



St. Mary's Limavady

Scoil Mhuire Léim an Mhadaidh

Living Faith, Inspiring Learning, Shaping Futures

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

St. Mary's Limavady

Date Approved by Board of Governors: JANUARY 2018

Next Policy Review Date: JANUARY 2020

Chairperson BOG _____

Complaints Procedure – Policy Statement

At St. Mary's Limavady, we take complaints very seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. In this regard, we encourage anyone with a concern to speak to us as soon as possible. If concerns are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved and there is no unnecessary dissatisfaction. Many issues can be addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff in school who will be happy to help. Open communication and regular engagement between the school staff and the wide range of users is vital to the effective management of the school. We welcome open communication with our staff. If you have any issues, please talk to the teacher/ form teacher / head of year or Vice Principal as soon as possible. If stakeholders are not satisfied with responses or if their concerns are about matters other than in the classroom they should be raised with the Principal. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible. This policy is established to create where appropriate and necessary a mechanism for the resolution of complaints be they written or verbal.

Aims

Our Complaints Procedure aims to:

- provide an efficient and thorough system through which issues are effectively addressed
- facilitate the school in providing the best possible service for its pupils and the local community
- provide a simple, speedy and accessible service that respects confidentiality
- be courteous and respectful
- address issues arising from complaints in a fair and honest manner within the timescales set out
- treat individuals and groups with openness, equality and inclusiveness
- keep people informed of progress and the final outcome of the issues raised
- Be simple, easily accessible and easy to use.

These procedures do not replace or supplement other established procedures and/or appeals mechanisms in such areas as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions etc.

In addition, where it becomes evident at an early stage that the nature of your complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures.

We are not able to deal with anonymous complaints and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints except for the referral of child protection concerns to the appropriate Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines. The complaint can only be made on the child's behalf by the legal parent/guardian.

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 – concerns will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate Agencies about your complaint;
- Reasons for our decisions.

Where there are grounds to your complaint we will acknowledge this and address the issues you have raised. Similarly, we will ensure that you are clearly advised where we believe that there are no grounds to your complaint.

Your Responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In raising an issue we would expect that you:

- Raise issues in a timely manner;
- Treat our staff as professionals, in a non-threatening manner and with respect and courtesy;
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issue you raise;
- Use these procedures fully and to engage in them at the appropriate levels.

In addition, we would expect that you have reasonable grounds for making a complaint and that you display due consideration for the structures, rules and procedures of the school.

Making a Complaint

Stage 1 - Informal - Speaking with the Teacher concerned

In the first instance a complaint or concern should normally be referred verbally to the teacher concerned, so that they may be allowed an opportunity to address the issue, as in many instances, these can arise through a simple misunderstanding. You should observe the school's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such approaches or meetings.

Stage 2 - Informal - Speaking with the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue with him/her. You should let the Principal know in advance the nature of your concerns so that he/she can prepare for the meeting.

If you have concerns relating to the Principal, you should arrange a meeting with him/her to discuss the issues as at Stage 1.

In some circumstances the Principal will not be able to deal effectively with your concerns immediately and he/she will require some time over which to investigate and prepare a proper response. If further time is required you will be told of this.

Stage 3 – Formal - Writing to the Principal

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved at source through the informal routes proposed at Stages 1 and 2 or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at this stage. Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address **specifically** the issue or issues that are of immediate concern to you.

- You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days.

Stage 4 - Formal – In writing to Governor Sub-Committee

If you still believe that your complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner, or in a case where you decide to raise an issue at this level, you may write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors. The Chairperson will be responsible for bringing your complaint to a Governors' Sub-Committee, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address **specifically** the issue or issues that are of immediate concern to you.

However, where it is evident that the nature of your complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures which may subsequently involve Governors at another level.

- You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days.

Appeals Process – Full Board of Governors

Finally, if you still believe that your complaint has not been addressed you may write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors requesting that you be allowed to meet with the full Board of Governors to appeal the outcomes. The Chairperson will be responsible for ensuring that you are invited to the next suitable scheduled meeting of Governors where your appeal will be heard. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out **specifically** the grounds for your Appeal.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting at which you will have an opportunity to discuss your concerns. Since this process is consultative in nature and not adversarial, a complainant will not have the right to be accompanied or represented by any other person, unless it is

deemed appropriate by the Board of Governors. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your Appeal request having been received.

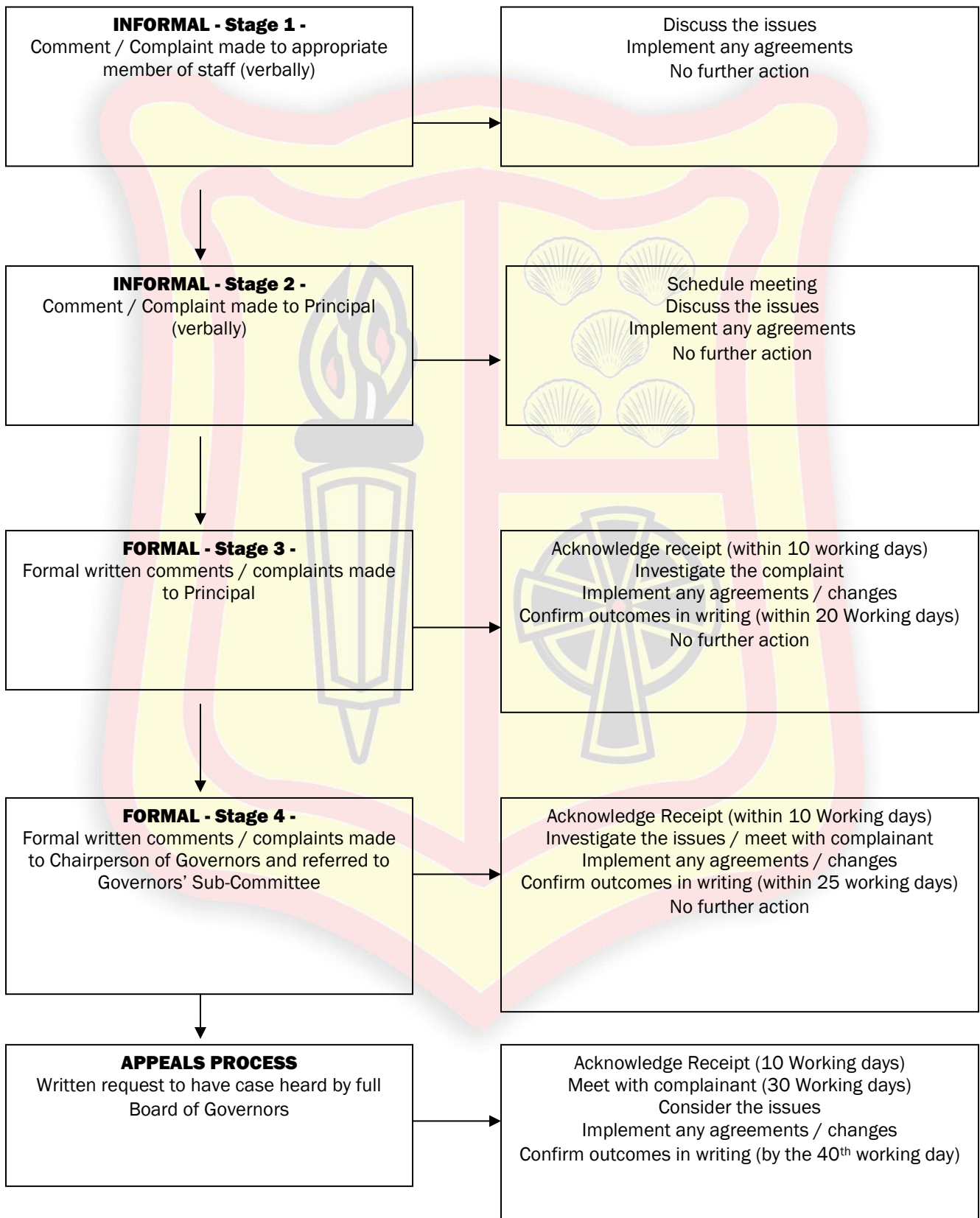
Following this meeting, and within 10 working days of that meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governors' findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions.

If you do not respond within a reasonable time to the outcome of an investigation into your comment / complaint we will assume that you are satisfied and do not require us to take further action.



HANDLING COMPLAINTS IN CATHOLIC MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

FLOW CHART



Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If following these procedures 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:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

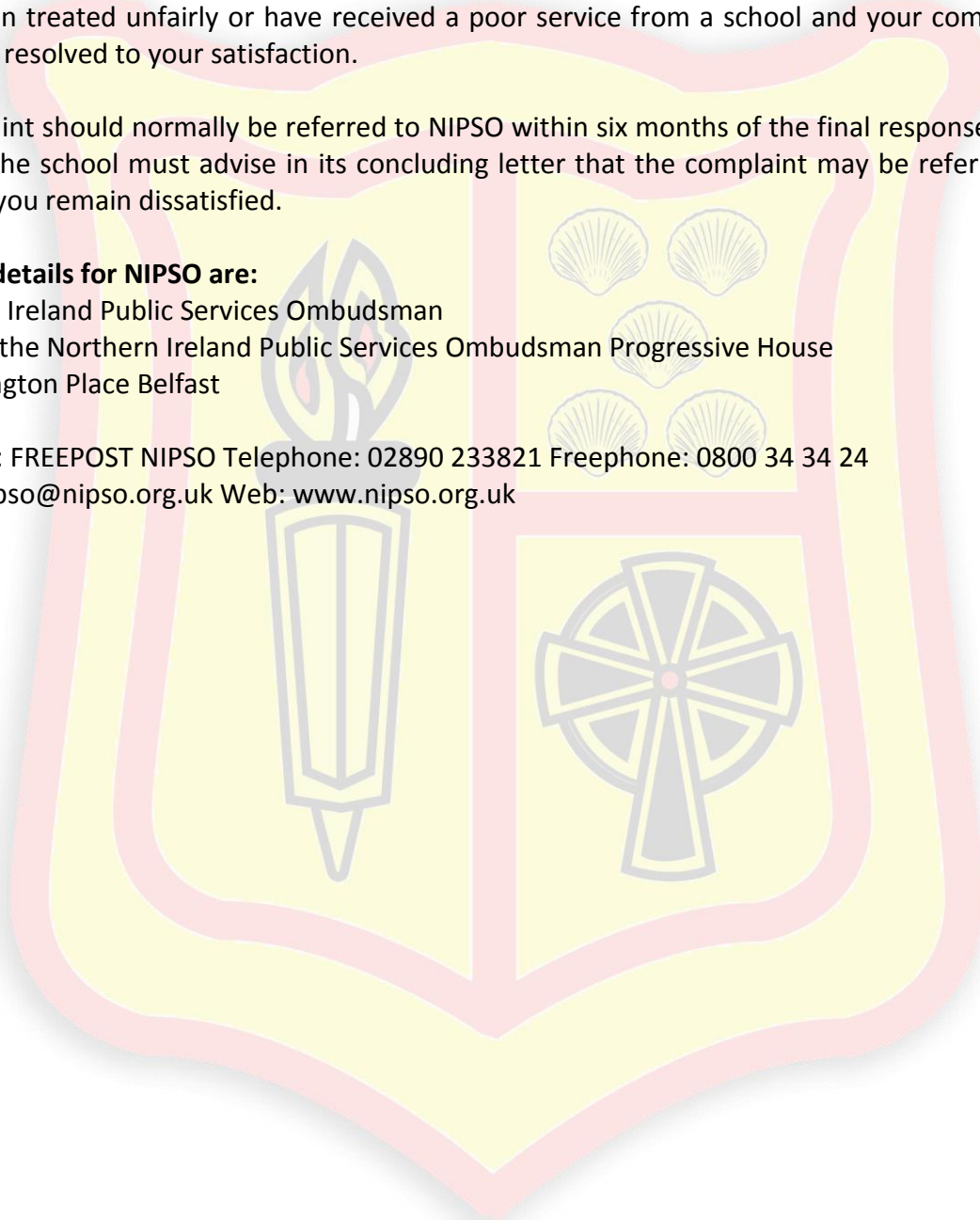
Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman Progressive House

33 Wellington Place Belfast

BT1 6HN

Freepost: FREEPOST NIPSO Telephone: 02890 233821 Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk Web: www.nipso.org.uk



HANDLING COMPLAINTS IN CATHOLIC MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

SAMPLE LETTERS



Formal - Stage 3

Complaint made in Writing to Principal – Acknowledgement

Dear

Thank you for your letter of **DATE** 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

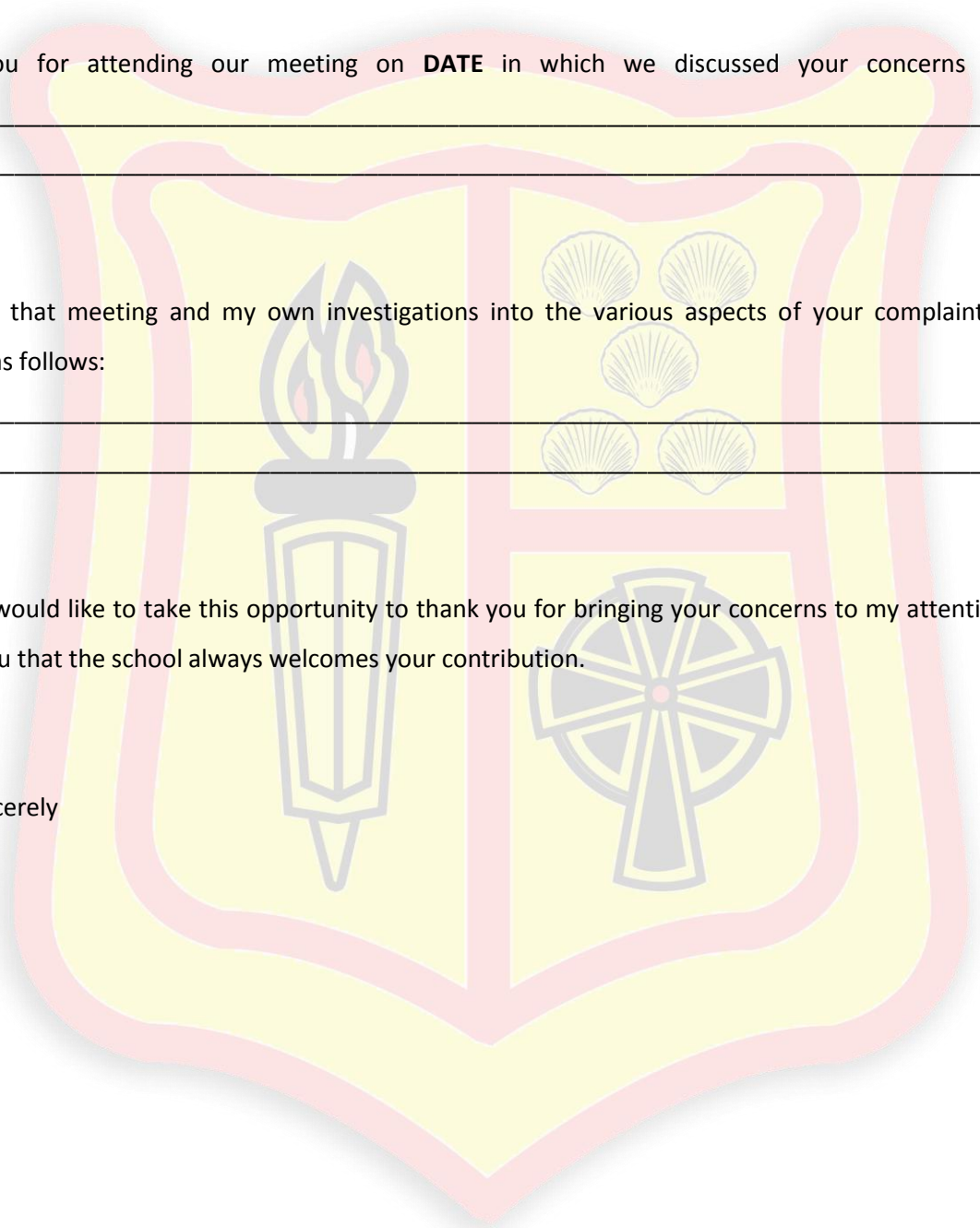
Thank you for attending our meeting on **DATE** in which we discussed your concerns regarding

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 **DATE** 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 **DATE in Any 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 **DATE** in which you outlined your concerns regarding

_____.

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

_____.

OPTION B – Meeting with Sub-Committee

Thank you for attending our meeting on **DATE** 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

Appeal

Request to Appeal - Acknowledgement

Dear

Thank you for your letter of **DATE** in which you set out the grounds for appealing the previous outcomes to your complaint regarding

I have referred your complaint to the Board of Governors for them to investigate and respond to the various aspects of your complaint. To this end I have arranged for your case to be considered at the next meeting of the Board of Governors, which takes place on **DATE in Any School**. You should attend this meeting so that you can have an opportunity to put forward your case in detail.

This will help the Board of Governors to consider all aspects of your concerns and then to respond as fully as possible to the issues you have raised. You will receive a full written response within 10 working days of that meeting.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Appeal

Outcome of Full Board of Governor Meeting

Dear

Thank you for attending the Board of Governor meeting on **DATE** in which you outlined your concerns in respect of _____

Following that meeting and our own investigations into the various aspects of your complaint, I would respond as follows _____

Our reasons for coming to our decision are _____

In relation to the general handling of your complaint I would comment as follows _____

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention and to assure you that the Board of Governors and school staff continue to welcome your contribution to school life.

Yours sincerely

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Discourteous or Threatening Behaviour Towards a Member of Staff

Dear

I have been informed of a regrettable incident when you attended the school on **DATE** 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

