



# COMPLAINTS

## The Difference Between A Concern and A Complaint

A 'concern' may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'.

A complaint may be generally defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'. It is in everyone's interest that complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to invoke formal procedures. We take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. There are occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally. In those cases, the school's formal procedure should be invoked.

### We ensure the complaints procedure:

- is easily accessible
- is simple to understand and use
- is impartial
- respects people's desire for confidentiality

### Timeliness

Complaints need to be considered and resolved as quickly, and efficiently as possible:

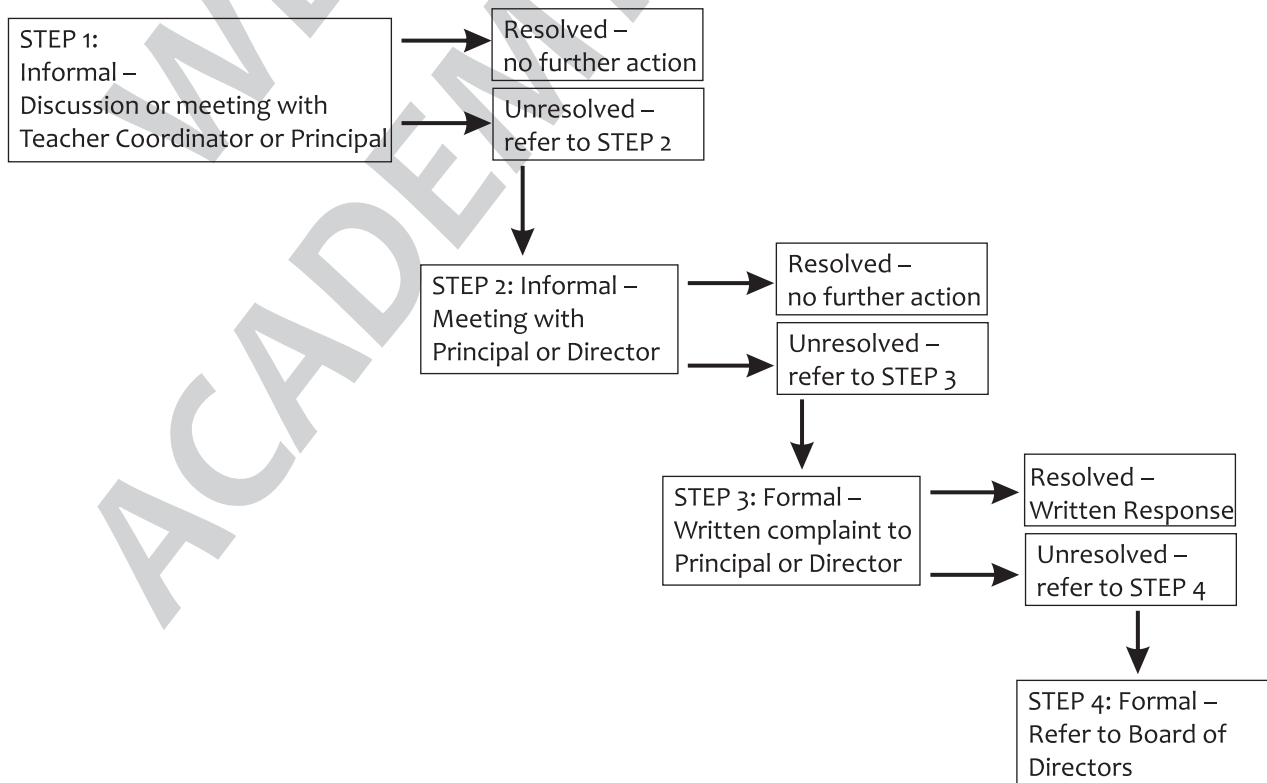
- Set realistic and reasonable time limits for each action within each stage
- Expect complaints to be made as soon as possible after an incident arises

### Recording Complaints

In order to prevent any later challenge or disagreement over what was said, brief notes of meetings and telephone calls should be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

Record the progress of the complaint and the final outcome. The Principal or complaints coordinator should be responsible for these records and hold them centrally.

## Flowchart of procedure for handling complaints:



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## STEP 2: Informal

If the complainant feels dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the class teacher or coordinator, he/she can ask for an appointment to meet with the Principal or Director:

- The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the ongoing concern, what has been discussed with the class teacher so far and any actions arising from the initial meeting
- It is in everyone's interest, particularly the child or children, for concerns to be sorted out quickly and smoothly. However, it may be that the Principal/Director will need to look into what has happened since the initial meeting before they can suggest how your concern might be resolved. If this is the case, it should be agreed how and within what timescale they will contact you to let you know the outcome of their enquiries and what actions they have taken/proposed to take.

**It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved at this stage through the informal process.**

## STEP 3: Formal (Written Complaint)

If the complainant feels the issue has not been resolved through the informal process, he/she may use this channel. A formal letter of complaint should be written to the Principal or Director. The letter should set out clearly the concern which has previously been discussed and why the complainant feels that the issue is unresolved. It is also helpful if he/she can set out what resolution is sought.

- Moving to the formal complaints procedure is a serious step. In consideration of future home/school relationships everyone concerned will need to concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue and negotiate an agreement as to how this can best be achieved.
- The Principal will consider the complaint and in doing so should:
  - establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
  - clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
  - meet or contact the complainant if further information is needed;
- interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of

- The Principal will keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved.

It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following

- an apology;
- an explanation;
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better (this is not an admission of negligence);
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint.

It may also be the case that the complaint may not have any substance and is therefore considered to be unfounded or unsubstantiated.

- The Principal should send a detailed written response within 15 school days. Where this proves unrealistic the complainant will be informed in writing and given an estimate of how long it will take to provide a detailed response.

## STEP 4: Complaints not resolved through the formal procedure

If the complainant believes that the school management has not properly followed its complaints procedure or has not acted fairly or reasonably in responding to the complaint he/she may refer the matter to the Board of Directors for a meeting.

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## At present we respond informally to complaints:

1. From parents made by telephone or letter.
2. From students through contact they make with their class teachers, other individual members of staff, Section Head or Director.
3. From staff through the Principal and other senior members of staff.

We pride ourselves that we are always ready to listen to problems, however, trivial they are perceived to be.

### FOR TEACHERS

From time to time matters may arise that a teacher may have concerns about. Even in the best run communities, things may get overlooked. Should you wish to make complaint about:

(i) a student, (ii) another member of staff, (iii) any other matters relating to school life

In the first instance see the Principal. It will be dealt with in confidence and you will be assured that we shall listen to you and appreciate your bringing the matter to our attention. If, after discussing the matter with the Principal, you feel that your complaint has not been dealt with appropriately, you will then have the opportunity to approach the Directors with your concern.

### FOR STUDENTS

If students are worried about something, unhappy with any aspect of life here, or have any problem, which they would like to talk about, they should first of all speak to their Class Teacher, Coordinator or any other member of staff they feel comfortable with. If may be that they feel too embarrassed to say what they are feeling, in which case they could always write a note to one of the people above explaining their concerns.

An alternative to either speaking themselves to a member of staff or writing a note would be to ask a friend to speak on their behalf. They should understand that any complaint will be dealt with in confidence and that we will not get upset by any suggestions or complaints.

We understand that in any community there are bound to be tensions from time to time between students and also between staff and students, and it is healthy to bring these out into the open when they arise. Because we are a school, which supports its students we will appreciate students' honesty, and they can be rest assured that no student will be punished or penalised for bringing a problem to our attention.