

# Guidelines for Handling School Complaints

St. Joseph's Primary School

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## Chapter I Scope of Application

1.1 The Guidelines are **applicable** to the handling of the following types of complaints through various means, including post, fax, email, phone or in person:

- (i) Complaints about the daily operation and internal affairs of the school
- The Education Ordinance has entrusted the Incorporated Management Committees (IMCs) with the power and responsibility to manage the school. The school together with its sponsoring body will, therefore, develop its school-based mechanism and procedures for handling school complaints in accordance with the Education Ordinance, Education Regulations, Codes of Aid, relevant circulars, guidelines, and codes of practice to ensure compliance with the relevant requirements.
  - A complainant should lodge his/her complaint **directly** to the school for effective handling if it concerns the daily operation and internal affairs of the school (*see Appendix I for relevant examples*).
  - Upon receipt of any complaints about the daily operation and internal affairs of a school from members of the public or via other organisations (such as the Chief Executive's Office, Legislative Council, Equal Opportunities Commission (the EOC), District Council, Offices of Councillors or other government departments), the EDB will seek the complainant's consent to refer the complaint to the relevant school for investigation and direct response. If the complainant does not consent to the referral, the EDB will not investigate the complaint. However, if the complaint involves any serious incident or school maladministration, even without the complainant's consent, the EDB may, without disclosing any personal information, allow the relevant school access to the content of the complaint so that the school could make improvements to its administration system.
  - The EDB may conduct direct investigation of any complaints under special circumstances, e.g. suspected breaches of the Education Ordinance, Education Regulations or Codes of Aid, non-compliance with the requirements stipulated in the relevant circulars, guidelines and codes of practice, student safety being endangered, school operation being seriously impeded, maladministration of the IMCs or serious mismanagement by the school, or when the involved student is determined by doctors/ professionals to have been affected by the incident, resulting in severe emotional problems/ psychological trauma/ suicidal tendencies.
  - To ensure compliance with respective requirements, the school will at the same time refer to the relevant circulars, guidelines and codes of practice when handling complaints of different nature or

complaints related to legislations other than Education Ordinance, such as:

■ **Complaints about child abuse:**

EDB Circular No. 1/2020 “Handling Suspected Cases of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence ”

■ **Complaints about disability discrimination:**

EDB Circular No. 14/2001 “Commencement of the Code of Practice on Education”; and “Disability Discrimination Ordinance Code of Practice on Education” issued by the EOC

■ **Complaints about equal opportunities:**

EDB Circular No. 33/2003 “The Principle of Equal Opportunities”

■ **Complaints about gender discrimination and sexual harassment:**

EDB Circular No. 2/2009 “Amendment to the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 480)” and “Questions and Answers on Preventing Sexual Harassment in The school” issued by the EOC

■ **Complaints about race discrimination:**

EDB Circular No. 25/2008 “Race Discrimination Ordinance” and booklet on “Racial Equality and School Uniform” issued by the EOC

■ **Complaints about procurement of services and goods (such as school bus service, provision of meal boxes, etc.):**

EDB Circular No. 4/2013 “Procurement Procedures in Aided Schools”, EDB Circular No. 10/2016 “Trading Operations in Schools”, and “Corruption Prevention Best Practice: Governance and Internal Control in Schools” issued by the Independent Commission against Corruption (ICAC)

■ **Complaints about acceptance of advantages and donations:**

EDB Circular No. 3/2022 “Acceptance of Advantages and Donations by Schools and their Staff”

(ii) Complaints about the Education Ordinance, education policies and services provided by the EDB

The EDB is responsible for formulating education policies, enforcing the Education Ordinance and providing education services. If a complaint falls into any of the following categories, it will be lodged to the EDB for direct handling, even though the case may have taken place in the school:

- Complaints about education policies (e.g. class structure and class size);
- Complaints about alleged contravention of the Education Ordinance (e.g. in relation to corporal punishment, unregistered teacher) or contravention of the Codes of Aid (e.g. exorbitant charges, expulsion of students); and
- Complaints about services directly provided by the EDB (e.g. school place allocation, services provided by the Regional Education Offices).

The EDB will also draw reference from relevant internal guidelines in handling the above complaints.

1.2 The Enhanced Arrangements are **not applicable** to handling of the following types of complaints:

- (i) Complaints related to ongoing legal proceedings;
- (ii) Complaints under the jurisdiction of other organisations/government departments;
- (iii) Complaints governed by other ordinances or statutory regulations such as complaints against corruption, fraud or theft;
- (iv) Complaints lodged by school staff (if the school receives any such complaints, it will handle them in accordance with the school-based mechanism and guidelines for staff complaints [if applicable]; if the EDB receives such complaints, it will handle them in accordance with the current procedures and reply to the complainant direct.)

1.3 In general, the school **will not handle** the following types of complaints:

- (i) Anonymous complaints
  - Whether the complaint is made in written form or in person, the complainant should provide his/her name, correspondence/e-mail address and/or contact phone number. If in doubt, the school may request the complainant to show his/her identity documents. Should the complainant fail or refuse to provide these personal details, thus rendering it impossible for the school to investigate the complaint and reply in writing, the complaint will be deemed anonymous and the school may not handle it.
  - However, under special circumstances (e.g. when there is sufficient evidence or when the case is serious or urgent), the senior management of the school may decide whether to follow up with an

anonymous complaint, such as treating it as an internal reference, informing the respondent about the complaint, or taking appropriate remedial and improvement measures. If follow-up actions are considered unnecessary, the school will briefly state the reasons and put on file for record.

(ii) Complaints not made by the person concerned

- The person concerned should lodge the complaint by himself/herself. Anyone who seeks to file a complaint on behalf of the person concerned has to obtain his/her prior written consent.
- If the case involves a student (or a minor, or an intellectually disabled person), then his/her parents/guardian, or the person authorised by the parents/guardian, may lodge a complaint on his/her behalf.
- If a complaint is lodged by more than one person on behalf of the person concerned, the school may require the person concerned to appoint one of them as the contact person.
- If a complaint is lodged on behalf of the person concerned or referred by other organisations/groups such as Legislative councillors, district councillors, trade unions or the media, the school / school sponsoring body may seek consent from the person concerned before accepting such kind of complaint. If, however, the organisation/group has obtained prior written authorisation from the person concerned, the school will handle the complaint in accordance with their prescribed procedures.

(iii) Complaints involving incidents that happened more than one year

- Normally, complaints related to the daily operation of the school should be lodged within the same school year. If the incident involved had happened more than one year, the environment might have changed or evidence might have disappeared, or the complainant/respondent might have already left his/her post or the school. The school will not be able to investigate the complaint because of the difficulty in collecting evidence. To provide greater flexibility, the one-year limit within which a complaint may be lodged should be one calendar year from the occurrence of the incident involved.
- Even though the complaint is filed after the incident had taken place more than one year, the school may decide to conduct an investigation under special circumstances, e.g. when there is sufficient evidence, or when the nature of the complaint is serious and urgent.

(iv) Complaints with insufficient information

The school may require the complainant to provide concrete information regarding a case. If the complainant fails to provide sufficient information to allow investigation to proceed, the school may not handle the complaint concerned.

## **Chapter II Guiding Principles for Handling Complaints**

In handling school-related complaints made by parents, students or the public, the school will refer to the following principles:

### **Principle I: Appropriate party/parties to handle complaints**

- 2.1 The school will handle complaints relating to their daily operation and internal affairs, and the EDB will handle those complaints concerning the Education Ordinance, education policies and services.
- 2.2 Complaints related to suspected breaches of other legislations of Hong Kong will be lodged to and handled by the relevant law enforcement agencies (e.g. the ICAC, Hong Kong Police Force).
- 2.3 If a complaint involves both the school and the EDB, it will be handled by the school and related division(s)/section(s) of the EDB.

### **Principle II: Timely and efficient**

- 2.4 Upon receipt of an inquiry/a complaint, the frontline staff will either directly handle it or immediately refer it to the designated staff/task force for action. If the responsible staff cannot resolve the problem, they will seek help from their seniors.
- 2.5 If an incident is referred or reported to the school by the media, the school will adopt the following measures:
  - (i) appoint a spokesman (e.g. the vice-principal) to handle inquiries from the public/the media so as to avoid giving confusing messages.
  - (ii) provide appropriate responses or clarification to the public as soon as possible, including information about actions taken or preliminary investigation results, and ensure that the information provided is clear, accurate and in line with requirements under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.
  - (iii) inform all teaching staff, students and parents of the progress of the case as far as possible; observe whether students and staff have been emotionally affected by the incident; and provide them with appropriate counselling where necessary.

### **Principle III: Clear and transparent**

- 2.6 The school will ensure that the school-based mechanism, procedures and guidelines for handling inquiries and complaints are well accepted by all stakeholders including the staff and parents.
- 2.7 The school may make parents and staff fully aware of the details of the procedures through different channels, e.g. school websites, circulars, student handbooks, staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings, seminars and school events.
- 2.8 The school will ensure that all staff responsible for handling inquiries and complaints understand and comply with the relevant policies and guidelines.
- 2.9 The school will regularly review their complaint handling policies and guidelines by consulting its staff and parents, and revise the handling procedures whenever necessary.

### **Principle IV: Fair and impartial**

- 2.10 The school will treat the complainants and respondents of the complaints fairly. The school will ensure that sufficient appeal channels are provided and consider inviting independent persons to participate in the complaint/appeal handling process, if necessary.
- 2.11 Before an investigation begins or where appropriate, the designated staff and related individuals should declare interests. If there is any conflict of interest, the persons concerned should not be involved in handling the case or have access to information relating to it.
- 2.12 To avoid conflict of interest, any staff member who is the respondent of the complaint should not be involved in handling the case, supervising the investigation, or signing and issuing letters to the complainant.
- 2.13 The school
- 2.14 will protect the rights of the complainants or other persons involved in the complaint, and ensure that their future communication and contact with the school would not be affected.

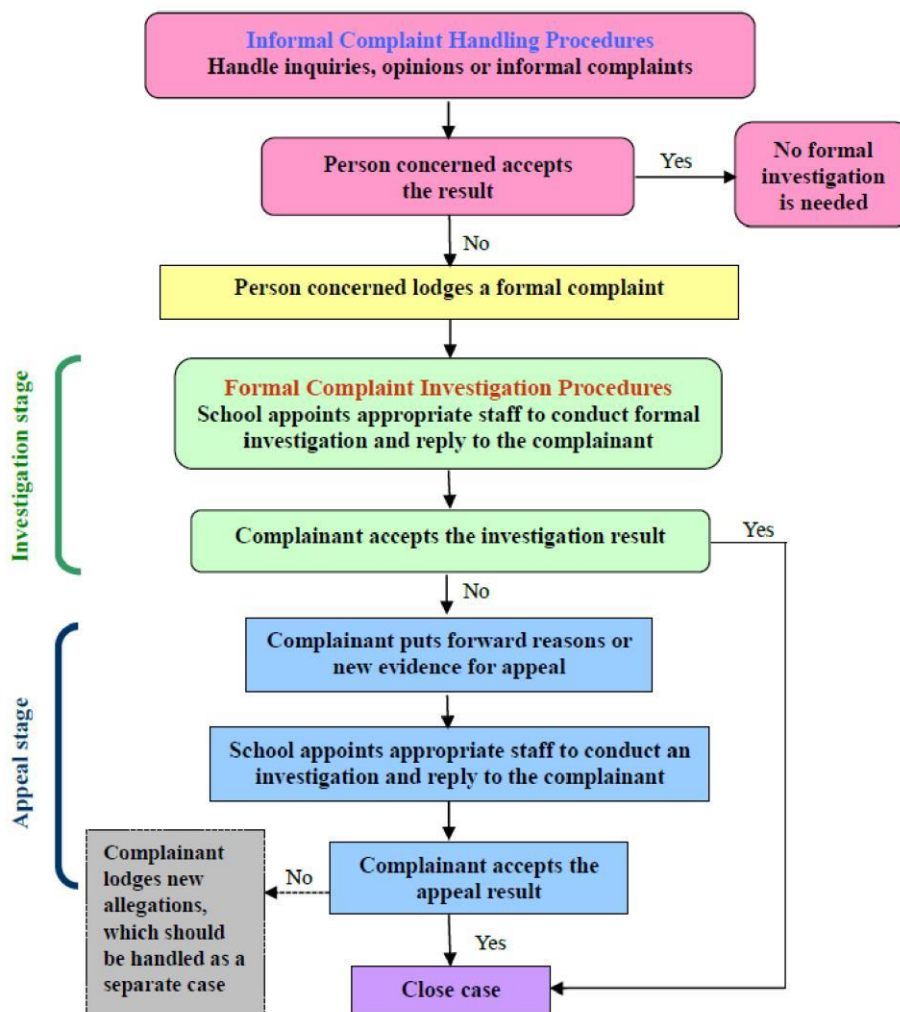


## Chapter III Procedures for Handling Complaints

### 3.1 Interpretation of Complaints

The frontline staff of the school will carefully differentiate between concerns and complaints. A concern refers to the inquiry or opinion expressed by the stakeholders for the interests of themselves, their children or the school, with a view to changing or improving the existing situation. A complaint is an expression of disappointment, dissatisfaction or grievance expressed by the complainant. They may demand the school to rectify its mistakes, take disciplinary action against the suspected offenders, or resolve the issue(s) raised in the complaint. The responsible staff should avoid mixing up concerns with complaints in order to decide the appropriate procedures to handle them. After the differentiation, the responsible staff will then follow the informal complaint handling procedures below. Please refer to Diagram 1 for the flowchart of complaint handling procedures in the school.

**Diagram 1: Flowchart of School Complaint Handling Procedures**



### 3.2 Informal Complaint Handling Procedures

#### (i) *Immediate handling*

- If the school receives an inquiry, opinion or informal complaint, whether verbal or written, the frontline staff should clearly distinguish its nature and take appropriate actions.
- If the case does not require an investigation involving evidence collection, or the person concerned does not request a formal written reply, the frontline staff should listen to the concerns of the inquirer/complainant with care and understanding, and provide whatever assistance or information required and resolve the problems promptly.
- Usually, an initial response will be given in two days' time. The school staff in charge of the relevant issue will have direct talks or interviews with the person(s) concerned to explain the stance of the school and remove their misunderstanding, misgivings or worries.
- The frontline staff can refer the case to a designated staff or a senior officer for prompt follow-up actions and resolutions. The principal may decide whether to take up the handling of the case, depending on the situation of the school and the nature of the case.

#### (ii) *Replying to complaints*

For verbal inquiries/opinions/complaints, oral replies will suffice and written replies are not required. For written opinions/complaints, or if the school wishes to make clear its stance or provide necessary details, the responsible staff may decide whether a simple written reply to the person(s) concerned/complainant is appropriate.

#### (iii) *Complaint records*

Informal complaints normally need not be documented in formal written records. If an inquiry/complaint has been resolved instantly, the designated staff or the principal may record the key points in a log book for future reference. A sample is provided in Appendix II.

#### (iv) *Appropriate follow-up*

The school will review whether the policies or procedures regarding complaints have been properly followed and suggest appropriate measures to improve the handling of similar cases or prevent similar cases from recurring. If necessary, the responsible staff may brief the person(s) concerned on the follow-up actions that the school has adopted and the results that follow.

### 3.3 Formal Complaint Investigation Procedures

#### (v) *Arrangements for the investigation and appeal stages*

If the problem cannot be resolved through the informal complaint handling procedures, the following formal complaint investigation procedures (including an appeal mechanism) will be initiated:

- **Investigation stage**
  - Assign appropriate staff to investigate the complaint and reply to the complainant;
  - acknowledge receipt of the complaint, seek the complainant's consent to obtain his/her personal data and information relating to the complaint, and inform him/her of the name, post title and contact number of the staff responsible for handling the case. (See samples of Acknowledgement Letters in Appendix III & Appendix IV);
  - take immediate measures to preserve all records related to the complaint case, including text files, images, and/or audio recordings (if any), as evidence. The school must comply with the provisions of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance when collecting, holding, processing, or using personal data;
  - contact the complainant and other persons involved or arrange meetings with them in order to have a better grasp of the situation or request them to provide relevant information;
  - handle the complaint as quickly as possible (not more than two months after receiving the complaint.), and send a written reply to inform the complainant of the investigation result;
  - if the complainant accepts the investigation result, conclude the case officially; and
  - if the complainant does not accept the investigation result or the way the school handled the complaint, and is able to provide new evidence or sufficient justification, he/she may lodge an appeal in writing against the school's decision **within 14 days** from the date of its reply.
  
- **Appeal stage**
  - assign appropriate staff of a higher rank than those responsible for the investigation stage, or staff from a different section, to handle the appeal and reply to the complainant;
  - resolve the appeal as quickly as possible (the investigation should be finished within two months after receiving the request for appeal.), and send a written reply to inform the complainant of the appeal result;
  - if the complainant accepts the appeal result, conclude the case officially;

- if the complainant does not accept the appeal result or the way the school handled the appeal, the school will cautiously review the appeal process to ensure that proper procedures have been followed; if the complainant raises other new allegations, the school will handle them separately in order to avoid mixing up the old complaints with the new ones.

(vi) *Resolving conflict through mediation*

The school may consider whether it is appropriate to seek mediation service from a mediator, or invite independent persons to provide impartial views to assist the persons concerned (including the complainants and the persons/organisations being complained against).

(vii) *Responding to complaints/appeals*

- If the complaint or appeal is in written form, the school will respond with a written reply. If the complaint is made verbally, the responsible staff may decide whether to respond orally or in writing. If the case is referred by the EDB/other organisation(s), a copy of the written reply will be forwarded to them for reference.
- The time limit for replying to a complaint/appeal will start from the date on which it is received or when the complainant agrees to let the school have access to his/her personal data. If the information submitted is incomplete, the time limit will start from the date on which the school receives from the complainant the necessary information. If a reply cannot be given within the specified period, the school will explain to the complainant in writing why a longer handling time is needed.

(viii) *Complaint / appeal records*

The school will keep a clear record of investigation procedures of the formal complaints (See sample in Appendix V). The school will also establish a complaint record management system to store relevant information (including correspondences, investigation reports and interview records). In addition, the school will keep statistics of complaints and appeals lodged through either the informal or formal handling procedures for future reference.

(ix) *Appropriate follow-up*

At the end of the investigation/appeal stage, the school will review whether the complaint handling policies and procedures are appropriate, and suggest proper measures to improve the method of handling and to prevent similar incidents from recurring. The staff in charge will inform the person(s) concerned of the school's follow-up actions and outcome of the review.

## Chapter IV Arrangements for Handling Complaints

### 4.1 Designated staff

Taking into account the nature of the complaint, its scope and the people involved, the school may assign a designated staff or set up a task force to handle the complaint with reference to the following arrangements:

- (i) Staff members who are responsible for the appeal stage will be different from those responsible for the investigation stage. In principle, the staff dealing with the appeal will be of a higher rank than those responsible for the investigation. If this is not practicable, the school will make other arrangements, such as appointing staff from another department, to ensure fair handling.
- (ii) Where necessary, the school/ school sponsoring body may establish a task force to handle special complaint cases. Depending on the situation, the task force may include members of the IMC and representatives from the school sponsoring body. To enhance credibility, the school may invite independent persons such as social workers, lawyers, psychologists, and parents or teachers not involved in the case to join the task force to provide professional advice and support.
- (iii) The appointed staff should be proactive in communicating with the inquirers/complainants, and prompt in providing responses as well as the information they need. The school will also ensure that frontline/ designated staff have proper authorisation and clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

Concerning the deployment of staff for handling complaints at different stages, the school may refer to the examples in the table below:

Targets involved	Example	Investigation stage	Appeal stage
Teaching and school staff	1	Senior teacher	Vice Principal
	2	Vice Principal	Principal
	3	Principal	Supervisor
Principal	1	Supervisor	Designated staff of school sponsoring body #
	2	IMC Investigation Task Force*	Supervisor / IMC Appeal Task Force*
Supervisor / IMC		Designated staff of school sponsoring body# / Task force	Designated staff of School sponsoring body# / Task force

#Designated staff could be the staff or the person in charge of the education office of the school sponsoring body.

\* If a complaint involves the Principal, the IMC investigation/appeal task force may include independent persons/managers.

## 4.2

### Confidentiality

- (i) All contents and information of complaints should be kept strictly confidential and restricted to internal reference or reference by relevant persons only.
- (ii) When the school needs to collect personal data during the handling process or when it receives requests for the disclosure of data/records in respect of the complaint case, it should observe the regulations and recommendations laid down in the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. This includes clearly stating the purpose and the form of collection of personal data, and that the data will only be used for handling the complaint or appeal cases. The school may refer to the relevant provisions in the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) and on the webpage of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data at (<http://www.pcpd.org.hk/>).
- (iii) The school will adopt appropriate security measures to protect personal data and privacy, such as keeping the data in safe places (e.g. cabinets under lock and key). Computer data should be protected by passwords. Use of portable data storage devices should be tightly controlled. Where necessary, encrypted portable data storage devices should be used.
- (iv) The school will establish procedures to ensure that only authorised persons are allowed access to information relating to the case. The responsible persons should not disclose or discuss in public any contents or information relating to the case without authorisation.
- (v) The school can incorporate the arrangements for interviews or meetings with relevant parties into the school-based complaint handling mechanism. To avoid misunderstanding, the school will:
  - state clearly whether the person(s) concerned can be accompanied by others (e.g. relatives, legal representatives) during the interview/meeting and reiterate this stance before the interview/meeting starts; and
  - indicate before the interview/meeting starts whether audio/video recording is prohibited or whether the consent of all attendees must be obtained if the session is to be audio/video recorded. This stance should be reiterated before the end of the interview/meeting.
  - remind the complainant during the interview/meeting that both parties should observe and comply with the Data Protection Principles stated in Schedule 1 of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486) and be cautious of any unauthorised disclosure of personal data or other information of a third party.

## 4.3

### Follow-up and evaluation

- (i) The school will conduct a comprehensive review on the strategies, process and steps it has taken in handling complaints in order to benefit from past experiences, improve its way of handling, and avoid similar cases from recurring.

- (ii) The school will take appropriate follow-up measures or revise relevant policies to improve its services.
- (iii) The school will regularly review its own complaint handling policies and report to the IMC by providing, for example, relevant data concerning complaint/appeal cases, and suggest, if necessary, improvement measures to enhance its school-based complaint handling mechanism and procedures.

#### 4.4 Support and training

The school will provide appropriate training to assist staff to effectively handle inquiries/complaints, e.g. providing training programmes on communication, negotiation and mediation skills, or arranging experience sharing sessions for frontline/designated staff to enhance their capability in handling complaints and resolving conflicts. The school will also visit the website of the EDB's Training Calendar System and encourage staff to attend relevant courses.

## Chapter V Review of Complaints

### 5.1 Criteria for review of complaints

The independent review arrangement is only applicable to the complaint cases which remain unresolved after having gone through the investigation and appeal stages in accordance with the School-based Mechanism under the Enhanced Arrangements.

Most school-related complaints can be settled through the informal and formal complaint handling procedures. However, some complaints may remain unresolved after the investigation and appeal stages. Complainants or relevant organisations (including The school/the EDB) may request the “Review Board on School Complaints” (Review Board) to review these cases under the following circumstances:

- (i) The complainant provides substantial grounds or new evidence to show that the school/EDB has handled the case improperly.
- (ii) The complaint has been properly dealt with through established procedures by the school/EDB but the complainant refuses to accept the investigation result and continues to lodge the same complaint to the school/EDB.

### 5.2 Membership of the Review Board

- (i) The EDB has set up a Panel of Review Boards on School Complaints (the Panel). Its members are independent persons from the education and other sectors appointed by the Permanent Secretary for Education. The Panel comprises a Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson and at least ten members.
- (ii) Where necessary, the Panel may set up several Review Boards to review different complaint cases. Each Review Board is composed of the following members:
  - The Chairperson/Deputy Chairperson of the Panel; and
  - Two other members appointed by rotation from the Panel.
- (iii) If necessary, the Review Board may invite up to two non-members (such as school staff, representatives of the EDB or professionals) to sit on the Board to provide information and/or advices on the case.
- (vi) Members of the Review Board should declare interests. Persons who have any conflict of interest with the organisations and/or persons relating to the case under review are obliged to refrain from participating in the review.

### 5.3 Functions and powers of the Review Board

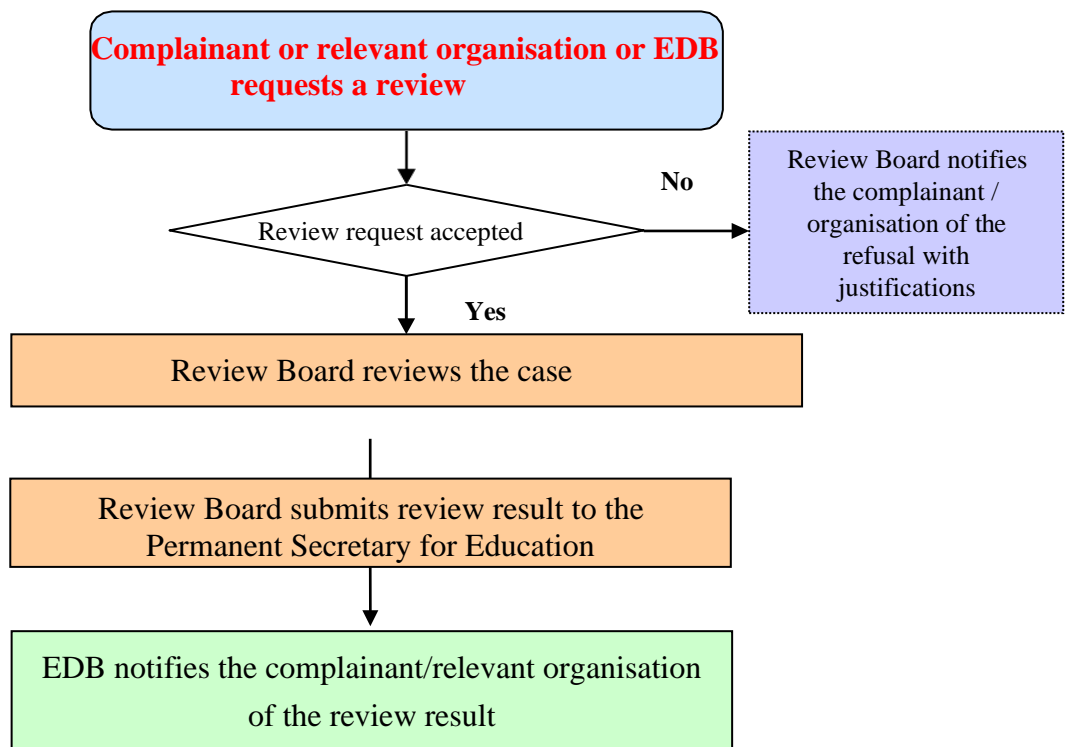
The Review Board is responsible for reviewing school-related complaint cases that have been handled by the school or the EDB through the investigation and appeal stages. The review results and recommendations will be submitted to the Permanent Secretary for Education for consideration.



#### 5.4 Review procedures

Please see Diagram 2 for the review procedures.

**Diagram 2: Review Stage**



- (i) The school will inform complainants in their reply after the appeal that if they do not accept the result of their appeal or the way the appeal has been handled, they may apply in writing to the Review Board Secretariat in the EDB for a review within 14 days from the date of the school's reply. In requesting a review, the complainant should state explicitly in the application the reasons for his/her discontent (e.g. the case has not been handled according to proper procedures or the investigation result is prejudiced) and provide substantial justifications or new evidence. The Review Board Secretariat will then forward the case to the Panel to decide whether a review should be conducted.
- (ii) If the review application is accepted, the Panel will set up a Review Board to handle it. If the application is unsuccessful, the Review Board Secretariat will inform the applicant/relevant organisation in writing of the reasons for refusal.
- (iii) The person who requests a review is required to sign a letter of consent, authorising the Review Board to forward information regarding the complaint to the school/school sponsoring body and/or other relevant organisation(s)/person(s). The Review Board also has the right to obtain information related to the complaint/review from the complainant, the

- school/school sponsoring body and/or other relevant organisation(s)/ person(s).
- (iv) The review process mainly involves examination of investigation reports and related documents. Taking into account the subject matter and nature of the case, the Review Board may:
- scrutinise the information provided by the complainant, respondent, school/school sponsoring body and/or EDB, as well as the files and records associated with the case;
  - require the complainant, respondent, school/school sponsoring body and/or EDB to clarify information and/or provide new evidence;
  - meet with the complainant, the respondent and/or other persons concerned respectively to collect further information.; and
  - invite the complainant, respondent, representative(s) of the school/school sponsoring body, and/or representative(s) of the EDB to attend case meetings.
- (v) To protect personal privacy, the Review Board/EDB may not disclose to anyone any personal information related to the complaint without the consent of the relevant parties (including the complainant, respondent, and/or the school/school sponsoring body).
- (vi) If the Review Board wishes to interview specific persons or convene a meeting on the case, it will make the following arrangements:
- The persons to be present at the interview or case meeting must be involved in the complaint and have obtained the approval of attendance from the Chairperson of the Review Board.
  - During the interview or case meeting, the complainant is not allowed to question the respondent or other witnesses, and vice versa.
  - Audio/video recording is prohibited during the interview or case meeting.

## 5.5 Result of review

- (i) The Review Board will examine whether the case has been handled properly according to the complaint handling procedures and whether the result of investigation by relevant party is fair and reasonable. It will then make recommendations on whether to close the case, settle the disputes through mediation, implement follow-up/remedial measures, or conduct a re-investigation. The review results and recommendations will be submitted to the Permanent Secretary for Education for consideration.
- (ii) The EDB will draw a final conclusion with reference to the review result and recommendations of the Review Board. The relevant person(s)/organisation(s) will be informed in writing of the outcome within three months after receipt of the request for review. If the EDB accepts closure of the case as recommended by the Review Board, the

EDB and the school will cease to handle the complaint. If the persons / organisations requesting the review consider the result unacceptable, they may further appeal via other channels.

- (iii) If the Review Board recommends that the case be re-investigated by the school/EDB, the school/EDB will assign staff at least one rank higher than those who handled the case previously to conduct the re-investigation. The re-investigation should be completed within two months and the result submitted in writing to the Review Board. Upon the Board's endorsement, the school/EDB will issue a written reply to the complainant and copy it to the Board. If the school/EDB cannot complete the investigation within two months, it should notify the complainant in writing of the reasons and the time needed for a definite reply.

## Chapter VI Handling of Unreasonable Behaviour

Under general circumstances, the school will not put any restrictions on complainants making contact with the school. However, sometimes certain unreasonable behaviour of complainants may have a negative impact on the school. Special measures for such inappropriate behaviours are to be taken.

### 6.1 Definition of unreasonable behaviour

Complainants' unreasonable behaviour can generally be classified into the following three types:

- (i) *Unreasonable attitude or behaviour*, such as:
  - Acts of violence or intimidation
  - Making complaints with abusive language or in an insulting and discriminatory tone
  - Providing false data or deliberately concealing facts
- (ii) *Unreasonable demands*, such as:
  - Requesting a huge amount of information or demanding special treatment
  - Making telephone calls incessantly to ask for a dialogue or an interview, or to command a certain staff member to reply
  - Commanding a certain staff member to meet at a specific time and place
- (iii) *Unreasonable persistent complaints*, such as:
  - Insisting on rejecting the explanations and findings of the school/EDB, and/or requiring the school/EDB to discipline certain person(s), even after appropriate investigation procedures have been taken
  - In respect of the same case, repeatedly making the same complaints or presenting similar justifications as before without providing any new evidence
  - In respect of the same case, persistently bringing in new allegations or new complaint targets, but failing to present concrete evidence
  - Interpreting things in an unreasonable or irrational manner, or wrangling over trivial details

## 6.2 Formulating school-based policy

- (i) The Principal will designate suitable staff members to ascertain whether a complainant's behaviour is reasonable, and decide what measures will be taken. However, if the complaint is lodged against the principal, such decisions will be made by the school supervisor or the IMC.
- (ii) All stakeholders should be informed of the school's policy regarding unreasonable behaviour of complainants.

## 6.3 Handling of unreasonable behaviours

### (i) *Unreasonable attitude or behaviour*

- Any unreasonable attitude or behaviour, including acts of violence, intimidation, and abusive/offensive conduct or language, whether performed face-to-face, by phone, or in writing are unacceptable. The staff member handling the complaint should convey this message clearly to the complainant and demand that he/she should stop acting in such a way. If the complainant refuses to comply after two attempts of warning, the staff member may terminate the meeting or conversation with him/her.
- Staff responsible for handling such behaviours should stay alert and take suitable actions to protect their own safety. They can make decision, depending on the situation, on whether to terminate the interview or dialogue with the complainant and ask the complainant to leave, if his/her behaviour poses an immediate threat to the staff's personal safety or damages their personal interests. In an emergency or if it is deemed necessary, the school will report to the police or take legal actions.

### (ii) *Unreasonable demands*

- If a complainant makes unreasonable demands which have an adverse impact on the school, e.g. interrupting its operation/services or other stakeholders are affected by the unreasonable behaviour of the complainant, the school may consider putting restrictions on the complainant's contacts with the school, including specifying the time, frequency, date, duration and modes of communication (for example, requiring the complainant to make an appointment before visiting the school, submit his/her views in writing, or contact only with the staff designated by the school). The school must notify the complainant in writing of such arrangements and handling procedures.
- If the complainant's behaviour improves, the school may consider whether the restrictions should be lifted. If the school decides to keep the restrictions, it should regularly review the conditions for imposing them.

- (iii) Unreasonable persistent complaints
- If the school has carefully examined the case and handled it properly under the prescribed investigation and appeal procedures, and sent a detailed and unbiased written explanation regarding the outcome to the complainant, the school may decide whether to restrict or stop contacts with the complainant, and cease handling the case altogether.
  - To avoid any unrealistic expectations on the part of the complainant, the school will communicate to him/her in a firm manner that a final decision has been made regarding the case and that the decision is irreversible.
  - In response to these complaints, the school may send a “Reply Card” to the complainant, referring him/her to the replies previously given, and reiterate that the school will neither respond to the same complaint nor contact him/her again (see Appendix VI for a sample “Reply Card”).

**Effective school-based mechanism**

- 7.1        To ensure that public inquiries / complaints are properly handled, the school has established a school-based complaint handling mechanism and procedures which are:
- ◆ Clear and unambiguous
  - ◆ Open and transparent
  - ◆ Concise and easy to follow
  - ◆ Fair and just
  - ◆ Able to protect confidentiality of information
  - ◆ Under continuous review and improvement
- 7.2        An effective school-based complaint handling mechanism not only increases public confidence in school governance, but also prevents public opinions / inquiries from evolving into formal complaints or unnecessarily escalating to the EDB or other government departments / organisations.

**Maintaining good communication**

- 7.3        The school will continue to maintain a close partnership with EDB, parents and staff by establishing an effective framework for handling public complaints. The school will also assume an open attitude and listen to the views of their sponsoring bodies and stakeholders to identify room for improvement regarding the school-based inquire / complaint handling mechanism and procedures.

**Making continuous improvement**

- 7.4        The EDB launched the “Project on Enhancement of Complaint Management in Schools” to make recommendations on the policies and procedures for handling complaints as well as to delineate the roles of various parties concerned. The EDB believes that this is the first step towards supporting schools in enhancing/establishing their own enquiry/complaint handling mechanisms. The EDB will continue keeping close contact with the school and stakeholders, listening to their views and enhancing the proposed mechanisms and procedures with the aim of helping the school to establish an effective framework for handling public complaints.

