

CARRICKFERGUS MODEL SCHOOL



COMPLAINTS POLICY



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Complaints Policy

Here at Carrickfergus Model 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. If concerns are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved and there is no unnecessary dissatisfaction. 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.

This 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. Some examples of complaints dealt with;

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

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 policy will be set aside in favour of the agreed policies below;

- Child Protection
- Special Education
- Admissions
- Suspensions and Expulsions
- Grievance
- Discipline
- Bullying and Harassment
- Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure

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.

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
- ensure a full and fair investigation of your complaint where appropriate
- 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.

WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

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.

Where the complaint is upheld we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after consideration, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

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.

Abusive behaviour of any kind toward any member of our school staff will not be tolerated and the Board of Governors may write to a parent if their behaviour is considered unacceptable. This includes, shouting, showing aggression, gesturing, hanging up on a phone call, threatening, goading other parents or spreading rumours about the staff or the school.

Rights of parties involved during the investigation

Person making the complaint

Where a meeting is arranged the complainant may be accompanied but not represented by another person. This Procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

Staff

Staff may seek the 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 consideration 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 parent/carer 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.

Where a person making a complaint is a Governor

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

WHO WILL DEAL WITH YOUR COMPLAINT?

Stage 1: If you feel that your complaint is more of a concern, then the class teacher should be the first point of contact. This approach will not prevent you from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage, if you believe it to be an appropriate course of action.

Stage 2: Please raise your complaint with the Principal, via a telephone call or via a face to face meeting. It is preferable that emails are not sent at this point. In some circumstances, the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and she may require some time to consider and prepare a response.

Stage 3: Please raise your complaint, once again with the Principal, but this time in writing. This may come in the form of an email or a letter. 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.

Normally you will receive a written acknowledge within 5 school working days.

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.

Stage 4: Please write to the Chair of the Board of Governors (Mr N Anderson) and deliver your letter to the Principal. As the Principal is secretary to the Board of Governors, she will acknowledge your letter in writing and forward it to the Chair of the Board of Governors. If the complaint is about the Principal, the same instructions should be followed, but the Principal will have no involvement in the rest of the process.

Normally you will receive a written acknowledge within 5 school working days.

Stage 5: If your complaint is to be dealt with by the Chairperson, he/she will make a decision as to whether it is appropriate for him/her to conduct a preliminary investigation or whether it is necessary to establish a Complaints Sub-Committee to consider to resolve the matter. The Sub Committee will consist of 3 Governors. The Sub-Committee will acknowledge in writing your complaint and either;

- provide a response to the issues you have raised;
or
- state that your complaint is being considered and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued.

In some case you may be required to meet with the Complaints Sub-Committee and due notification will be given of such meetings. You should then expect a written response, indicating the findings of the Sub-Committee, the reasons supporting its decisions and any recommendations, if applicable. Any recommendations will be brought to the Board of Governors for ratification.

Normally you will receive a written response 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.

Stage 6: If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board of Governors you can appeal the decision and the process above will be repeated. The written response from this Sub-Committee will be final and this Sub-Committee will be made up with 3 different Governors to Stage 5.

Normally you will receive a written response 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.

Stage 7: Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If after following this process, 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

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. 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.

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 Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

RECORD KEEPING

All records will be destroyed 3 years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOW CHART

