



# Concerns/Complaints Policy



**ST LOUISE'S MISSION STATEMENT**  
*"In partnership with parents, guardians, staff,  
governors and students St Louise's promotes excellence in  
learning and teaching within a Catholic, Vincentian,  
Comprehensive ethos"*

## **Policy Statement**

St Louise's Comprehensive College is committed to working in partnership with you, our parents, in the best interests of your son/daughter. The purpose of this Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians and carers.

We will use this information, wherever possible, to help maintain and improve our service. We encourage and welcome all comments and views, both positive and negative.

This policy is designed to establish a clear procedure for the resolution of complaints which can be verbal or written. Our concerns/complaints policy is outlined below.

### **1. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

This procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils. However, school staff, and the Board of Governors recognise the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

The school will not investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the school to be of a serious nature. Anonymous complaints may be investigated where they relate to alleged Child Protection matters or alleged financial impropriety. This will be at the discretion of the school.

***Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of the agreed procedure such as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline, Bullying and Harassment or the Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.***

## **2. AIMS**

### **2.1** Our Complaints Procedure aims to:

- provide an efficient and thorough system through which issues are effectively addressed;
- facilitate the school in provide the best possible service for its students and the local community;
- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- allow swift handling of a complaint within established time-limits for action;
- keep people informed of progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- respect confidentiality;
- fully address all aspects of a complaint and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- in the interest of continuous improvement, provide relevant information to the school's Principal, Senior Leadership Team and Board of Governors.

***A copy of this Procedure is available on the school's website or is available from the school on request.***

### **3. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE**

#### **3.1 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 – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint; and
- reasons for our decisions.

Where the complaint is upheld we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after investigation, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

#### **3.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint**

In making your complaint we would expect that you:

- raise issues in a timely manner;
- treat our staff with respect and courtesy;
- provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise; and
- use these procedures fully and engage with 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 appropriately dealt with in other ways.

#### **3.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation**

The process is non-adversarial and does not provide a role for any other statutory or non-statutory body.

## **Complainant**

Where a meeting is arranged the complainant may be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Board of Governors and the Principal, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

## **Staff**

Staff may seek the advice and support from their professional body or Trade Union and may also be accompanied by another person to meetings where it is accepted, by the Board of Governors and the Principal, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

A member of staff who is the subject of a complaint will be provided with full details of any allegations made against him/her before being required to respond to the matters raised. In many occasions this may be best achieved by providing the member of staff with a copy of the letter. However, the views of the complainant will be sought before doing so.

## **Legal Representation**

Legal representation, or representation by a person, or persons acting in a professional capacity **is not** permitted within this Procedure.

This Procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

### **3.4 Where the complainant is a Governor**

Where the complainant is a member of the Board of Governors, s/he will play no part in the management, or appeal, of the complaint as set out in this Procedure.

## **4. MAKING A COMPLAINT**

If you have a concern about your daughter we would like you to tell us about it. We welcome suggestions for improving our work in the school. Be assured that no matter what you want to tell us, our support and respect for you and your child in the school will not be affected in any way. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem which has happened some time ago.

## **4.1 Complaint about a Teacher (other than the Principal)**

### **4.1.1 Step 1 Informal Stage**

#### **What to do first - Speaking with the Head of Year – Person Responsible for your sons/daughters Year Group**

Most concerns and complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's Head of Year. It is usually best to discuss the problem face to face. You will need an appointment to do this, and can make one by ringing the school office. The Head of Year will investigate your complaint and make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong, and they will explain their own actions to you. This does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the question. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

This approach will not prevent you from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage, if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.

### **4.1.2 Step 2 – Informal**

#### **Speaking with the Assistant Principal/Vice Principal**

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

In some circumstances the Assistant Principal or Vice-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.

### **4.1.3 Step 3 - Writing to the Principal**

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Steps 1 and 2, or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at Step 3. You should write to the Principal, and state the grounds for your complaint, as concisely as possible, addressing specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you.

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

- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; **or**
- state that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received). The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

### **4.1.4 Step 4 - 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 Steps 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 Step 3. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of three voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- state that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints 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 talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

#### **4.1.5 Step 5 - Appeals Process**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. This procedure is outlined below.

### **5. APPEALS PROCESS – FULL BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

Finally, if you still believe that your complaint has not been addressed you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors requesting that you be allowed to meet with the full 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.

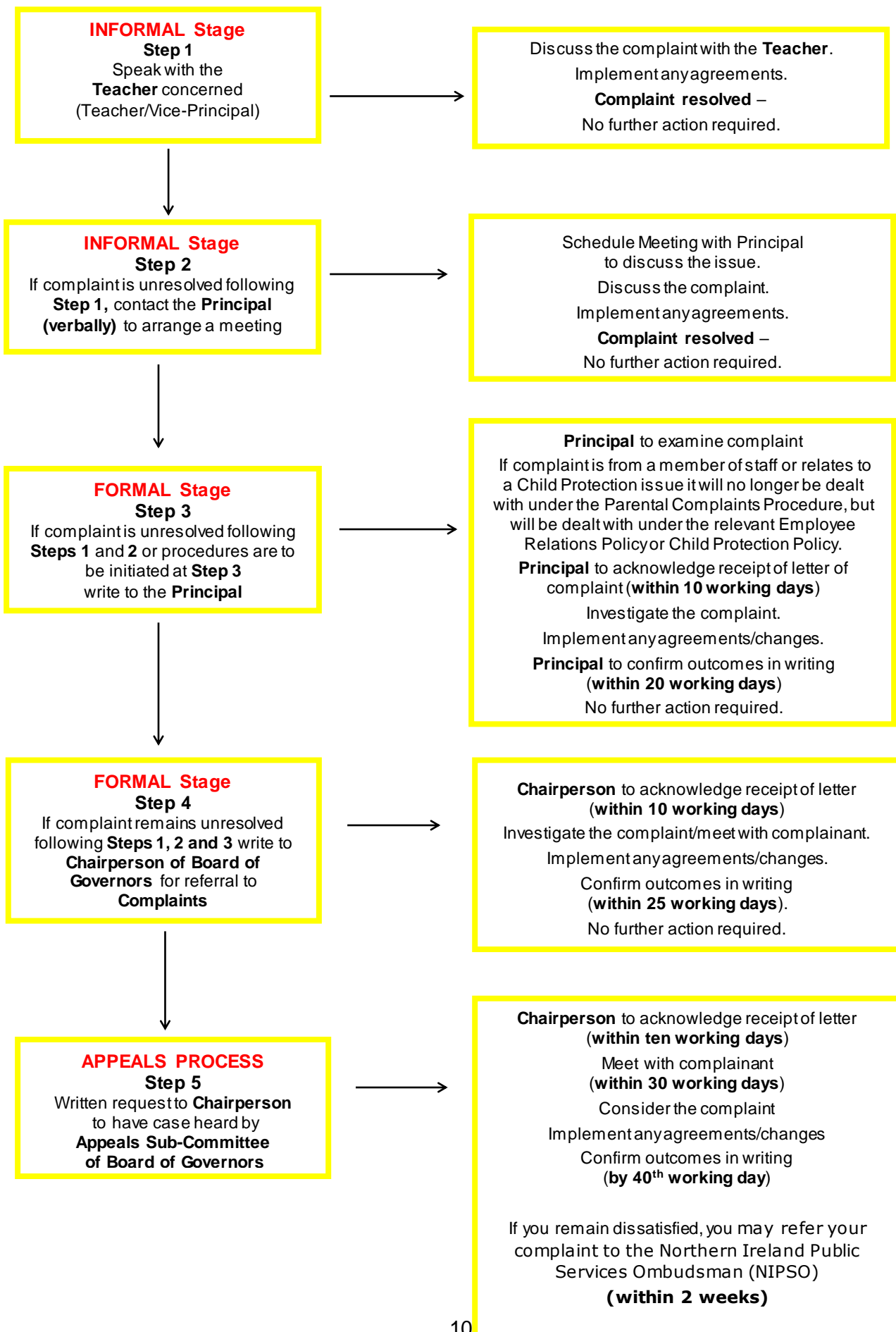
If on completion of our internal complaints procedure you remain dissatisfied with our final response, you may refer your complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about public service providers in Northern Ireland. The referral to NIPSO must be submitted within two weeks of the day on which the internal complaints procedure has been exhausted.

NIPSO's contact details are:

Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN or  
Freepost NIPSO. The Freephone number is 0800 342424 or you can  
email to [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk).

## 6. MAKING A COMPLAINT ABOUT A TEACHER (OTHER THAN THE PRINCIPAL)

(with timescales for responses)



## **7. COMPLAINT ABOUT A MEMBER OF SCHOOL'S SUPPORT STAFF**

### **7.1 Informal stage**

#### ***Step 1 - Raising verbally with the Principal***

A complaint concerning a member of the school's support staff should be raised verbally with the Principal. A meeting should be arranged with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances, the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and s/he may require some time to investigate and respond. If further time is required, you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which the Principal will respond.

### **7.2 Formal Stage**

#### ***Step 2 - Writing to the Principal***

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Step 1 or it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures formally. You should write to the Principal, and state the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible addressing specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you.

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

- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- state that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received). The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

### **7.3 Formal – Chairperson of the Board of Governors**

#### ***Step 3 - 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 Steps 1, and 2 you should write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, including, if applicable, copies of the original correspondence relating to Step 2. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of three voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- state that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints 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 talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

#### ***Step 4 - Appeals Process***

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. This procedure is outlined below.

#### **7.4. APPEALS PROCESS – APPEALS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within ten working days of receiving written feedback from the Complaints Sub-Committee, appealing their decision. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your appeal.

The Chairperson will be responsible for establishing an Appeals Sub-Committee comprising of at least three members of the Board of Governors who were not involved in the original investigation. You will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where your appeal will be heard.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting with the Appeals Sub-Committee at which you will have an opportunity to explain the grounds for your appeal. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal request having been received.

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

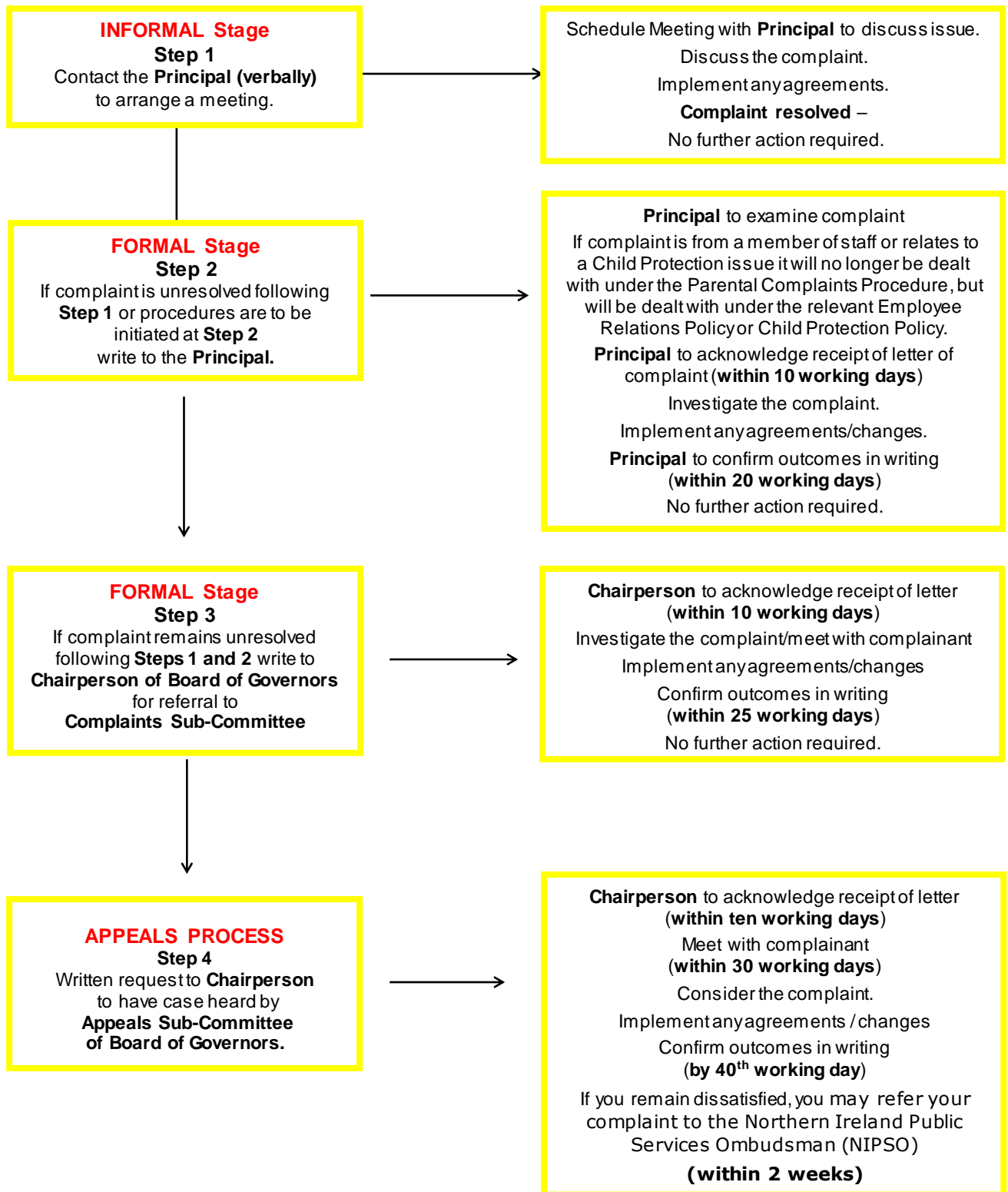
The decision of the Appeals Sub-Committee is final. At the end of the process the Chairperson will inform you, in writing, that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is considered closed.

If on completion of our internal complaints procedure you remain dissatisfied with our final response, you may refer your complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about public service providers in Northern Ireland. The referral to NIPSO must be submitted within two weeks of the day on which the internal complaints procedure has been exhausted.

NIPSO's contact details are: Progressive House, 33 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6HN or Freepost NIPSO. The Freephone number is 0800 342424 or you can email to [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk).

## 7.5 MAKING A COMPLAINT ABOUT A MEMBER OF SUPPORT STAFF

(with timescales for responses)



## **8. COMPLAINT ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL**

**Where a complaint relates to the Principal the matter will be dealt with formally by the Board of Governors.**

### **8.1 Formal Stage**

#### ***Step 1 - Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors***

Where a complaint relates to the Principal you should write to the Chair of the Board of Governors, stating the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of three voting members. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- state that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

#### **8.2 Step 2 - Appeals Process**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. This procedure is outlined below.

### **APPEALS PROCESS – APPEALS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within ten working days of receiving written feedback from the Complaints Sub-Committee, appealing their decision. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your appeal.

The Chairperson will be responsible for establishing an Appeals Sub-Committee comprising of at least three members of the Board of Governors who were not involved in the original investigation. You

will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where your appeal will be heard.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting with the Appeals Sub-Committee at which you will have an opportunity to explain the grounds for your appeal. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal request having been received.

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

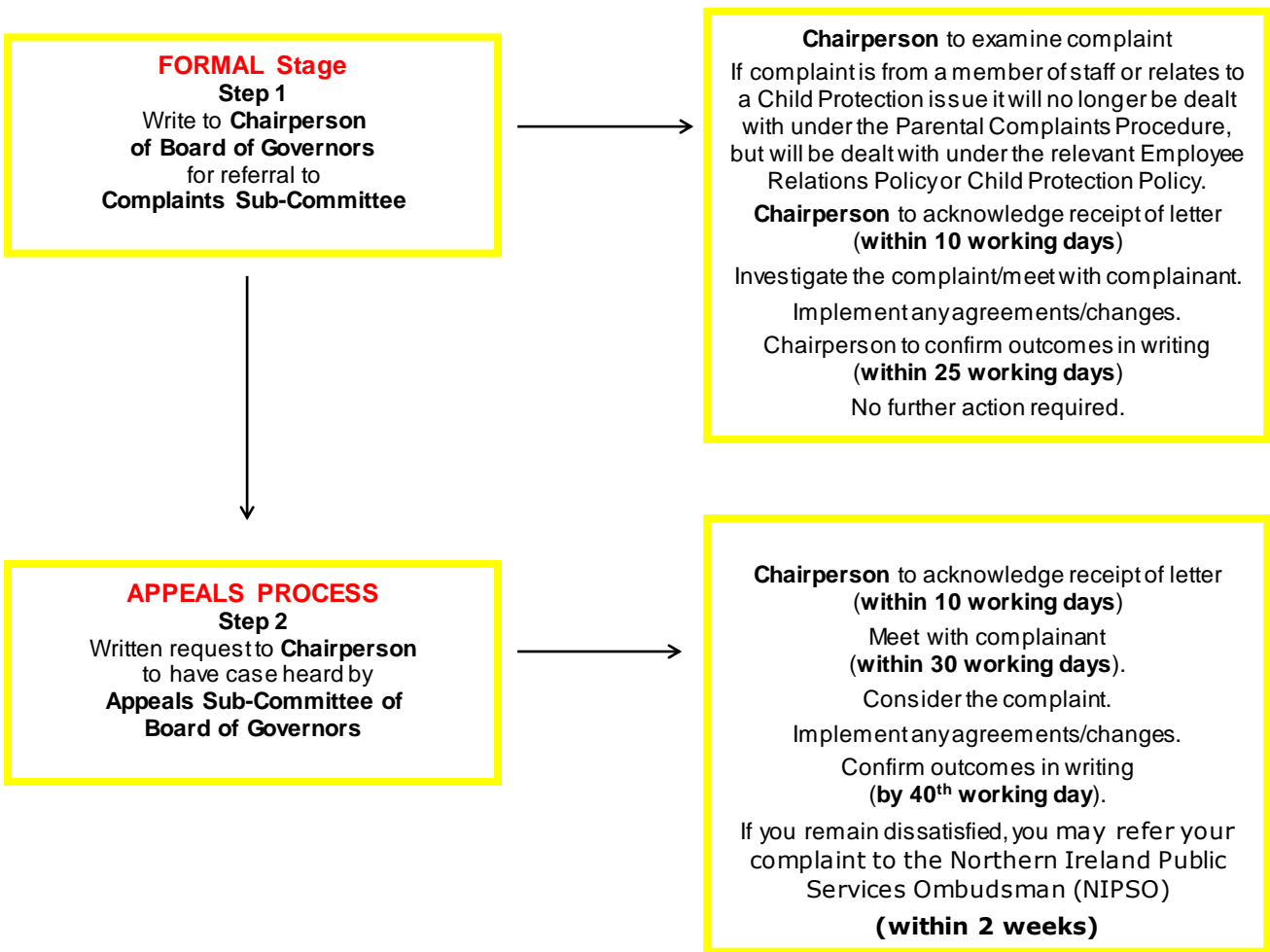
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**8.3. MAKING A COMPLAINT ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL** *(with timescales for responses)*



## **9. RECORD KEEPING**

The Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Governors will maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings, concerning your complaint. These records will be held confidentially in the school and will be kept apart from student records. All such records will be destroyed **three years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.**

## **10. FRIVOLOUS OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS**

Where the Board of Governors considers the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute a frivolous or vexatious complaint, it will seek advice from the relevant employing authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.