

St Mary's Primary



Killyleagh

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Complaints Procedure Policy

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Signature of Chair _____

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1.POLICY STATEMENT

In St Mary's a culture of achievement, improvement and ambition exists with clear expectations that all pupils can and will achieve to the very best of their ability.

We aim to provide an inclusive, caring and safe environment in which all children can grow in self-esteem, independence and confidence. Our care for the children enables their holistic development; spiritually, physically, intellectually, morally, emotionally and socially.

Integral to this is the recognition of the self-worth and value of every child, the fostering of the key values of Catholic education and the promotion of mutual understanding and respect for others.

In order to accomplish this, we seek to create a learning community where children, parents, staff and governors demonstrate a commitment to achieving high standards, mutual care and support of each other.

In keeping with the school's Mission Statement, we take complaints very seriously. We have the best interests of all pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. In this regard, we encourage you to raise any concerns you might have as soon as possible. If issues are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved without any sense of dissatisfaction developing unnecessarily.

Most issues can be addressed quickly and effectively by talking to the relevant staff member who will be happy to help. Open communication and regular engagement between school staff and parents/guardians is vital to the effective management of the school.

If you have any concerns or would like clarification of any matter you should talk to your child's class teacher as soon as possible. Any concerns other than those associated with your child's classroom should be raised with the Principal. All concerns raised will be taken seriously and every effort will be made to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

2. AIMS

2.1 In operating this Complaints Procedure we aim to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- provide timely responses to concerns and complaints;
- keep people informed of progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- respect confidentiality;
- fully address all aspects of a complaint and provide an effective response;
- take appropriate action to rectify the issue and prevent it happening again where appropriate;
- be responsive to learning from outcomes which will inform and improve practice within the school.

A copy of this Procedure is available on the school's website or is available from the school on request.

3. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

3.1 Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with a complaint we will ensure;

- fair treatment
- courtesy
- a timely response
- accurate advice
- respect for privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility of consultation with other appropriate parties about the complaint and
- clear reasons for decisions.

Where there are grounds to your complaint we will acknowledge this and address the issues you have raised. Similarly, we will ensure that you are clearly advised where we believe that there are no grounds to your complaint.

3.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In making a complaint it is important to;

- raise issues in a timely manner
- treat our staff with respect and courtesy
- provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues raised

- use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels.

3.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation

- Where a meeting is arranged the complainant may be accompanied but not represented by another person.
- This Procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

4. MAKING A COMPLAINT

4.11 Informal Stage

Stage 1 - Speaking with Teacher

In the first instance, a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned, so that s/he 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 staff.

This approach will 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.

Stage 2 - Speaking with the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1, you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately, and s/he may require some time to investigate and respond. If further time is required, you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which the Principal will respond.

4.12 Formal Stage

Stage 3 - Writing to the Principal

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

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten 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.

Stage 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 Stages 1, 2 and 3, you should write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, including, if applicable, copies of the original correspondence relating to Stage 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 three voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten 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 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.

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

Stage 5 Appeals Process – Full Board of Governors

If you still believe that your complaint has not been addressed, you may write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors requesting that you be allowed to meet with the full Board of Governors to appeal the outcomes. The Chairperson will be responsible for ensuring that you are invited to the next suitable scheduled meeting of Governors where your appeal will be heard. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your Appeal.

Again, where it is evident that the nature of your complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures which may subsequently involve Governors at another level.

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 at which you will have an opportunity to discuss your concerns. Since this process is consultative in nature and not adversarial, a complainant will not have the right to be accompanied or represented by any other person, unless it is deemed appropriate by the Board of Governors. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your Appeal request having been received.

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

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

5 RECORD KEEPING

The School Principal 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 five years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

Our responses will be in English and we will attempt to address all the points and issues raised.

If you do not respond within a reasonable time to the outcome of an investigation into your comment / complaint, we will assume that you are satisfied and do not require us to take further action.

6. NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)

If following the above stages, 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:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Progressive House

33 Wellington Place

Belfast

BT1 6HN

Freepost: FREEPOST NIPSO

Telephone: 02890 233821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

7. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

7.1 The Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking concerns raised seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that issues can be resolved quickly and effectively.

Some examples of complaints dealt with;

- not following school policy
- communication delays / lack of communication
- difficulties in staff / pupil relationships.

7.2 Complaints with separate established procedures

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/ Chair of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when the complaint is raised.

Matters may still be referred to NIPSO, if it is felt that maladministration has occurred.

Exceptions	Contact
• Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Operations and Estates Sara Long
• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services Dr Clare Mangan
• School Development Proposals	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Education John Collings
• Child Protection / Safeguarding	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services Dr Clare Mangan

7.3 The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Chairperson of the Board of Governors to be of a serious nature. The decision of whether to deal with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors.

8. EQUALITY

At the formal stage the school requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

9.UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

The school is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain.

There will be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been completed and the complaint having been reviewed by the Ombudsman, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If they try to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant repeatedly continues to contact the school with the same issue it may choose not to respond.

Appendix 1

HANDLING COMPLAINTS IN ST MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

