

is any maladministration by the school you complained about. Where the Ombudsman finds maladministration, she may make recommendations about what should be done to put things right.

The Ombudsman will inform you of the result of the investigation in a report.

## How to make a complaint to the Ombudsman

### What should you do first?

You should first put your complaint to the school concerned using its complaints procedure.

### What should you do next?

If you remain dissatisfied after completing the school's complaints procedure you can bring your complaint to the Ombudsman. This should normally be done in writing. You can submit a complaint form online via our website. Alternatively you can download the complaint form from our website, or contact our Office to request a complaint form.

If you have difficulty in submitting your complaint to us in writing, please contact us on Freephone 0800 343424.

### How to contact the Ombudsman's Office:

You can contact us in the following ways:

**Telephone:** 028 9023 3821 or

**Freephone:** 0800 34 34 24

**Text Phone:** 028 9089 7789

**Email:** [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

**web:** [nipso.org.uk](http://nipso.org.uk)

**Freepost:** Freepost NIPSO

or  
The Northern Ireland Public  
Services Ombudsman  
Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
BELFAST  
BT1 6HN

or  
By calling, between  
9.00am & 5.00pm,  
Monday to Friday,  
at the above address.

Please contact us if you would like this form in another language or format (such as large print or Braille)

Making a complaint  
about **a school to the  
Ombudsman**



This leaflet tells you how to make a complaint to the Ombudsman about **schools in Northern Ireland.**

*Our ASSIST team is here to help.  
If you need advice about making  
a complaint to the Ombudsman,  
please call us on Freephone  
0800 34 34 24*

## How can the Ombudsman help you?

The Ombudsman provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints about public service providers in Northern Ireland. From 1 April 2017, the Ombudsman can also investigate complaints about publicly funded schools within 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 to that organisation has not been resolved to your satisfaction. However, you must normally use the school's complaints procedure before making a complaint to this Office. If the Ombudsman investigates your complaint and finds that the school has been at fault, she can recommend appropriate action.

## What can you complain about?

The Ombudsman can consider complaints about maladministration. The term maladministration is not defined but is generally taken to mean poor administration or the wrong application of rules.

Some examples that the Ombudsman may regard as maladministration include:

- Avoidable delay
- Faulty procedures or failing to follow the correct procedures
- Not telling you about any rights of appeal you have
- Unfairness, bias or prejudice
- Giving advice that is misleading or inadequate

- Refusing to answer reasonable questions
- Discourtesy and failure to apologise
- Mistakes in handling your complaint

Some examples of complaints the Ombudsman might be able to consider include:

- Failure to follow guidance in examinations
- Failure to provide information on the awarding of grades
- How the school dealt with your complaint about bullying
- Difficulties or delays in getting a Special Educational Needs assessment
- Failure to take account of information for school admissions
- Complaints handling

## Is there anything the Ombudsman cannot investigate?

The Ombudsman can only deal with complaints about the administrative actions of schools.

We would not generally accept your complaint if:

- You make your complaint more than 6 months after completing the school's complaints procedure
- You could have gone to court or have already begun legal action
- The Ombudsman believes the action or decision you are complaining about was reasonable

*If you are unsure whether the Ombudsman can deal with your particular complaint, please contact our ASSIST team on 0800 343424.*

## How the Ombudsman will deal with your complaint

The Ombudsman can decide whether or not to accept a complaint for investigation.

An initial assessment of your complaint will be made to decide if the Ombudsman has the legal authority to investigate your complaint. If we cannot accept your complaint, we will try to inform you of our decision within 2 weeks.

If the Ombudsman has the legal authority to accept your complaint, we will make an assessment of your complaint to decide if it should be investigated. This assessment involves us considering your complaint and the supporting evidence you have presented. We will usually seek further information from the school you have complained about. We may also ask the school about any proposals it may have to settle the complaint, rather than the Ombudsman carry out an investigation.

When we have gathered sufficient information, we will assess your complaint to decide whether an investigation by the Ombudsman:

- is appropriate and necessary
- would bring about a solution or adequate remedy
- could be of benefit to the general public

We aim to inform you of our decision within 10 weeks from receipt of your complaint.

If we decide to investigate, your complaint will be passed to an Investigation Team to establish if the allegations made in your complaint can be substantiated and if there