

# **St. Patrick's Senior National School**

## **Complaints Procedure Policy**

### **1. Policy statement and purpose**

St. Patrick's Senior National School aims to provide a high-quality education for all pupils and to maintain good working relationships between staff, pupils and parents/guardians. Where a parent/guardian has a concern or complaint, this policy sets out a clear, fair and timely process to raise and resolve that concern locally wherever possible. This procedure is informed by the Education Act 1998 (Section 28), Department of Education guidance on schools' complaint procedures, the agreed parental complaints arrangements (INTO/CPSMA/management bodies — revised Dec 2023/Jan 2024), and the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).

### **2. Scope**

This policy covers:

- Complaints by parents/guardians about any aspect of the school's provision, including complaints about teachers and other school staff.
- It does not cover complaints that follow a separate statutory process (e.g., formal fitness-to-teach / disciplinary procedures for teachers, or matters that are the subject of legal proceedings). Where another statutory route is more appropriate the complainant will be advised accordingly.

### **3. Principles**

St. Patrick's S.N.S. will:

- Seek to resolve complaints fairly, promptly and at the earliest possible stage;
- Treat all parties with respect and confidentiality (subject to safeguarding requirements);
- Act in accordance with child protection and data-protection obligations;
- Make a clear distinction between informal concerns (best raised promptly with the class teacher) and formal complaints that require written investigation;

- Ensure that complainants and staff know the steps, timescales and who to contact.

#### 4. Key exceptions (where this procedure does not apply or is adjusted)

The Board will not investigate, under this procedure, complaints that are:

- a) Matters of professional competence that must be referred under separate Departmental procedures (e.g., professional competence or disciplinary matters).
- b) Frivolous, vexatious or abusive complaints. The Board may refuse to process such complaints and will record its reasons.
- c) Matters that are already the subject of legal proceedings, or where another statutory procedure applies.
- d) Complaints that raise child protection concerns will be handled under the Child Protection Procedures (the DLP will be informed and Tusla notified where required) rather than under this general complaints procedure.

#### 5. Complaints stages and timescales

("days" means school days)

Stage 1 — Informal resolution (recommended first step)

1. Parent/guardian raises concern with the child's class teacher (or relevant staff member) as soon as possible and seeks an informal resolution.
2. If not resolved, approach the Principal for further discussion.
3. If still unresolved, the parent/guardian may request that the matter be considered by the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

Aim: resolve informally within 5 school days of first raising the concern.

Stage 2 — Formal written complaint

1. If the concern remains unresolved, the complainant should submit a formal written and signed complaint to the Chairperson of the Board of Management (via the school office or email). The written complaint should set out: the nature of the complaint, relevant dates, any steps already taken to resolve it and the outcome sought.
2. On receipt the Chairperson will: acknowledge receipt in writing within 3 school days, and where appropriate provide the teacher/member of staff with a copy of the complaint.

Stage 3 — Chairperson/Principal action

1. The Chairperson (or a person authorised by the Board) will seek to resolve the complaint by informal mediation and may arrange a meeting between the parties

(teacher, Principal, parent). This meeting should usually take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

2. If resolved, agreed actions will be recorded and communicated to both parties.

#### Stage 4 — Board of Management investigation

1. If unresolved, the Chairperson will report the matter to the Board of Management. The Board will decide whether the complaint is substantiated, requires further investigation, or is to be dismissed.
2. If further investigation is required, the Board will:
  - Inform the staff member concerned that investigation is proceeding;
  - Supply copies of relevant written evidence to the staff member and invite a written response;
  - Offer the staff member an opportunity to make a presentation to the Board and to be accompanied by a friend or representative if they wish;
  - Invite the complainant to meet the Board if required (and allow them to be accompanied).

#### Stage 5 — Board decision and communication

1. When the Board has completed its consideration it will notify both parties in writing of its decision and any actions it proposes to take within 5 school days of the Board meeting.
2. The Board's decision is final for the purposes of the school's internal procedures. Where the complaint relates to a matter that falls outside the Board's remit (for example, matters referred to the Department or the Teaching Council), the complainant will be informed of appropriate alternative routes.

### 6. Child protection, serious allegations and emergency matters

- Any complaint or disclosure that raises a safeguarding/child protection concern will be managed immediately under the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023). The Designated Liaison Person (DLP) will be informed without delay and Tusla notified where required. In such cases this complaints procedure is suspended while safeguarding procedures take precedence.

## 7. Record keeping, confidentiality and data protection

- A confidential record of all formal complaints and their outcome will be maintained by the Board (kept securely). Notes of meetings, correspondence and evidence will be stored in accordance with data-protection requirements (GDPR). The school will share information only on a need-to-know basis and will advise complainants of any limits to confidentiality (for example, safeguarding obligations).

## 8. Unreasonable or persistent complaints

- If a complainant persists with a complaint that has been fully investigated and concluded, the Board may decide that no further action will be taken and may inform the complainant of that decision in writing. The Board will set out reasons for its decision and any further recourse available (for example, where relevant, referral to the Teaching Council for fitness-to-teach concerns or to other statutory bodies).

## 9. External review and appeal routes

- Where the complaint concerns professional competence or conduct of a registered teacher, guidance is available from the Teaching Council and the Department and separate statutory procedures may apply. Complainants may be advised of these routes where appropriate.
- For concerns about public services provided to children, parents can also seek information from the Ombudsman for Children's Office or other statutory bodies as relevant. The Department of Education does not routinely adjudicate on individual complaints between parents and schools but provides guidance on the operation of complaints procedures.

## 10. Communication & publication

- This complaints procedure was adopted by the Board of Management of St. Patrick's S.N.S. on: \_\_\_\_\_.
- The procedure will be available on the school website and in hard copy on request from the school office. The Board will review the procedure every 3 years or earlier if legislation or guidance changes.

## 11. Responsibilities

- Parents/Guardians: raise concerns promptly, follow the staged procedure, provide clear written complaints when requested.
  - Class teacher / Staff: attempt to resolve concerns at the earliest stage, engage professionally in meetings.
  - Principal: lead informal resolution, liaise with Chairperson and Board, ensure safeguarding obligations are met.
  - Chairperson/Board of Management: oversee formal investigations, ensure fair procedures and appropriate records.
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### Ratification and Communication

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management of St. Patrick's S.N.S. at its meeting on \_\_\_\_\_. Parents may view this policy on the school website or by appointment with the Principal.

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Fr. John O Connor

Chairperson of the Board of Management