



Carrickfergus Grammar School policy on...	COMPLAINTS PROCESS
Date ratified	29 May 2019
Date implemented	1 September 2019
Date to be reviewed	September 2020
Consulted	Education Authority, Governors, Staff

1. Scope of Complaints Process

1.1

The Complaints Process 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, effectively and informally.

1.2

Where it becomes evident at an early stage that the nature of the complaint should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this complaints procedure would be set aside by the Principal and/or Board of Governors in favour of the alternative procedure such as Safeguarding (Child Protection), Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline or Harassment.

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The school will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when the complaint is raised.

Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of Children from school	Education Authority – Operations and Estates Directorate
Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs	Education Authority – Children and Young People's Services Directorate
School Development Proposals	Education Authority – Education Directorate
Child Protection / Safeguarding	Education Authority – Children and Young People's Services Directorate

1.3

The school will not deal with anonymous complaints and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints except for the referral of child protection concerns within the scope of Procedures and Guidelines to the appropriate Child Protection Authority.

2. Aims of Complaints Process

2.1

Our Complaints Process aims to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised. Copies will be available on request or via the school website;
- be simple to understand and use;
- advise on when an informal complaint becomes a formal complaint;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action at formal stages, keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a fair investigation;
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- provide information to the school's Senior Leadership Team and Board of Governors so that services can be improved.

3. What to expect under Complaints Process

3.1

In dealing with your complaint we will ensure that you receive:

- fair treatment;
- courtesy;
- a timely response – at Steps 3 and 4, the complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a response normally made within 20 school working days of receipt of the complaint;
- 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 upheld we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after investigation, it is judged that the grounds for your complaint are insufficient, you will be advised accordingly.

The above assumes that the complaint is reasonable, and that you have treated school staff with appropriate regard, respect and courtesy. Should this not be the case, the school reserves the right to review whether it investigates the concern or not.

3.2

In making your complaint we would expect that you:

- raise issues in a timely manner;
- treat our staff with total respect and courtesy at all times;
- provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise;
- use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels;
- in addition, we would expect that you have reasonable grounds for making a complaint and are not seeking to invoke these or other procedures as a means of dealing with issues that are appropriately dealt with in other ways.

3.3

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

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

A member of staff who is the subject of a complaint will be provided with full details of any allegations made against him/her before being required to respond to the matters raised. In many occasions this may be best achieved by providing the member of staff with a copy of any letter received at the formal stage of complaint.

Whilst someone may accompany you at any meetings, legal representation, or representation by a person or persons acting in a professional capacity, is not permitted within this procedure.

3.4

Where the complainant is a member of the Board of Governors, he/she will play no part in the management of the complaint as set out in this procedure.

4. Making a Complaint

If you have a concern about your child in school, you have the right to tell us about it. Please tell us of your concern as soon as possible. It is difficult for us to investigate properly an incident or problem which has happened some time ago. It is unlikely we will investigate incidents of concern which happened over 6 months ago, and we anticipate that the vast majority of concerns will be raised with us within days.

If you wish to raise an issue for clarification purposes, there may be pertinent times to do so in the school year, such as parent –teacher consultations at which you will have the opportunity to speak with subject teachers and the Class Tutor.

4.1 Step 1 Informal Stage

In the event that you wish to raise a concern without waiting for scheduled school events such as parent-teacher consultations, you may contact the Head of Subject (if it is a subject-specific concern), Head of Year (if it is a pastoral concern) or SENCo (Special Educational Needs) by phone. It may on some occasions be preferable to discuss the problem face to face at this stage. If so, you will need an appointment to do this, and can make one by ringing the school office. The Head of Subject or Head of Year will listen further to your concern and make every effort to resolve your problem informally. This does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view, but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the concern. It may also help to prevent a similar problem arising again.

The Head of Subject or Head of Year may decide to re-direct your concern to a more relevant member of staff. For example, if it is a concern in relation to Special Educational Needs, it may be referred to the Assistant SENCo or SENCo.

If the complaint refers to a Head of Subject or Head of Year, please phone or make an appointment to see him / her to discuss the matter in an informal capacity. Should you still not be satisfied, please move directly to Step 2.

4.2 Step 2 Informal Stage

In the unlikely event that your concern remains unresolved, you should arrange a meeting with the Senior Teacher in charge of Pastoral Care or the Vice Principal (Curriculum) to discuss the issue. You should let us know in advance the nature of your concerns so that we can prepare for the meeting. In some circumstances we will not be able to deal effectively with your concerns immediately and will require some time in order to investigate and prepare a proper response. If further time is required, you will be told of this.

If the complaint refers to the Principal, please make an appointment to see him or her to discuss the matter in an informal capacity. Should you still not be satisfied following the meeting with the Principal, please move directly to Step 4 in this regard.

4.3 Step 3 Formal Stage

If your concern is still not resolved after Step 2, please contact the school Principal in writing who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. This will trigger the commencement of the formal complaints process.

Please provide as much information as possible including;

- name and contact details;
- what the complaint is about;
- what has already been done to try to resolve it and;
- what you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a response normally 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. These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

4.4 Step 4 Formal Stage

If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Step 3, the complaint may be progressed to Step 4 which is overseen by the Board of Governors.

Please write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (care of the school 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 in Step 3. Governors may seek further information from you, as necessary.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a final response normally made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the complaint. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the committee. These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

This will officially end the school's Complaints Process.

5. Record Keeping

5.1

A formal record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings, concerning your complaint will be kept when it reaches Step 3 onwards. Informal notes will be kept at the preceding 2 steps. The formal records will be held confidentially in the school and will be kept apart from student records. All such records will be destroyed five years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

6. Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints

6.1

Where the Board of Governors considers the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute a frivolous or vexatious complaint, it will seek advice from the relevant employing authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

7. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

7.1

If following Step 4 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

APPENDIX A: COMPLAINTS PROCESS FLOW CHART

STEP 1 – INFORMAL

Refer concern to Head of Department or Head of Year.

STEP 2 – INFORMAL

Refer concern to Senior Teacher - Pastoral or Vice Principal – Curriculum.

STEP 3 – FORMAL

Refer concern to Principal in writing. Your concern will be acknowledged within 5 school working days in writing, and a response will ensue in writing within 20 school working days.

STEP 4 – FORMAL

Refer concern to Chair of Board of Governors in writing. Your concern will be acknowledged within 5 school working days in writing, and a response will ensue in writing within 20 school working days.

If still not satisfied, you may refer to complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.