

The Irish Society's Primary School

COMPLAINTS POLICY

At any time if the concern or enquiry is of a Child Protection nature the Designated Teacher or Deputy Designated Teacher should be contacted. Please refer to the procedures set out in the school's Child Protection Policy.

The Board of Governors together with the Principal set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education.

The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians.

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1. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Board of Governors together with the Principal set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians.

- 1.1 The procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils. However, schools need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.
- 1.2 Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of the agreed procedure such as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline, Bullying and Harassment or Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.
- 1.3 The school will not deal with anonymous complaints (except for those concerning child protection matters) and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints.
To allow for proper investigation, complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. Any matter raised more than 3 months after the event being complained of will not normally be considered, save in exceptional circumstances. 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.

2. AIMS

2.1 In operating this Complaints Procedure we aim to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Allow swift handling of a complaint within established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of progress.
- Keep people informed of progress.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation.
- Have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- Provide information to the school's Senior Management Team and Board of Governors so that services can be improved.

2.2 The procedures are designed to be:

- Easily accessible and published. A copy of the procedures will be placed on the school's website or available on request from the school.
- Simple to understand and use.
- Impartial; and
- Non-adversarial.

3. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THESE PROCEDURES

3.1 Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with your complaint we will ensure that you receive

- Fair treatment
 - Courtesy
 - A timely response
 - Accurate advice
 - Respect for your privacy- complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint and
 - Reasons for our decisions
- Where the complaint is justified we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after investigation, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint you will be advised accordingly.

3.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In making your complaint we would expect that you:

- Raise issues in a timely manner;
- Treat our staff with respect and courtesy;
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise; and
- Use these procedures fully and engage in them at the appropriate levels.

3.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation

The process is non-adversarial and does not provide a role for any other statutory or non-statutory body.

Complainant

The complainant may be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

Staff

Staff may seek advice and support from their professional body or trade union and may also be accompanied by another person where it is accepted by the Principal and Board of Governors that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

A member of staff who is directly referred to in a complaint will be provided with a written copy of the complaint and details of any information brought by the complainant before being required to respond to the matters raised.

Legal Representation

Legal representation or representation by person(s) acting in a professional capacity is not permitted within this procedure. This procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

3.4 Where the complainant is a Governor

Where the complainant is a member of the Board of Governors, they will play no part in the management or appeal of the complaint as set out in this procedure.

4. WHO WILL DEAL WITH YOUR COMPLAINT?

At the informal stage your complaint should be raised and dealt with by the teacher concerned. If you proceed to the formal part of the process, the Principal will assume responsibility for the process, unless she/he is the subject of the complaint, in which case the Chair of the Board of Governors will assume responsibility. Governors approached by a complainant should refer him/her to the Principal or the Chairperson as indicated in the following stages of the procedure. Should it be necessary, the Board of Governors will be responsible for establishing a Complaint Sub-Committee to investigate and resolve the matter.

5. MAKING A COMPLAINT

The Principal has responsibility for the implementation of the complaint's procedure.

Stage One

Open lines of communication are encouraged between school and home. If an issue arises, it should normally be discussed, in the first instance, with the class teacher. For practical reasons and for proper consideration to be given, it will be necessary to make an appointment with the teacher concerned through the office, giving some indication of the nature of the concern.

If the member of staff whom the parent has first contacted cannot deal with the matter immediately, s/he will make an arrangement to deal with it as soon as possible or refer the matter to another member of staff. On some occasions, the Principal may deal directly with a matter at this stage if it seems appropriate.

If after discussion with the teacher the issue remains unresolved, the matter should be discussed with the Principal. Again, it will be necessary to make an appointment through the office, giving some indication of the nature of the concern.

Stage Two

If the complaint relates to the Principal, the complainant should contact the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

If no satisfactory solution has been found within 10 working days, the complainant will be asked if they wish their concern to be considered further.

As with all public organisations, we must have a formal complaints procedure that should be followed if, after consultation with the teacher and/or Principal, the issue remains unresolved.

It is hoped that such a procedure will only rarely be used, but for your information it is set out below.

Stage Three

At this stage it is clear that the concern is a definite complaint. Parents who wish to pursue a complaint at Stage Three should put their complaint in writing to the school stating clearly that they are lodging a formal complaint. The Principal may designate another member of staff to carry out any investigation required or the Principal may carry out any investigation. The Principal (or designated member of staff) will acknowledge the complaint orally or in writing within 10 working days of receipt.

This will confirm that your letter has been received, and will either:

- Provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- State that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received). The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meeting. The principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

Once all the relevant facts have been established, the Principal (or designated member of staff) will arrange a meeting with the complainant to discuss and resolve the matter. The complainant will be notified in writing of the outcome of this meeting.

This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full (some details may be then given of the action the school may be taking to review procedures etc. But details of the investigation or any disciplinary procedures will not be released.
- The matter has been fully investigated and that the appropriate procedures are being followed which are strictly confidential.

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Principal is now concluded.

Stage 4

At this stage if the complainant wishes to take the matter further, s/he should notify the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within 5 weeks of receiving the letter detailing the outcome of the complaint and stating that s/he wishes for the complaint to proceed to Stage Four.

Written notification should be sent to:-

**The Chairperson of the Board of Governors
The Irish Society's Primary School, 3 Rugby Avenue, Coleraine. BT52 1JL**

A letter of acknowledgement will be sent within seven days and the Governors will respond as quickly as possible following their convened meeting.

The Board of Governors will establish a sub-committee to deal with the complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of 3 voting members. Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of concern to you.

The Chairperson of the sub-committee will write acknowledging receipt of the written request and the complaint will be heard within 10 working days of receipt. This will confirm that your letter has been received and

- Provide a response to the issue(s) you raised;
Or
- State that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors and due notification will be given of such meeting. The Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint. Following the meeting the sub-committee will consider its decision and write to both parties with the outcome within 15 days.

Stage 5 Appeals Process- Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board of Governors Sub Committee you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within 10 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 10 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 10 working days of this meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governor's findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions. The complainant, and the Principal or Chair, as appropriate will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- The concern is not substantiated by the evidence.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full but that the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly, so the matter is now closed.
- The concern was substantiated in part or in full and the Board of Governors will take steps to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation (where this is practicable).

The complainant is not entitled to access any details of the investigation except for any statements that may have been provided by their child. Any information relating to the application of disciplinary procedures is strictly confidential.

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.

6. RECORD KEEPING

The Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Governors shall maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meeting(s) concerning your complaint. The records shall be held confidentially in the school and shall be kept apart from pupil records. All such records will be destroyed three years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

7. MALICIOUS OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

Where a Board of Governors consider the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute frivolous or vexatious behaviour, they will seek advice from the relevant Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

When The Irish Society's Primary School's complaints process has been exhausted (following Stage 5), the complainant may refer the matter to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) from 1 April 2017. Complainants must bring their complaint to NIPSO within six months of completion of the internal complaints process. [Circular Number: 2016/08 Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland)]

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.

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: 02890233821

Freephone: 0800343424

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk