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Complaints Policy and Procedures for Parents/ Guardians
and Students aged 18 or over

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Defined Terms

This section provides a description of the defined terms used in this Policy. These will be capitalised throughout the document.

Complaint/Concern	Refers to an issue, query or dissatisfaction raised in relation to a student's education, welfare or experience in the School, which may be addressed informally or through the formal complaints process.
Complainant	Refers to a parent/ guardian of a student attending the School or a student who is aged 18 years or over who raises a Concern or Complaint under this Policy.
Hearing	Refers to a formal meeting of the Board of Management, convened as part of the Formal Stage (Board of Management Hearing) investigation, at which the Staff Member Concerned and/ or the Complainant may present their respective cases, respond to the Complaint and be accompanied or assisted by a representative, prior to the Board making a final decision.
Natural Justice	Refers to the principles of fair procedures, including the right of each party to know the details of the Complaint, to be heard, to respond and to have the matter considered in an impartial and fair manner.
Restorative Practice	Refers to an approach that focuses on building, maintaining and repairing relationships through respectful dialogue, mutual understanding and collaborative problem-solving.
the School	Refers to Loreto Secondary School, St Michael's.
School Day	Refers to a day on which the school is in operation.
Staff Member Concerned	Refers to the teaching or non-teaching member of staff against whom a Complaint has been made, or whose actions, decisions or responsibilities are the subject of the Complaint.

Abbreviated Terms

BOM	Board of Management of Loreto Secondary School, St Michael's
DEY	Department of Education and Youth
JMB	Joint Managerial Body

1. Preamble

The School recognises that, from time to time, parents/ guardians, or students aged 18 years or over, may have Concerns or Complaints in relation to their child's, or their own, education or experience in the School. The School is committed to fostering a positive, respectful and collaborative relationship between home and school, where Concerns or Complaints are addressed in a fair, transparent and constructive manner.

This Policy provides a framework for the raising and resolution of Complaints by parents/ guardians (and students aged 18 years or over). While many Concerns can be resolved informally at an early stage, some may require a more formal approach. The Policy therefore outlines procedures to ensure that Complaints are handled in a consistent, fair and timely manner, in line with best practice.

The Policy is informed by procedures developed by the Joint Managerial Body (JMB)¹ for voluntary secondary schools and relevant guidance issued by the Department of Education and Youth (DEY). The Policy operates within the framework of the Education Act 1998 (as amended).

2. Purpose of the Policy

This Policy aims to facilitate the early and effective resolution of Concerns and Complaints and to promote a culture of open communication and mutual respect between parents/ guardians and students aged 18 years or over and the School. It seeks to ensure that all Complaints are addressed in a fair, impartial and consistent manner, that clear guidance is provided on the steps involved, and that all parties are afforded the principles of Natural Justice, including the right to be heard and to respond. It also outlines escalation pathways, including referral to the Principal and the Board of Management (BOM) where necessary, and provides procedures to support transparency and consistency in how Complaints are managed.

3. Scope of the Policy

This Policy applies to parents/ guardians of students attending the School and to students who are aged 18 years or older. It applies to the raising and resolution of Complaints relating to the education, welfare or overall school experience of a student, including Concerns regarding the actions, behaviour or professional conduct of staff, where relevant to the student.

3.1 Examples of Complaints Covered

Complaints under this Policy may arise in the following areas (this list is illustrative and not exhaustive):

- Concerns regarding a student's teaching and learning experience (e.g. understanding of material, pace of learning or feedback received)
- Issues relating to communication between the School and home
- Concerns about a student's welfare, care or support within the School
- Matters relating to classroom management or interactions with staff members, including teaching and non-teaching staff
- Matters relating to the implementation or application of school policies and procedures, where these impact on a student

¹ [JMB Complaints Procedures for Voluntary Secondary Schools pg110](#)

3.2 Matters Not Covered in this Policy

This Policy does not apply to the following matters, which are addressed through separate procedures or processes:

- Matters relating to a teacher's professional competence (i.e. their overall professional performance, including teaching quality over time, subject knowledge and assessment practices). Such matters may be raised with the School in the first instance; however, they are not dealt with under this Policy and are subject to separate processes, including inspection and oversight by the DEY
- Complaints that are anonymous, repetitive or unreasonable, or that do not directly concern the School's activities or any member of its staff
- Matters where legal proceedings have been initiated or where another formal procedure is already in place
- Matters that fall within the scope of other specific school policies or statutory procedures

Further guidance on relevant policies is set out in Section 3.3 below.

3.3 Linked Policies

The following policies may be relevant, depending on the nature of the Complaint and, in some cases, may provide alternative or complementary procedures:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Code of Behaviour Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) Policy, where applicable
- Data Protection Policy
- Health and Safety Policy

Copies of these policies are available on the School website and may also be obtained from the School office upon request.

4. Policy Statement and Objectives

The School is committed to fostering positive and respectful relationships between parents/ guardians, students and staff. It recognises that Concerns or Complaints may arise from time to time and has procedures in place to facilitate their early and fair resolution, with the aim of resolving issues promptly and maintaining positive working relationships within the School community. The School encourages parents/ guardians and students aged 18 years or over to raise Concerns at the earliest opportunity so that they can be addressed effectively.

In implementing this Policy, the School is committed to:

- Handling all Complaints fairly, transparently and in a timely manner
- Encouraging open and respectful communication between parents/ guardians and students aged 18 years or over and the School
- Supporting early resolution of Concerns, where possible, at an informal level
- Ensuring that all parties are treated in accordance with the principles of Natural Justice
- Maintaining appropriate confidentiality throughout the complaints process
- Applying the procedures consistently, in line with guidance for voluntary secondary schools developed by the JMB and relevant guidance issued by the DEY
- Linking the complaints process to relevant school policies, where appropriate
- Ensuring compliance with relevant legislation, including equality and education law

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The effective operation of this Policy depends on the cooperation and shared responsibility of all parties involved. The following sections outline the respective roles and responsibilities within the complaints process.

5.1 Parents/ Guardians and Students aged 18 years or over

Parents/ guardians and students aged 18 years or over are expected to engage with this Policy in a constructive and respectful manner and to raise Concerns in a timely and appropriate way. They should, where possible, seek to resolve matters informally in the first instance and follow the procedures set out in this document. Parents/ guardians and students aged 18 years or over are encouraged to raise Concerns in advance of scheduled meetings, such as parent-teacher meetings, as these meetings are typically time-limited and designed to facilitate brief engagement, and are not always an appropriate setting for addressing specific Complaints in detail. Parents/ guardians and students are expected to engage respectfully with school staff, to provide clear and accurate information in relation to the Concern or Complaint and to submit Complaints in writing and signed where required at formal stages. They are also expected to maintain appropriate confidentiality and to avoid discussing the matter in a way that may undermine the process.

5.2 All Staff

All members of staff are required to engage with Concerns or Complaints in a professional, respectful and constructive manner and to comply with the provisions of this Policy. In the first instance, Concerns should normally be raised with the relevant staff member, typically the class teacher or other appropriate staff member, depending on the nature of the Concern. Staff are expected to respond to Concerns in a timely and respectful manner and, where possible, to seek to resolve issues informally at an early stage. Where a matter cannot be resolved informally, staff will engage with and adhere to the formal procedures set out in this Policy (see Section 6) and will cooperate fully with any enquiries or processes arising.

5.3 Deputy Principals

Deputy Principals will address Complaints in accordance with the procedures outlined in this Policy (see Section 6), in a consistent, timely and impartial manner. They are responsible for ensuring that the Policy and its procedures are applied fairly and correctly, for supporting the resolution of Complaints at the appropriate stage, and for maintaining appropriate records where required. Deputy Principals will report matters to the Principal as appropriate and will support the overall effective operation of the complaints process within the School.

5.4 Principal

The Principal has overall responsibility for the management and oversight of Complaints within the School and for ensuring that this Policy is implemented effectively. The Principal provides leadership, guidance and direction in complex, sensitive or escalated cases and may undertake any enquiries necessary to reach a fair and informed decision. The Principal ensures that all Complaints are handled in a timely, fair and impartial manner, in accordance with the Policy, relevant guidance and applicable legislation, and will refer or escalate matters to the BOM where appropriate.

5.5 Board of Management (BOM)

The BOM is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Policy and for ensuring that complaints procedures (see Section 6) are applied consistently and effectively across the School. The BOM provides governance and accountability for the process and considers Complaints referred to it in accordance with the Policy. In doing so, it ensures that decisions are made in line with the principles of Natural Justice and that the process complies with relevant legislation and applicable guidance. The BOM will take any necessary action to support fair, transparent and proportionate outcomes.

6. Complaints Procedure

The objective of this procedure is to resolve Complaints as early as possible, in a fair, respectful and efficient manner, in accordance with the principles of Natural Justice. The following sections outline the step-by-step complaints procedure, including both informal and formal stages.

6.1 Informal Stage

The objective of the informal stage is to address Complaints at the earliest possible opportunity, without the need to progress to formal procedures where possible.

A Complainant who wishes to raise a Complaint should do so in a timely and appropriate manner and, where possible, seek to resolve the matter informally in the first instance.

At the informal stage, the following steps should be followed:

- **Step 1:** The Complaint should be raised with the Staff Member Concerned, with a view to resolving the issue. The Complainant may contact the School office to arrange for the Staff Member Concerned to return their call or may contact the Staff Member Concerned directly by email during school hours to arrange a suitable time to speak or meet. The Complainant is encouraged to arrange an appropriate time to discuss Concerns, rather than raising them in time-limited settings such as parent-teacher meetings. These meetings are designed to facilitate brief engagement and are not always an appropriate setting for addressing specific Complaints in detail.

In line with the School's commitment to Restorative Practice, the Staff Member Concerned may, where necessary, request that another staff member (such as a Year Head or Deputy Principal) be present at a meeting to support a respectful, balanced and constructive discussion and to facilitate a positive resolution.

- **Step 2:** Where the Complaint cannot be resolved with the Staff Member Concerned, or where it is not appropriate to raise the matter directly with them, it should be raised with the Deputy Principal with responsibility for the relevant year group, with a view to achieving an informal resolution.
- **Step 3:** Where the matter remains unresolved following engagement with the Deputy Principal, the Complainant may request to discuss the matter with the Principal. This represents the final step within the informal stage.

While discussions are informal at this stage, brief notes and/ or minutes may be recorded and retained by the School, where appropriate, to support clarity and continuity.

During the Informal Stage, practical actions or recommendations may be identified by the Staff Member Concerned and/or the Deputy Principal and/or the Principal to address the Complaint. The School may also

arrange follow-up contact, where necessary, to review the situation and ensure that the matter has been satisfactorily addressed.

In the case of a Complaint against the Principal, the parent/ guardian (and student aged 18 years or over) should raise the Concern directly with the Principal in the first instance, where appropriate. If the matter cannot be resolved with the Principal, the Complainant may proceed to the Formal Stage (Board of Management Review) as set out in Section 6.3.

6.2 Formal Stage (Principal)

Where a Complaint remains unresolved following the informal stage, the Complainant may submit the Complaint in writing to the Principal. This stage provides an opportunity to resolve the matter at School level before referral to the BOM. The Complaint must be clearly outlined, signed and dated and should outline the nature of the Concern and the steps taken to date to resolve the matter.

The Complainant is encouraged to use the Complaints Submission Template (see Appendix 1) when submitting a formal Complaint.

At this stage, the following process will apply:

- The Principal will acknowledge receipt of the written Complaint within 5 School Days
- The Principal will review the Complaint and may undertake any enquiries considered necessary
- The Principal will arrange to meet with the Complainant and, where appropriate, the Staff Member Concerned, with a view to resolving the Complaint. This meeting will normally take place within 5–10 School Days of receipt of the written Complaint from the Complainant
- The Complainant and the Staff Member Concerned may be accompanied at this meeting, by a support person or representative, where appropriate
- Following the meeting and any necessary enquiries, the Principal will issue a written outcome to the Complainant, outlining the findings and any actions, where appropriate, to address the Concern

Where the Complaint is not resolved at this stage, the Complainant may refer the matter to the BOM in accordance with Section 6.3 of this Policy.

6.3 Formal Stage (Board of Management Review)

Where a Complaint has not been resolved at the Formal Stage (Principal), the Complainant may refer the matter in writing to the Chairperson of the BOM. The Complainant may rely on the written Complaint previously submitted at Section 6.2 and may include any additional information considered relevant.

On receipt of the written Complaint, the BOM will acknowledge receipt, formally note the Complaint and appoint two authorised representatives, one of whom may be the Principal where appropriate, to consider the matter. The BOM will ensure that the process is conducted in accordance with Natural Justice.

At this stage, the following process will apply:

- The authorised representatives will provide the Staff Member Concerned with a copy of the written Complaint and afford them an opportunity to respond
- The authorised representatives will arrange a meeting involving the Complainant and the Staff Member Concerned and, where appropriate, the Principal, with a view to resolving the Complaint. This meeting will normally take place within 10 School Days of receipt of the written Complaint from the Complainant
- The Complainant and the Staff Member Concerned may be accompanied at this meeting, by a support person or representative, where appropriate

Following the meeting and any potential follow up enquiries, the authorised representatives will determine the outcome of the process and will communicate this outcome in writing to the Complainant, the Staff Member

Concerned and the BOM. The written outcome will indicate whether or not the matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

Where the Complaint is not resolved at this stage, and the Complainant wishes to proceed further to a Hearing stage, they must indicate this in writing to the BOM within 10 School Days of receipt of the written outcome.

6.4 Formal Stage (Board of Management Hearing)

Where a Complaint has not been resolved at the Formal Stage (Board of Management Review), the BOM will consider the outcome of the investigation and determine whether further examination of the matter is warranted. The BOM will ensure that all proceedings at this stage are conducted in accordance with the principles of Natural Justice, including the right of each party to be heard, the right to an impartial decision-making process and the application of fair and transparent procedures.

Where the BOM determines that the Complaint is not substantiated, the Complainant and the Staff Member Concerned will be informed of this decision in writing within a reasonable timeframe, normally within 3 School Days of the Board meeting.

Where the BOM determines that the Complaint warrants further investigation, the matter will proceed to a formal Hearing. In such circumstances, the following process will apply:

- The Staff Member Concerned will be informed that the matter is proceeding to a formal Hearing
- The Staff Member Concerned will be provided with copies of any relevant written documentation relating to the Complaint
- The Staff Member Concerned will be invited to provide a written response
- The Staff Member Concerned will be afforded an opportunity to attend before the BOM Hearing to present their case and may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative
- The Complainant may also be invited to attend before the BOM Hearing and may be accompanied by a support person
- The Hearing(s) will normally take place within 15 School Days of the conclusion of the Formal Stage (BOM Review) process outlined in Section 6.3

Following the completion of the Hearing and any further enquiries, the BOM will make a decision on the Complaint. This decision will be communicated in writing to the Complainant and the Staff Member Concerned within 5 School Days of the decision being made.

The decision of the BOM shall be final, except where a right of appeal is provided for under relevant legislation, including the Education Act 1998 (as amended).

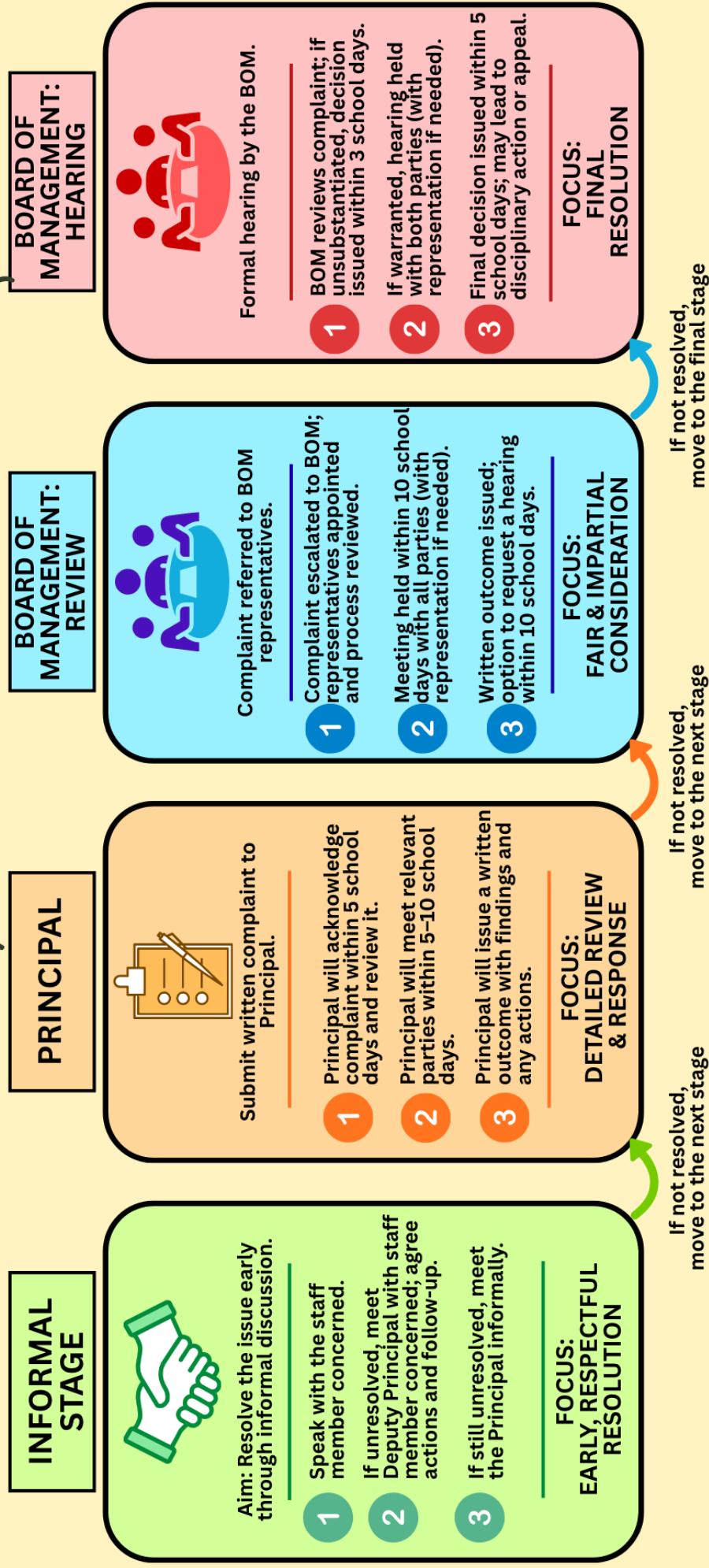
Where a Complaint is upheld, the matter may be addressed by the BOM under the appropriate disciplinary procedures. In such circumstances, any members of the BOM who were involved in the earlier investigation of the Complaint will not participate in decisions relating to any disciplinary action.

6.5 Summary of Complaints Procedure

A diagram outlining the stages of the complaints procedure is provided on the following page. Full details are set out in Section 6 of this Policy.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS/ GUARDIANS & STUDENTS AGED 18 OR OVER: STEPS & TIMELINES

FORMAL STAGE



Our goal is to resolve complaints fairly and respectfully at the earliest possible stage.

7. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important element of the complaints process. All Complaints will be handled in a sensitive and appropriate manner, having regard to the rights and privacy of all parties involved.

Information relating to a Complaint will be shared only on a need-to-know basis in order to facilitate the effective consideration and resolution of the matter. While every effort will be made to respect confidentiality, it cannot be guaranteed in all circumstances, particularly where disclosure is required in order to ensure fair procedures.

All parties involved in the process are expected to respect the confidentiality of the process and to avoid discussing the matter in a way that may compromise its fair and proper handling.

8. False or Malicious Complaints

Where a Complaint is found to be intentionally misleading or made in bad faith, the School will address the matter in accordance with relevant policies, including those relating to standards of behaviour and engagement with the School. In keeping with the School's commitment to Restorative Practice, this may involve supporting the Complainant to reflect on the Concerns raised and to re-engage with the process in a constructive and respectful manner. Where necessary, appropriate parameters may be put in place around future communication and engagement to support positive working relationships and to ensure the wellbeing of staff.

However, a Complainant will not be disadvantaged or penalised for raising a Concern in good faith, even where the Complaint is not upheld or arises from a misunderstanding. This provision is not intended to deter any person from raising a genuine Complaint.

9. Review and Monitoring

The Policy will be reviewed every three years following its implementation and may be reviewed more frequently if deemed necessary.

Signed: _____

Chairperson of BOM

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Principal/Secretary to BOM

Date: _____

Appendix 1: Complaint Submission Form (Parent/Guardian and Students aged 18 years or over)

To: Principal / Chairperson of Board of Management
From (Name of Complainant): _____
Relationship to Student (if applicable): _____
Student Name: _____
Year Group: _____
Date: _____

1. Nature of Complaint

Please clearly describe the nature of your complaint, including relevant details such as dates, locations and persons involved.

2. Steps Taken to Date

Please outline any steps you have already taken to resolve this matter (e.g. discussions with staff member concerned, Deputy Principal, Principal).

3. Outcome Sought

Please indicate the outcome or resolution you are seeking.

4. Additional Information (if any)

Please include any further information you consider relevant.

Declaration

I confirm that the information provided is accurate to the best of my knowledge and that this complaint is made in good faith.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Note

This form will be processed in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure and confidentiality requirements.