

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for Emergency Services



Wednesday, March 22, 2017

LAUNCH OF THE INDEPENDENT OFFICE TO RESOLVE SCHOOL DISPUTES

In an Australian-first, Victorian families will have access to an Independent Office responsible for resolving the most complex and difficult school disputes.

Minister for Education James Merlino launched the new Independent Office for School Dispute Resolution at an event at Parliament today and said that the Office would provide a dispute resolution process for schools and families that will aim to achieve a shared agreement.

The Independent Office is designed to resolve disputes concerning school-based decisions or actions. Matters that may come to the Office include issues of access and inclusion, wellbeing and engagement, management of medical conditions, responses to bullying, appropriate setting for students at risk or disengaged students.

Francis Handy will chair the new Office having worked in the public and private sectors in Australia, the United Kingdom, United States and Canada. He has more than 20 years' experience in dispute resolution, including work in schools.

Two experienced deputy chairs have also been appointed: Jo-Anne Mazzeo, a dispute resolution lawyer with a background in mental health and disability law, and Treasure Jennings, an expert in dispute resolution with a wealth of experience as the Public Transport Ombudsman.

They will be supported by 13 other Independent Office members with expertise in primary and secondary education as well as a range of other areas likely to come before the office including family disputes, vulnerable children, disability, mental health, LGBTI issues and Koorie engagement.

The members will come together on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature of a dispute with the aim of finding an outcome agreeable to all sides. For more on the new service visit the website: www.schoolresolution.vic.gov.au.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Education James Merlino

"By boosting complaint resolution services in our schools, more complaints will be resolved quickly and fairly. This is better for the student, the parents and the school."

"When the Liberals were in Government they did nothing to improve dispute resolution processes for parents and students. Thanks to the Andrews Labor Government parents will have a voice in resolving complex and difficult disputes."

Quotes attributable to Parents Victoria President Sharron Healy

"Parents Victoria applaud the introduction of the Independent Office as a long-awaited systemic improvement for school complaint resolution."

"Independence in resolving our toughest cases is vital to finding a solution all parties will be happy with. After fighting for this for over ten years, Parents Victoria is pleased that we finally have an independent avenue for school disputes."

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