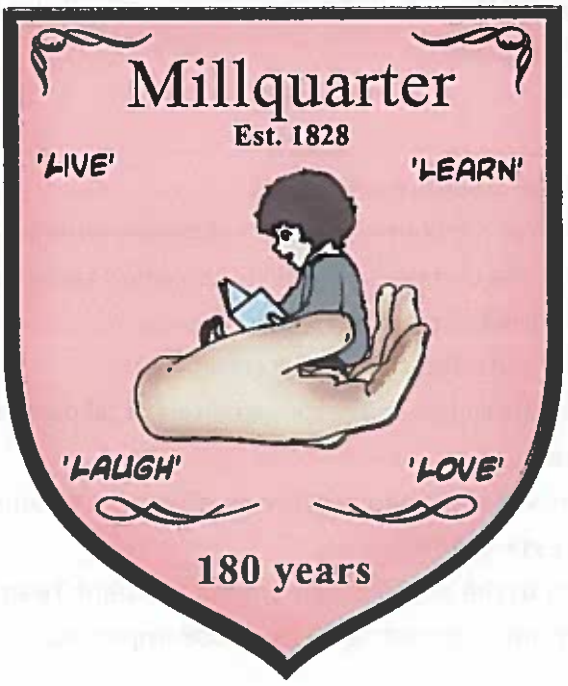
Millquarter Primary School

Complaints Policy



2017

SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Board of Governors together with the Principal set the direction and tone of Millquarter Primary school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians.

The Procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils. Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of the agreed procedure such as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline, Bullying and Harassment or Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.

Millquarter Primary school will not deal with anonymous complaints (except for those concerning child protection matters) and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints.

AIMS

In operating this Complaints Procedure we aim to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Allow swift handling of a complaint within established time-limits for action, keeping people informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair consideration of the complaint;
- Have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- Respect confidentiality;
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- Provide information to the school's Senior Management Team, Board of Governors and Education Authority, so that services can be improved.

The procedures are designed to be:

- Easily accessible and publicised. A copy of the procedures is available (on the school's website or) or upon request from the school;
- Simple to understand and use;
- Impartial; and
- Non-adversarial.

WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THESE PROCEDURES

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with your complaint we will ensure that you receive:

- Fair treatment;
- Courtesy;
- A timely response;
- Accurate advice;
- Respect for your privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint; and
- Reasons for our decisions.

Where the complaint is upheld we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after consideration, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In making your complaint we would expect that you:

- Raise issues in a timely manner;
- Treat our staff with respect and courtesy;
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise; and
- Use these procedures fully and engage in them at the appropriate levels.

Person making the complaint

The complainant may be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the consideration and resolution of the complaint.

Staff

Staff may seek the advice and support from their professional body or trade union and may also be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the consideration and resolution of the complaint.

A member of staff who is directly referred to in a complaint will be provided with a written copy of the complaint and details of any information brought by the parent/carer before being required to respond to the matters raised.

Legal Representation

Legal representation or representation by person(s) acting in a professional capacity is not permitted within this procedure. This procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

Where the person making the complaint is a Governor

Where the person making the complaint is a member of the Board of Governors, that Governor will play no part in the management or appeal of the complaint as set out in this procedure.

WHO WILL DEAL WITH YOUR COMPLAINT?

At the informal stage your complaint should raised and dealt with by the class teacher if appropriate, Key Stage Head, Vice-Principal or Principal.
If the complaint does not relate to a teacher in the school, but to a member of the non-teaching staff, it should be referred to the Principal.
If you proceed to the formal part of the process, the Principal will assume responsibility for the process, unless s/he is the subject of the complaint, in which case the Chairperson of the Board of Governors will assume responsibility. The Chairperson will make a decision as to whether it is appropriate for him/her to conduct a preliminary investigation or whether it is necessary to establish a Complaints Sub-Committee to consider and resolve the matter.

TIMESCALES

Every effort should be made by all parties to resolve complaints in a timely manner. The entire procedure, should a complaint proceed right to the Appeals Stage, should be dealt with in 20 working days, where possible.

MAKING A COMPLAINT

Informal Stage: Step 1 - Speaking with the teacher concerned

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 teaching staff.

This approach would 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.

Informal Stage: Step 2 - Contacting the Principal

If your complaint is against a member of the non-teaching staff or if your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1 you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In advance of this meeting you should inform the Principal in writing, of the nature of your complaint so that s/he may be in a position to resolve the problem without further delay.

In some circumstances the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and s/he may require some time to consider and prepare a response. If further time is required you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which a response will be issued.

Formal Stage: Step 3 - Making a formal written complaint to the Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Governors

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Steps 1 and 2, or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at Step 3.

You should write to the Principal or the Chairperson and state the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible addressing specifically the issue(s) that ate of concern to you.

If your complaint is against the Principal you should write directly to the Chairperson. Details of how to contact the Chairperson will be available from the school. You will then receive a written acknowledgement of your letter from the Principal or Chairperson. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

- Provide a response to the issue(s) you raised, or
- State who is considering your complaint and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued.

Formal Stage: Step 4 - Initial investigation of the written complaint by the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and/or Complaints Sub-Committee

If your complaint is to be dealt with by the Chairperson, he/she will make a decision as to whether it is appropriate for him/her to conduct a preliminary investigation or whether it is necessary to establish a Complaints Sub-Committee to consider and resolve the matter.

A Complaints Sub-Committee will consist of a minimum of three Governors. The sub-committee will acknowledge in writing your complaint. This will confirm that your complaint has been received, and:

- Provide a response to the issue(s) you raised;
  or
- State that your complaint is being considered and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued.
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In some cases you may be required to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub-Committee may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

You should expect a written response. This will include the findings of the Complaints Sub-Committee, the reasons supporting its decisions and any recommendations, if applicable. Any recommendations will be brought to the Board of Governors for ratification.

Formal Stage: Step 5 - Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board of Governors Complaints Sub-Committee you may write to the Chairperson appealing its decision. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your appeal. The Chairperson will be responsible for establishing an Appeals Sub-Committee comprising of at least three members of the Board of Governors who were not involved in the consideration of the original complaint.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting with the Appeals Sub-Committee at which you will have an opportunity to explain the grounds for your appeal. The Appeals Sub-Committee will also review all information and correspondence from the original complaint and the consideration by the Complaints Sub-Committee. You should expect a final written response. This will indicate the findings of the Appeals Sub-Committee, the reasons supporting its decisions and any recommendations, if applicable. Any recommendations will be brought to the Board of Governors for ratification.

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If following Stage 5 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.

RECORD KEEPING

The Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Governors shall maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meeting 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 three years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

MALLICIOUS OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

Where a Board of Governors consider the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute frivolous or vexatious behaviour, they will seek advice from the relevant Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed and updated every three years and presented to Governors for approval. It will be made available to parents on request.

Signed (Principal): Anita Kearney. Date 30.1.17

Signed (Chair of Governors) Brendy Boyd Date _____

Annex 1

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOW CHART

INFORMAL STAGE
Step 1
Speak with the Teacher

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INFORMAL Stage
Step 2
If complaint is unresolved following Step 1 or if the complaint is against a member of the non-teaching staff contact the Principal to arrange a meeting.
If complaint is against the Principal go to Formal Stage Step 3.

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FORMAL Stage
Step 3
If complaint is unresolved following Steps 1 and 2 or procedures are to be initiated at Step 3 write to the Principal or Chairperson of Governors.

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FORMAL Stage
Step 4
Chairperson to make preliminary investigation and/or refer to Complaints Sub-Committee for its investigation.

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APPEALS PROCESS
Step 5
Written request to Chairperson to have complaint heard by Appeals Sub-Committee