

**Tung Chung Catholic School**  
**Mechanism for Handling School Complaints**  
**(With effect from January, 2015)**

**Missions**

In view of the interests of the parents, their children or the school, stakeholders may inquire and provide feedback and suggestions regarding the performance of the school. They may demand the school to rectify its mistakes or resolve the issue(s) raised in the complaint. To strive for excellence and efficiency, the school adopts an open and proactive attitude to complaints.

**Reference**

The content of this guideline mainly refers to “Guidelines for Handling School Complaints (Revised version)”.

**Scope of Application**

The principles are applicable to handling complaints about the daily operations and internal affairs of schools lodged by parents, students or the public through various means, including post, fax, email, phone or in person. The Guidelines are not applicable to handling of the following types of complaints:

- Complaints related to ongoing legal proceedings;
- Complaints under the jurisdiction of other organisations/government departments;
- Complaints governed by other ordinances or statutory regulations such as complaints against corruption, fraud or theft;
- Complaints lodged by school staff (Complaints should be handled in accordance with the specifications of the school-based or the sponsoring body’s mechanism and guidelines for staff complaints [if applicable].)

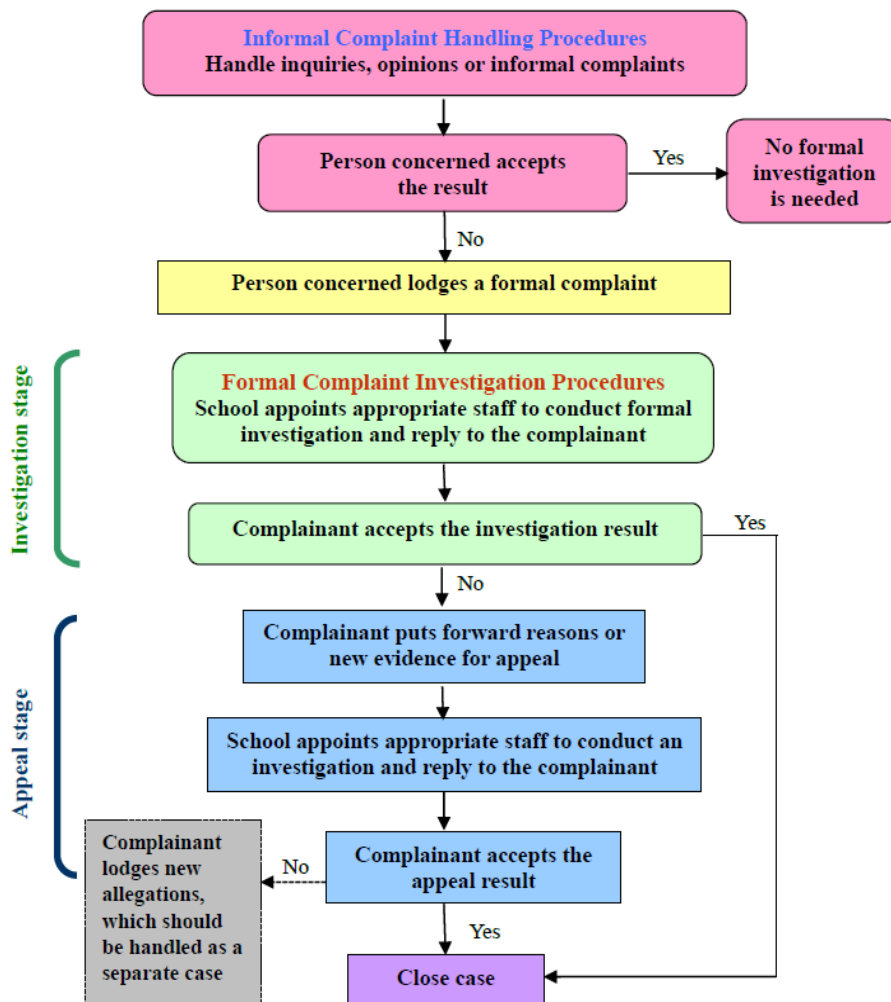
In general, the school needs not handle the following types of complaints:

- Anonymous complaints. 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 (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.
- Complaints involving incidents that happened more than one year
- Complaints with insufficient information

## Workflow

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. Please refer to Diagram 1 for the flowchart of complaint handling procedures in schools.

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



## Informal Complaint Handling Procedures

### Immediate/prompt handling

The school is to handle inquiries or complaints as soon as possible to prevent any uninviting situation from worsening. The following arrangements are adopted:

- If the school receives an inquiry, opinion or informal complaint, whether verbal or written, the frontline staff should clearly identify its nature and take appropriate action.
- The concerns of the inquirer/complainant should be listened to with care and understanding. If the incident is not serious, the frontline staff should provide assistance or information required or promptly respond to the concerns raised by the inquirer/complainant to help resolve the problems involved.
- The time limit for an initial response is one week.
- If necessary, the frontline staff should refer the case to a designated staff (subject panels, committee chairpersons, assistant principal or vice principal, etc) 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. Moreover, the school staff in charge of the relevant issue should have direct talks or interviews with the person(s) concerned to explain the schools' stance and remove any misunderstanding, misgivings or worries of them.

### *Replying to complaints*

For verbal inquiries/opinions/complaints handled by the informal complaint handling procedures, oral replies are suffice. 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.

### *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, the related staff should report to the designated staff. The designated staff is to record the key points for future reference.

## **Formal Complaint Investigation Procedures**

### *Arrangements for the investigation and appeal stages*

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) will be initiated:

#### (i) Investigation stage

If the school receives any formal complaints (including those referred by the EDB or other organisations), they should be handled according to the following procedures:

- in accordance with the school-based mechanism, assign appropriate staff to investigate the complaint and reply to the complainant (Refer to the section of “designated staff”);
- acknowledge receipt of the complaint, seek the complainant's consent to obtain his/her personal data and information related 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. Acknowledgement Letters are provided in Appendixes I and 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;
- 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;
- 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:

- 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;
- handle and resolve the appeal as quickly as possible (It is suggested that schools complete their investigation 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 should cautiously review the appeal process to ensure that proper procedures have been followed.
- 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.

### *Resolving conflict through mediation*

When handling complaints, the school may, taking the nature of individual cases into account, consider whether it is appropriate to adopt different means to resolve conflicts quickly. This includes seeking mediation service from a mediator, or inviting independent persons/professionals to provide impartial views to assist the persons concerned (including the complainants and the persons/organisations being complained against).

### *Responding to complaints/appeals*

If the complaint or appeal is in written form, the school should 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 should be forwarded to them for reference.

### *Complaint/appeal records*

The school should keep a clear record of cases handled by the formal complaint investigation procedures (Appendix III). The relevant information should be stored in the general office for future reference.

### **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:

- ◆ Staff members who are responsible for the appeal stage should be different from those responsible for the investigation stage. In principle, the staff dealing with the appeal should be of a higher rank than those responsible for the investigation. If this is not practicable, the school should make other arrangements, such as appointing staff from another department, to ensure fair handling.
- ◆ Where necessary, schools/sponsoring bodies 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 bodies. 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.
- ◆ 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 should 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

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

### **Confidentiality**

All contents and information of complaints should be kept strictly confidential and restricted to internal reference or reference by relevant persons only. Only authorised persons are allowed access to information related to the case. The responsible persons should not disclose or discuss in public any contents or information related to the case without authorisation. To avoid misunderstanding, the school will:

- ◆ Mention 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, audio/video recording is prohibited unless the consent of all attendees is obtained.

### **Handling of Unreasonable Behaviour**

While dealing with unreasonable behaviour of complainants, we need to follow the following guidelines:

- (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 is unacceptable. The staff member handling the complaint should convey this message clearly to the complainant and demand that he/she stop acting in such a way. If the complainant refuses to comply after the warning, the staff member may terminate the meeting or conversation with him/her.
  - ◆ The school has developed contingency measures and guidelines to remind the staff responsible for handling complaints made by persons of unstable emotion to stay alert and take suitable action to protect their own safety. If the complainant's behaviour poses an immediate threat to the staff's personal safety or their personal interests, the staff member is empowered to make decisions, depending on the situation, on whether it is necessary to terminate the interview or dialogue with the complainant and to ask the

complainant to leave. In an emergency or if it is deemed necessary, the school may report to the police.

(ii) Unreasonable demands

- ◆ If a complainant makes unreasonable demands which have an adverse impact on the school, 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 remove the restrictions.

(iii) Unreasonable persistent complaints

- ◆ Faced with these 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.
- ◆ 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. Please see Appendix IV for the "Reply Card".

**Tung Chung Catholic School**



**東涌天主教學校**

Yat Tung Estate, Tung Chung, NT

新界東涌逸東村

Tel : 2121-0884 Fax : 2109-4803

**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 XXXXXXXX (telephone number).

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

(Name)

Principal of Tung Catholic Cathloic School

\* Please delete where inappropriate.

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**Acknowledgement Letter (2)**

[For cases that 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 XXXXXXXX (telephone number).

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

(Name)

Principal of Tung Catholic Cathloic School

\* Please delete where inappropriate.



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

To: Tung Chung Catholic 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.

**Tung Chung Catholic School  
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:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Tel : 2121-0884 Fax : 2109-4803

**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.

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

(Name)

Principal of Tung Catholic Cathloic School

\* Please delete where inappropriate.

