

ASSUMPTION GRAMMAR SCHOOL



PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Title	Parental Complaints Procedure
Summary	Guidance for all stakeholders regarding: How to deal with Parental Complaints
Purpose	To ensure an effective response to Parental Complaints
Operational Date	September 2026
Next Review Date	September 2027
Author	Principal

To be listed on school website	September 2026
Date posted if applicable	September 2026

Related Documents

- Guidance on Using the School Complaints Procedure – Education Authority
- Handling School Complaints (Support for School Governors) – Education Authority
- Model School Parental Complaints Procedure - CCMS

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1. THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

SCHOOL NAME: ASSUMPTION GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BALLYNAHINCH

FOREWARD

'The Assumption Grammar School puts the person at the centre of education, in a framework of relationships that make up a living community. The ultimate goal of an Assumption School is the gradual growth of the person into a happy, caring, mature and responsible member of a diverse community. A loving relationship with God, with others, the acceptance of one's own uniqueness, using one's giftedness to serve others, is the basis of a happy and fulfilled life.' (Fully Alive – Education in Assumption Schools 2021)

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Governors and the Principal of Assumption Grammar School are committed to working in partnership with parents and the wider school community.

We take all complaints seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. In this regard, we encourage anyone with a concern to contact us as soon as possible. Open communication and regular engagement between the school staff and parents or the wider school community is vital to the effective management of the school.

Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification, or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved at this informal stage. Members of staff will make sure that they understand the concern(s) raised.

Initial concerns should be raised directly with the school with the relevant member of staff.

We welcome communication with our staff. Parents/Guardians/Carers may contact the school as follows:

Contact the school office:

via phone: 02897562250

email: admin@assumption.ballynahinch.ni.sch.uk

This approach does not prevent you from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage if you believe that to be appropriate.

If you wish to make a formal complaint, please follow the procedure set out in Section 9 of this document.

Data Protection Issues: If the complaint concerns GDPR, contact the Education Authority (EA) Data Protection Officer at dpo@eani.org.uk

A copy of the formal Parental Complaints Procedure is available on the website or from the school office

2. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

COMPLAINT: A complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction with our work.

The Board of Governors, together with the Principal, set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians/carers.

The procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils. However, schools need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage can reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

Examples of complaints dealt with under this procedure include

- Not following school policy
- Communication delays or lack of communication
- Difficulties in staff/pupil relationships

3. COMPLAINTS WITH SEPARATE PROCEDURES

Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of other agreed procedures. This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures. However, if your complaint relates to the school's failure to correctly administer any of these procedures then you may complain by means of this procedure.

For example: some statutory and appeal mechanisms are listed below. This list is not exhaustive.

Admissions/Expulsions/Exclusion of Children from the school	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Operations and Estates www.eani.org.uk
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Children and Young People's Services www.eani.org.uk
School Development Proposals	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Education www.eani.org.uk

The Principal or the Chairperson of the Board of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use if it remains unclear.

4. ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints or phone calls (except for those concerning child protection matters) and, therefore, these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints. Complaints of this nature will be referred to the Chairperson. The decision of dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Chairperson and the Board of Governors.

5. AIMS OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

In operating this Complaints Procedure, we aim to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- provide responses within clearly stated timeframes to concerns and complaints;
- keep complainants informed of progress;

- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- respect confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- be responsive to learning from outcomes that will inform and improve practice within the school; and
- provide information to the school's Senior Leadership Team and Board of Governors so that services can be improved.
- Be impartial and non-adversarial.

The procedure is designed to be:

- easily accessible and publicized;
- simple to understand and use.

Please note that the school cannot disclose data or information about individuals, including sanctions which have been applied to the pupils; in line with the principles of natural justice as well as the right to privacy under article 8 of the ECHR, sanctions or disciplinary action are confidential.

In the case of staff, the common law obligation on employers to ensure confidentiality is established in the employee relationship. In effect, the employer has a duty of care to ensure that this confidentiality is maintained, particularly within the confines of the working relationship. This duty does not merely apply to a disciplinary sanction, but also extends to other matters and processes including investigations, grievances etc. There is also an onus on an employer to act reasonably in disciplinary processes and a breach of confidentiality is generally an unreasonable act.

In the case of both staff and pupils, the Data Protection Act 2018 provides a statutory basis to ensure that personal data is protected. Disclosing disciplinary sanctions, would place the school in breach of this statutory duty. There is no legitimate basis to publicly disclose details about a disciplinary process, including any sanction (this would constitute unlawful data processing).

Availability of Procedure

A copy of the procedures will be placed on the school's website [Home - Assumption Grammar School](#) and are available on request from the school.

6. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THESE PROCEDURES

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with your complaint we will ensure that you receive:

- fair treatment;
- courtesy;
- a timely response within stated timeframes;
- accurate advice;
- respect for your privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint; *and*
- clear reasons for our decisions.
- Where the complaint is upheld, we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after investigation, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In making your complaint we would expect that you:

- raise the issue as soon as reasonably practicable, normally within a 6 month period or within 6 months of you becoming aware of the issue;
- treat our staff with respect and courtesy at all times;
- provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise; and
- use these procedures fully and engage in them at the appropriate levels.

Rights of parties involved during the investigation

The process is non-adversarial and does not provide a role for any other statutory or non- statutory body.

Complainant

The complainant may be accompanied, but not represented, by another person during the process (for example, a spouse, friend, family member or interpreter) provided that person is not offering legal representation or acting in an official capacity, where it is accepted by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

If you feel unable to speak on your own behalf, you may seek support from outside agencies, as agreed with the school, including local MLAs or Councillors, Citizens' Advice Bureau, Parenting NI, or the Children's Commissioner.

Staff Members

Staff should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process, for example a union representative or a colleague.

A member of staff who is directly referred to in a complaint will be provided with a written copy of the complaint and details of any information brought by the parent/guardian before being required to respond to the matters raised.

Pupils

Where a pupil is involved, permission should be sought from parents or guardians, and the pupil should be accompanied by a parent, guardian or other nominated adult.

Legal Representation

Legal representation or representation by a person(s) acting in a professional capacity is not permitted within this procedure. This procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

Where the complainant is a Governor

Where the complainant is a member of the Board of Governors, they will play no part in the management or appeal of the complaint as set out in this procedure.

7. EQUALITY

The school requires formal complaints to be made in writing (by letter or email). Where this may present difficulties for any reason, please contact the school office and we will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process

8. WHO WILL DEAL WITH YOUR COMPLAINT?

At the informal stage, your complaint should be raised and dealt with by the teacher concerned. If you proceed to the formal part of the process, the Principal will assume responsibility for the process, unless

he/she is the subject of the complaint, in which case the Chair of the Board of Governors will assume responsibility. Should it be necessary, the Board of Governors will be responsible for establishing a Complaints Sub-Committee to investigate and resolve the matter.

9. MAKING A COMPLAINT

Stage 1 - Informal Stage

Step 1 - Speaking with the teacher concerned

In the first instance, a complaint should normally be raised verbally or by email to request to speak with the relevant teacher concerned (whether that be a classroom teacher, Head of Department, Head of Year, Assistant Principal, Vice Principal or Principal), so that he/she may have an opportunity to address the issue(s).

Please observe the school's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such meetings and follow the school's policy with respect to access to members of teaching staff.
This is available by contacting the school office.

This approach would not prevent you from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage, if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.

If the complaint relates to a member of the non-teaching staff in the school, it should be referred to the Principal. This may then be delegated to another appropriate member of staff to deal with.

If the complaint is with the Principal, proceed to Step 2(B).

Step 2 - Contact the Principal if your complaint is against a member of staff other than the Principal.

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1, you should arrange a meeting with the Principal who will delegate it to a designated member of the Leadership Team to discuss the issue(s). In advance of this meeting, you should inform the Principal, in writing, of the nature of your complaint so that he/she may be in a position to resolve the problem without further delay. The teacher should be informed of this complaint by a member of the Leadership Team within 24 hours of it being received.

In some circumstances, the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and he/she may require some time to investigate and prepare a response. If further time is required, you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which a response will be issued.

Acknowledgement within 10 school working days.

Final response within 20 school working days.

Step 2(B) - Contact the Chair of the Board of Governors if your complaint is against the Principal.

If your complaint remains unresolved following Stage 2, you should write to the Chair of the Board of Governors through the Principal's PA. Step 4 of the procedure will then commence.

Stage 2 - Formal Stage

Step 3 – Writing to the Principal if your complaint is against a member of staff other than the Principal

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Steps 1 and 2, or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the formal procedures at Step 3. You should write to the Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. You should state the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible, addressing specifically the issue(s) that are of

concern to you.

Please include the following information:

- Name and contact details;
- What the complaint is about, try to be as specific as possible;
- What you have done to try to resolve the complaint informally; and
- What you would like the school to do to try to resolve your complaint.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within [10] working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; *or*

state that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of [20] working days from the date on which your letter was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

Step 4 - Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors

If you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner following the completion of Steps 1–3, or if your complaint concerns the Principal, you should write to the Chair of Board of Governors including, if applicable, copies of the original correspondence relating to Step 3. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of 3 voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of concern to you. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within [10] working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and:

provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or

state that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of [25] working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

The Board of Governors may decide to outsource the handling of the complaint to an appropriate external agency who will act on behalf of the Board.

Step 5 - Appeals Process – Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board of Governors' Sub Committee, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within 10 working days of receiving written feedback from the Complaints Sub-Committee, appealing the decision. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your appeal.

The Chairperson will be responsible for establishing an Appeals Sub-Committee comprising of at least 3 members of the Board of Governors who were not involved in the original investigation. You will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where your appeal will be heard.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting with the Appeals Sub-Committee at which you will have an opportunity to explain the grounds for your appeal. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal request having been received.

Within 10 working days of this meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governors' findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions.

The decision of the Appeals Sub-Committee is final. At the end of the process, the Chairperson will inform you, in writing, that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is considered closed.

RECORD KEEPING

The Principal and members of staff of the school and Chairperson of the Board of Governors shall maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings concerning your complaint. These records shall be held confidentially in the school and shall be kept apart from pupil records. All such records will be destroyed 6 years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

10. NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)

Details: www.nipso.org.uk

If following Stage 9 you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can refer the matter to the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about schools in Northern Ireland. You have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if you feel that you have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from a school and your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction.

A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the school. The school must advise in its concluding letter that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied.

Contact details for NIPSO are provided below.

Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 HN

Freephone: 0800 34 43 24
email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

11. UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly, impartially and with patience. There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedure having been completed and the matter having been reviewed by NIPSO, a complainant remains dissatisfied. The school must balance the rights of an individual to make a complaint and have it fairly investigated, with the rights of the staff not to be subjected to unacceptable actions or behaviour.

Any decision to treat a complainant as unreasonable must take into account the need to ensure that the

procedure is being fairly applied, and that every attempt has been made to communicate with and address the complainant's concerns. Where such a decision is taken the complainant will be advised accordingly.

Complainants may be considered unreasonable where, for example, they:

- Persist in pursuing a complaint after procedure has been properly exhausted;
- Persistently change the substance of a complaint or raise new issues while a complaint is being addressed;
- Repeatedly fail to identify the precise issues they wish to have investigated, despite reasonable efforts to help them do so;
- Use threatening, abusive or aggressive language or behaviour towards staff;
- Make excessive or unreasonable contact with the school placing undue demands on staff time; or
- Make repetitive complaints which ignore previous responses.

Where the Board of Governors consider the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute frivolous or vexatious behaviour, it will seek advice from the relevant Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

DEFINITIONS

A vexatious complaint is one that is pursued regardless of its merits, solely to harass, annoy or subdue somebody; something that is unreasonable, without foundation, frivolous, repetitive, burdensome or unwarranted.

A frivolous complaint is one about a minor or trivial matter, or an issue so vague or poorly explained that we cannot consider it meaningfully.

RECORD KEEPING

The Principal and Chair of the Board of Governors shall maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings concerning each complaint. An individual case file will be opened for each complaint and stored confidentially, separately from pupil records, in a secure location, in accordance with safeguarding and GDPR legislation.

All records will be destroyed six years after the date of the last correspondence

A summary record of all complaints received, the stage at which they were resolved and any outcomes or recommendations will be maintained using a complaints log. This log may be used to identify patterns and inform improvements to school practice and procedure.

12. FORMAL ADOPTION

This procedure was adopted by the Board of Governors on _____ (date)

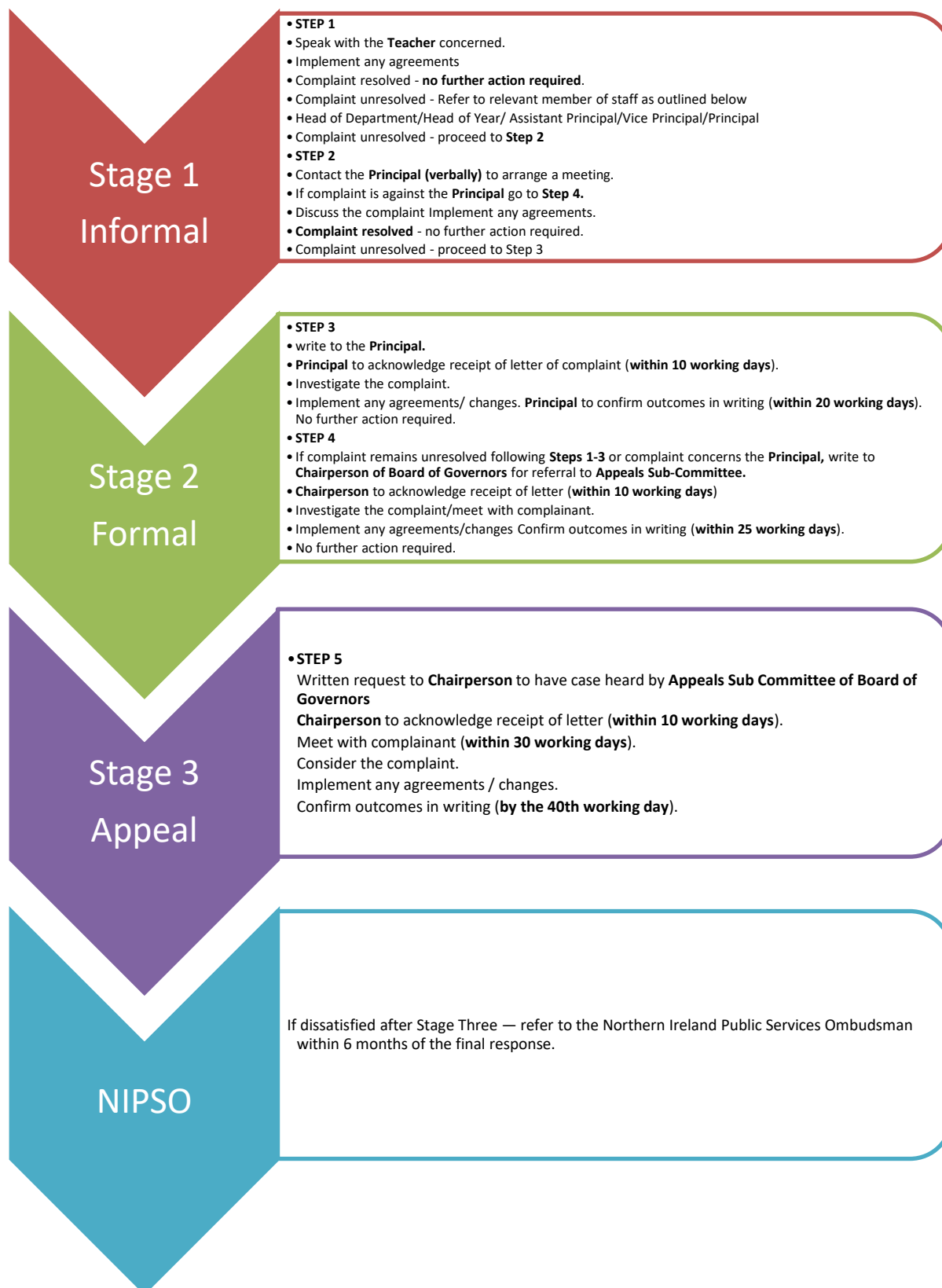
Signed: _____
Chairperson, Board of Governors

Signed: _____
Principal

Date _____

Date _____

13. ANNEX 1 Complaints procedure



14. ANNEX 2 Guidance on what to include in your complaint

Stage 2 - Step 3 — Writing to the Principal

When writing your complaint, please include the following information:

- Your full name and contact details (address, telephone number and/or email address);
- Your child's name and year group;
- A clear and specific description of your complaint — what happened, when it happened, and who was involved;
- What steps you have already taken to try to resolve the issue (for example, whether you have spoken to a teacher or Head of Year); and
- What outcome you would like the school to achieve in order to resolve the complaint.

Stage 3 – Step 4 — Writing to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors

When progressing to Stage Three, please include the following:

- Your reasons for disagreeing with the Stage Two findings;
- Any aspect in which you believe the school's Complaints Procedure was not fully followed; and
- Copies of relevant correspondence from Stage Two, where available.

Stage 5 — Requesting an Appeal

When requesting a Stage Three appeal, please include the following:

- Your reasons for disagreeing with the Stage Two and Three findings;
- Any aspect in which you believe the procedure was not fully or correctly followed at Stage Two and Three; and
- Copies of relevant correspondence from Stages One, Two and Three, where available.

Need help putting your complaint in writing?

If you find it difficult to submit your complaint in writing, please contact the school office and we will make reasonable arrangements to support you. You may also wish to seek help from organisations such as Citizens' Advice Bureau, Parenting NI, or your local MLA or Councillor. It is not the school's responsibility to contact these organisations on your behalf.