

Complaints Procedure

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| Contents | Page |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Foreword | 1 |
| 2. Aims of the Complaints Procedure | 2 |
| 3. School Complaints Procedure – At a Glance | 3 |
| 4. Scope of the Complaints Procedure | 5 |
| 5. What to Expect Under this Procedure | 6 |
| 6. Equality | 8 |
| 7. Unreasonable Complaints | 8 |

1 Foreword

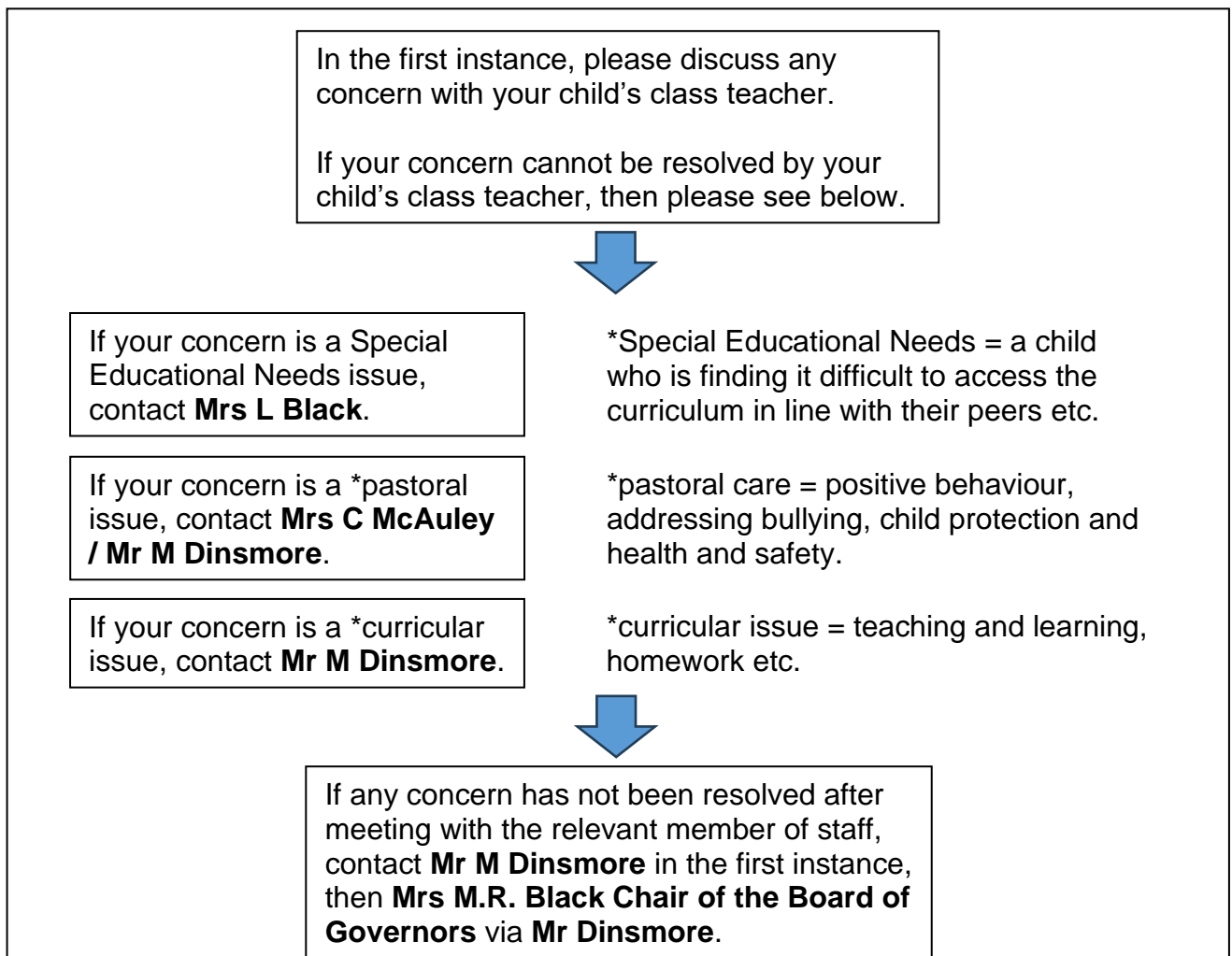
1.1 At St Patrick's Primary School, we take complaints seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the heart of all we do. In this regard, we encourage anyone with a concern to speak to the relevant member of staff as soon as possible. When *issues are managed at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved leaving no unnecessary dissatisfaction.*

Many issues can be addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff in school, who will be happy to discuss the concern. Open communication and regular engagement between the school staff and the wide range of stakeholders is vital to the effective management of the school.

You can speak to staff by contacting the school office on 028 2177 1619 to make an appointment with the class teacher or by requesting a telephone appointment.

Concerns about matters other than in the classroom should be raised with the Principal.

1.2 Communication Chart



2 Aims of the Complaints Procedure

2.1 When dealing with complaints the school will:

- encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible;
- provide timely responses to concerns and complaints;
- keep you informed of progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation of your complaint where appropriate;
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- respect confidentiality;
- fully address complaints 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 School Complaints Procedure – At a Glance



3.1 Time Limit

Please contact the school as soon as possible - unless there are exceptional circumstances, complaints will normally only be considered within 6 months of origin of the complaint to the school.

3.2 Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the school Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. *If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.* 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 you with this process.

Please provide as much information as possible including:

- name and contact details;
- what the complaint is about;
- what has already been done to try to resolve it; and
- what you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a response normally made within 20 school working days of receipt of the complaint. This response will be issued in writing by the Principal and will indicate with reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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

If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Stage 1, the complaint may be progressed to Stage 2 which is overseen by the Board of Governors.

3.3 Stage Two

If the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (*care of the school and marked 'private and confidential'*). Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process. The Chairperson will convene a committee to review the complaint.

Please provide as much detail as possible as indicated above, and in addition include the following:

- Reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings; and
- Any aspect in which you think that the school's complaints procedure was not fully followed.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a final response normally made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the complaint. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the committee. ***These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.**

3.4 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If following Stage Two 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.or.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

4 Scope of the Complaints Procedure

4.1 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.

4.2 Some examples of complaints dealt with:

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

4.3 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 Chief Executive Richard Pengelly |
| Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) | |
| School Development Proposals | |
| Child Protection / Safeguarding | |

4.4 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.

5 What to Expect Under this Procedure

5.1 Your Rights as a Person Making a Complaint

In dealing with 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.

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

5.3 Rights of Parties Involved During the Investigation

Where a meeting is arranged, the complainant may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

Complainant: - should be informed that they may be accompanied but not represented by another person e.g. spouse, family member, friend, interpreter, provided this person is not offering legal representation or acting in an official capacity.

If the complainant feels unable to speak on their own behalf, they may avail of support from outside agencies as agreed with the school, for example, Local MLAs / Councillors / Citizens' Advice Bureau / Parenting NI / Children's commissioner.

Staff Members: - should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process e.g. union representative, colleague¹.

Pupils: - permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent, guardian or other nominated adult should accompany pupils.

It may be appropriate to seek a written statement if a person is unable to meet for any reason.

Parties should normally be informed when a complaint is made against them and be able to see relevant correspondence.

This Procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

5.4 Timeframes

Where concerns are raised with the relevant Teacher or Principal, a response will normally be provided during the meeting or within an agreed timeframe.

Stage 1 – normally acknowledged within 5 school working days, response normally within 20 school working days

Stage 2 – normally acknowledged within 5 school working days, response normally within 20 school working days

If, for any reason, the review of a complaint takes longer to complete, you will be informed of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

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

6 Equality

6.1 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.

7 Unreasonable Complaints

7.1 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. The school must balance the rights of an individual to make a complaint and have it fairly investigated with the rights of staff not to be subjected to unacceptable actions or behaviour.

If the complainant tries 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.

Any decision to treat a complainant as unreasonable must take into account the need to ensure that the complaints procedure is being fairly applied, and every attempt has been made to communicate and address concerns about behaviour/conduct with the complainant. In the event that such a decision has been taken, the complainant will be advised accordingly

