

# St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School



## SCHOOL COMPLAINTS POLICY

**March 2024**

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## **Introduction**

We hope that issues can be addressed by talking to the relevant staff. Open communication and regular engagement between the school, parents/carers and other stakeholders is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole school community.

### **1.1. School Information**

#### **A Statement of the Ethos of the School**

St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School is a community where Christian values are upheld. We strive to establish an environment where excellence is promoted, where children can realise their full potential in their academic, personal, physical, moral and spiritual development. We are committed to building a learning community which nurtures and promotes the development of decent, caring and confident pupils who can contribute to wider society, treating all people with a sense of justice and to work with parents as partners in their son's education. We are committed to ensuring each pupil has the experiences, resources and teaching appropriate to his abilities and aptitudes and to providing opportunities for pupils to participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities.

*Developing excellence, moral responsibility and service to the community in the spirit of  
Blessed Edmund Rice.*

As an Edmund Rice school our ethos is based on the five Principles of the ERST Charter:

- Nurturing faith, Christian spirituality and Gospel-based values
- Promoting partnership in the local community
- Excelling in teaching and learning
- Creating a caring school community
- Inspiring transformational leadership.

Edmund Rice Schools in partnership with the home and parish are dedicated to providing and developing a Catholic Education that cultivates a living faith, fosters Christian spirituality and educates people in Gospel – based values. St Mary's values and respects everyone and expects the same in return. We value parents'/carers' opinions and feedback. We also understand how important it is to deal with complaint early and we will do our very best to do this.

In St. Mary's, we take complaints seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. We encourage anyone with a worry to speak to us as soon as possible. If issues are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved leaving no unnecessary dissatisfaction. We welcome communication with our staff. Parent/Carers can do this by contacting staff as outlined below:

**We take all issues seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.**

#### **1 Scope of the Complaints Procedure**

The Board of Governors together with the Principal, sets the direction and tone of the School, in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of the Complaints Policy is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians.

- 1.1** The policy 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.
- 1.2** Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Parental Complaints Policy will be set aside in favour of the agreed procedure such as Child Protection/Safeguarding, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline, Bullying and Harassment or the Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.
- 1.3** 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/Safeguarding matters or alleged financial impropriety. This will be at the discretion of the school.

## **2. Aims of the Complaints Procedure**

### **2.1 In operating this Parental Complaints Procedure, we aim to:**

- Encourage resolution as quickly as possible;
- Provide timely responses;
- Keep complainants informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of your complaint;
- Have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- Respect confidentiality;
- Fully address complaints and provide an effective response;
- Take appropriate action to rectify the issue and prevent it happening again;
- Be responsive to learning from outcomes that will inform and improve practice within the school.
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use;
- Be impartial;
- Be non-adversarial.

### **2.2 Parental Complaints Procedure is designed to be:**

- Easily accessible and publicised;
- Simple to understand and use;
- Impartial
- Non-adversarial

## **3 What to Expect under this Parental Complaints 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 confidentiality as possible, allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint;
- 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;
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels;

### **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 allegation 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.

#### **Legal Representation**

Legal representation, or representation by a person, or persons acting in a professional capacity, is not permitted within this Parental Complaints Policy.

This Policy 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, he/she play no part in the management or appeal of the complaint as set out in this policy.

## **4 Making a Complaint**

### **4.1 Complaint about a Teacher**

#### **4.2.1 Informal Stage**

##### **Step 1 – Speaking with Head of Year/Head of School/Vice Principal**

In the first instance, a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the relevant Head of Year/Head of School/Vice Principal.

The parent's complaint will be discussed with the teacher and/or Head of Department concerned and, if deemed appropriate, the teacher may discuss the issue directly with the parent.

Parents should observe the school's arrangements for making any appointments, school staff will endeavour to arrange an appointment within 10 working days.

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.

##### **Step 2 – Speaking with the Principal**

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1, you should arrange a meeting 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 she 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.

#### **4.1.1 Formal Stage**

##### **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 is/are of 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 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.

#### **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, 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 is/are of concern to you. You will receive acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

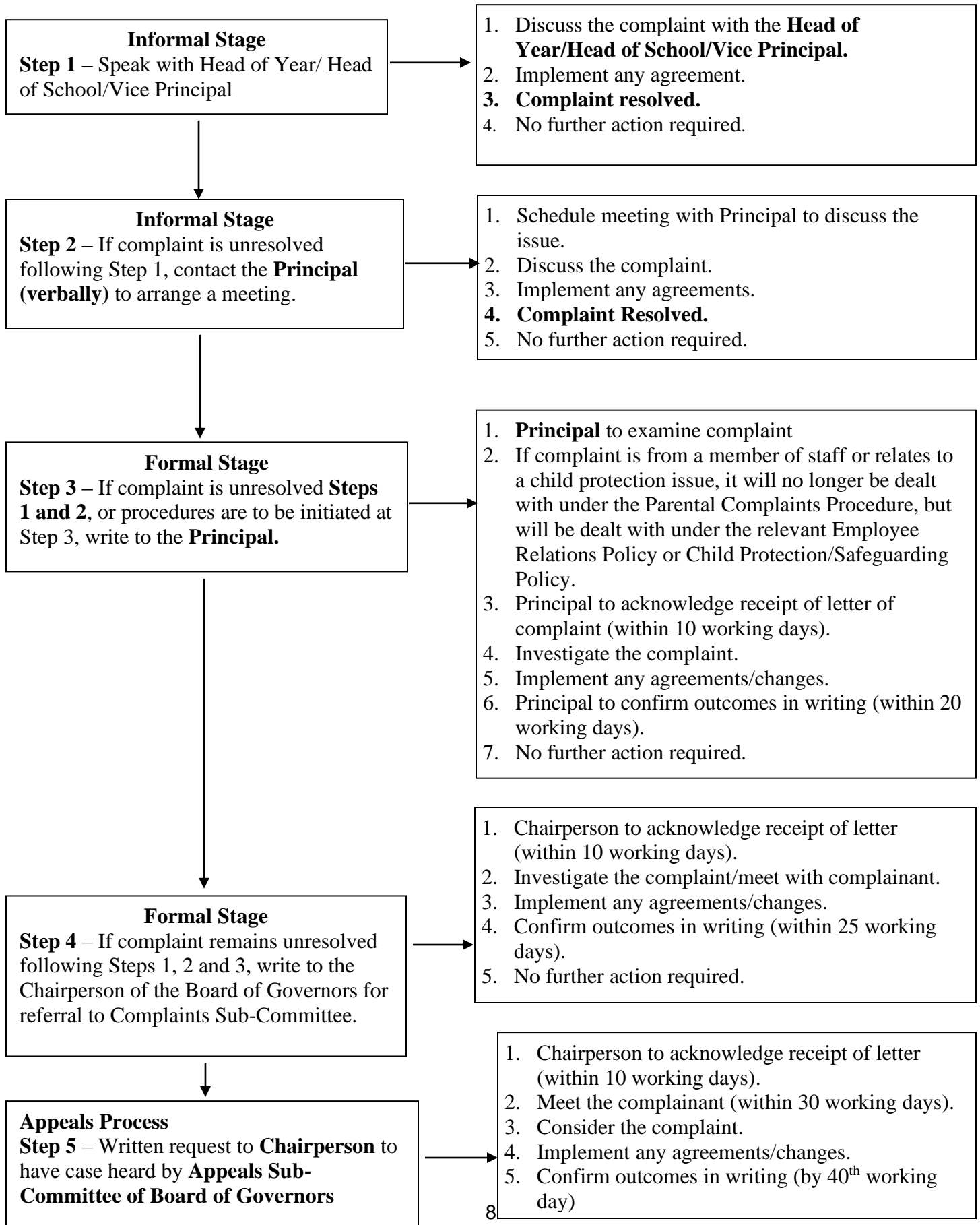
- Provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- State that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require 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 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 in Annex 1 on Page 14.

**Making a Complaint about a Teacher (other than the Principal) (with timescales for responses)**





## **4.2 Complaint about a Member of the School's Support Staff**

### **42.1 Informal Stage**

#### **Step 1 - Raising verbally with the Head of Corporate Services/Vice Principal Pastoral)**

A complaint concerning a member of the school's support staff should be raised verbally with the Head of Corporate Services/Vice Principal (Pastoral Care). A meeting should be arranged with the Head of Corporate Services/Vice Principal (Pastoral Care) to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances, the Head of Corporate Services/Vice Principal (Pastoral Care) may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and he/she 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 Head of Corporate Services/Vice Principal (Pastoral Care) will respond.

### **4.2.2 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 is/are of 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 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.

#### **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 written within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

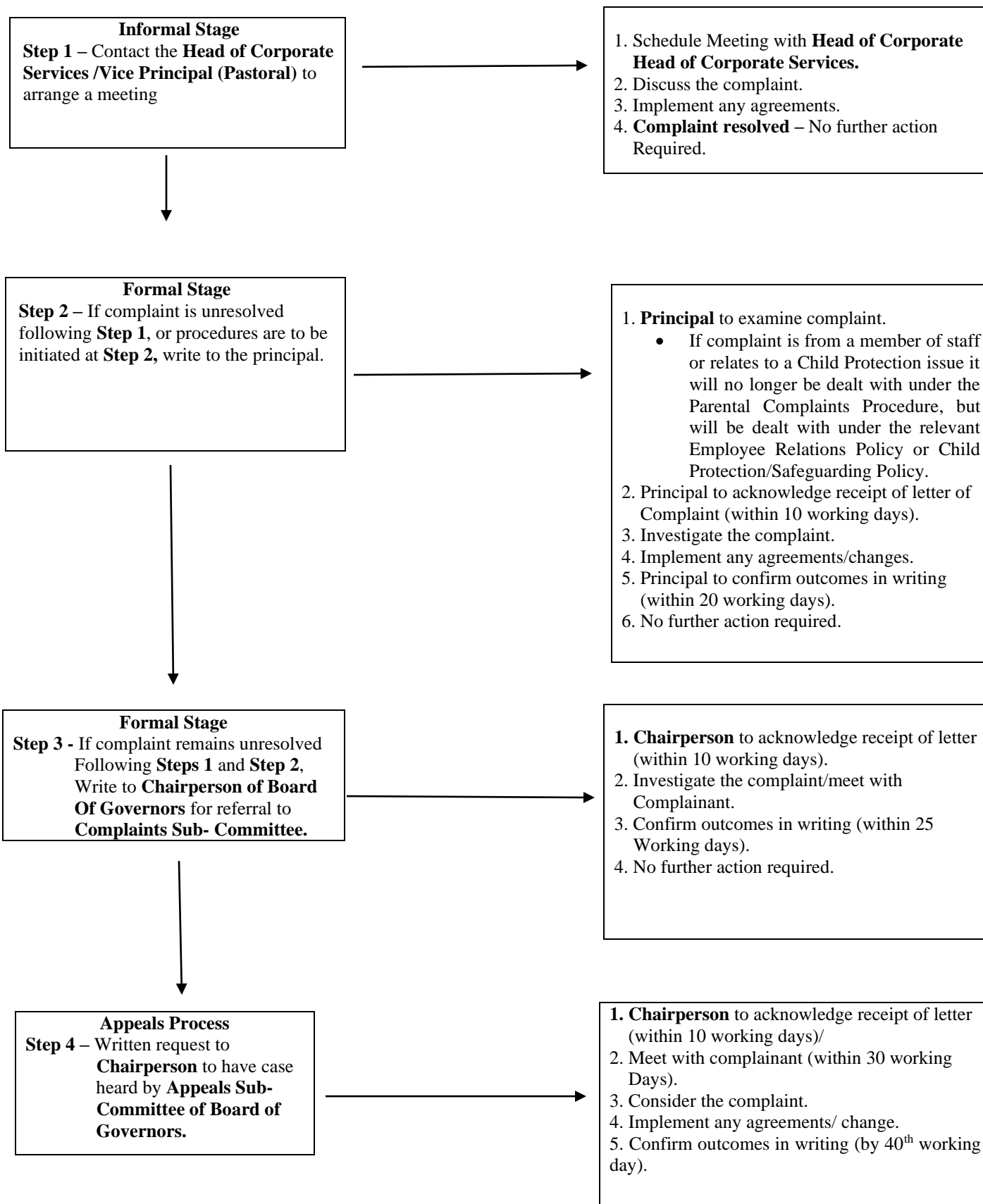
- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- state that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

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. Procedure is outlined in Annex 1 on page 14.

**Making a Complaint about a Member of the School’s Support Staff (with timescales for responses):**



### **4.3 Complaint about the Principal**

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

#### **4.3.1 Formal Stage**

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

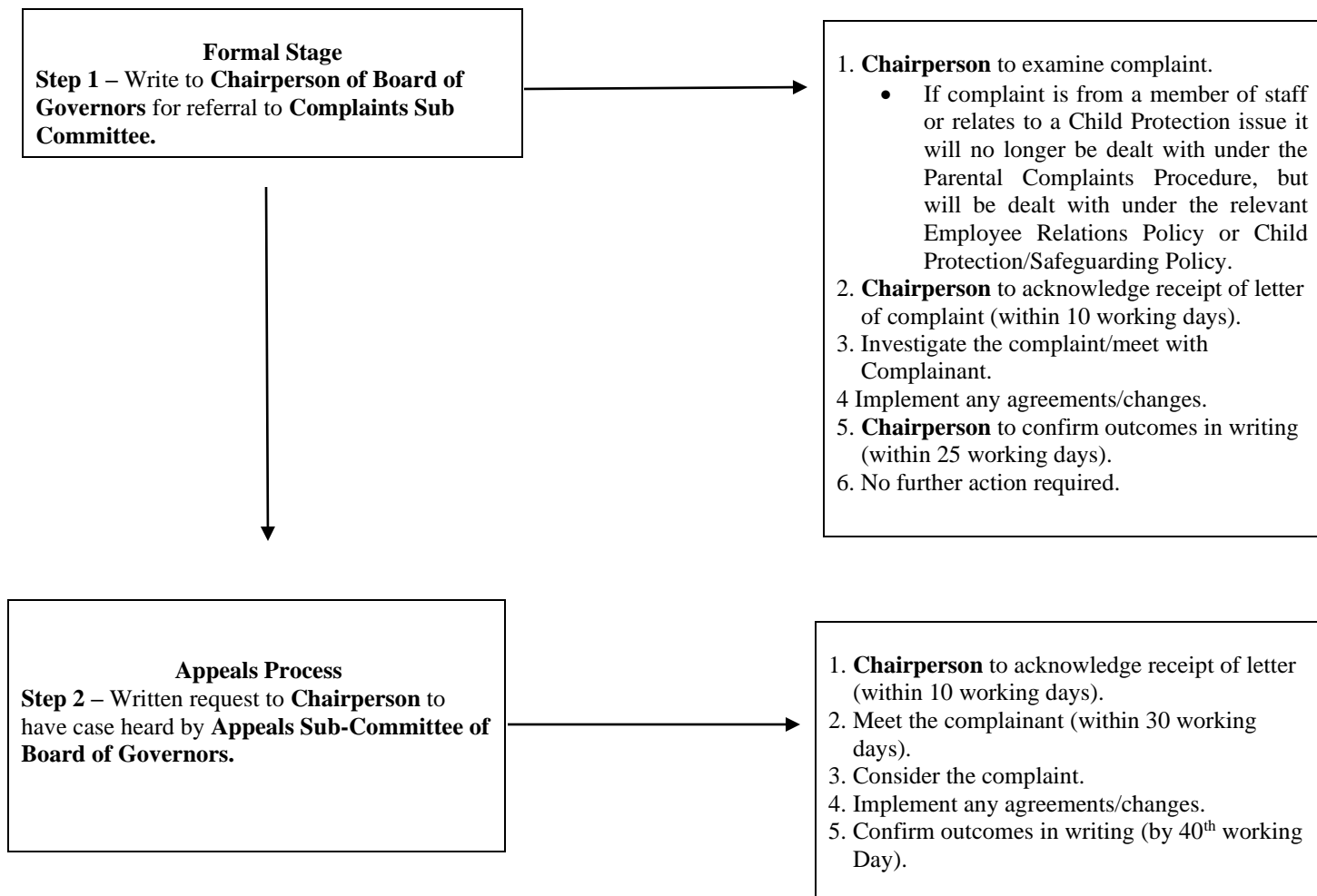
Where a complaint relates to the Principal, you should write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, stating the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will 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 10 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).

##### **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 in Annex 1 on page 14.

## **Making a Complaint about the Principal (with timescales for responses):**



### **5. 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.**

### **6. 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 actions.

### **7. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

The Public Services Ombudsman Act 2016 gives the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) permission to investigate complaints from the public about maladministration in relation to all publicly funded schools. From 01/04/17, children and parents are able to complain to the NIPSO office about all aspects of the Board of Governors' decisions and actions (including inaction) when their complaint has been examined by the Board of Governors and they remain unhappy with the outcome.

If you have a concern or complaint about maladministration in the School, please contact the Vice Principal(Pastoral) or the Vice Principal (Curriculum) in the first instance. If necessary, you may then follow the schools Parental Complaints Policy. Should you remain dissatisfied with the School's response after completing the internal complaints procedure, you can bring your complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman within six months.

Contact details for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman are:

Telephone: 028 9023 3821  
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)  
Website: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

Freepost: Freepost NIPSO

Address: The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
6T1 6HN

Office Hours: 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday

## **Annex 1**

### **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 10 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 of 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 10 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 of your appeal. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal request having been received.

Within 10 working days of this meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governor findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decision.

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.

<b>APPROVALS</b>	
<b>Principal:</b>	
<b>Chair of the Board of Governors:</b>	
<b>Date of Approval by Governors:</b>	
<b>Date of next annual review:</b>	