

C.C.C. Kei Tsun Primary School

Guidelines for Handling School Complaints

1 Aim

- To allow the school to handle complaints more speedily and effectively and to respond to the reasonable demands from complainants
- To help the school get to the root of the issues and take appropriate follow up actions

2 Scope of Application

- (i) The school only handles the complaints about the daily operation and internal affairs of the school.
- (ii) Whether the complaint is made in written form or in person, the complainant should provide his /her name, correspondence, e-mail address and contact phone number. Should the complainant fail or refuse to provide such 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 consider not to handle it.
- (iii) Under special circumstances (e.g. when there is sufficient evidence or when the case is serious or urgent), the school principal may decide whether to follow up with an anonymous complaint, or treating it as an internal reference and informing the subject of the complaint about the case for taking appropriate remedial and improvement measures. If follow up actions are considered unnecessary, the school should briefly state the reason and put on file for record.
- (iv) Generally speaking, 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.
- (v) 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.
- (vi) If the organisation/group has obtained prior written authorisation from the person concerned, schools should handle the complaint in accordance with their prescribed procedures.
- (vii) The school only handles complaints lodged with the same school year, hence, one calendar year.

3 Guiding Principles for Handling Complaints

3.1 Handling of complaints by the appropriate party/parties

A complaint should be directly handled by the organisation which is responsible for making the policies, providing the relevant services, or managing the persons/matters being complained.

3.2 Timely and efficient handling

The school should handle and respond to all verbal or written enquiries, opinions or complaints as soon as possible to prevent any uninviting situation from worsening. Upon receipt of an enquiry a complaint, the frontline staff should 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 should seek help from their seniors.

3.3 Clear and transparent mechanism

- (i) When setting up a clear and effective guidelines and procedures for handling complaints, the school will consult teachers and parents.
- (ii) They may make parents and staff fully aware of the details of the procedures through different channels, e.g. staff meetings, the school website, circulars, parent meetings.
- (iii) All staff responsible for handling enquiries and complaints understand and comply with the relevant policies and guideline.
- (iv) The school should regularly review our complaint handling policies and guidelines, and revise the handling procedures whenever necessary.

3.4 Fair and impartial handling

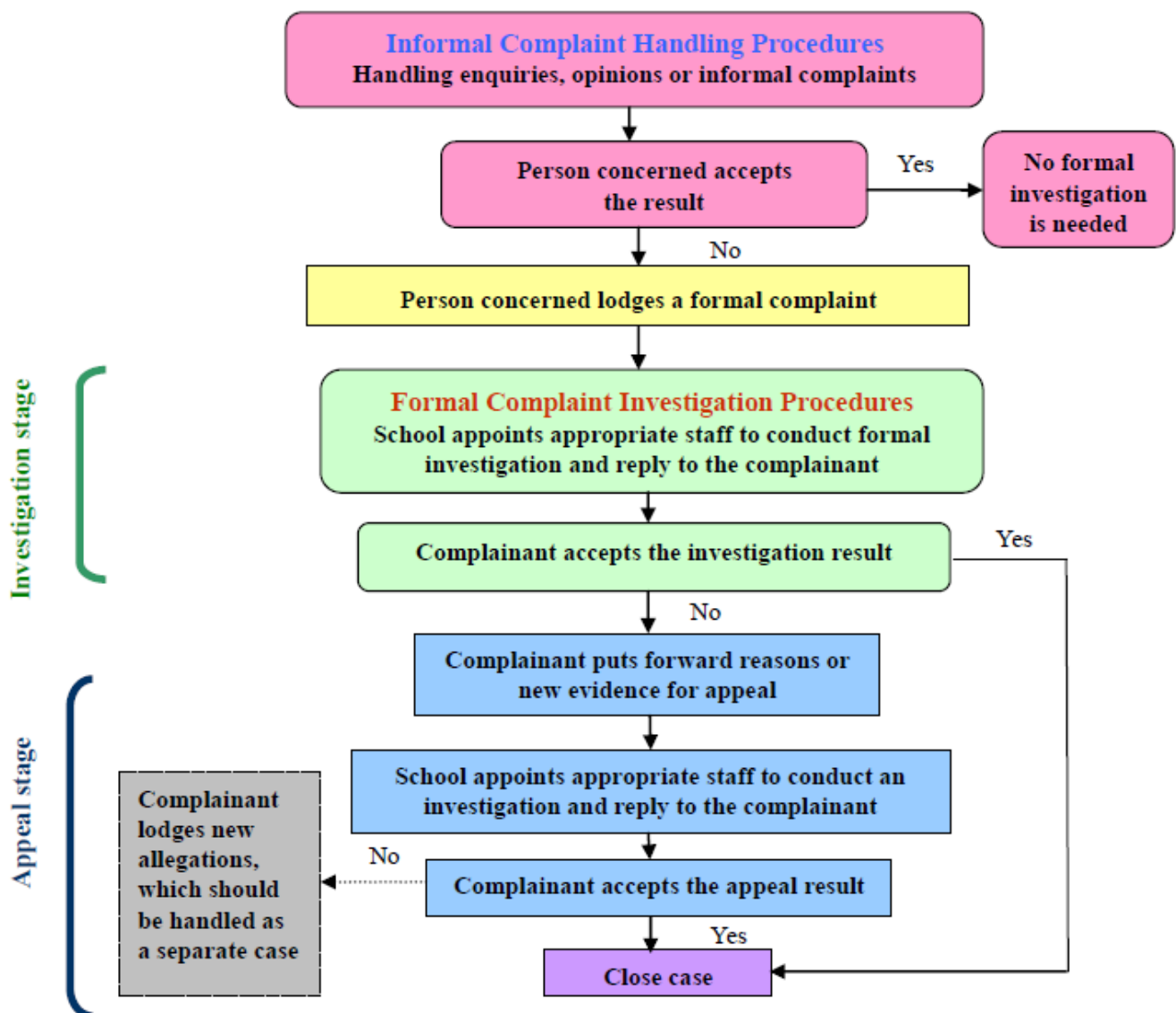
- (i) The school should approach complaints positively and treat the complainant s and the subjects of the complaints fairly.
- (ii) Before an investigation begins or where appropriate, the designated staff and related individuals should declare interests. If there is any conflict of interest, the persons concerned should not be involved in handling the case or have access to information relating to it.
- (iii) To avoid conflict of interest, any staff member who is the subject of the complaint should not be involved in handling the case supervising the investigation, or signing and issuing letters to the complainant.
- (iv) The school should see to it that the rights of the complainants or other persons involved in the complaint are being protected and that their future communication and contact with the school would not be affected.

4 Procedures for Handling Complaints

To avoid confusion in the handling process, the frontline staff of schools should carefully differentiate between concerns and complaints. A concern refers to the enquiry or opinion expressed by the enquirers 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 complainants. 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.

In general, unless the person concerned insists on making a formal complaint, the responsible staff can promptly provide assistance or help resolve his/her problem by following the informal complaint handling procedures.

Diagram 1: Flowchart of School Complaint Handling Procedures



4.1 Informal Complaint Handling Procedures

- (i) If the school receives an enquiry, opinion or informal complaint from the public, whether verbal or written, the frontline staff should clearly distinguish its nature and take appropriate action. In general, 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 may handle the matter following the informal complaint handling procedures of the school.
- (ii) The frontline staff should listen to the concerns of the enquirer/complainant with care and understanding. If the incident is not serious, they should provide whatever assistance or information required or promptly respond to the concerns raised by the enquirer/complainant and help resolve the problems involved.
- (iii) If necessary, the school staff in charge of the relevant issue should have direct talks or interviews with the persons concerned within two working days to explain the schools' stance and remove any misunderstanding, misgivings or worries of them.
- (iv) If necessary, the frontline staff should refer the case to a designated staff or a senior officer for prompt follow up actions and resolutions.
- (v) For verbal enquiries/opinions/complaints handled by the informal complaint handling procedures, oral replies will suffice.
- (vi) If an enquiry/complaint has been answered or resolved instantly, it is suggested that the key points can be recorded in a log book for future reference.

4.2 Formal Complaint Investigation Procedures

4.2.1 Initiating the procedures

- (i) If the school has made its best efforts to resolve the problem through the informal complaint handling procedures but the complainant still does not accept the school's response or the problem remains unresolved, the formal complaint investigation procedures (including an appeal mechanism) should be initiated.
- (ii) Taking into account the nature of the complaint, its scope and the people involved, schools may assign appropriate staff to setup a task force to handle the complaint with reference to the following arrangements.

Targets involved	Investigation stage	Appeal stage
School staff	Senior teacher (PSM)	Principal and Vice Principal
Teaching staff	Senior teacher (PSM)	
Senior teacher (PSM)	Principal and Vice Principal	Supervisor
Principal	Supervisor and IMC	IMC Appeal Task Force
Supervisor/IMC	Designated staff of school sponsoring body	

4.2.2 Investigation stage

- (i) 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 phone number of the staff responsible for handling the case for contact purposes.
- (ii) If necessary, 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.
- (iii) Complete the investigation with two to four weeks after receiving the complaint, and send a written reply to inform the complainant of the investigation result.
- (iv) If the complainant accepts the investigation result, conclude the case officially.

4.2.3 Appeal stage

- (i) 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.
- (ii) In accordance with the School-based mechanism, the Principal and two Vice Principals will form the Appeal Committee and to handle the appeal and reply to the complainant.
- (iii) Complete their investigation within four to six weeks after receiving the request for appeal, and send a written reply to inform the complainant of the appeal result.
- (iv) If the complainant accepts the appeal result, conclude the case officially.

4.2.4 Handling the unacceptance of appeal result

- (i) If the complainant does not accept the appeal result or the way the school handled the appeal, the school should cautiously review the appeal process to ensure that proper procedures have been followed.
- (ii) The school submits a report to the IMC and seek advice on following up the case.