

**Chiu Sheung School, Hong Kong**

**Guidelines for Handling School  
Complaints**

**2018/19**

## **Foreword**

With a view to building a good communication culture and to adopt an open attitude to diverging views, we are committed to strengthen communication and maintain a close partnership with our stakeholders to enhance school governance and provide quality education

## **Main Reference**

*Guidelines for Handling School Complaints* published by the Education Bureau (EDB)

## **Scope of Application**

A) The Guidelines are designed to help handling complaints more effectively. They are applicable to complaints lodged by parents, students or the public through various means, including post, fax, email, phone or in person in the follow types:

1. Complaints about the daily operations and internal affairs of schools will be handled by school directly.
2. Complaints about Education Ordinance, education policies and services provided by the EDB should be lodged to the EDB for direct handling, even though the case may have taken place in the school.

B) The Guidelines are not applicable to handling of the following types of complaints:

1. Complaints related to ongoing legal proceedings;
2. Complaints under the jurisdiction of other organisations / government departments;
3. Complaints governed by other ordinances or statutory regulations such as complaints against corruption, fraud or theft;
4. Complaints lodged by school staff.

## **Guiding Principles for Handling Complaints**

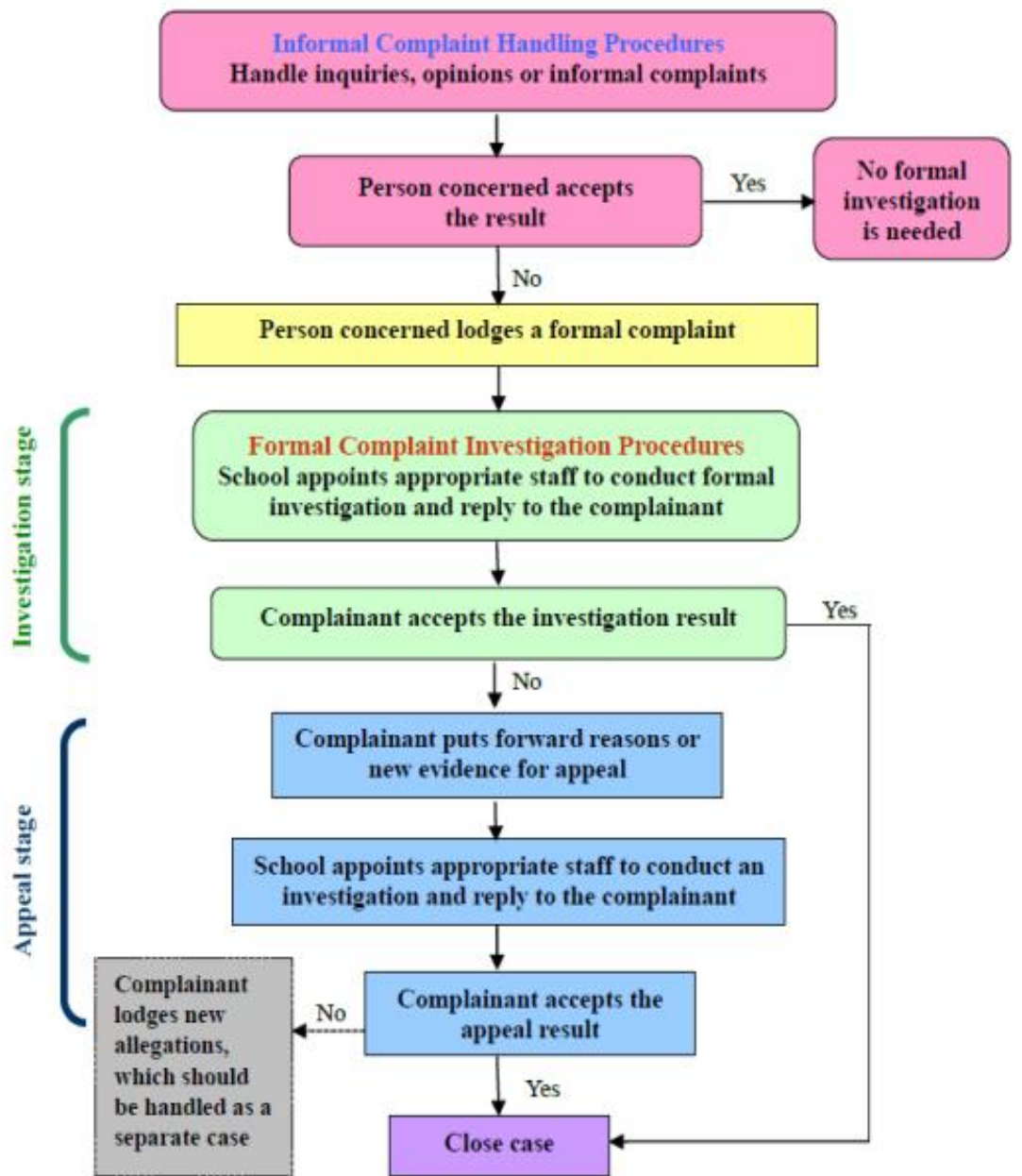
1. All complaints shall be treated with strictest confidence.
2. Complaints shall be handled by the appropriate party/parties.
3. Complaints shall be handled in a timely and efficient manner.
4. Complaints shall be handled with a clear and transparent mechanism.
5. Complaints shall be handled fairly and impartially.

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

1. Anonymous complaints.
2. Complaints not made by the person concerned.
3. Complaints involving incidents that happened more than one year.
4. Complaints with insufficient information.

## Procedures for Handling Complaints

Flowchart of school complaints handling procedures



## **Informal Complaint Handling Procedures**

### **1. Immediate/prompt handling**

If the school receives an inquiry, 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.

If necessary, the frontline staff should refer the case to a designated staff or a senior officer for prompt follow up actions and resolutions.

### **2. Replying to complaints**

For verbal inquiries/opinions/complaints handled by the informal complaint handling procedures, oral replies will suffice and written replies are normally not required. For opinions/complaints which are presented in written form 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 (in general, within 3 school days).

### **3. Complaint records**

Cases handled by the informal complaint handling procedures normally need not be documented in formal written records. If an inquiry/complaint has been answered or resolved instantly, it is suggested that the designated staff or the principal may record the key points in a log book for future reference.

### **4. Appropriate follow-up**

Schools should 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.

## **Formal Complaint Investigation Procedures**

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 following formal complaint investigation procedures (including an appeal mechanism) should be initiated:

### **(i) Investigation stage**

1. In accordance with the school-based mechanism, assign appropriate staff to investigate the complaint and reply to the complainant;
2. 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;
3. 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;
4. Handle the complaint as quickly as possible (It is suggested that schools complete their investigation within two months after receiving the complaint.), and send a written reply to inform the complainant of the investigation result;
5. 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.

### **(ii) Appeal stage**

The school should adopt the following procedures with appeal cases:

1. In accordance with the school-based mechanism, 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;
2. Handle and resolve the appeal as quickly as possible (It is suggested that investigation be completed within two months.), and send a written reply to inform the complainant of the appeal result;
3. 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 should cautiously review the appeal process to ensure that proper procedures have been followed;
4. If the complainant raises other new allegations, the schools should handle them separately in order to avoid mixing up the old complaints with the new ones.

## Arrangements for Handling Complaints

### Designated staff

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

Targets involved	Investigation stage	Appeal stage
Teaching and school staff	Senior teacher	Vice Principal
	Vice Principal	Principal
	Principal	Supervisor
Principal	Supervisor	Designated staff of school sponsoring body #
	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.

### Confidentiality

1. All contents and information of complaints should be kept strictly confidential and restricted to internal reference or reference by relevant persons only.
2. When schools need to collect personal data during the handling process or when they receive requests for the disclosure of data/records in respect of the complaint case, they should observe the regulations and recommendations laid down in the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.
3. Schools should 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.
4. Schools should 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.

## **Handling of Unreasonable Behaviour**

Appropriate communication and mediation are conducive to removing misunderstanding and enhancing mutual trust. Under general circumstances, schools should not put any restrictions on complainants making contact with the school. However, sometimes certain unreasonable behaviour of complainants may have a negative impact on schools. Schools may therefore develop appropriate policies and measures to handle this kind of unreasonable behaviour to ensure that their operation would not be affected.

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

**In general, school should develop policies and measures to deal with unreasonable behaviour of complainants.**

## Appendix I

### Complaints Relating to Daily Operations and Internal Affairs of Schools

Domain	Examples
Management and Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School accounts (e.g. accounting records )</li><li>• Other charges (e.g. extra-curricular activities charges and registration fees)</li><li>• School policies (e.g. system of reward and penalty, arrangements regarding students' suspension from school)</li><li>• Standards of contractors' services (e.g. school bus services, supply of meal boxes)</li><li>• Service contracts (e.g. tendering procedures)</li><li>• School environment and hygiene (e.g. noise pollution, mosquitoes problems)</li></ul>
Learning and Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School-based curriculum (e.g. subject lesson time)</li><li>• Selection of subjects and class allocation (e.g. arrangements for students' choice of subjects)</li><li>• Homework (e.g. amount of homework , school-based assessment criteria)</li><li>• Students assessment (e.g. assessment criteria)</li><li>• Staff performance (e.g. behaviour/attitudes of teaching staff, job performance)</li></ul>
School Ethos and Student Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School ethos (e.g. uniform and other aspects of appearance)</li><li>• Home-school cooperation (e.g. consultation mechanism, communication channels)</li><li>• Student support (e.g. support for students with special educational needs)</li><li>• Extra-curricular activities (e.g. arrangements for interest groups and other student activities)</li></ul>
Student Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students' overall performance (e.g. academic results, conduct)</li><li>• Student discipline (e.g. foul and abusive language, smoking, fighting, bullying)</li></ul>



## Appendix II

### Sample Acknowledgement Letter (1)

[For cases where complainants have provided their personal particulars and no referral is needed.]

DD MM YYYY

Name of the complainant

Address of the complainant

Dear Mr/Ms \*XX:

We received your written/verbal\* complaint on DD MM YYYY. The case is being investigated and a reply will be sent to you within XX days/as soon as possible.

If you have any inquiries, please contact Mr/Ms X (Teacher/Panel Chairperson/Vice Principal\*) at 25461644.

(Signature)

Principal of

Chiu Sheung School, HK

Name and post

of the designated staff\*

\* Please delete where inappropriate

## Appendix III

### Sample Acknowledgement Letter (2)

[For cases where referral of the complaint to a third party (e.g. government departments or contractors of school services) is needed.]

DD MM YYYY

Name of the complainant

Address of the complainant

Dear Mr/Ms\* XX:

We received your written/verbal\* complaint on DD MM YYYY. To facilitate our investigation and follow-up, please fill in the reply form attached and send it to us before DD MM YYYY. We will notify you of the outcome when the investigation is completed.

If you have any inquiries, please contact Mr/Ms X (Teacher/Panel Chairperson/Vice Principal\*) at 25461644.

(Signature)

Principal of  
Chiu Sheung School, HK  
Name and post  
of the designated staff\*

\* Please delete where inappropriate

**Sample Acknowledgement Letter (2)**  
**Reply Form**

To: Name of School

File No.: (if applicable)

Name of the complainant: Mr/Ms \_\_\_\_\_

[Please write the name as appears on your HK I.D. Card]

# Correspondence Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Contact No.: \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that the personal information provided above will only be used for investigating the complaint.

To assist the school in handling this complaint, I agree that:

1. The school may forward copies of the complaint and other information I present to relevant persons/ organisations; and
2. The school may ask relevant persons/organisations for my personal details and other information related to this complaint.

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the complainant

# Item that must be completed.

**Sample Complaint Record**

**Date received** \_\_\_\_\_

- Source:**             Directly lodged to the school  
                          Referred by the EDB  
                          Referred by other organisations: \_\_\_\_\_

- Mode:**    Phone    Letter    Email    Fax    In person  
              Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**Personal information of the complainant:**

Name: Mr/Ms/Mrs \_\_\_\_\_

- Identity:     Parent    Councillor    Public  
                  Organisation \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Others \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Authorised representative of the complainant (please state the name, address and contact telephone number of the representative and his/her relation with the complainant):  
                 \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Subject(s) of complaint:**

- Principal    Teacher    Staff  
 Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Complaint:**

- Management and Organisation             Learning and Teaching  
 School Ethos and Student Support    Student Performance  
 Others \_\_\_\_\_

**Summary of complaint:**

**Investigation stage**

**Person-in-charge** \_\_\_\_\_

Issue of Notice of Acknowledgement (date: \_\_\_\_\_)

Telephone contact (date: \_\_\_\_\_)

Interview with the complainant (date: \_\_\_\_\_)

Issue of written reply (date: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Summary of findings:**

**Appeal stage** (if applicable)

**Date of appeal:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Person-in-charge:** \_\_\_\_\_

Issue of Notice of Acknowledgement (date : \_\_\_\_\_)

Telephone contact (date : \_\_\_\_\_)

Interview with the complainant (date: \_\_\_\_\_)

Issue of written reply (date: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Summary of appeal result:**

**Follow-up actions or recommendations (if applicable)**

**Signature of person-in-charge:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix V

### Sample Reply Card

DD MM YYYY

Name of the complainant

Address of the complainant

Dear Mr/Ms\* XX:

We received your letter dated DD MM YYYY. Our stance on the relevant issue has been detailed in our reply/replies dated DD MM YYYY (and dates of other replies [if applicable]). We will not respond to the same complaint nor contact you again.

(Signature)

Principal

Chiu Sheung School, HK

Name and post of the designated staff\*

\* Please delete where inappropriate