

St Columba's P.S. Newbuildings



Complaints Policy

Reviewed August 2017

Ratified by the Bog October 2017

Review due: August 2019

Introduction

Our school seeks to be a '**listening school**' and will do its best to enable parents/guardians to feel confident to raise issues and concerns with appropriate staff. Comments/Complaints will be considered following a clear set of procedures based on Board guidance. These procedures will be made clear to any parent/guardian or member of the public making a complaint.

Our school will try to resolve a parent/guardian's concern as informally and quickly as possible and always make clear what action, if any, is being taken. The Board of Governors will consider complaints through the Complaints Committee where it has been impossible to resolve them at school management level. Individual complaints will not be discussed by the full Board of Governors.

If a complaint is brought to the attention of an individual member of the Board of Governors, he/she should make sure that the complaint is dealt with under the correct complaints procedure adopted by the school.

Definition of terms

A **customer** is the term used to define those who avail of school services and support. The **customer base** of the school is defined as follows:

Parents/guardians

Pupils

Teachers

Support Staff

All other relevant agencies

A **comment** is a statement on the part of the customer, either verbal or written, which:

Tells the staff when they are doing things right;

Cannot be described as a complaint under the definition below.

A **complaint** is:

An expression of dissatisfaction which requires a response or may lead to investigation;

A perceived injustice/failure of reasonable expectations on the part of the customer about a specific issue(s).

A **comment/complaint** may be verbal, written or emailed.

All **anonymous complaints** will be treated as comments on the basis that the school has no recourse to a complainant. However, if the comment has potential implications for future criminal investigations relating to the individual concerned, the Principal and the Board of Governors will take appropriate action, which may involve the Board and/or other bodies.

Principles

This Comments/Complaints Policy aims to:

Facilitate the school in the pursuance of its commitment to provide services to the highest standards;

Reflect the values associated in the aims and objectives of the school as outlined in the school prospectus;

Be simple, speedy, accessible and respect confidentiality;

Be courteous;

Treat individuals and groups with openness and honesty;

Identify and respond to the needs of their customers;

Provide a mechanism within which any issue identified by customers can be quickly and effectively addressed;

Ensure that parents/guardians, staff and governors know a Comments/ Complaints Policy is in place.

Purpose

Address all issues arising from a complaint in a fair and confidential manner within the time-scale set out in the Policy;

Inform the complainant of progress and the final outcome of the complaint investigation;

Enhance customer confidence and satisfaction;

Provide guidance and protection for staff, parents/guardians and members of the public.

Practices/procedures for dealing with complaints (More detail in Appendix 1)

We want our pupils to be healthy, happy and safe, and to achieve and recognise that parents, guardians or carers play an important part in making this happen. Cooperation between parents, staff and governors leads to a shared sense of purpose and a good atmosphere in the school.

Each level of the procedure set out below offers the opportunity for concerns and complaints to be resolved as quickly as possible.

Level 1 – informal

Parents, carers or guardians should, in the first instance, make an appointment to speak to the class teacher about the concern. It is best to resolve issues at this point.

Level 2 - informal

Parents, carers or guardians dissatisfied with the result of the discussions with the class teacher should ask for an appointment to meet with the Principal.

If a resolution to the issue is proving difficult to find, the Principal can speak to one member of the governing body about the issue who may be willing to offer informal intervention. However, there is no obligation on any governor to become involved at this level.

It is hoped that most problems will have been resolved by now.

Level 3 – formal complaint letter to Principal

An issue that has not been resolved through the informal levels 1 and 2 can become an official complaint.

Parents, carers or guardians wishing to move to level 3 must write a formal letter of complaint to the Principal. The letter will need to set out clearly the issues which have previously been discussed and why the parent, carer or guardian considers the issue to be unresolved.

Principals should consider the complaint and discuss a resolution with the complainant. The Principal should offer a resolution to the complainant in writing within 10 school days of receipt of the letter.

Concerns or complaints specifically about the Principal.

The decision that the Principal has made as a result of the complaint does not become a complaint about the Principal. If the complainant feels the complaint has not been resolved he/she should proceed to Level 4, a Governors' Complaints Panel. If, the concern or complaint is specifically about the Principal and is unable to be resolved at the informal stage, then it will be necessary for the complainant to formally complain to the Chair of Governors. The school will provide the Chair of Governor's name and the complainant should write to him or her at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent, private and confidential'. The Chair of Governors should acknowledge the complainant's letter in writing within 5 school days of receipt and contact a Governor Support Service Officer for advice.

Level 4 – formal complaint requesting a Governors' Complaints Panel.

Complainants wishing to move to level 4 of the formal complaints procedure will need to write a letter to the Chair of Governors to request that a Governors' Complaints Panel meets to hear the complaint. This formal complaint letter must be received within 10 school days of the last meeting with the Principal concerning the issue. The complainant should write to the Chair of Governors at the school address marking the envelope 'urgent and confidential'. The letter will need to set out the complaint that has previously been formally discussed with the Principal and

show why the matter is not resolved. 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.

Receipt of complainant's letter	Acknowledgement within 5 school days
Receipt of complainant's letter	Governors' Panel meeting within 15 school days (unless this goes into school holidays)
Written documentation sent to Governors' Panel Members and complainant and Principal.	5 school days before meeting.
Governors' Panel members decision communicated to all concerned	As soon as possible but within 10 school days of meeting.

Step 5 - Appeals Process

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within ten working days of receiving written feedback from the Complaints Sub-Committee, appealing their 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 original investigation. You will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where your appeal will be heard.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. 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. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal request having been received.

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

The decision of the Appeals Sub-Committee is final. At the end of the process the Chairperson will inform you, in writing, that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is considered closed.

Complaints involving Other Agencies

A complaint may involve the school and one or more agencies. If the school, as the lead body, subsequently identifies that the complaint is the responsibility of the agency, the complaint will be formally transferred to that body and the school will undertake to inform the complainant.

Complaints relating to Child Protection

The school acknowledges its responsibility, under the Children (NI) Order 1995, to work in partnership with other statutory agencies to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. This partnership is facilitated by the Board's Child Protection Service.

When the school receives a complaint/concern, which may be a Child Protection issue, that complaint/concern will be dealt with under the school's Child Protection Policy. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be passed to the Board's designated officer who will decide on the appropriate course of action. Such complaints/concerns will be dealt with in accordance with the guidance issued by the Western Area Child Protection committee (1998) and the Department of Education (1999).

Access to the policy

The Policy is available in the school on request.

The school has a system for recording all comments/complaints.

Monitoring the Policy

The Principal will monitor complaints received and report to the Board of Governors on an annual basis on the implementation of policy and procedures. This will give details of:

The number and types of complaints

The average time taken to respond;

The number of satisfied resolutions.

Confidentiality

All concerns and complaints will be treated with discretion. It is vital that parents/guardians feel confident that their complaint will not penalise their child. However, a complainant will need to be aware that some information will have to be shared with those involved in order that the complaint can be investigated.

Why we like to hear from you

Comments/Complaints are useful to the school because they allow it to monitor, evaluate and review its service in pursuit of continuous improvement.

This policy will be subject to review on an annual basis.

Unresolved complaints

If the complaint has not been resolved to the complainant's satisfaction by the Board of Governors, the complaint can be referred to the EA/CCMS.

If a complainant remains dissatisfied he/she can complain to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). They provide a free, independent impartial service for handling complaints about schools in Northern Ireland. If you feel that you have been treated unfairly or received poor service from a school and your complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction you have the right to complain to the Ombudsman. A complaint should normally be referred to the Ombudsman within 6 months of the final response from the school. This information will be included with the concluding letter from the school. You can contact NIPSO at:

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: 02890233821

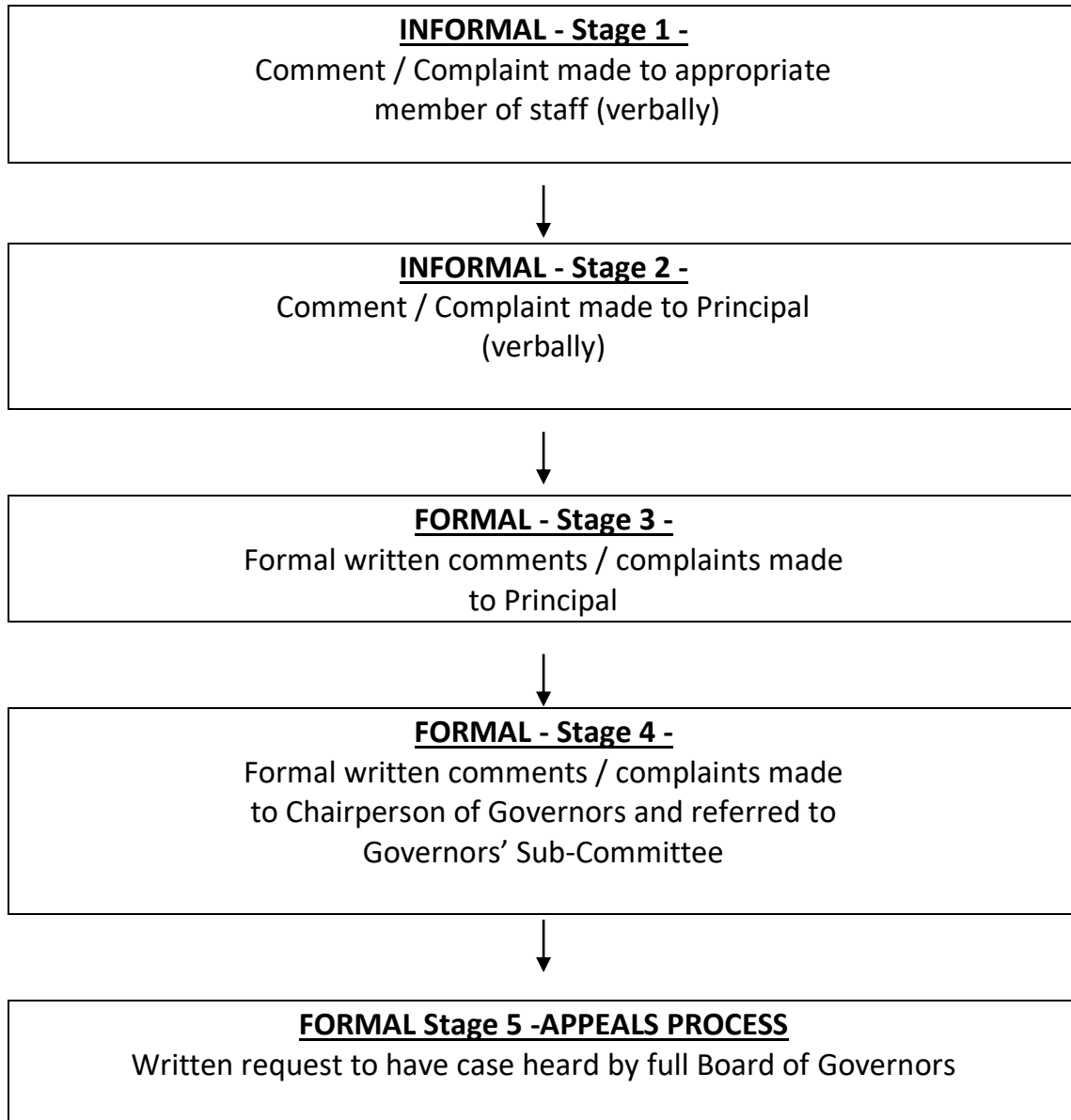
Freephone: 0800343424

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website: www.nipso.org.uk

Appendix 2

COMMENTS/COMPLAINTS FLOW CHART



It is hoped that any complaints will be resolved within the process outlined above, however if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can refer the matter to the N.I. Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) 028 90233821.

In Writing to:

**FREEPOST NIPSO
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast**

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website: www.nipso.org.uk