

Concerns & Complaints

Preparing our minds for the session

E te hui

For this gathering

**Whāia te mātauranga kia
mārama**

Seek knowledge for
understanding

Kia whai take ngā mahi katoa

Have purpose in all that you do

Tū māia, tū kaha

Stand tall, be strong

Aroha atu, aroha mai

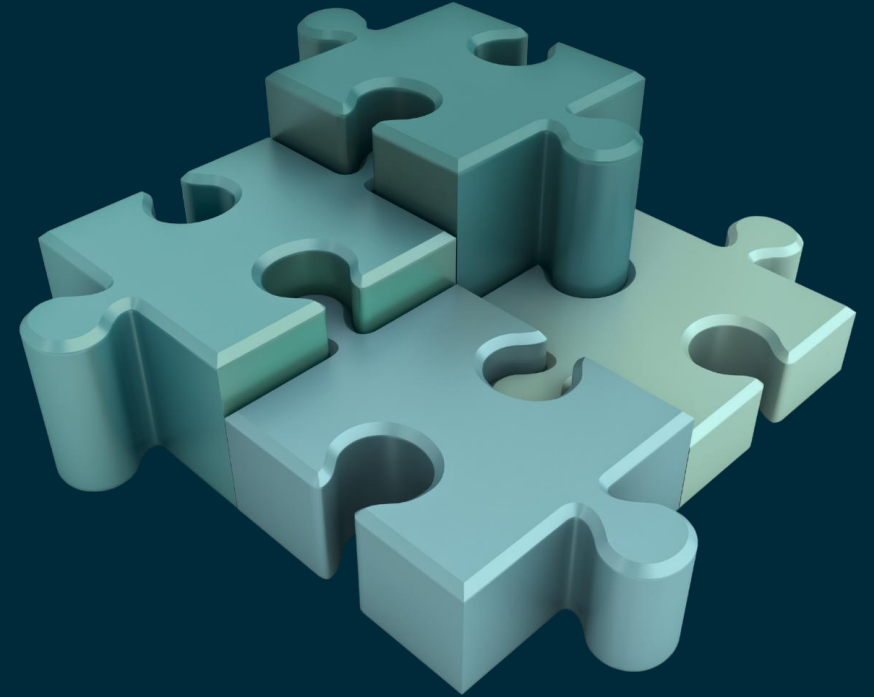
Let us show respect

Tātou i a tātou katoa.

For each other.

What we'll cover

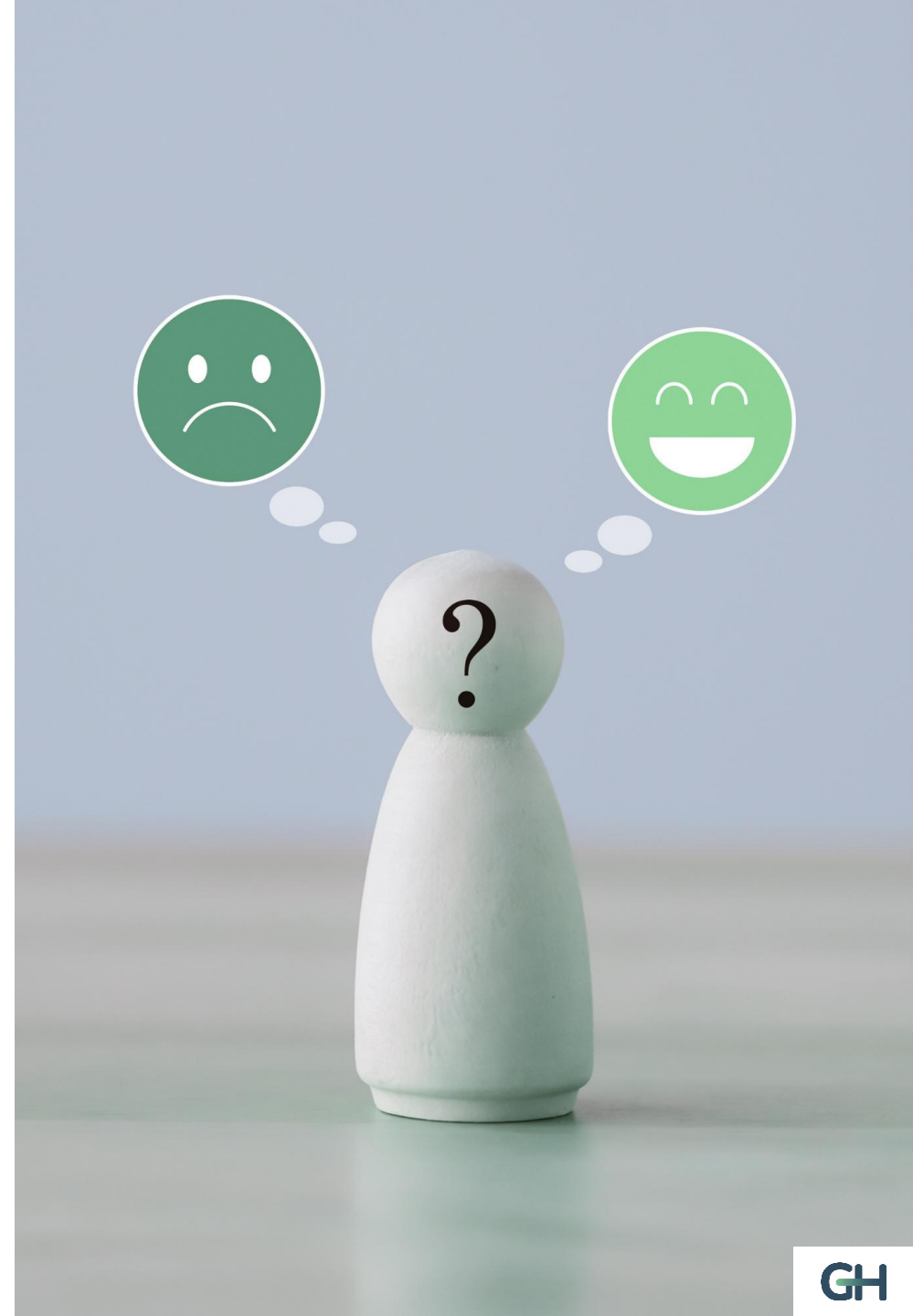
- Recognising concerns and complaints
- Your board's role
- Dealing with a complaint
- Support and next steps



Take a minute to reflect

Think of a time when you either made a complaint or handled one.

- How did it make you feel?
- What was the complaint really about?
- What could have been done to resolve it earlier?



Part 1

Recognising concerns and complaints

What's behind concerns and complaints?

Common reasons include:

- Wanting the best outcome for a child
- Identifying opportunities to improve the school experience
- Feeling unheard or that issues remain unresolved
- Misunderstandings or miscommunication
- Personality clashes, existing tensions, or past conflicts



What's the difference?

Concerns are:

- Normally, about the classroom and relationships within the school
- Best raised directly with those involved
- Unlikely to involve disciplinary, legal, or employment consequences

Complaints are:

- Unresolved concerns that have been escalated to your board **OR**
- Matters that relate to the actions or decisions of the principal, the board, or a board member
- They may involve disciplinary, legal, or employment consequences

Scenario 1: Concern or Complaint?

A parent emails the presiding member about the school lunch programme.

They want the board to review the quality of the food provided.



Scenario 2: Concern or Complaint?

A group of parents have written to the board.

They are upset at the board's decision to replace the school pool with a new classroom block.



Scenario 3: Concern or Complaint?

A parent is upset about the lack of support for their child's learning needs.

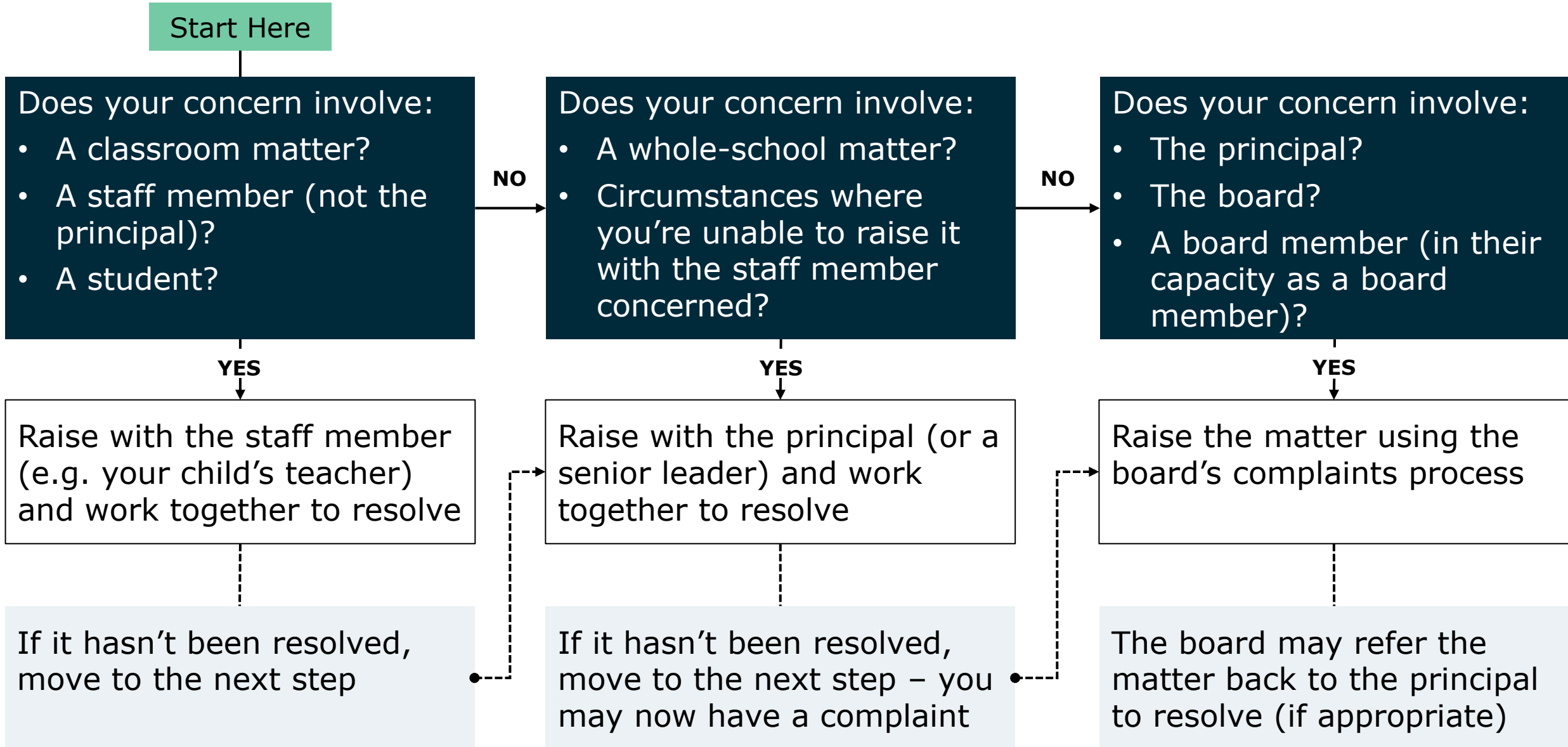
The principal has tried to resolve it.

The parent has now written to the board.



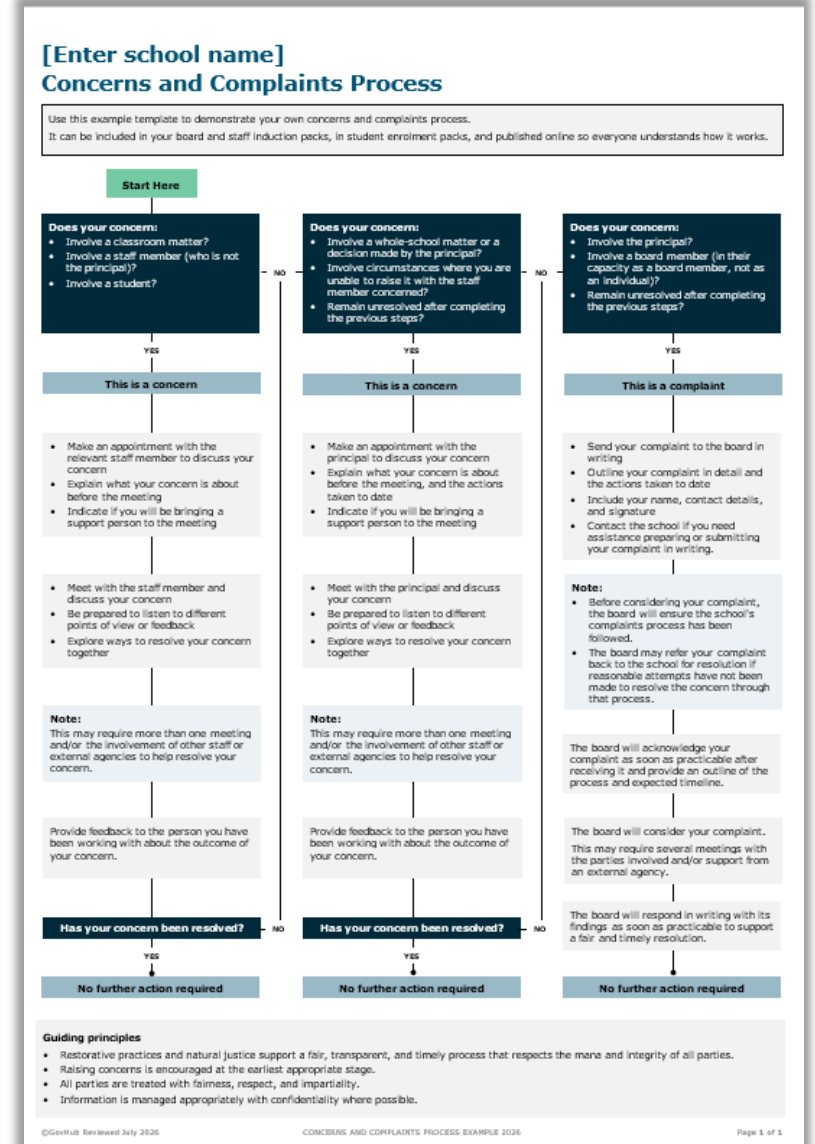
Example process for a community member

Start Here



Key takeaways

- Concerns and complaints offer valuable insight into your school's operations.
- A clear process means issues are addressed at the appropriate level, with board involvement only when necessary.
- Empower staff to address concerns early to prevent escalation into formal complaints.
- An example Concerns and Complaints Process is available in the GovHub Resource Centre.

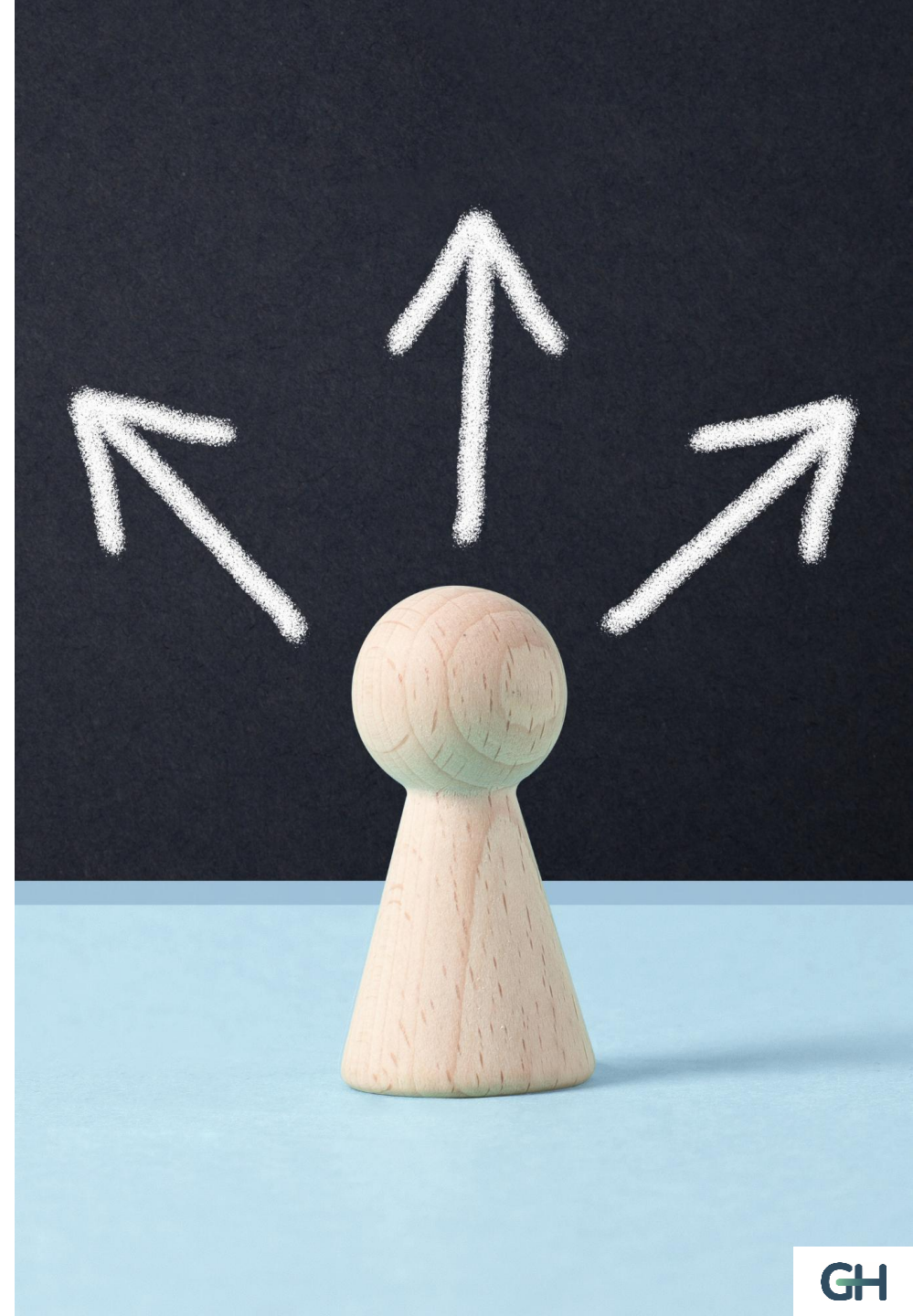


Part 2

Your board's role

What are your board's responsibilities?

- Develop a concerns and complaints policy that you regularly review and share.
- Monitor concerns and complaints data presented to your board.



How does your policy stack up?

- Does it put ākonga at the centre?
- Does it clearly state what outcome you are looking for?
- Has authority been delegated?
- Does it reflect your community, local tikanga, and school values?
- Is it easy to understand?
- Is it easy to find and regularly shared with your community?
- Does it ensure that good records are kept and shared appropriately?

Monitoring concerns and complaints

- The principal's report should provide well-analysed data.
- Look for themes – are there recurring patterns?
- Seek assurance from the principal that they are actively addressing concerns to prevent them from becoming complaints.
- Does your school keep a concerns and complaints register?



Activity

- How do you share your concerns and complaints policy and process with your community?
- What information does your board receive about concerns and complaints?
- How do you know if your concerns and complaints policy is working well?



Key takeaways

- Because concerns are resolved at the lowest level possible, your board's role in them is usually indirect.
- When a complaint comes to your board, your role becomes more direct.
- Your responsibilities include:
 - Setting and reviewing policy
 - Making the policy and process easy to find
 - Monitoring the data.

Part 3

Dealing with a complaint

What are the principles of natural justice?

The right to be heard

I can present my case and respond to allegations.

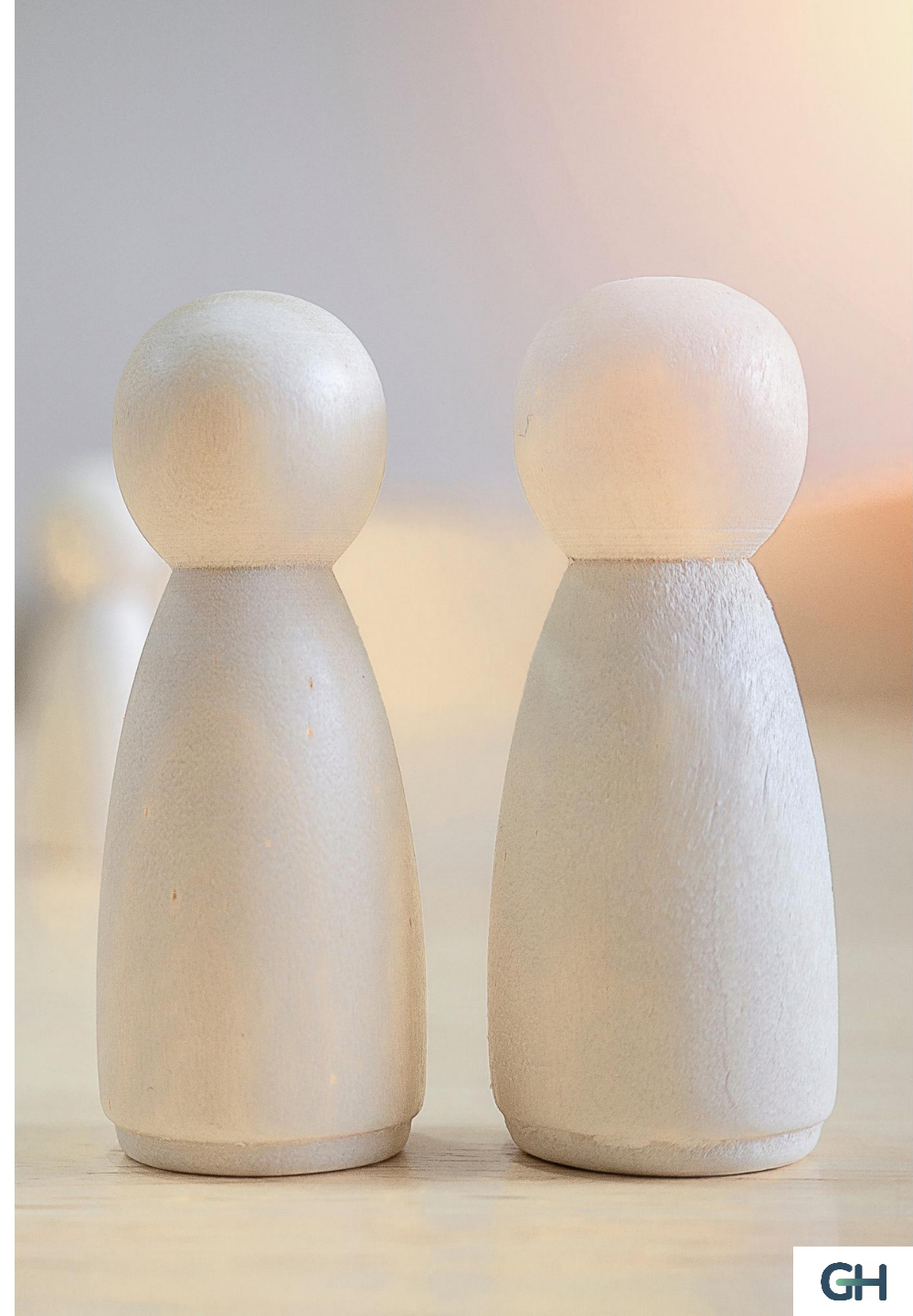
The right to an unbiased decision-maker

I am confident there are no conflicts of interest.

The right to be informed

I know what's going on and why decisions are made.

Note: these rights apply to both parties.



What are the elements of a fair process?

- Impartial
- No conflicts of interest
- Accessible
- Open and transparent
- A chance to respond
- A process for review
- Confidential
- Respectful



Activity

Your board has received a complaint.

What are the first things you need to do?



Example complaints process



Contact GovHub for guidance if the complaint involves an employee

1

Receive

- Decide if it will be handled by your board or referred to the principal
- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint and explain the process as soon as practicable
- Record details of the complaint
- Assign responsibility to a delegated person or committee.
- Ensure there are no conflicts of interest
- Inform relevant parties



2

Engage

- Reach out to the complainant and gather information
- Seek a full understanding of the matter and potential resolution
- Empathise and be curious – don't explain or defend

Example complaints process cont'd

3

Assess

- Gather relevant evidence
- Determine the key complaint issue(s)
- Identify resolution options
- Consider all possible courses of action

4

Respond

- Formulate a response
- Communicate the findings, reasons, and possible remedies
- Encourage feedback

5

Finalise

- Implement and monitor agreed solutions
- Document the entire process
- Thank the complainant
- Confirm in writing that the complaint is closed
- Undertake regular reviews to identify trends and areas for improvement

What if a complaint involves the principal or a staff member?

- Contact GovHub before you do anything.
- Keep accurate records from day one.
- Be mindful of both the complainant's rights and the obligation to be a good employer.
- If it relates to employment or could become an industrial relations matter, alert your school's insurance broker.
- Consider relevant staff disciplinary policies, employment agreements, and advice from an employment adviser.

What if a complaint can't be resolved?

Undertake a review:

- Have you complied with your policy?
- Have you followed the required process?
- Have you done everything reasonably possible to resolve the complaint?

If you are confident in all of the above, then you can:

- Close the complaint
- Refer the complainant to the Office of the Ombudsman
- Set expectations and boundaries if required

How to handle repeat or unreasonable complainants

- Treat each complaint on its own merit
- Recognise unreasonable behaviour
- Leverage existing relationships
- Manage expectations
- Set clear boundaries
- Consider using a committee



Key takeaways

- Treat all complaints fairly and without bias.
- Follow your complaints policy and process, treating each step with care and diligence.
- Get advice and support early, especially if the complaint involves a staff member or the principal.
- Getting the process right helps reduce unresolved complaints and improve complainant satisfaction.
- Remember, GovHub is there to support you.

Part 4

Summary, support, and next steps

What are the benefits of getting it right?

- Concerns and complaints are seen as a form of feedback and an opportunity to improve.
- People feel confident and supported to resolve concerns early.
- The process is fair and reflects your school's values and tikanga.
- Your community understands the process and feels safe to raise issues.
- Students experience a safer, more inclusive and supportive learning environment, enhancing their overall wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Reflection and next steps

What we covered today:

- Recognising concerns and complaints
- Your board's role
- Dealing with a complaint
- Support and next steps



Support and information

Visit Us



Resource Centre

resourcecentre.org.nz

Learning Library

Slide Decks and Videos

Help for Boards

- ▶ Concerns & Complaints
- ▶ Board Governance Example Templates
- ▶ Board as Employer
- ▶ Board as Employer of Principals

Contact Us



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Closing the session

Unuhia, unuhia

Draw on, draw on

Unuhia ki te uru tapu nui

Draw on the supreme sacredness

**Kia wātea, kia māmā,
te ngākau, te tinana,
te wairua i te ara tangata**

To clear, to free the heart, the
body, and the spirit of mankind

**Koia rā e Rongo,
whakairia ake ki runga**

Rongo, suspended high above us

Kia tina! Tina! Hui e! Tāiki e!

Draw together! Affirm!

Ngā mihi nui!
Thank you!