



# Cookstown High School

## Concerns & Complaints Policy

December 2017

## **Rationale and Ethos**

At Cookstown High School we aspire to provide the best possible educational and service experiences for our learners and create meaningful and enduring partnerships with families and other stakeholders.

Sometimes however there may be times when stakeholders will feel less than satisfied with an aspect of the service provided by school. If this happens we would like to be informed. That enables school to work with families to reach consensus, which is the essence of the home school partnership and is in the best interests of our pupils.

This Concerns and Complaints Policy is intended to assist stakeholders who are dissatisfied with school and provide a clear framework for the management of expressions of concern and complaints.

Parents or carers who voice concerns, make comments or complaints should feel confident in doing so, knowing that it will in no way have any negative impact on their children or on the school's commitment to developing a positive home school partnership for the future.

This policy should be read and interpreted in the context of the school ethos which values each person as unique, calls on all members of the school community to show respect for all and to take responsibility for their own words and actions.

## **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.

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

## **Definitions**

For the purpose of this policy Cookstown High School feels it is useful to establish a common understanding of the following terms.

### *Comment*

An expression of praise or appreciation directed at staff or a service delivered by the School, a suggested service improvement, or an anonymous complaint where the School has no way to respond to the stakeholder.

### *Concern*

An expression of unease about any matter related to School. The concern may be about the wellbeing of a pupil, an aspect of school life or the exercise of the School's function. Concerns require attempts at resolution with the objective of restoring the relationship between the person expressing the concern and School.

### *Complaint*

Any expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the School. Complaints require investigation with the objective of restoring the relationship between the complainant and the School.

## **Below is a guide to how to effectively voice your concerns:**

*General concerns:* Any problem or concern should be raised promptly with your son or daughter's Form Tutor. If your concern is of a particularly serious or sensitive nature, you may prefer to discuss it with a member of staff responsible for the area you are concerned about, for example, the relevant Head of Year or Curriculum Leader (Head of Department). Staff will make every effort to resolve the problem or concern promptly at this informal stage. Experience shows that most concerns can best be resolved through informal discussion. If you suspect the concern is of a Safeguarding or Child Protection nature, then please follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures immediately.

*Concern about the quality of learning or teaching:* This may be brought in the first instance to the Curriculum Leader. The Curriculum Leader will listen to your concern, follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale. If the concern is about the Curriculum Leader you may bring it directly to the Vice Principal Curriculum.

*Concern about relationships with a teacher:* This should be brought in the first instance to the Head of Year. The Head of Year will listen to your concern, follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale. If the concern is about the Head of Year you may bring it directly to the Vice Principal Pastoral.

*Concern about how a behavioural matter has been dealt with:* This should be brought in the first instance to the Head of Year or, if the concern is about the Head of Year, to the Vice Principal Pastoral. The relevant member of staff will listen to your concern, follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale.

*Concern about how a Curriculum Leader or Head of Year has responded to or dealt with a matter:* This should be brought to the appropriate Vice Principal: the Vice Principal Pastoral deals with all matters relating to pupil wellbeing, behaviour and inclusion, the Vice Principal Curriculum with any matter relating to Learning and Teaching. The Vice Principal will listen to your concern and may ask a Senior Teacher to investigate it as appropriate. The Vice Principal will respond to you within an agreed timescale.

*Concern about how a Vice Principal has responded to or dealt with a matter:* This should be brought in the first instance to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will listen to your concern follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale.

If having taken your concern through the appropriate channels you still feel that the matter has not been dealt with satisfactorily you may wish to initiate a formal complaint.

## Complaints Procedure

### STAGE 1

- Please contact School as soon as possible, unless there are exceptional circumstances, complaints will normally only be considered within six months of origin of the complaint to the school.
- Formal complaints should be conveyed in writing to the Headmaster stating clearly that you wish the matter to be dealt with as a complaint. Where this may present difficulties, please contact School which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with the process. If the original concern was about the Headmaster you should send your complaint to the Chairman of the Board of Governors (see STAGE 2).
- Please provide as much information as possible including;
  - Your name & contact details*
  - What the complaint is about*
  - What has already been done to try and resolve it*
  - What you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint*
- The Headmaster may ask a Vice Principal to investigate, if appropriate, and will respond to you in writing within an agreed timescale.
- The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days and normally responded to within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.
- The response will be issued in writing by the Headmaster and will indicate with reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

### STAGE 2

- If you remain unsatisfied you may complain in writing to the Board of Governors. Letters should be addressed to the Chairman of the Board of Governors and sent to School marked '*private and confidential*'. Where this may present difficulties, please contact School which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with the process. The matter will be brought to the Board of Governors at its next scheduled meeting, or sooner, and a Complaints Panel formed.
- The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days and normally responded to within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.
- At this stage the full Board of Governors will be informed only that there is a complaint and will receive no further details.
- The Complaints Panel will consider your complaint which will usually involve meeting with you to discuss the matter. Once the Complaints Panel has made a decision the Chairman of the panel will write to you explaining their decision and advising you of your right to bring the complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO).

## **Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

- Since 1 April 2017 the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman has had the power to investigate complaints concerning publically funded schools. Once the internal complaints process has been exhausted (stages 1 and 2) complainants who remain unsatisfied may refer the matter to the Ombudsman. The NIPSO provides a free, independent and impartial service for handling complaints. A complaint should normally be referred to the NIPSO within six months of the final response from School.

The Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman can be contacted at:

Progressive House  
33 Wellington Place  
Belfast  
BT1 6HN

Freepost NIPSO

Tel: 02890 233821  
Freephone: 0800 343424  
[www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)