to information ordinarily provided to parents, including school reports and newsletters.

Parents seeking information that is not ordinarily provided to parents are encouraged to apply for access through the Freedom of Information process, or, if the information is sought for use in court proceedings, by issuing a subpoena.

**Freedom of Information requests should be directed to:**  
**Manager – Freedom of Information Unit**  
**Department of Education and Training**  
**2 Treasury Place**  
**EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002**  
**03 9637 3134**  
**foi@edumail.vic.gov.au**

### **Managing Disputes**

Whenever faced with a dispute between persons who are responsible for decision-making in relation to a child, staff at Colac Secondary will seek to:

- avoid becoming involved
- avoid attempting to determine the dispute
- act neutrally and not adopt sides
- act in the best interests of the student involved
- act in the best interests of the school community

Colac Secondary College encourages parents and carers to seek the assistance of the Family Relationship Centre or obtain independent legal advice if they are unable to reach an agreement about important decisions.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

School Policy Advisory Library:

- Decision Making Responsibilities for Students
- Requests for Information About Students
- Intervention Orders

#### **EVALUATION**

This policy will be reviewed every three to four years or more frequently if necessary due to changes in regulations or circumstances.

Council Approval date	December 2023
Review date	2026
DET/VRQA required	Yes