



# NIS Grievance Procedure

It is in everyone's interest that grievances are detected and resolved at the earliest opportunity, in the most informal way and with the utmost respect to students, parents, teachers and school.

The NIS grievance procedure aims to identify what to do and who to contact when a student, parent or staff member has a problem or concern. This grievance procedure aims to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- be easily accessible and published
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift action with assigned time-limits and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a fair and full investigation by an independent person where necessary
- balance people's desire for confidentiality with other people's desire to be informed
- address all aspects of the grievance and provide an effective response
- provide information to the school's management team so that services can be improved

## Concern or complaint?

It is vital to separate concerns from complaints to ensure that all true complaints can be progressed efficiently and effectively.

Concerns need to be reported through the usual NIS communication channels to reach the appropriate responsible person and thus find an effective solution to everybody's satisfaction within a reasonable timescale.

Should the usual channel for solving concerns break down, or if the nature of the issue doesn't fit these channels, a formal complaint can be filed to the complaints coordinator. The initial attempts to try resolve a concern or problem through the normal channels will be recorded on the complaint form. The complaints coordinator will log the complaint and ensure its progress through the appropriate complaint stages.

## Stages of complaints

The complaints coordinator will assess complaints and decide how they should be progressed through the stages to get a fair, respectful and satisfactory solution. There is some flexibility in how complaints flow through the stages: some complaints may be closed satisfactory after stage 1 while other complaints skip a stage at the discretion of the complaints coordinator.

Should a first approach be made to the Board of Management, the complainant will be advised about the correct procedure and referred to the Complaints coordinator. Supervisors will not act on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or be involved at the early stages, in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.



- Stage 1: Independent Peer review
- Stage 2: Stream coordinator review
- Stage 3: Principal review
- Stage 4: Board of Management hearing and Complaints Panel review

### Complaint Stage 1 – Independent Peer review

The complaint will be reviewed by an independent peer who is not involved in the grievance. This could be a NIS staff member such as a teacher or support staff, or parent body such as the Parent Advisory Council. The complaints procedure respects the views of a complainant who indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff. In these cases, the complaints coordinator can refer the complainant to another staff member.

Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complaints coordinator may consider referring the complainant to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

### Complaint Stage 2 – Stream coordinator review

The stream coordinator will review the complaint if the peer review did not result into satisfying solution, or if the Complaints coordinator deemed the complaint of a nature that needed to be reviewed directly at stage 2.

### Complaint Stage 3: Principal review

The Principal's influence will already have shaped the way complaints are handled in the school. At this point, the complainant may be dissatisfied with the way the complaint was handled at stage one and/or stage two, as well as pursuing their initial complaint. The head may delegate the task of collating the information to another staff member but not the decision on the action to be taken.

### Complaint Stage 4 – BoM hearing and Complaints Panel review

The complainant needs to write to the Board of Management (BoM) giving details of the complaint. The BoM's appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions.

Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole BoM at an early stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint.

The governing body may nominate a number of members with delegated powers to hear complaints in earlier stages of the Grievance procedure, and set out its terms of reference. These can include: drawing up its procedures; hearing individual appeals; making recommendations on policy as a result of complaints.



If the BoM chair deems the complaint serious, he/she will assign a Complaints Panel (CP) to it. The CP may consist of three or five people drawn from Board of Management (BoM), Board of Supervisors (BoS) and/or Board of Patrons (BoP) members or any other independent parties. The panel may choose its own chair and procedures in line with the school's Grievances Procedure.

### The responsibility of the Complaints Panel

#### **The panel has the authority to:**

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

#### **Any Board member sitting on a complaints panel will remember that:**

a. It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so.

No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, members will ensure a balance of governance and sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious affiliation.

b. The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it has to be recognised the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the hearing does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish that the complainant is satisfied that his or her complaint has been taken seriously.

c. An effective panel will acknowledge that many complainants feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting. Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child. The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial.

d. Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults. Where the child's parent is the complainant, it would be helpful to give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the hearing, if any, the child needs to attend.

e. The governors sitting on the panel need to be familiar with the complaints procedure.

#### **Notification of the Panel's Decision**

The chair of the Complaints panel needs to ensure that the complainant is notified of the panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response; this is usually within a set deadline which is publicised in the procedure. The letter needs to explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.



## Repeating Complaints

This Grievance procedure aims to eliminate or greatly reduce the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the chair of the BoM is able to inform them in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

# Complaints form

*Annex A*

Please complete and return to the Complaints Coordinator.

Your name:	Student's name:	Your relationship to the student
Telephone number	Address:	
Email		
Please give details of your complaint.		
What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.		
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?		
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?		
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.		
Signature		Date

Office use:

Acknowledgement sent by who	Date
Complaint referred to:	Date