

HOLY TRINITY PRIMARY SCHOOL



POLICY FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS

UPDATED June 2024

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1. FOREWORD

At Holy Trinity Primary School, we take complaints very seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. In this regard, we encourage anyone with a concern to speak to us as soon as possible. Our School Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking complaints seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that they can be resolved quickly and effectively.

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

We welcome open communication with our staff; you can speak to staff by contacting the school office on 02890616465 and they will organise an appointment with the relevant staff at a suitable time.

If you have any issues please talk to the teacher, as soon as possible. Concerns about matters other than in the classroom should be raised with the Principal. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

2. AIMS

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.
- address issues arising from comments / complaints in a fair and honest manner within the timescales set out.
- treat individuals and groups with openness, equality and inclusiveness.
- 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.
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use.
- Be impartial.
- Be non- adversarial

These procedures do not replace or supplement other established procedures and/or appeals mechanisms in such areas as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions etc.

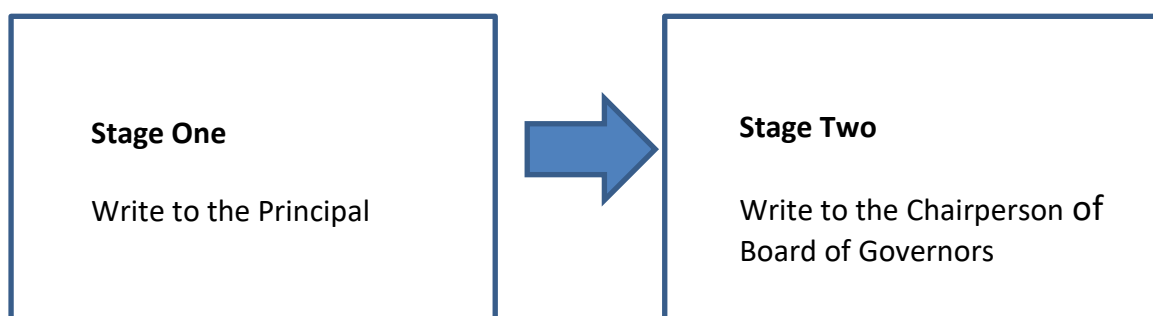
In addition, where it becomes evident at an early stage that the nature of your complaint may give rise to further disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other

established Disciplinary Procedures.

This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however if your complaint relates to the school's failure to correctly administer any of these procedures, then you may complain by means of this procedure.

We will not usually deal with anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the chairperson of the board of governors to be of a very serious nature. The decision for dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the board of governors.

3. **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE –AT A GLANCE**



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 the date of the incident about which you are complaining.

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- please try to be specific
- what you have already done to try to resolve it and
- what you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint.

The principal will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but within 10 school working days. This will be a short response and you will be sent a copy of, (or a link to) the school's complaints procedure. A final response will normally be 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. If for any reason, the consideration 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.

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.

Stage Two

If the complaint is about the principal or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. The letter should be left in the school office and marked "private and confidential". The Chairperson will convene a committee to review the complaint. Please provide as much detail as possible as indicated above.

If the complaint is about the principal, this committee will investigate the complaint. Please provide clear information and include the following

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

The chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but within 10 school working days. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the second letter. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the committee and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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.

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) www.nipso.org.uk

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.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

4. SCOPE OF 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.

Some examples of complaints dealt with;

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

4.2 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school 	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Operations and Estates Sara Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) 	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People’s Services Dr Clare Mangan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Development Proposals 	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Education John Collings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Protection / Safeguarding 	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People’s Services Dr Clare Mangan

4.3 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. *(see guidance notes for further information)*

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
- 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 parties may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

Complainant: - should be informed that they may be accompanied but not represented by another person during the process e.g. spouse, friend, family member or 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. (*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.

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 as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally within 20 school working days

Stage 2 – Normally acknowledged as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final 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. MAKING A COMPLAINT

6.1 Equality

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.

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

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

A full set of guidance materials to support this procedure is currently being developed. It will be helpful to consult this to understand the scope of the complaints procedure.