

Wheatfield Primary & Nursery School



Complaints Handling Policy

WHEATFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL & Nursery

Complaints Procedure – Policy Statement

This policy is designed to establish a clear mechanism for the resolution of complaints. The Board of Governors, together with the Principal, at all times, will seek appropriate guidance from the Education Authority.

Aims

Our Complaints Procedure aims to:

- provide an efficient and thorough system through which issues are effectively addressed
- facilitate the school in providing the best possible service for its pupils
- provide a simple, speedy and accessible service that respects confidentiality
- be non-threatening, courteous and respectful
- address issues arising from complaints in a fair and honest manner within the timescales set out
- treat individuals with openness, equality and inclusiveness
- keep people informed of progress and the final outcome of the issues raised
- be simple, easily accessible and easy to use.

These procedures should be viewed as separate from other procedures and/or appeals mechanisms in such areas as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, etc.

Should it become evident at any stage that the nature of your complaint may give rise to further disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures.

We are not able to deal with anonymous complaints and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints except for the referral of child protection concerns to the appropriate Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines.

This policy relates to the parents/guardians of pupils who are currently attending Wheatfield Primary School. It is expected that any concerns of previous pupils would have been raised prior to a pupil leaving the school.

What to expect under these procedures.

Your rights as a person making a complaint.

In dealing with your complaint we will ensure that you receive:

- fair treatment;
- courtesy;
- a timely response;
- accurate advice;
- respect for your privacy – concerns will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate Agencies about your complaint;
- reasons for our decisions.

Where there are grounds to your complaint we will acknowledge this and address the issues you have raised. Similarly, we will ensure that you are clearly advised where we believe that there are no grounds to your complaint.

Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint.

In raising an issue we would expect that you:

raise issues in a timely manner;

treat our staff as professionals, in a non-threatening manner and with respect and courtesy;

provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issue you raise;

use these procedures fully and to engage in them at the appropriate levels.

In addition, we would expect that you have reasonable grounds for making a complaint and are not seeking to invoke these or other procedures as a means of dealing with issues that are more appropriately dealt with in other ways.

Making a Complaint

Stage 1 – Informal – Speaking with the teacher concerned

In the first instance a complaint or concern should normally be referred verbally to the class/subject teacher concerned, so that they may be allowed an opportunity to address the issue, as in many instances, these can arise through a

simple misunderstanding. You should observe the school's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such approaches or meetings.

Stage 2 – Informal – Speaking with the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue with him/her. You should let the Principal know in advance the nature of your concerns so that he/she can prepare for the meeting.

If you have concerns relating to the Principal, you should arrange a meeting with him./her to discuss the issues as at Stage 1.

In some circumstances the Principal will not be able to deal effectively with your concerns immediately and he/she will require some time over which to investigate and prepare a proper response. If further time is required you will be told of this.

Stage 3 – Formal – Writing to the Principal

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved at source through the informal routes proposed at Stages 1 and 2 or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at this stage. Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of immediate concern to you.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either;

- Provide a response to the issues you raised;

Or

- Indicate that your concerns are being fully investigated and the timeframe – a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received – against which you can expect a response to be issued.

Stage 4 – Formal – Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors

If you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner following the completion of Stages 1, 2 and 3, you should write to the

Chairperson of the Board of Governors, including, if applicable, copies of the original correspondence relating to Stage 3. The Chairperson will be responsible for bringing your complaint to a Governors' Sub Committee, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub Committee will have a minimum of 3 voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of immediate concern to you and outline why you feel your complaint has not been addressed satisfactorily.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and;

- Provide a response to the issues you raised;
- **or,**
- Indicate that your concerns are being fully investigated and the time frame – a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received – against which you can expect a response to be issued; unless this occurs during or immediately prior to a holiday period, in which case a response will be issued as soon as is practicably.

The investigation may require you to meet the Sub Committee of the Board of Governors and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub Committee of the Board of Governors may also speak with the parties relevant to the complaint.

Appeals Process – Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

Finally, if you still believe that your complaint has not been addressed you may write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors requesting that you be allowed to meet with the Complaints Appeals Committee of the Board of Governors to appeal the outcomes. The Chairperson will be responsible for ensuring that you are invited to the next suitable scheduled meeting of Governors where your appeal will be heard. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your Appeal.

Again, where it is evident that the nature of your complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures which may subsequently involve Governors at another level.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting at which you will have an opportunity to discuss your concerns. Since this process is consultative in nature and not adversarial, a complainant will not have the right to be accompanied or represented by any other person, unless it is deemed appropriate by the Board of Governors. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your Appeal request having been received.

Following this meeting, and within 10 working days of that meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governors' findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions.

This procedure does not provide a role for any other statutory or non-statutory body.

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

At the closure of the complaint at a school level (and within two weeks of the closure of the complaint), we will write to complainants to action our statutory obligation to inform complainants that they can pursue their complaint further via the NI Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

Our written notice will state:

- That the internal complains process has been exhausted;
- That the complainant may refer the matter to the NIPSO;
- The time limit for making such a referral to the NIPSO (usually being 6 months from the date of the school's response;
- How to contact the NIPSO

You may also complain to:

The Chief Executive, Education Authority, the Department of Education and the Education & Training Inspectorate.

Record Keeping.

The School Principal shall maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings concerning your complaint. These records shall be held confidentially in the school and shall be kept apart from pupil records. All such records will be destroyed five years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

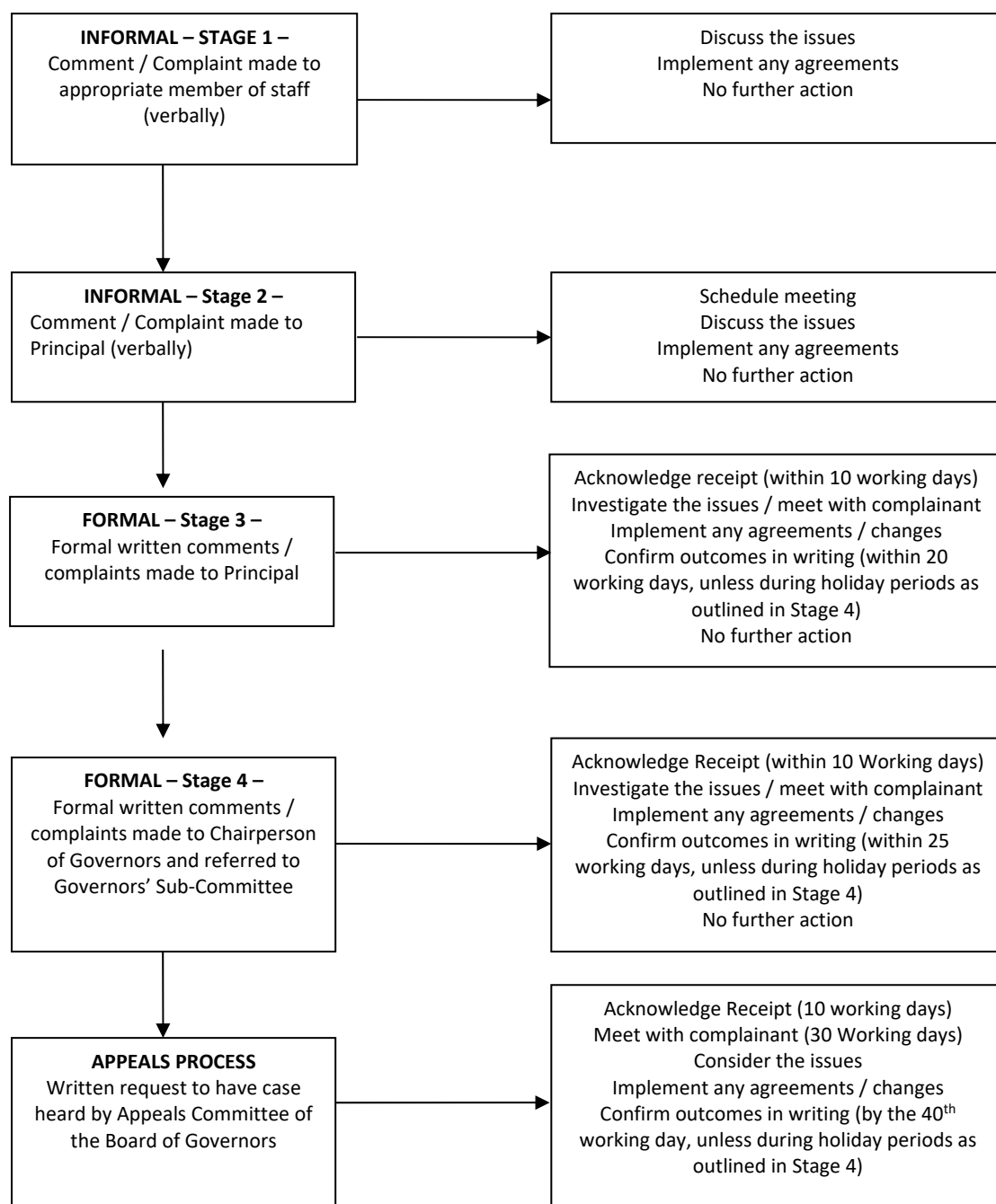
We will attempt to address all the points and issues raised.

If you do not respond within a reasonable time to the outcome of an investigation into your comment / complaint we will assume that you are satisfied and do not require us to take further action.

Persistent and Malicious Complaints.

Complaints considered by the Board of Governors to be persistent and malicious will be addressed under the Persistent and Malicious Complaints Policy (2017).

HANDLING COMPLAINTS FLOWCHART



HANDLING COMPLAINTS

SAMPLE LETTERS

FORMAL – Stage 3

Complaint made in Writing to Principal – Acknowledgement

Dear

Thank you for your letter of **1 January 2** in which you outlined your concerns regarding

Option A

I have investigated the various aspects of your complaint and would respond as follows

or

Option B

I hope that you will appreciate that I need some time in order to investigate your concerns to respond as fully as possible to the issues you have raised. I will write to you again within the next 10 working days.

Or

Option C

It would be extremely helpful if you could contact the school in order to arrange a suitable time for a meeting to discuss your complaint. This will help me to investigate your concerns and to respond as fully as possible to the issues you have raised. I will write to you again within 10 working days of that meeting.

Yours sincerely

Principal

Formal Stage 3

Complaint made in Writing to Principal – Response following meeting

Dear

Thank you for attending our meeting on **15 January 2 in** which we discussed your concerns regarding

Following that meeting and my own investigations into the various aspects of your complaint, I would respond as follows:

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention and to assure you that the school always welcomes your contribution.

Yours sincerely

Principal

Formal – Stage 4

Complaint made in Writing to Chairperson of Governors – Acknowledgement

Dear

Thank you for your letter of 1 January 2 in which you outlined your concerns regarding

I have referred your complaint to a Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors for investigation and response to the various aspects of your complaint .

Option A

I hope that you will appreciate that the Sub-Committee will need some time in order to investigate your concerns to respond as fully as possible to the issues you have raised. The Sub-Committee will write to you with their response within the next 25 working days.

Or

Option B

I hope that you will appreciate that the Sub-Committee will need some time in order to investigate your concerns. Indeed, it would be extremely helpful if you could attend a meeting of the Sub-Committee to discuss your complaint on **15 January 2 at 6.30pm in Wheatfield**. This will help the Sub-Committee to investigate your concerns and to respond as fully as possible to the issues you have raised. The Sub-Committee will write to you with their response within 10 working days of that meeting.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Formal – Stage 4

Outcome of Sub-Committee Investigation / Meeting

Dear

OPTION A – No Meeting Needed

Thank you for your letter of 1 January 2 in which you outlined your concerns regarding

I have investigated the various aspects of your complaint and would respond as follows

OPTION B – Meeting with Sub-Committee

Thank you for attending our meeting of **15 January 2** in which we discussed your concerns regarding

Following that meeting and the Sub-Committee’s own investigations into the various aspects of your complaint, I would respond as follows

Both Options

Our reasons for coming to our decision are _____

Finally, on behalf of the Governors’ Sub-Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention and to assure you that the school continues to welcome your contribution.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Governor Sub-Committee for Complaints

Appeal

Request to Appeal – Acknowledgement

Dear

Thank you for your letter of 1 January 2 in which you set out the grounds for appealing the previous outcomes to your complaint regarding

I have referred your complaint to the Complaint Appeals Committee of the Board of Governors for them to investigate and respond to the various aspects of your complaint. To this end I have arranged for your case to be considered at the next meeting of the Board of Governors, which takes place **15 January 2 at 6.30pm in Wheatfield**. You should attend this meeting so that you can have an opportunity to put forward your case in detail.

This will help the Board of Governors to consider all aspects of your concerns and then to respond as fully as possible to the issues you have raised. You will receive a full written response within 10 working days of that meeting.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Appeal

Outcome of Full Board of Governor Meeting

Dear

Thank you for attending the Board of Governor meeting on **15 January 2** in which you outlined your concerns in respect of _____

Following that meeting and our own investigations into the various aspects of your complaint, I would respond as follows

Our reasons for coming to our decision are _____

In relation to the general handling of your complaint I would comment as follows

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Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention and to assure you that the Board of Governors and school staff continue to welcome your contribution to school like.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Discourteous or Threatening Behaviour Towards a Member of Staff

Dear

I have been informed of a regrettably incident when you attended the school on **1 January 2** to discuss your concerns with a member of staff.

Whilst I understand that your visit was prompted by a perceived complaint in relation to the member of staff with whom you spoke, I regret that I must insist that you do not re-enter school premises for any reason without first contacting the school principal to arrange your visit. This decision has been taken so as to protect the pupils and staff in the school and to avoid the potential for a further similar incident, which could have other more serious consequences.

In the meantime, I would encourage you to read the enclosed school's Complaints Procedure in relation to your original issue.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

**This policy (Handling Complaints) was adopted on 5th October
2017**

Date of review;August 2018