

Process for Handling Complaints

This resource outlines the complaint-handling process for proprietors of state integrated schools. The Proprietor holds legal responsibility for preserving the special character or educational philosophy. When complaints involve special character matters the ultimate goal is to reach a fair and satisfactory outcome for all parties.

State Integrated School Board Professional Development and Learning Series

© APIS 2026



Core Principles of Complaint Management

Respect

All complaints must be managed with dignity and consideration for everyone involved in the process.

Procedural Fairness

Every party has the right to be heard and to have their concerns addressed through proper channels.

Confidentiality

Privacy is maintained throughout the entire complaint-handling process to protect all individuals.

Resolution Focus

The ultimate goal is to reach a fair and satisfactory outcome for all parties.

What if the complaint is about special character?



Board Responsibility

School boards are responsible for managing concerns and complaints within their community. When issues relate to the school's special character, boards, particularly proprietor's appointees must ensure governance decisions align with the Integration Agreement.



Proprietor Partnership

In state integrated schools, the Proprietor holds legal responsibility for preserving the special character or educational philosophy. When complaints involve special character matters, boards should consult with the Proprietor to meet responsibilities collaboratively and in accordance with legal and governance obligations.



Governance vs. Management Issues

The Presiding Member must determine whether the complaint falls under Board governance responsibilities or Principal management authority or if this is a matter for the proprietor.

Management Issues

Operational matters within Principal's authority

- Day-to-day operations
- Staff performance
- Curriculum implementation
- Student discipline

Governance Issues

Matters requiring Board-level decision-making and oversight

- Complaint about the Principal
- Board Policy violations
- Strategic direction concerns
- Board member conduct
- Compliance matters

Proprietor Issues

Matters requiring Proprietor level decision making or resolution would involve a complaint to the proprietor directly or is the board cannot resolve the special character related complaint.

- Special character breaches
- Integration Agreement compliance
- Proprietor's appointee conduct
- Situations where special character is in jeopardy.

Addressing Complaints to the Proprietor about special character breaches

What are the key responsibilities of proprietors and school boards regarding special character in state integrated schools?

Proprietors are legally responsible for preserving the special character, especially as outlined in each school's integration agreement, while school boards govern in alignment with this special character and manage daily operations through the principal, maintaining a collaborative partnership with the proprietor.

How does Education & Training Act (ETA) define the limits of proprietor authority in complaints processes?

The ETA assigns proprietors a defined and limited role regarding matters such as property, enrolment, employment, and special character positions, stating they do not have overarching powers to overrule school board decisions, which can create limitations during complaints processes.

What procedures should be followed when a complaint about special character arises?

Complaints should first be directed to the school board chair according to the school's written process, with the proprietor only engaging directly if statutory powers are needed or if the complaint is not resolved by the school board, and always in careful collaboration with the school board.

What actions can proprietors take if issues regarding special character persist at the school board level?

Proprietors can replace their appointees on the board, request Ministry intervention for ongoing governance problems, direct compliance with the integration agreement in certain areas, and, in extreme cases, initiate discussions with the Minister of Education which could result in significant decisions including school closure.

Why is proactive communication between the proprietor and the school board important?

A "no surprise" approach is advocated to ensure both parties share responsibility and work cooperatively, with transparent and proactive communication being vital for preserving special character and effectively navigating potential complaints.

Mechanisms for proprietors to consider:



Minimising Issues at the School Board Level

- a). Establish a formal understanding with the school board to clarify the proprietor's role and rights over property, employment, enrolment and special character. A MOU is one example of how this could be achieved and agreements about complaint handling can be included.
- b). Ensure active participation of proprietor's appointees with professional development for effective representation.
- c). Utilise NZCEO and proprietor resources to support appointees and school boards in preserving the school's special character.
- d). Promote a "no surprises" approach, encouraging transparency and proactive communication on critical decisions.



Handling Complaints

- a). Direct complaints first to the school board presiding member (chair) as per the school's written complaints process.
- b). Guide complainants to the school board if they haven't formally submitted their complaint.
- c). Allow the option of the complainant communicating with the Proprietor if the school board fails to satisfactorily address their complaint. Agree this in an MOU with the board.
- d). Where the proprietor judges the complaint to be one where the proprietor feels they may need to exercise their statutory powers then the proprietor will inform the complainant and the school board that they are engaging in a complaints process.



Statutory Interventions

- a). Replace proprietor's appointees on the school board if they do not support and represent the proprietor's position in maintaining special character.
- b). Request Limited Statutory Intervention from the Ministry of Education for ongoing governance issues.
- c). Direct the school board to comply with the integration agreement in cases of property, non-compliance with special character (tagged) positions, maximum roll conditions or concerns over the delivery of the religious studies curriculum.
- d). In extreme cases, the proprietor may decide to initiate a discussion with the Minister of Education on the issue causing difficulty. This could lead to a range of decisions including the closure of the school.

More information and a [flowchart](#) can be found [here](#).

Commitment to Excellence

The complaint-handling process reflects the commitment to maintaining a respectful, fair, and transparent environment for all members of the school community.



Respectful Management

Every complaint is handled with dignity and consideration



Procedural Fairness

All parties receive fair treatment throughout the process



Confidentiality

Privacy is protected at every stage



Resolution Focus

Working toward positive outcomes for all

A well-structured complaint process strengthens trust and accountability within our school community.