

# **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**



**St. Oliver Plunkett Primary School**

## Article 13

Every child must be free to say what they think and to seek and receive all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

### THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

CONTENTS	Page No
1 Scope of Complaints Procedure	2
2 Aims	2 - 3
3 What to Expect Under this Procedure	4
4 Making a Complaint	
4.1 About a Teacher other than the Principal	5 - 7
4.2 About a Member of the School's Support Staff	8 - 10
4.3 About the Principal	11 - 12
5 Record Keeping	13
6 Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints	13
Annex 1 Sample Letters	15 - 20

## THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

### St. Oliver Plunkett Primary School

#### **Complaints Procedure – Policy Statement**

At St. Oliver Plunkett Primary School, we are committed to listening about our service. 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.

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

**The Board of Governors together with the Principal set 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 Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians.**

- 1.1 The 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.
- 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 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.**
- 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 matters or alleged financial impropriety. This will be at the discretion of the school.

#### **2. AIMS**

- 2.1 In operating this Complaints Procedure we aim to:
  - 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 Senior Management Team and Board of Governors.

- 2.2** This Procedure is designed to be:
- easily accessible and publicised;
  - simple to understand and use;
  - impartial; and
  - non-adversarial.

A copy of this Procedure 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.

#### **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**

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

#### **4.1.1 Informal Stage**

##### ***Step 1 - Speaking with Teacher***

In the first instance, a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned, so that s/he may have an opportunity to address the issue(s).

**Please observe the school's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such meetings and follow the school's policy with respect to access to members of staff.**

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 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.

#### **4.1.2 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 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.

##### ***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.

### ***Step 5 – Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)***

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may refer the matter to the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (Nipso).

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about schools in Northern Ireland. You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if you feel that you have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from a school and your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction.

A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the School. The school must advise in its concluding letter that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied.

Contact details for NIPSO are:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

Freepost: FREEPOST NIPSO

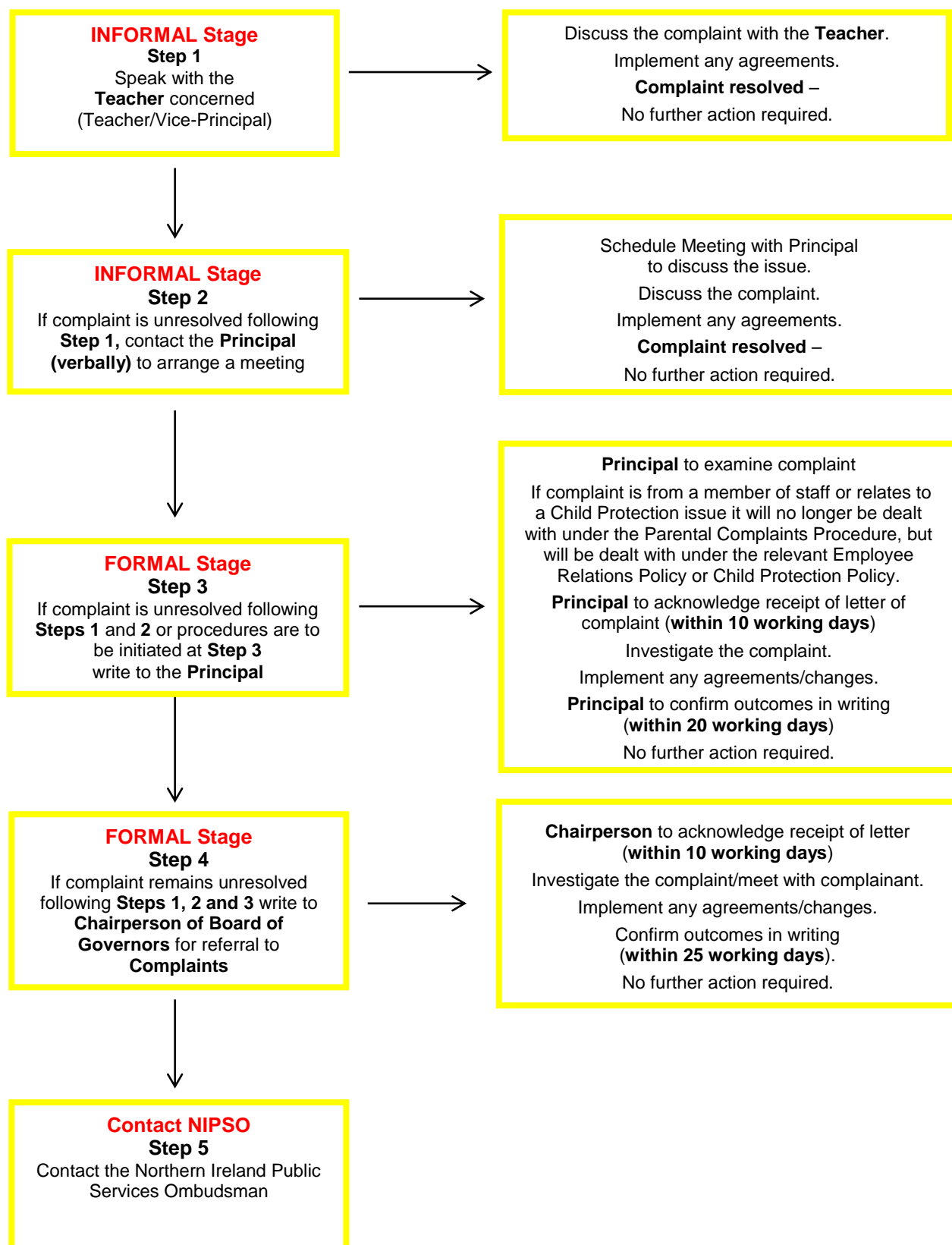
Telephone: 02890 233821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

Web: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

**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**

### **4.2.1 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.

### **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 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.

#### ***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 – Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may refer the matter to the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (Nipso).

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about schools in Northern Ireland. You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if you feel that you have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from a school and your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction.

A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the School. The school must advise in its concluding letter that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied.

Contact details for NIPSO are:

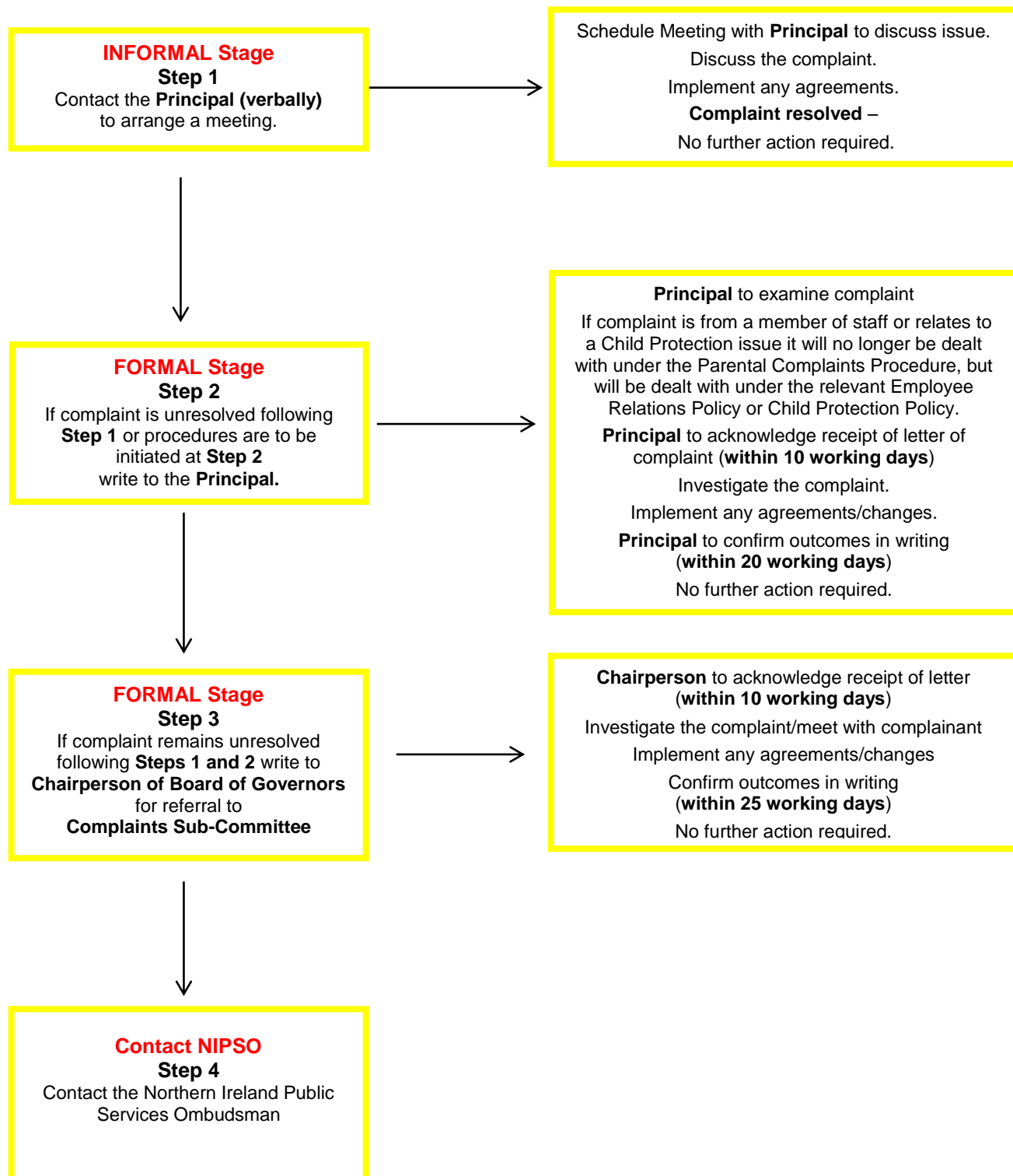
Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

Freepost: FREEPOST NIPSO

Telephone: 02890 233821  
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

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

**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 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).

##### ***Step 2 – Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)***

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may refer the matter to the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (Nipso).

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about schools in Northern Ireland. You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if you feel that you have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from a school and your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction.

A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the School. The school must advise in its concluding letter that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied.

Contact details for NIPSO are:

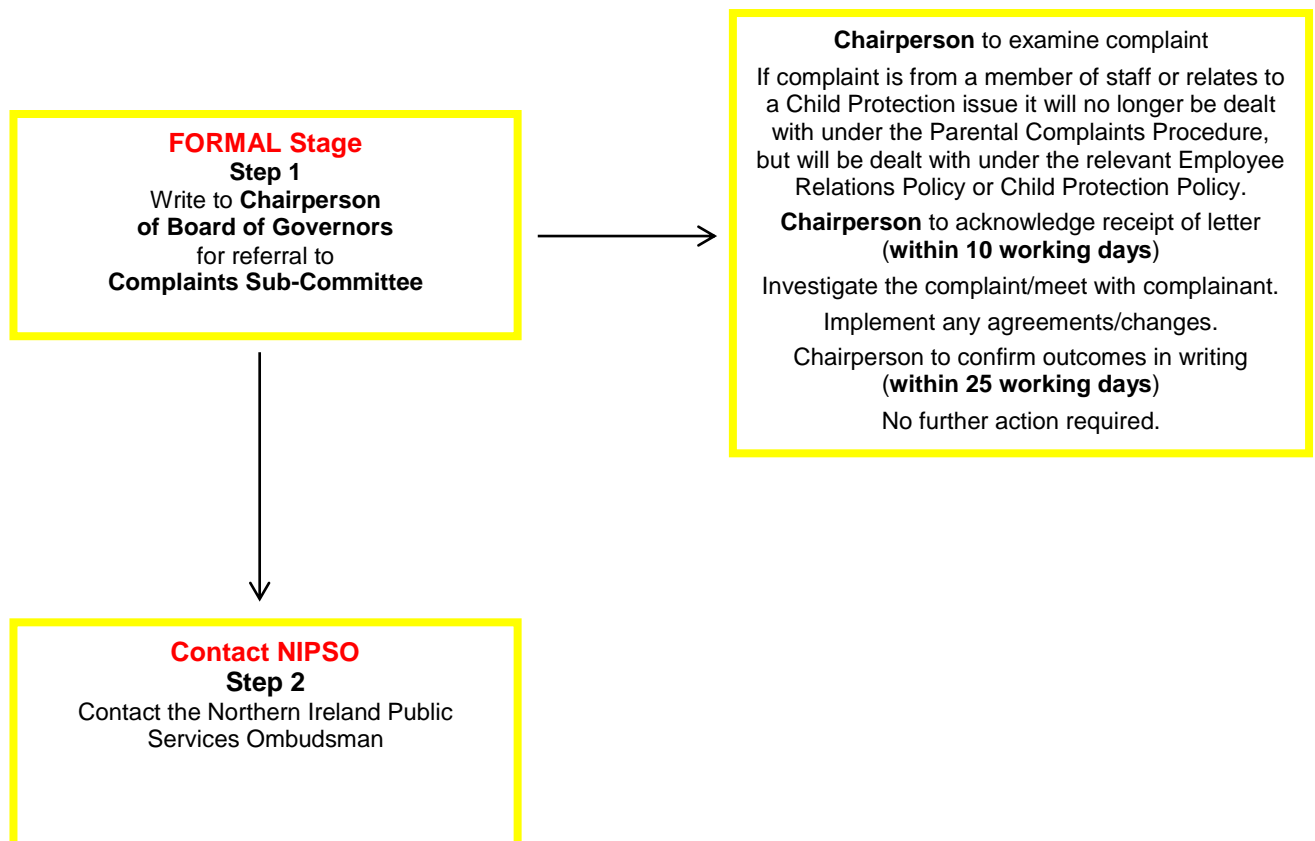
Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

Freepost: FREEPOST NIPSO

Telephone: 02890 233821  
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

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

## 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 pupil 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 such actions.

**HANDLING COMPLAINTS IN  
ST. OLIVER PLUNKETT  
PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**SAMPLE LETTERS**

## **Formal - Stage 3**

### **Complaint made in Writing to Principal – Acknowledgement**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your letter of \_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_, in St. Oliver Plunkett Primary School. 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
in which you outlined your concerns regarding \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

or

#### **OPTION B – Meeting with Sub-Committee**

Thank you for attending our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_  
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

## **Discourteous or Threatening Behaviour Towards a Member of Staff**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I have been informed of a regrettable incident when you attended the school on \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss your concerns with a member of staff.

Whilst I understand that 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