



# Victorian Principals Association

Unit 2, 13-21 Vale Street, North Melbourne Victoria 3051, Australia

t: (03) 8379 4000 f: (03) 9326 9950 e: [info@vpa.org.au](mailto:info@vpa.org.au) w: [www.vpa.org.au](http://www.vpa.org.au)

## VPA Position Paper

---

### Vexatious Complainants

#### **Purpose**

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) seeks to provide increased support for Principals/Schools in conflict situations involving community members.

#### **Background to the VPA Position**

The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

- Increasingly, Principal class members are being unfairly criticised and targeted by community members for processes in their schools. This can be via social media, students and in person.
- The need for Principals class members to be supported with training that provides them with skills and knowledge about how to react when they are being verbally attacked or criticised by community members.
- Principals are dealing with increasing levels of mental health issues from community members.
- The VPA has real concern about the occupational health and wellbeing of principal class members in dealing with continual and complex issues.
- According to the Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, lack of support is one of the prime stressors for Principals.
- There is no working code of conduct for community members that is well publicised and backdated for existing community members.
- The community member often has, or seems to have, more rights than the Principal or school staff members.
- Sometimes schools do not hear back from regions after providing the RD with documentation.
- Schools are less protected from abuse than other Government agencies and have fewer supports and measures of security or alarms.

#### **VPA Position**

The VPA advocates for:

- Properly trained personnel in regions to deal with conflict situations or complaints.
- Drafting and distribution of a survey to schools which seeks to ascertain the type of threats made to staff over a two week period.
- Principal class members to be regularly supported with clear instructions on how to cope with conflict.
- A Code of Conduct, backdated for existing community members, to be written by DEECD and publicised widely.
- Principals to be encouraged to use the powers issued to them under the Summary Offences Act – 1966 (Victoria) whereby they can issue a Trespass Order if they believe their safety or the good order of the school is being compromised.

- DEECD to be responsible for declaring vexatious complainants.
- Provision of timely feedback to the school from DEECD.
- The generation of positive media coverage showing how Principals and staff are dealing with conflict, rather than how aggrieved parents are feeling.
- DEECD to provide communications such as posters to be produced and displayed in the workplace; highlighting statewide expectations of acceptable behaviour.
- The Employee Assistance Program to be promoted annually in all schools.
- The provision of adequate security measures in all schools and the capacity through camera surveillance for schools to enter lockdown mode from the Office area.
- Usage of Dr Phil Riley's research in the Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey to inform an evidence-based approach to finding solutions.

## References

S026-2012 Using Social Media: Guide for DEECD Employees in Schools

[https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/ohs/DEE\\_EHU-01-1-](https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/ohs/DEE_EHU-01-1-1_Occupational_Health_and_Safety_Policy.pdf)

[1 Occupational Health and Safety Policy.pdf](https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/ohs/DEE_EHU-01-1-1_Occupational_Health_and_Safety_Policy.pdf)

Riley, P (2012), *The Australian Principal Health & Wellbeing Survey 2011 Interim Report*, Monash University, [http://www.vpa.org.au/image/bqam/Principal\\_Health\\_\\_Wellbeing\\_Survey\\_Presentation.pdf](http://www.vpa.org.au/image/bqam/Principal_Health__Wellbeing_Survey_Presentation.pdf)