



Cookstown High School

Handling Complaints Procedure

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SECTION 1: PROCEDURE OVERVIEW

DETAILS

TITLE	Complaints Procedure
TARGET AUDIENCE	Parents/Guardians, School Stakeholders, Staff
REVIEW DATE	Oct 21
REVIEW LEAD	Mrs C Allen
PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN THE REVIEW OF THIS PROCEDURE:	Senior Leadership Team
POLICY PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS ON:	7 December 2021
POLICY RATIFIED BY THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS ON:	7 December 2021
EFFECTIVE FROM:	8 December 2021
REVIEW FREQUENCY:	Every three years (minimum)
PRINCIPAL	Miss G J Evans
CHAIR OF BOARD OF GOVERNORS	Mrs L Dripps

This procedure has been reviewed to include reference to the remit of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) in investigating complaints from members of the public in relation to maladministration in publicly-funded schools.

RECORD OF PROCEDURE AMENDMENTS

The following table outlines any significant changes/amendments made to this procedure since it was ratified by the Board of Governors on:

DATE OF REVIEW OR AMENDMENT	SUMMARY OF CHANGED / AMENDMENTS TO PROCEDURE	AMENDED BY

1.2 PROCEDURE REFERENCES

This procedure has been developed with reference to the following relevant sources and publications:

- Education Authority (EA) – Introduction of a Revised Model School Complaints Procedure

1.3 AIMS

This procedure aims to:

- provide an efficient and thorough system where concerns or complaints raised are effectively addressed;
- encourage resolution of any concerns or complaints raised with the school as soon as possible;
- provide timely responses to any concerns or complaints raised;
- take appropriate action to address any concern or complaint, or to rectify a situation and as far as possible, prevent it from arising again;
- address concerns and complaints raised in a fair, honest, impartial, sensitive and confidential manner within specified timescales;
- ensure a full and fair investigation takes place
- ensures that those raising a concern or complaint remain informed of progress and the final outcome of any investigation carried out; and
- be responsive to learning from outcomes which will inform and improve practice within the school.

1.4 SCHOOL VISION, MISSION AND AIMS

This procedure reflects Cookstown High School's vision for Inspiring Excellence, Providing Opportunity and Support, and Fulfilling Potential. The school's mission is to provide a stimulating, challenging and caring environment that allows each individual to develop to his/her full potential.

This procedure relates directly to the following school aims whereby we:

- to develop the full potential of each pupil by promoting a sense of personal achievement and enjoyment in the pursuit of academic and vocational excellence;
- enable pupils to gain qualifications relevant to further education, higher education, employment and adult life in a rapidly changing world;
- create a caring school community where staff and pupils live and work together in mutual respect, where personal problems of individuals receive a sympathetic and understanding hearing;
- set high expectations for learning, behaviour and dress code;
- help pupils acquire self-discipline, self-respect, self-confidence and a wide range of knowledge and skills;
- help pupils communicate by effective use of language, written, spoken and electronic;
- create an awareness and develop an understanding and tolerance of other ways of life;
- help pupils gain an aesthetic appreciation of human achievements in the Arts and Science and encourage exploration of their own personal creativity;
- help pupils appreciate the importance of physical and intellectual pursuits outside the classroom.

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION

Cookstown High School is committed to providing a high quality of educational provision for its pupils, parents/guardians, community, staff and stakeholders. We recognise the importance of open and regular communication between the school and the community it serves. We, therefore, welcome and value the views and feedback of all stakeholders and use this to maintain and, where appropriate, enhance or improve the quality of our provision. We view all concerns or complaints raised positively as an opportunity to reflect on and, where necessary review existing practice.

SECTION 3: RATIONALE

For the purpose of clarity:

A **concern** is considered to be an expression of worry or doubt about an issue considered to be important for which reassurance are sought.

A **complaint** is regarded as an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or lack of action on the part of the school, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the school.

SECTION 4: ADDRESSING AND RESOLVING CONCERNS INFORMALLY

While we aim to achieve a high level of satisfaction for the community we serve, we encourage anyone with a concern to bring the matter to our attention as soon as possible so that we may resolve the issue at its earliest stage.

Many issues can be resolved informally simply by talking to the relevant staff member(s) in the school who will be pleased to help. We would encourage anyone with a concern to provide us with the opportunity to address and resolve the matter on an informal basis before embarking on the Complaints Procedure.

We take all concerns raised very seriously and we make every effort to address and resolve matters as quickly as possible.

In the first instance, any concern may be verbally referred to the appropriate member of staff. It is expected that most concerns will be resolved at this initial stage, particularly those which may have arisen through a simple misunderstanding.

If, however, a concern remains unresolved, it may be referred to the appropriate Line Manager. This may, for example be a Curriculum Leader, a Head of Year, or it may be a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the Vice-Principals or the Principal.

Any person raising a concern with the school should expect to have the matter addressed within a reasonable timescale, allowing sufficient time for information relating to the issue to be gathered and a response considered. The member of staff dealing with the concern will provide an indication of the timeframe within which the person raising the concern may expect to receive a response.

If, having raised a concern informally, a person is not satisfied that it has been addressed and/or resolved, a formal complaint may be initiated through the school's two-stage Complaints Procedure.

SECTION 5:

FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

STAGE 1 WRITE TO THE PRINCIPAL

When making a complaint, the complainant should contact the school Principal who will arrange for the matter to be investigated.

If the complaint is about the Principal, the complainant should proceed to Stage 2.

The school requires all complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, the complainant should contact the school. We will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

Anyone making a complaint should provide the following information:

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

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 10 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 the reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

Please note that the timeframes outlined above do not apply during school holiday periods.

If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome at Stage 1, the complaint may be progressed to Stage 2 which is overseen by the Board of Governors.

STAGE 2 WRITE TO THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

If a complaint is unresolved after Stage 1, it should be referred, in writing, to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. The correspondence should be addressed for the attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and marked as private and confidential.

Where this may present difficulties, the complainant should contact the school and the school will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

As in Stage 1, it will be important for the complaint to provide the following information:

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

The Chairperson will convene a committee to review the complaint.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and the final response normally made with 20 school working days from the date of receipt of the complaint.

The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the committee.

Please note that the timeframes outlined above do not apply during school holiday periods.

NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)

If, following completion of Stage 2 of the schools Complaints Procedure, a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they 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. Anyone has the right to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel that they have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from a school and their complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction. A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the school.

The school will advise in its concluding letter that, if the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO.

In most instances, the Ombudsman will only investigate a complaint after all the school's internal processes have been exhausted. The contact details for the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman are: 080034 34 24 or 02890233821

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

SECTION 6: SCOPE OF THE COMPLAINTS 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, we hope that issues can be resolved quickly and effectively.

The Complaints Procedure is not limited to the parents/guardians of pupils registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, wishing to raise a concern or complaint about any aspect of the school's provision should follow the guidance contained in this procedure, unless the complaint is of such a nature that it should be addressed under a separate, established and /or statutory procedures and appeals mechanisms. The Principal / Chairperson of the Board of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when the complaint is raised.

In addition, where it becomes evident at an early stage that the nature of a complaint may give rise to future disciplinary action, these procedures will be set aside in favour of other established Disciplinary Procedures.

Exceptions	Contact
Admissions/Expulsions	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Operations and Estates
Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services
School Development Proposals	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Education
Child Protection/ Safeguarding	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

Cookstown High 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 or not to deal with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors. The procedures contained in this procedure do not, therefore, provide a resolution of any complaint brought forward on an anonymous basis.

SECTION 7: WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

7.1 THE RIGHTS OF A PERSON MAKING A COMPLAINT

In dealing with a complaint, we will ensure that the person making the complaint receives:

- fair treatment
- courtesy
- a timely response
- accurate advice
- respect of privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing of the possibility of consultation with other appropriate parties regarding the complaint
- clear reasons for decisions.

Where the complaint is upheld, we will acknowledge this and address the issues raised. Similarly, we will ensure that a complainant is clearly advised where we believe that there are no grounds to the complaint.

7.2 THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PERSON MAKING A COMPLAINT

It is important for the person making the complaint to:

- raise the issue 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.

7.3 THE RIGHTS OF PARTIES INVOLVED DURING THE INVESTIGATION

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

Where a meeting is arranged and where it is deemed appropriate by the Board of Governors, a complainant may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

Legal representation, or representation by a person(s) acting in a professional capacity, is not permitted within the procedures outlined in this procedure.

Any member of staff who is subject of a complaint will be provided with details of any allegations made against him/her before being required to respond to the matter raised

This procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

7.4 TIMEFRAMES

Where concerns are raised with the relevant teacher or Principal, a response will normally be provided during the meeting or within the agreed timeframe.

STAGE	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COMPLAINT	RESPONSE OF COMPLAINT
1	Normally within 10 school working days	Normally within 20 schools working days
2	Normally within 10 school working days	Normally within 20 school working days

If, for any reason, the review of a complaint takes longer to complete, the complainant will be informed of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

Please note that the timeframes outlined above do not apply during school holiday periods.

SECTION 8 MAKING A COMPLAINT

The school requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, the complainant should contact the school and we will make reasonable arrangements to support them with this process.

The school is committed to dealing with 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 the complainant tries to re-open the same issue, the Chairperson of the Board 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, the school may choose not to respond.

At each stage of the Complaints Procedure, it is our wish to resolve the complaint. As appropriate, we will acknowledge if the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that a situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the school will try to ensure that the concern/complaint raised will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- and undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

8.4 WITHDRAWAL OF A COMPLAINT

If a complainant wishes to withdraw a complaint, the school will require written confirmation of this decision.

SECTION 9: RECORD KEEPING

The Principal and the Chairperson of the Board of Governors will maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings with a complainant. These records will be held confidentially in the school and will be kept apart from pupil records. All such records will be destroyed five years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

SECTION 10: MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE PROCEDURE

It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors, in liaison with the Principal, to monitor the effectiveness of this procedure. This procedure will be reviewed at least every four years, but may be updated sooner in response to:

- relevant circulars and publications from Department of Education (DE) / Education Authority (EA)
- recommendations made by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)
- learning which emerges from issues/situations which arise
- review of other related school policies such as the External Communications Procedure.

To appropriately monitor the effectiveness of this procedure the Board of Governors will:

- maintain a record of all complaints received by the school
- review all complaints received by the school to identify trends and priorities for action
- assess the effectiveness of strategies used to resolve complaints received by the school.