

**Our Lady's & St Mochua's
Primary School**

**Concerns/Complaints
Policy and Procedures**

At Our Lady's & St Mochua's PS we are committed to listening about our service. We will use this information, wherever possible, to help maintain and improve our service. We encourage and welcome all comments and views.

This policy is designed to establish a clear mechanism for the resolution of concerns/complaints that you may have.

If concerns are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved and there is no unnecessary dissatisfaction. We welcome open communication with our staff.

In line with our school vision

'Reaching for the future... a voice today...'

we will endeavour to ensure that all concerns/complaints are dealt with to the satisfaction of all parties.

Please read the enclosed procedures carefully.

Aims

Our Concerns/Complaints Procedure aims to:

- ❖ encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible
- ❖ Provide an efficient and thorough system through which issues are effectively addressed
- ❖ Facilitate the school in providing the best possible service for its pupils and the local community
- ❖ Provide a simple, speedy and accessible service that respects confidentiality
- ❖ Be courteous and respectful
- ❖ Address issues arising from the concerns/complaints in a fair and honest manner within the timescales set out
- ❖ Treat individuals and groups with openness, equality and inclusiveness
- ❖ Keep people informed of progress and the final outcome of the issues raised
- ❖ Be simple, easy accessible and easy to use

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 concern/complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures.

We are not able to deal with anonymous concerns/complaints and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints except for the referral of child protection concerns to the appropriate Child Protection Procedures and Guidelines.

Your Responsibilities as a person raising a concern/making a complaint

In raising an issue we would expect that you:

- ❖ Make an appointment with the member of staff you wish to speak with;
- ❖ treat our staff as professionals, in a non-threatening manner and with respect and courtesy;
- ❖ provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issue you raise;
- ❖ use these procedures fully and to engage in them at the appropriate levels.

In addition, we would expect that you have reasonable grounds for raising a concern/making a complaint and are not seeking to invoke these or other procedures as a means of dealing with issues that are more appropriately dealt with in other ways.

Your rights as a person raising a concern/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 – concerns will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate Agencies about your complaint;
- ❖ reasons for our decisions.

Raising a Concern/Making a Complaint

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 4.*

Stage 1 - Informal - Speaking with the Teacher concerned

In the first instance a complaint or concern should normally be referred verbally to the class/subject teacher concerned, so that they may be allowed an opportunity to address the issue, as in many instances, these can arise through a simple misunderstanding. You should observe the school's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such approaches or meetings.

This approach would not prevent you from choosing to enter the process at a later stage, if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.

Stage 2a - Informal - Speaking with the Principal

If your concern/complaint remains unresolved you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue with him/her. You should let the Principal know in advance the nature of your concerns so that he/she can prepare for the meeting.

If you have concerns relating to the Principal, you should arrange a meeting with him/her to discuss the issues as at Stage 1.

In some circumstances the Principal will not be able to deal effectively with your concerns immediately and he/she will require some time over which to investigate and prepare a proper response. If further time is required you will be told of this.

Stage 2b – Formal - Writing to the Principal

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your concern/complaint resolved at source through the informal routes proposed at Stages 1 and 2 or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at this stage. Your written concern/complaint should 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.

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

Stage 3a - Formal – In writing to Governor Sub-Committee

If you still believe that your concern/complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner, or in a case where you decide to raise an issue at this level, you may write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors. The Chairperson will be responsible for bringing your concern/complaint to a Governors' Sub-Committee, which will investigate and respond to your concern/complaint. Your written concern/complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of immediate concern to you.

However, where it is evident that the nature of your concern/complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures which may subsequently involve Governors at another level.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 5 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and;

- ❖ Provide a response to the issues you raised;
- or,
- ❖ Indicate that your concerns are being fully investigated and the timeframe – a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your written concern/complaint was received - against which you can expect a response to be issued;
- or,
- ❖ Indicate a date, time and place for you to attend a meeting with this Sub-Committee at which your concerns will be discussed in full. If this meeting is required, it will take place within 20 working days from the date on which your written concern/complaint was received and you should expect a written response within a further 10 working days of the meeting having been held.

Stage 3b - Appeals Process – Board of Governors Appeals Committee

Finally, if you still believe that your concern/complaint has not been addressed you may write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors requesting that you be allowed to meet with the Board of Governors Appeals Committee to appeal the outcomes. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your Appeal.

Again, where it is evident that the nature of your concern/complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures which may subsequently involve Governors at another level.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 5 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting at which you will have an opportunity to discuss your concerns. Since this process is consultative in nature and not adversarial, a complainant will not have the right to be accompanied or represented by any other person, unless it is deemed appropriate by the Appeals Committee. This meeting will normally take place within 20 working days of your Appeal request having been received.

Following this meeting, and within 10 working days of that meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governors' findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions.

Stage 4: Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NSIPS)

If following Stage 3 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

Record Keeping

The School Principal shall maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings concerning your concern/complaint. These records shall be held confidentially in the school and shall be kept apart from pupil records. All such records will be destroyed five years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

Our responses will be in plain English and we will attempt to address all the points and issues raised.

If you do not respond within a reasonable time to the outcome of an investigation into your concern/complaint we will assume that you are satisfied and do not require us to take further action.

This procedure does not provide a role for any other statutory or non-statutory body.

Scope of Complaint's Procedure

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

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

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*)

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. 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.

Signed: _____ **B Rafferty (Chairman of the BOG)**

_____ **G Farrell (Principal)**

Adopted: June 2018