



Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs

Complaints Policy (for complaints made by parents)

Rationale

The Board of Management of *ABACAS Special School* has adopted the Complaints Procedure, agreed by the teachers' union and management bodies, which provides a mechanism for dealing with parental complaints against a teacher or other member of staff as set out in Section 28 of the Education Act 1998.

Relationship to school ethos

The school promotes positive home – school contacts and endeavours to enhance the self-esteem of everyone within the school community. The policy contributes towards those ideals.

Aims/Objectives

- To foster fruitful and trusting relationships between school and parents
- To afford parents an opportunity to express opinions/grievances through the framework of a defined procedure.
- To minimize the opportunity for conflict by providing parents with an opportunity to liaise with the class teacher.

Introductory statement

As a school community, we are committed to upholding the ethos of Autism Ireland, our school mission statement and our vision for the school in all our dealings with pupils, parents, one another and with the wider community in which our pupils attend school.

For that reason, we will try to prevent or minimise the need for complaints where this is possible. However, given that our community is made up of human beings and that mistakes can be made, we will approach these issues in a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance for the benefit of all.

This policy seeks to outline our approach to dealing with the following:

- Telephone complaints
- Complaints about the principal teacher
- Complaints about teachers
- Complaints about special needs assistants (SNAs)
- Complaints about pupils
- Complaints about other parents
- Complaints about ancillary staff.



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Telephone complaints

If answered by personnel other than the principal, these will be dealt with by asking for the name of the complainant, his/her relationship to the school and what the call is in connection with, before passing these details on to the principal. No further details will be sought, nor will the complainant be engaged with over the phone, except by the principal teacher. The principal will decide on a case by case basis, whether to talk to the complainant immediately or to investigate the matter first.

Complaints about the principal

Parents wishing to make a complaint about the principal should proceed in accordance with the following procedure:

Stage 1

- 1.1 A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint about the Principal Teacher should approach the Principal Teacher with a view to resolving the complaint.
- 1.2 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

- 2.1 If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further, she/he should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- 2.2 The Chairperson should bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the Principal Teacher and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3

- 3.1 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 Principal Teacher with a copy of the written complaint; and
 - b. Arrange a meeting with 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

- 4.1 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 3.1 (b)
- 4.2 If the Board considers that the complaint is not substantiated, the Principal Teacher and the complainant should be so informed within 3 days of the Board meeting.
- 4.3 If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation, it proceeds as follows:



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- a. The Principal Teacher should be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage;
- b. The Principal Teacher should be supplied with a copy of any written evidence in support of the complaint;
- c. The Principal Teacher should be requested to supply a written statement to the Board in response to the complaint;
- d. The Principal Teacher should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of the case to the Board. The teacher would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting;
- e. 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 3.1 (b)

Stage 5

- 5.1 When the Board has completed its investigation, the Chairperson should convey the decision of the Board in writing to the Principal Teacher and the complainant within 5 days of the meeting of the Board.
- 5.2 The decision of the Board shall be final.

Note: In the above, 'days' means school days.

Complaints about teachers

The Complaints Procedure outlined in the 'Management Board Members' Handbook' which has been agreed between the INTO and the relevant management bodies will be followed in relation to complaints about teachers made by parents. This procedure is outlined as follows:

Stage 1

- 1.3 A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint should approach the class teacher with a view to resolving the complaint.
- 1.4 Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher she/he should approach the Principal Teacher with a view to resolving it.
- 1.5 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

- 2.3 If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further she/he should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- 2.4 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 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.



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Stage 3

- 3.2 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:
- Supply the teacher with a copy of the written complaint; and
 - 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

- 4.4 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 3.1 (b)
- 4.5 If the Board considers that the complaint is not substantiated, the teacher and the complainant should be so informed within 3 days of the Board meeting.
- 4.6 If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation, it proceeds as follows:
- The teacher should be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage;
 - The teacher should be supplied with a copy of any written evidence in support of the complaint;
 - The teacher should be requested to supply a written statement to the Board in response to the complaint;
 - The teacher should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of the case to the Board. The teacher would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting;
 - 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 3.1 (b)

Stage 5

- 5.1 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 5 days of the meeting of the Board.
- 5.2 The decision of the Board shall be final.

Note: In this above 'days' means school days.

Complaints about Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)

Parents wishing to make a complaint about an SNA should approach the class teacher in the first instance as outlined in the procedure below:

Stage 1



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- 1.6 A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint about an SNA should approach the class teacher with a view to resolving the complaint.
- 1.7 Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher she/he should approach the Principal Teacher with a view to resolving it.
- 1.8 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

- 2.5 If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further she/he should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
- 2.6 The Chairperson should bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the SNA and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3

- 3.3 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 SNA with a copy of the written complaint; and
 - b. Arrange a meeting with the SNA and, where applicable, the class teacher and 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

- 4.7 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 3.1 (b)
- 4.8 If the Board considers that the complaint is not substantiated, the SNA and the complainant should be so informed within 3 days of the Board meeting.
- 4.9 If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation, it proceeds as follows:
 - a. The SNA should be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage;
 - b. The SNA should be supplied with a copy of any written evidence in support of the complaint;
 - c. The SNA should be requested to supply a written statement to the Board in response to the complaint;
 - d. The SNA should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of the case to the Board. The SNA would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting;
 - e. 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 3.1 (b)

Stage 5



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- 5.1 When the Board has completed its investigation, the Chairperson should convey the decision of the Board in writing to the SNA and the complainant within 5 days of the meeting of the Board.
- 5.2 The decision of the Board shall be final.

In the above, 'days' means school days.

Complaints about pupils

- Complaints made about pupils by other parents will be handled by the class teacher in the first instance and the principal if thought necessary, through the procedures set out in the Code of Behaviour and the Anti-Bullying Policy. Under no circumstances will a parent be allowed access to a child other than their own child in the school.

Complaints about other parents

- Complaints made by parents about other parents will be handled by the class teacher in the first instance and the principal if thought necessary. Under no circumstances will the school provide the contact details of one parent to another parent without the permission of the parent in question.

Complaints about ancillary staff

- These will be referred to the principal who will approach the staff member directly in order to resolve the issue.

Complaints about substitute teachers and peripatetic teachers

- These will be referred to the principal who will approach the teacher in question directly with a view to investigating and resolving the issue.

Complaints about visitors to the school

- In the case of visitors to the school, (e.g. students on work experience, students on teaching practice, visiting members of other agencies) the complainant will refer the issue to the principal in the first instance.
- If not resolved at this stage, the issue will be referred to the management body dealing with the worker with a view to resolving the issue.

General guidelines regarding all complaints

- a. It is expected that, under normal circumstances, a parent wishing to make a complaint about a staff member would approach either the class teacher or principal (as outlined in the procedures above) at a mutually suitable time with a view to resolving the difficulty.
- b. Where the complaint relates to a class teacher or SNA and the class teacher is bypassed by the parent in favour of discussing the complaint with the principal, it will be suggested that the class teacher should be approached first. However, if the principal feels that this would be



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- unwise, due to the demeanour of the parent in question, the complaint will be listened to without prejudice, notes taken and the parent will be asked to return when the teacher has been given an opportunity to present his/her views on the issues to the principal.
- c. The principal, having listened to both sides, will try to bring the issue to a satisfactory conclusion.
 - d. Parents will be expected to make an appointment to see the class teacher if the matter needs more than a few minutes to resolve, in view of the fact that classes must have adequate supervision at all times and that corridors are unsuitable venues for discussion purposes.
 - e. No staff member is expected to have to deal with an angry, aggressive, threatening, intimidating or otherwise abusive parents. The support of the principal or, if unavailable, the deputy principal or a colleague should be sought in these circumstances.
 - f. In the interest of the personal safety of staff, parents presenting with a complaint under the influence of drugs or alcohol, should not be engaged with unless the teacher is supported by the principal, deputy principal or colleague.
 - g. Staff members should retain a written record of any altercation which arises with a parent or guardian during which the staff member is threatened, shouted at or otherwise abused. A copy of this record should be given to the principal.

Roles and Responsibilities

All stakeholders involved in the education of pupils will take responsibility for implementing the policy.

Review

The Policy will be evaluated on an ongoing basis by representatives from the whole school community and will be reviewed every three years.

Ratification and Communication

The Policy will be presented to the Board of Management for ratification on 14th November 2018.

Signed: _____

Chairperson of the Board of Management

Procedure for complaints concerning a class teacher or SNA

