



Our Lady of Lourdes N.S.

Complaints and Grievances Policy

(Parents)

Introductory Statement:

Our Lady of Lourdes N.S. seeks to encourage and foster positive and respectful relationships among all members of the school community. However, the Board of Management (BOM) recognises that disagreements, conflicts and grievances may arise from time to time which necessitate the availability of clearly-stated procedures to be followed by all concerned with such matters. In addition, the BOM is mindful of its legal obligations in the management and support of all staff members and recognises the need for disciplinary procedures to guide it in its working with staff members.

Rationale:

The purpose of this policy is:

- to give guidance on how to deal with grievances and complaints in the school community.
- to follow legislation including the Education Act, the Education Welfare Act, The Teaching Council Act, and Equality legislation amongst others that impose obligations and duties on Boards of Management to facilitate and encourage school climate that fosters positive relationships among all members of the school community.
- to follow various Department of Education and Skills' Circulars which guide the BOM in the management of the various relationships that arise within the school context.

Aims:

The policy aims:

- to give guidelines to members of the school community on how to engage with complaints and grievances in the school.
- to facilitate the resolution of difficulties when they may arise in an agreed and fair manner.
- to provide awareness regarding the steps which individuals may take if they have a complaint or grievance
- to encourage the use of informal resolution methods and the use of mediation as often and as early as possible during disputes.

Procedures for Addressing Complaints against teachers:

It is acknowledged that disagreements and/or complaints may arise from time to time. It is recognised that parents/legal guardians are the primary educators in a child's life and as such from time-to-time concerns may arise which they may need to engage with the school. It is expected that engagement will be timely, courteous and resolution focused to ensure that the important relationship between the parent and school can be preserved and respected. It is expected that all parties concerned will engage proactively.

It is envisaged that all disputes/challenges should be addressed initially at a more informal level, usually involving contact and communication between parent(s) and teacher(s). Experience has shown that where a mutually respectful willingness among parent(s) and teacher(s) exists to discuss difficulties and to engage in a solution-driven approach to addressing such disputes/challenges, then the majority of such matters are resolved speedily and to the satisfaction of all involved.

The parental complaints procedure was revised and agreed by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the management bodies of primary schools, the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association, the Church of Ireland, An Foras Pátrúnachta, the Muslim Primary Education Board, Educate Together and the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education in 2023. It is designed to provide an open and clearly defined process to facilitate parents/legal guardians in raising concerns about their own child/children in an agreed, fair and transparent manner.

The procedure is a staged procedure where every effort is made to resolve matters at the earliest possible stage. In most cases, concerns will be dealt with either informally or formally at the earlier stages of the procedure. Where it has not been possible to agree a resolution at the earlier stages, the procedure does allow for the escalation of the matter to the Board of Management. This procedure sets out, in four stages, the process to be followed in progressing a complaint and the specific timescale to be followed. It is expected the parties will follow each stage in sequence.

- Where the term written correspondence is used, this refers specifically to a letter or e-mail correspondence from a parent/legal guardian(s).
- Only complaints about a teacher which are written and signed by a parent/legal guardian and which relate to their own child, will be investigated.
- Where a complaint raised by a parent/legal guardian is deemed by the employer/board of management to relate to the following, this procedure will not apply;
 - matters of professional competence and which are to be referred to the Department of Education
 - frivolous or vexatious complaints and complaints which do not impinge on the work of a teacher in a school; or
 - complaints in which either party has recourse to law or to another existing procedure.
- In all circumstances, any form of written correspondence for the attention of the Board of Management, must be supplied to the Chairperson of the board of management **only**. Any deviation from this could be deemed prejudicial and as acting outside the scope of this agreement.
- **Days in this procedure refer specifically to school days**. A school day is a day on which the school is in operation. Holiday periods, school closures and leaves of absences are not counted as school days for the purpose of this procedure.
- Group/collective complaints are not provided for and each parent/legal guardian raising a concern will be dealt with separately through this process.
- The procedure is a domestic forum and accordingly, neither management nor the INTO intends that there would be legal representation at any stage.
- Issues should be raised in a timely manner. It is in the best interests of the child that issues are raised to achieve early resolution at the earliest possible stage with the teacher, ideally when the pupil is in that teacher's class.

Stage 1

- A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint should, unless there are local arrangements to the contrary, approach the class teacher with a view to resolving the complaint.
- Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher, s/he should approach the principal with a view to resolving it.
- If the complaint is still unresolved, the parent/guardian should raise the matter with the chairperson of the board of management with a view to resolving it.

Stage 2:

- If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further s/he should lodge the complaint in writing with the chairperson of the Board of Management.
- The chairperson should bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the teacher and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within five days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3:

- If the complaint is not resolved informally, the chairperson should, subject to the general authorisation of the board and except in those cases where the chairperson deems the particular authorisation of the board to be required:
 - a) supply the teacher with a copy of the written complaint; and
 - b) arrange a meeting with the teacher and, where applicable, the principal teacher with a view to resolving the complaint.Such a meeting should take place within 10 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 4:

- If the complaint is still not resolved the chairperson should make a formal report to the board within 10 days of the meeting referred to in Stage 3 (with teacher / principal).
- If the board considers that the complaint is not substantiated the teacher and the complainant should be so informed within three days of the board meeting.
- If the board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation it proceeds as follows:
 - a) the teacher should be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage;
 - b) the teacher should be supplied with a copy of any written evidence in support of the complaint;
 - c) the teacher should be requested to supply a written statement to the board in response to the complaint;
 - d) the teacher should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of case to the board. The teacher would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by an advocate at any such meeting;
 - e) the board may arrange a meeting with the complainant if it considers such to be required. The complainant would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting; and
 - f) the meeting of the board of management referred to in (d) and (e) will take place within 10 days of the meeting referred to in Stage 3.

Stage 5:

- When the board has completed its investigation, the chairperson should convey the decision of the board in writing to the teacher and the complainant within five days of the meeting of the board.
- The decision of the board shall be final.
- The Complaints Procedure shall be reviewed after three years.
- Primary School Management or INTO may withdraw from this agreement having given the other party three months' notice of intention to do so.
- In this agreement 'days' means school days.

Note: The vast majority of complaints are resolved locally and informally. However, in certain circumstances, for example, where a complaint is considered to be serious in nature, or where the teacher is required to submit a written response to his/her board of management, the teacher should contact his/her INTO District Representative or INTO Head Office for advice and assistance. In advising a teacher, the INTO will be anxious to ensure that there is due process and fair procedures applied, which generally include:

- that the teacher is fully appraised of all matters being considered by the board of management, including being provided with copies of all relevant documentation;
- the right to respond and adequate time to prepare a response;
- entitlement to be represented by the INTO, if necessary.

Where a teacher contacts the INTO in relation to a complaint(s) made against him/her, the officials involved will generally meet with the teacher and require him/her to provide detailed written information and documentation on the matter. The officials will assess the case and decide if additional specific legal advice or a legal consultation is required. Specific legal advice is obtained for members in accordance with the Rules of the INTO and the conditions prescribed by the CEC.

Taken from

<https://www.into.ie/ROI/InfoforTeachers/ParentTeacherRelations/INTOManagementComplaintsProcedure/>

Success Criteria:

The practical indicators of the success of the policy include:

- We receive positive feedback from staff members and members of the school community.
- Procedures/steps which individuals may take if they believe that they have a complaint or grievance are carried out in accordance with national best practice guidelines.
- The use of informal resolution methods and the use of mediation as often and as early as possible during disputes is evident in practice.
- The successful resolution of any difficulties or challenges that arise within the school environment.

Roles and responsibility of the policy:

The Board of Management, Principal and Policy Committee have been responsible for supporting, developing, implementing and evaluating this policy.

Implementation Date:

The plan was implemented in January 2024.

Amendments will be implemented immediately.

Timetable for Review:

This policy was reviewed in 2024 and every four years thereafter.

Signed: Mercedes Campion
MERCEDES CAMPION
Principal

Signed: Brian Twomey
BRIAN TWOMEY
Chairperson, Board of Management

Date: 24/1/2024