



Harmony Hill Primary School

**Complaints Policy**

2024-2026

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to make it clear how people can raise legitimate concerns or register complaints with the school.

In general, anonymous complaints will be disregarded unless substantiated by another party. It is at the discretion of the Principal, in consultation with the Board of Governors, to decide whether the gravity of any anonymous complaint warrants further investigation.

## 2. AIMS

The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. This is good practice, is fair to all those concerned and it helps promote staff, parent and pupil confidence in the school's ability to safeguard and promote welfare. The school will try to resolve the concern or complaint in a positive way, with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing systems and procedures in light of circumstances.

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, Anti-Bullying** or the **Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers**.

In operating this Complaints Procedure the school aims 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.

This Procedure is designed to be:

- easily accessible and publicised;
- simple to understand and use;
- impartial; and
- non-adversarial.

### **3. DEFINITIONS**

**A CONCERN;** is a query or anxiety or dissatisfaction with an aspect of the school processes and procedures which is raised or otherwise brought to the attention of the school and which is resolved informally either orally or in writing.

**A COMPLAINT;** is a concern that is not resolved informally but has been made formally in writing and considered under the formal procedure as described in this policy.

### **4. CONTACTING THE SCHOOL**

**In the first instance, the first point of contact is the Class Teacher**

If the Class Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the Class Teacher to consult another appropriate member of staff such as SENCo, Vice-Principal, or the Principal. (SMT)

**Child Protection concerns should be referred to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Mr C Hyndman, or alternatively, if unavailable, the Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Mrs H Johnston, or Designated Governor for Children Protection & Safeguarding, Mr S O'Neill.**

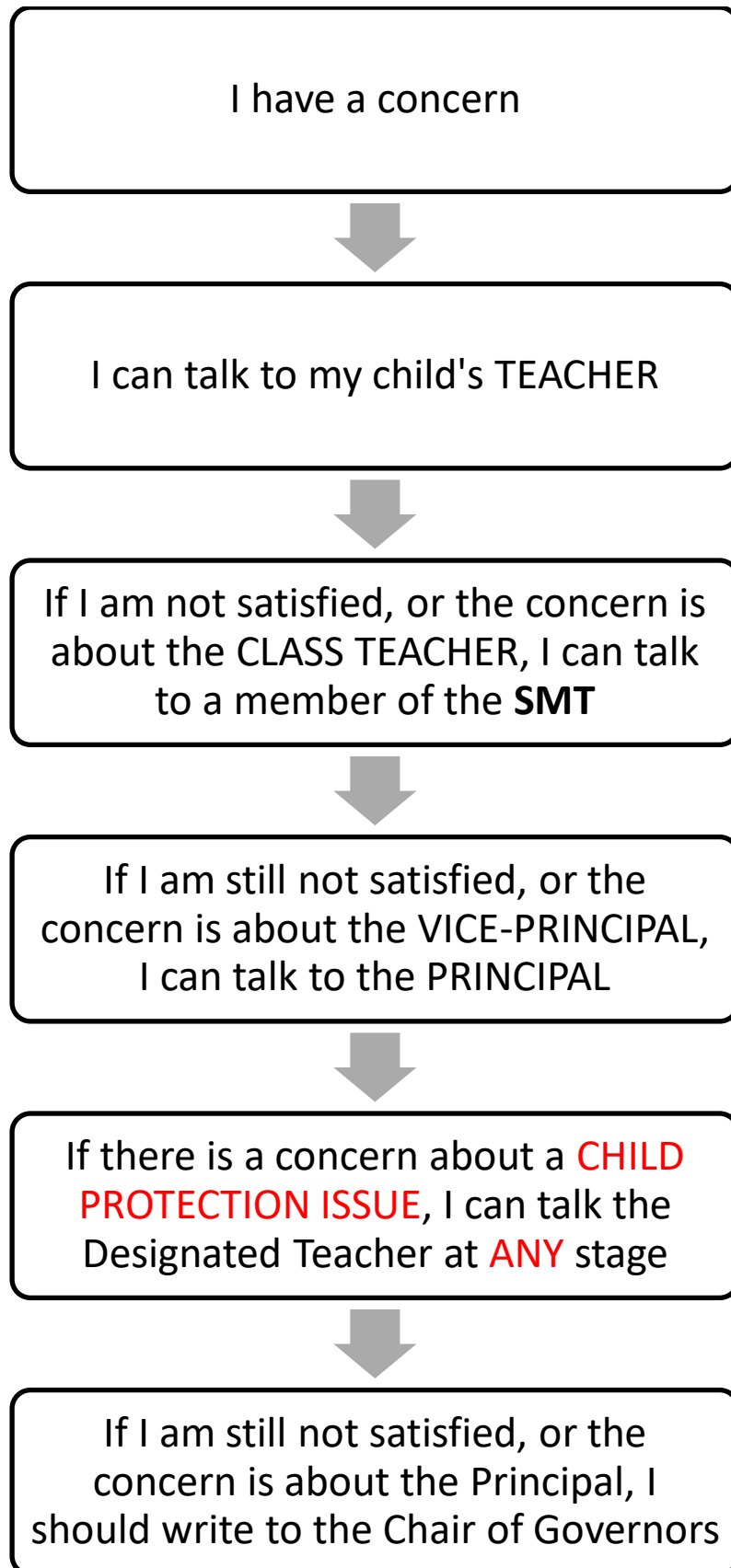
### **5. MAKING OF APPOINTMENTS WITH TEACHING STAFF**

Due to the busy nature of school life and the demands of a teaching timetable it will normally be necessary to make an appointment to see a particular member of staff at the school face-to-face (this is done by calling the school office/reception.)

Parents cannot expect to be seen immediately by arriving at the school unannounced. In the interests of safeguarding, **visitors to the school must either report to Reception, or be met directly by a member of staff.**

**Under no circumstances may a visitor to the school independently enter the buildings to find a member of staff as this may constitute a Safeguarding issue.**

## 6. WHO TO CONTACT



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

### **Rights of a person making a complaint**

In dealing with a parental complaint the school will ensure that parents receive:

- Fair treatment.
- Courtesy.
- A timely response.
- Accurate advice.
- Respect for their privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that some consultation may be necessary with other appropriate parties and
- Reasons for decisions regarding the complaint.

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

### **The responsibilities of a person making a complaint**

In making a complaint, the school would expect that parents:

- Raise issues in a timely manner;
- Treat staff with respect and courtesy;
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues parents raise; and
- Use established procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels.

### **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.

### **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.



## 8. STAGES IN HANDLING A CONCERN / COMPLAINT

Harmony Hill Primary School takes great care with the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents wish to raise a concern or make a complaint they can expect the following procedure to apply:

### Stage 1: Informal resolution (Speaking with the teacher)

- The first stage will normally be regarded as the raising of a concern. It is hoped that most concerns at this level can be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a concern the normal course of action would be to contact their child's Class Teacher.
- A record of the concern will be kept by the School.
- It is important to establish whether the person is asking a question, seeking advice, expressing an opinion or raising a concern, or making a complaint.
- If the Class Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the Class Teacher to consult another appropriate member of staff such as SENCo, Vice-Principal, or the Principal.
- Should the matter not be able to be resolved in an informal way, then parents are advised to proceed the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
  - *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 parents from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage, if they believe that to be an appropriate course of action.*

### Stage 2: Informal resolution (Speaking with the Vice-Principal)

- If a complaint remains unresolved following Step 1, parents should arrange a meeting with the Vice-Principal to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances the Vice-Principal may not be able to deal effectively with the complaint immediately, and may require some time to investigate and respond. If further time is required parents will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which the Vice-Principal will respond.

### Stage 3: Formal resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should ***put their complaint in writing to the Principal***
- The Principal (or Vice-Principal as designated deputy) will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible after receiving the written complaint and will indicate that the formal complaint procedure has been initiated.
  - If the complaint refers to the Principal the person should write to the Chair of the Board of Governors.
- If requested, the complainant will have the opportunity to meet with the Principal (or Vice-Principal as designated deputy). The complainant may be

accompanied to the meeting by a friend or relative; however, legal representation **is not** permitted.

- It may be deemed necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations. Written records will be kept and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- The Principal (or Vice-Principal as designated deputy) will write to the complainant within ten working days. This will confirm that their letter has been received and either;
  - provide a response to the issue(s) raised; or
  - state that their complaint is being investigated and indicate when parents can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which their letter was received). The investigation may require parents 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.
- It is hoped that parents will feel satisfied with the outcome, or that, at least, all of the concerns raised have been fully considered. If parents are still not satisfied they may proceed to Stage 4.

#### **Stage 4: Appeal to the Board of Governors**

- If a complainant is not satisfied by the Principal's response they may write to the Board of Governors asking them to review the decision. A Sub-Committee of the Board may then be formed.
- Receipt of a written request for appeal will be acknowledged in writing.
- All relevant correspondence will be sent to the Sub-Committee as soon as possible. The hearing will be arranged and any relevant personnel, the Principal and the complainant will be informed of the date, time and place of the hearing at least 5 days in advance.
- The Chairman of the Sub-Committee will ensure that its proceedings are properly minuted.
- The aim of the hearing should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

The normal procedure for the hearing will be as follows:

- The Chairman will introduce all parties and explain their role
- The Chairman will explain the purpose of the hearing
- The complainant is given the opportunity to describe their complaint
- Clarification may be sought by members of the Sub-Committee or by the Principal
- Both parties will leave and give the sub-committee time to deliberate.
- The Sub-Committee will consider the complaint and the evidence presented and reach a decision regarding the most appropriate action to resolve the complaint and, where appropriate, make recommendations to change the school systems or procedures to try to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

## **Stage 5: The Appeals process**

If parents are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, parents may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

This procedure is outlined in Appendix 1

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

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

If following Stage Five you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can 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 provided below.

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)

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

### **Step 1: Informal stage: Raising verbally with the Vice-Principal**

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

### **Step 2: Formal Stage: Writing to the Principal**

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

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

- provide a response to the issue(s) parents raised; or
- state that their complaint is being investigated and indicate when parents can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which their letter was received). The investigation may require parents 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 parents believe that their complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner following the completion of Steps 1 and 2, parents 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 their complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to their complaint.

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

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

The investigation may require parents 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 parents are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, they may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

This procedure is outlined in Appendix 1

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

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

If following Stage Four you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can 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 provided below.

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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)

## **10. COMPLAINT ABOUT THE PRINCIPAL**

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

### **Step 1 Formal Stage: Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors**

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

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

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

If parents are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, parents may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

This procedure is outlined in Appendix 1

## **11. GENERAL POINTS**

### **Confidentiality**

Names of those involved in raising a concern or making a complaint cannot be kept confidential; however, knowledge of the complaint will be limited to those who need to know. Concerns or complaints which could involve the safety of an individual, or where a Child Protection issue is raised, cannot be kept confidential as it may need to be referred to a senior member of staff, or to an outside agency.

### **Conduct during meetings**

- All persons involved in a meeting (whether in person or over the telephone) are expected to act in a professional and courteous manner
- Informal meetings can only be held with parents and guardians; having an external person present may make the meeting formal, and the school may request that the meeting progresses under these terms.
- Legal representation is not allowed at any stage during meetings.
- For all parties involved in any form of conversation or meeting, defamatory or aggressive conversations are not acceptable and the conversation will be postponed to a later date when the conversation can continue in a professional manner. Insulting or threatening conversations or those involving inappropriate language may be terminated.
- When a professional meeting or conversation cannot be continued, the original decision by the school will stand.

## **12. RECORD KEEPING**

### **Record Keeping (Complaints)**

- A record of a complaint will be held confidentially in the school
- All such records will be destroyed five years after closing in line with the School's Disposal Schedule. However, the school may keep records longer in the case of a contentious issue.

### **Record Keeping (Safeguarding/Child protection Issues)**

- The school acts in line with the disposal schedule of child protection records as provided by the Department of Education.

## **13. 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.

## **14. REVISION OF POLICY**

This policy will be reviewed by the Leadership Team and Board of Governors at least every two years; however, the school may revise the policy at any time it considers necessary. The latest version will be available by contacting the school directly.



## **APPENDIX 1**

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

If parents are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, they 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. Their written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for their 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. Parents will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where their appeal will be heard.

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

Within ten working days of this meeting, parents 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 parents, in writing, that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is considered closed.

## **NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)**

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

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can 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.

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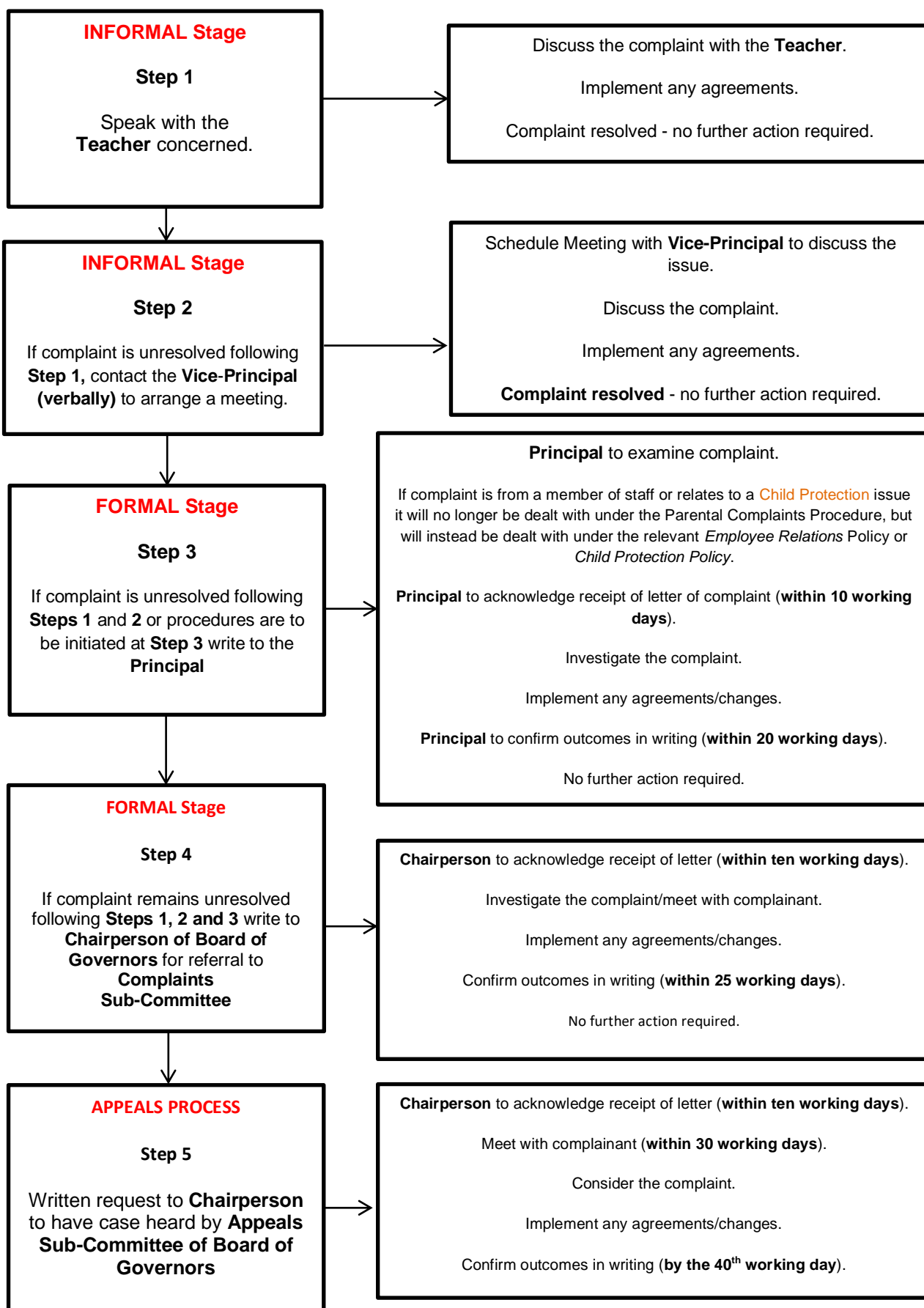
Telephone: 02890 233821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

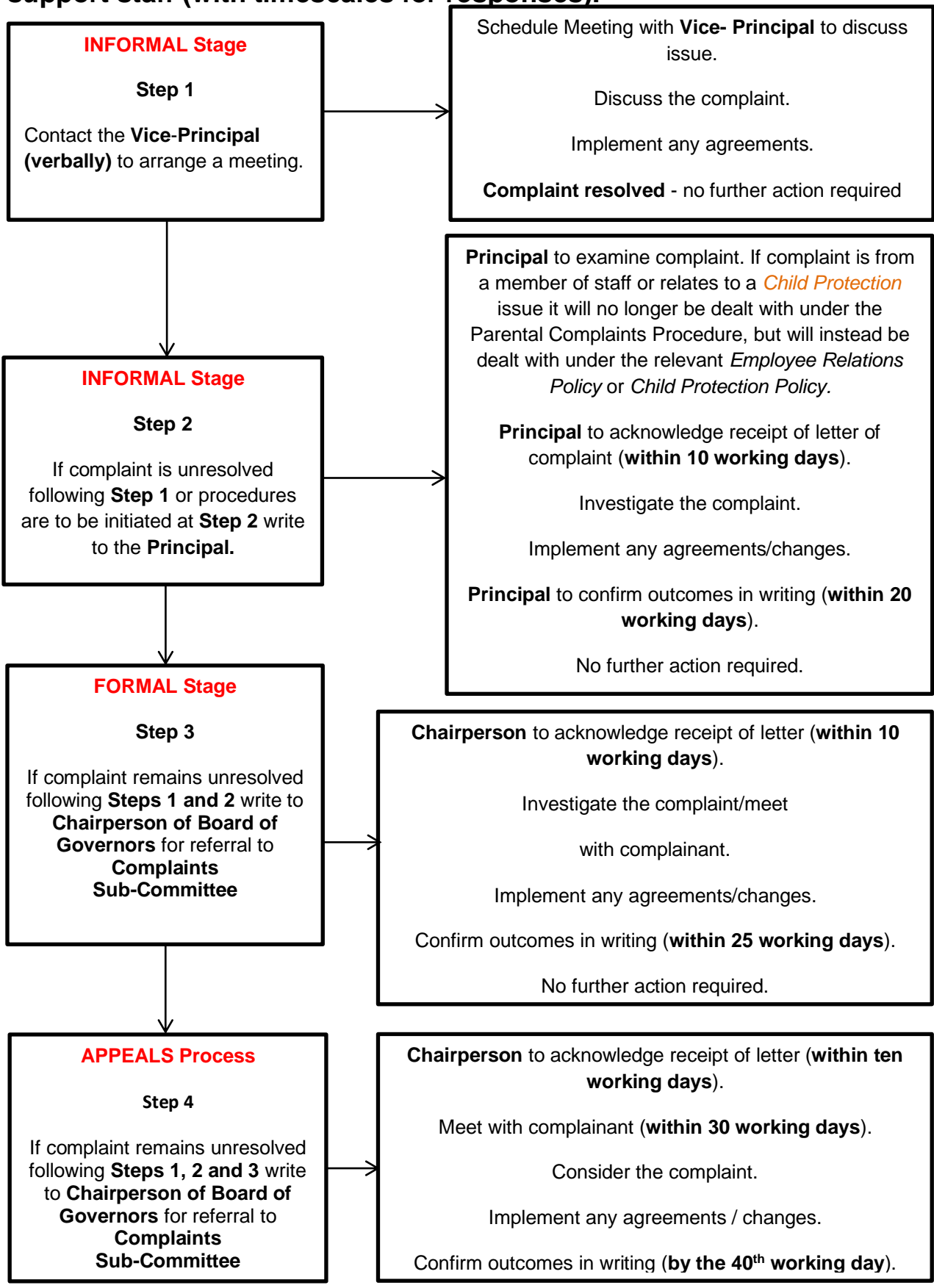
Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

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

## APPENDIX 2: Making a complaint about a Teacher (other than the Principal) with timescales for responses.



### APPENDIX 3: Making a complaint about a member of the school's support staff (with timescales for responses).



## APPENDIX 4: Making a complaint about the Principal (with timescales for responses).

