

Complaint handling failures follow allegations into principal's conduct towards autistic pupil

A father complained to a primary school after the principal allegedly made degrading comments about his autistic son, stating on three separate occasions that he was 'strange, weird and odd.' He also highlighted other instances of harassment towards himself, his wife, and his son.

His complaint was put to the Board of Governors (BoG). It was also investigated independently by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) alongside a separate allegation made against the complainant's wife regarding the throwing of a pencil.

The complainant felt that the BoG did not address his issues of complaint in a timely manner, as these were only responded to some two years and four months later. This meant that with the passage of time, the allegations were hard to prove.

Having brought his complaint to this Office, our investigator found conflicting accounts of these matters, with no independent evidence to support the allegations.

Our investigator was not able to address allegations relating to harassment, as these are matters for the police. However delays were found in the BoG's handling of the complaint. As per section 10 of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, consideration was given on seeking an alternative resolution.

Following our enquiries and discussion with the BoGs, they agreed to issue an apology to the complainant for failing to deal with his complaint in a timely manner.