

Comments and Complaints Policy

Ashgrove Nursery School views all comments and complaints as learning opportunities to improve the quality of our service and acknowledges that improvement should be a consequence of any effective comments and complaints procedure. We value the opportunity to engage, at an early stage, with children, parents, staff and any other professional or person who wishes to make a complaint about school services or staff.

Definition:

'A complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction with our work.'

EA, 2019 in conjunction with Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, Controlled Schools' Support Council, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

Scope and Purpose

This Policy will apply to all those who make use of Ashgrove Nursery School services, including the pupils, for whom an adult with parental responsibility can make a comment or complaint on their behalf.

This Policy sets out how any comments or expression of dissatisfaction relating to the Nursery School will be managed.

By taking concerns raised seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is anticipated that issues can be resolved quickly and effectively.

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- Inform parents/carers and relevant others, how to make a comment or complaint.

- Encourage comments and complaints by publishing our procedures and making them easy to use.
- Ensure that the Nursery School responds to complaints in a reasonable time and in an efficient, confidential, and courteous manner
- Improve our stakeholder's confidence by demonstrating that comments and complaints are taken seriously by the Nursery School.
- Use information from this process to improve, monitor and evaluate our services.
- Enhance staff morale by reporting on positive comments and/or addressing any deficits.

Aims:

When dealing with complaints the school will:

- Encourage resolution as quickly as possible
- Provide timely responses
- Keep Complainants informed of progress
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of a complaint
- 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
- Be responsive to learning from outcomes that will inform and improve practice within the Nursery School
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use
- Be impartial
- Be non-adversarial.

Complaints Handling Procedure

Details of the Complaints Procedure, with relevant contacts is outlined in the Parents' Handbook provided for each parent during the Induction Process, in the Child Protection/Safeguarding information sent to all parents prior to their child starting Nursery School.

Any comments/complaints will be taken seriously by the Nursery School and dealt with in a way which respects confidentiality.

To enable complaints to be resolved, 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(s) about which there is a complaint.

Our Nursery School is committed to responding to complaints as follows:

At a Glance: See Appendix 1 - Comments and Complaints Communication Chart

Stage 1 - Write to the Principal

Stage 2 - Write to the Board of Governors

STAGE 1

When making a complaint, Complainants should contact the Nursery School Principal, Mrs N. Cruickshank, who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated.

If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.

The Complainant may initially begin their complaint through contacting the Nursery School Clerical Officer, Mrs C Yildiz or through the Child's Class Teacher (if relevant).

(See also Appendix 1 Communication Chart)

The Nursery School requires complaints to be made in writing.

Where this may present difficulties, contact the Nursery School and efforts will be made to make reasonable arrangements to support this process.

Complainants should provide as much information as possible including:

- Name and contact details of Complainant
- What the complaint is about
- What has already been done to try to resolve the complaint; and
- What is being asked of the school to resolve the complaint.

The Principal will acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible, but within 10 school working days.

This will be a short response and the Complainant will be sent a copy of the Nursery School's Comments and Complaints procedure.

A final response will be made within 20 school working days of receipt of the complaint.

This response will be issued in writing 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, the Complainant 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 the Complainant remains unhappy with the outcome at Stage One, the complaint may be progressed to Stage Two which is overseen by the Board of Governors.

STAGE 2

If the complaint is about the Principal or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, Mrs S Sheeran, should be written to.

As in Stage One, where this may present difficulties, the Nursery School should be

contacted and will make reasonable arrangements to support the Complainant with this process.

The letter should be left at the Nursery School office with the Clerical Officer and marked 'private and confidential'.

The Chairperson will convene a sub-committee to consider the complaint.

In the case of the complaint being about the principal, this sub-committee will investigate the complaint.

Clear information should be provided and include the following:

- Reason(s) why the Complainant disagrees with the Stage One findings
- Any aspect of the Nursery School's Complaints Procedure was not fully followed.

The Chairperson of the Governors Complaints sub-committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least 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 by the Chairperson of the Governors sub-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,

Complainants will be informed of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

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, should the Complainant remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, the matter can be referred 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. Complainants have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel that they have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from a School and that the complaint has not been resolved to their 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 the Complainant remains dissatisfied.

Contact details for NIPSO are provided below:

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

Issues raised by Parents/Carers

If a child has an issue at school, we would anticipate that the matter would normally be resolved through discussion with the child's Class Teacher.

This Nursery School actively encourages Parents/ Carers to communicate with their child's Class Teachers, as they will often be able to resolve matters at an early stage.

In many situations, this may include an agreed course of action or in some cases an apology where that is appropriate.

Parents/Carers will be informed of the name of their child's Class Teacher throughout the Induction Process and during the Nursery School Year at Parent Consultations etc.

If Parents/Carers feel dissatisfied after initially talking to the Class Teacher, then they will be referred to the Nursery School's Complaints Procedure.

Parents/Carers will be provided with a hardcopy of the procedure for their convenience and information.

Correspondence received by the Nursery School does not have to indicate specifically that it is a Complaint in order to be treated as a Complaint.

Where the Principal recognises that such communication would most effectively be managed from the outset, by means of the Complaints Procedure, then she will proceed to do so and will advise the Complainant accordingly.

Copies of the Nursery School's Complaints Procedure will be available on the Nursery School's website, or available from the Nursery School on request.

Issues raised by Other Users

If people other than Parents/Carers wish to raise an issue, they will be able to communicate with the Class Teacher, as these staff will often be able to resolve matters at an early stage.

These other Nursery School users will be directed to speak to the Clerical Officer to arrange a meeting or a telephone conversation with the Nursery School Principal.

In many situations this may include an agreed course of action or in some cases, an apology where that is appropriate.

If these initial attempts to resolve the issue by talking have been unsuccessful, then the Users will be referred to the

Nursery School Complaints Procedure in order that matter may be more fully investigated.

Copies of the Comments and Complaints Procedure will be available on the Nursery School's website or available from the School on request.

What to Expect Under This Procedure

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with complaints, this Nursery School 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.

Responsibilities of the person making a complaint

When making a complaint it is important that the Complainant:

- Raises the issue in a timely manner
- Treats the Nursery Staff with respect and courtesy
- Provides accurate and concise information in relation to the issues raised
- Uses the Complaints Procedures fully and engages with them at the appropriate levels.

Rights of parties involved during the Investigation

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

Complainant: Will 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 e.g. Local MLAs / Councillors / Citizens' Advice Bureau / Parenting NI / Children's Commissioner.

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

Pupils: Those persons with parental responsibility can make a comment or complaint on a pupil's behalf due to the age and stage of development of our children at this Nursery School.

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.

Timeframes

Stage One - Normally acknowledged as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

Stage Two - Normally acknowledged as soon as possible, but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally provided within 20 school working days

See also Appendix 4 - Draft Letter of Acknowledgement of Comment/Complaint

If, for any reason, the consideration /review of a complaint takes longer to complete, complainants 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.

Complaints with separate established procedures

This Policy may not pertain to all aspects of Nursery School life and in such instances, there are other statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms available. Although not an exhaustive list, these include:

Exceptions	Contact
Admissions /Expulsions / Exclusion of children from School	Contact ww.eani.org.uk
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services
Development Proposals	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Operations and Estates
Child Protection / Safeguarding (See Appendix 2 and separate Policy)	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services

These matters may still be referred to NIPSO if it is felt maladministration has occurred.

The Principal/Chair of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint has been raised.

Anonymous Complaints

The Nursery 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 dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

Unreasonable Complaints

Ashgrove Nursery 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 complaint's procedure having been completed and the complaint has been reviewed by the Ombudsman, that the complainant remains dissatisfied.

Our Nursery 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.

Any decision to treat a Complainant as unreasonable, must consider the need to ensure that the complaints procedure is being fairly applied and that every attempt has been made to communicate and address concerns about behaviour/conduct with the Complainant.

If such a decision has been taken, the Complainant will be advised accordingly.

Responsibility and Staff Involvement

It is the duty of the Principal and Board of Governors to ensure that all comments and complaints are given due consideration in accordance with this Policy.

The Principal and Governors will also consider, on at least an annual basis, a summary of comments and complaints received by the Nursery School, to identify any related policy/procedural changes that may need to be implemented.

They will also ensure that all staff adhere to the practices and procedures of the Policy.

The Principal has responsibility for ensuring that:

- Any complaints received are properly and accurately logged, acknowledged, investigated and a solution forwarded in accordance with the Education Authority's standards
- All staff are aware of their responsibilities as the first point of contact when dealing with persons making a comment or complaint
- All staff have access to the Education Authority's Model School Complaints Procedure 2019 (on which this Policy is based).

Record Keeping

This Nursery School believes that robust Record Keeping is an essential component of good complaints handling.

As such:

- The Principal/Governors will open an individual file (case file) for each separate complaint to record all contact and subsequent responses
- The Principal will record and date any complaints in the Complaints File which is held securely in the Link Room locked Filing Cabinet
- Once a complaint has been resolved, the outcome will also be written in the Complaints File
- Any recommendations for changes in procedures will be made and noted

against the Comments and Complaints Policy.

See Appendix 3 - Record of School Complaints

Equality

As per the Nursery School Equality and Inclusion Policy and the EA's Equal Opportunities Policy, the Nursery School and/or the Education Authority will deal with all complaints fairly and honestly regardless of who makes a complaint.

All members of the Nursery School community will be treated equitably, and no bias will be shown to any individual or group.

The Nursery School also recognises the needs of people who may experience difficulties making a complaint.

Information about the complaint system will reflect the needs of people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as those with reading difficulties, sight or hearing impairments, or intellectual disability.

As such, special requests for alternative means of communication will be facilitated.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This Policy will be monitored in an ongoing way within the self-evaluative culture of the school.

See also:

- Admissions Policy

- Curriculum Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Whistle blowing Policy

This Policy was initially adopted by the Governors on 20/09/16.

It was reviewed on the 15th of May 2024.

It continues to be reviewed at least annually or prior to this date should the need arise.

Comments and Complaints Communication Chart

Stage 1

The Nursery School Clerical Officer: Mrs C. Yildiz
Tel: 028 90843 178 / email:
info@ashgrovens.carnmoney.ni.sch.uk



Your child's teacher: Mrs McAlister, Mrs N. Cruickshank, Mrs
Irwin
Tel: 028 90843 178 / email: info@ashgrovens.carnmoney.ni.sch.uk



Principal: Mrs N. Cruickshank
Tel: 028 90843 178 / email: info@ashgrovens.carnmoney.ni.sch.uk

Stage 2

(unless Complaint is in relation to the Principal)

Chairperson Board of Governors: Mrs S Sheeran
Tel: 028 90843 178 / email: info@ashgrovens.carnmoney.ni.sch.uk



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

Important Information

- Complaints are handled fairly, confidently and respectfully.
- This procedure does not cover:
- Child Protection Concerns
- Staff Disciplinary or grievance issues
- Admission or SEN appeals

(These follow separate procedures)

**If you would like a copy, please let us know and we can email or print off. All policies are available in hallway of the Nursery School*

Procedure for a Parent/Carer to raise a Child Protection concern

If parents have a concern about a child's safety at our Nursery School, they are invited to take the following course of action:

I have a concern about my/a child's safety



I can talk to my child's class teacher



If I am still concerned, I can talk to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Mrs Nicola Cruickshank, OR the Deputy Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Mrs McAlister/Mrs Irwin
Tel: (028) 90843178



If I am still concerned, I can write/talk to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, Mrs Sandra Sheeran, Tel: (028) 90843178



At any time, I can talk to:
The local Children's Services Gateway Team
Or the PSNI Central Referral Unit 101

Record of School Complaints

Record of School Complaints					
Date Initial Letter Received	Nature of Complaint <i>Curriculum</i> <i>Behaviour</i> <i>Bullying</i> <i>Staff</i>	Stage One Handled By: Principal: Mrs. N. Cruickshank	Stage Two Handled By: Chairperson Board of Governors: Mrs S Sheeran (detail any other Governors in Sub-Committee)	Ombudsman Contact <i>Name of contact</i>	

Appendix 4

Draft Letter of Acknowledgement of Comment/Complaint



Ashgrove Road,
Newtownabbey

Tel: (028) 90 843178

Email: info@ashgrovenurseryns.carnmoney.ni.sch.uk

Website: www.ashgrovenurseryschool.co.uk

Name

Address

Dear

I acknowledge receipt of your letter of complaint which was received on/../2...

The Nursery School will carry out an investigation of the issues in line with our Complaints Procedure and will respond to you by (*insert a date 20 days from receipt of the letter*).

As part of our investigation, we may wish to speak to you and if that is the case, we will be in touch to arrange this.

I enclose a copy of our Nursery Schools' Complaints Procedure for your information.

Yours sincerely

Principal

Or

Chairperson Board of Governors