Kirkistown Primary School

Learning together,
building for the future

Complaints Procedure Policy

Policy Review
Date agreed: Sept 2021
Next Review Date: Sept 2023
Signed by Chair of Governors:

_____

Date: _____

Contents Page

1. Introduction **3**

1.1 School Information
1.2 Communication Chart

2. Scope of the Complaints Procedure **5**

2.1 Complaints with Established Procedures
2.2 Anonymous Complaints

3. Aims of the Complaints Procedure **5**

3.1 When dealing with Complaints
3.2 Availability of Procedure

4. Complaints Procedure - at a Glance **6**

4.1 Time Limit
4.2 Stage One
4.3 Stage Two
4.4 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

5. What to Expect Under this Procedure **8**

5.1 Your rights as a person making a complaint
5.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint
5.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation
5.4 Timeframes
5.5 Equality
5.6 Unreasonable complaints

1. Introduction

The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents / carers.
At Kirkistown 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 to the satisfaction of all parties. 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 school community is vital to the effective management of the school and to nurturing positive relationships within our school community as a whole. If you have any concerns please talk to the class teacher or Principal. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

It is important to differentiate between *concerns* and *complaints*. The first stages outlined in the policy are focused on raising concerns with the class teacher and principal. Should you feel you need to proceed to making a formal complaint the procedure is outlined below.

1.1. School Information

The opinions of our school community matter greatly to us. We aim to be open and straightforward in all our dealings with our community; we appreciate feedback that is positive and constructive criticism too. We are always happy to listen to suggestions and try to survey our community on many aspects of their school experience to ensure that they are satisfied and to also improve that experience going forward.

Vision Statement
As a school, we aim to create independence and inspire lifelong learning.

School Ethos
As a community, we will provide an environment that caters for the intellectual, physical, spiritual, moral and cultural development of all pupils.

Mission Statement

- We strive to ensure that the learning, achievements, attitudes and well-being of all members of the school community are valued.
- We provide a broad and balanced curriculum which will actively encourage everyone.
- Pupils are given opportunities to take responsibility and be encouraged to make a positive contribution to their learning, school, and the wider community.
- We are committed to promoting a healthy lifestyle and the wellbeing of the whole child.
- Staff, pupils, parents and governors work together to build a learning community that celebrates the values we share.

We take all issues seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

1.2. Communication Chart

Executive Officer – Mrs O'Lone
Telephone: 028 4277 1455
Email: molone861@c2kni.net

Your child's teacher: Mrs Harbinson / Miss Taggart / Mr Graham / Mr Irwin
Tel: 028 4277 1455

School Principal: Mr R Graham
Telephone: 028 4277 1455
Email: rgraham577@c2kni.net

RAISING CONCERNS

Informal Stage

Step 1 - Speaking with Teacher

In the first instance, a concern should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned, at an agreed time, so that s/he may have an opportunity to address the issue(s). **Please observe the school's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such meetings and follow the school's policy with respect to access to members of staff:**

1. No concerns should be raised with the class teacher at the school gate or classroom door. Confidentially is paramount. During school hours, children's safety, happiness and learning is our priority so all concerns should be raised by making an appointment with the class teacher after 3.00pm. The same applies for telephone calls. Concerns are most effectively dealt with when time is given to meet and discuss issues with responses and outcomes shared with parents and review dates set. If you require regular communication with the class teacher, a home-link facility/ email is available where necessary.
2. 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.
3. In accordance with the ethos of our school, staff have the right to be spoken to with respect and should there be any perceived aggression, intimidation or disrespect, meetings and telephone calls will be adjourned, and the matter passed to the principal. In such cases the principal will meet with the parent when an agreed non-adversarial persona is adopted. All pupils and staff have the right to feel safe in school and we have zero tolerance for any aggressive behaviour. Any breach of appropriate conduct may result in police intervention and the revoking of license on school grounds.

4. Concerns about a sub teacher should be reported to the Principal and not the sub teacher or other members of staff.

The teacher will inform the principal of the concern and share how it was resolved.

Step 2 - Speaking with the Principal

If your concern remains unresolved following Step 1, you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your concern immediately and may require some time to investigate and respond. If further time is required you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which the Principal will respond. Meetings and telephone calls with the Principal should follow same format as meetings with class teacher – arranged for **after 3.00pm**. The principal is typically teaching every day except Wednesday so appointments can be scheduled for anytime on a Wednesday by ringing the school office. In some cases the Designated Teacher for Child Protection or Pastoral Care leader may also attend meetings.

At this informal stage your concerns should be raised and dealt with by the teacher.

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 concern, 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.

If you wish to make a complaint, please follow the School Complaints Procedure attached.

KIRKISTOWN PRIMARY SCHOOL
COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

2. Scope of the Complaints Procedure

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

2.1 Complaints with Established Procedures

Our school Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking complaints seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that they 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

This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however if your complaint relates to the school's failure to correctly administer any of these procedures, then you may complain by means of this procedure.

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms, which are not part of the schools complaints procedure, are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The principal/ chair of governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

Exceptions
• Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) • School Development Proposals • Child Protection / Safeguarding

2.2 Anonymous Complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the chairperson of the board of governors to be of a very serious nature. The decision of dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the chairperson of the board of governors.

3. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

3.1. When dealing with Complaints

Our school aims to:

- Encourage resolution as quickly as possible;

- Provide timely responses;
- Keep complainants informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of your 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 school.
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial.

3.2. Availability of Procedure

A copy of this Procedure is available on our school's website or is available from the school on request.

4. Complaints Procedure – At a Glance

4.1. Time Limit

To enable complaints to be resolved, please 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 you are complaining.

4.2. Stage One

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 Two.** 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 you with this process.

When writing your complaint, please provide clear information and include the following:

- Your name and contact details
- What your complaint is about – please try to be specific
- What you have already done to try to resolve it and

- What you would like the school to do to resolve your complaint

The principal will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but within 10 school working days. This will be a short response and you will be sent a copy of, (or a link to) the school's complaints procedure. A final response will normally 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, 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.

If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Stage One, the complaint may be progressed to Stage Two which is overseen by the board of governors.

4.3. Stage Two

If your complaint is about the principal or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the chairperson of the board of governors. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. The letter can be left at the school office and marked *'private and confidential'*. The chairperson will convene a committee to consider the complaint.

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

Please provide clear information and include the following:

- Reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings
- Any aspect in which you think that the school's complaints procedure was not fully followed

The chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days. A final response will normally made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the second letter. The response will be issued by the chairperson of the 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.

These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

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

If following Stage Two 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 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

5. What To Expect Under This Procedure

5.1. Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with complaints 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.

5.2. Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

When making a complaint it is important 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 raised
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels

5.3. Rights of parties involved during the investigation

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

Complainant: - should 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. (*Local MLAs / Councillors / Citizens' Advice Bureau / Parenting NI / Children's commissioner)*

Staff Members: - should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process e.g. union representative, colleague[1]

Pupils: permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent, guardian or other nominated adult should accompany pupils.

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.

5.4. Timeframes

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

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.

5.5. Equality

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.

5.6. 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 has been reviewed by the Ombudsman, the complainant remains dissatisfied. The school must balance the rights of an

[1] For information on workers' statutory rights to be accompanied, this should be read in accordance with Section 3 of the LRA's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures (Paras 110-116).

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 take into account the need to ensure that the complaints procedure is being fairly applied and every attempt has been made to communicate and address concerns about behaviour/conduct with the complainant. In the event that such a decision has been taken, the complainant will be advised accordingly.