

Poyntzpass Primary School



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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May 2019	21 st May 2019	

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Foreword from the Principal

‘Together We Learn’

At Poyntzpass 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, parents/carers and other stakeholders is vital to the effective management of the school.

*We welcome open communication with our staff; parents / carers can speak to staff by making an appointment at a mutually convenient time through Miss McKeown in the school office on **02838328267** . We welcome face to face meetings or a telephone conversation may suffice.*

If you have a concern about your child, you should raise it or talk to the class teacher as soon as possible. If your concern is related to a matter other than in the classroom, you should speak to the Principal. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

AIMS

When dealing with complaints we aim to:

- 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 your complaint 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 Procedure is available on the school's website or is available from the school on request.

5. MAKING A COMPLAINT

5.1 Informal Stage

Step 1 - Speaking with the Teacher/ Principal concerned.

In the first instance a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned (whether that be a classroom teacher, Vice-Principal or Principal), 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 teaching staff. Please ring Miss McKeown the school secretary to arrange a meeting.

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

If the complaint does not relate to a teacher in the school, it should be referred to the Principal.

Step 2 - Contact the Principal if your complaint is against a member of staff other than the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1 you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In advance of this meeting you should inform the Principal in writing, of the nature of your complaint so that s/he may be in a position to resolve the problem without further delay.

In some circumstances the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and s/he may require some time to investigate and prepare a

response. If further time is required, you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which a response will be issued.

Step 2 - Contact the Chair of the Board of Governors if your complaint is against the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1 you should write to the Chair of the Board of Governors. Step 4 of the procedure will then commence.

5.2 Formal Stage

Step 3 – Writing to the Principal if your complaint is against a member of staff other than the Principal.

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Steps 1 and 2, or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at Step 3. You should write to the Principal, and state the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible addressing specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days.

This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

- ✓ provide a response to the issue(s) you raised; or
- ✓ state that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received). The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

The Principal will collect such other evidence as he/she deems necessary. Where this involves an interview with a member of staff, who is the subject of the complaint, that member of staff may be accompanied by a friend or representative if they wish. The investigation will begin as soon as possible and when it has been conducted, the complainant and the member of staff concerned, will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- ✓ There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- ✓ The concern is not substantiated by the evidence
- ✓ The concern was substantiated in part or in full. (some details may then be given of the action the school may be taking to review procedures etc. But details of the investigation or of any disciplinary procedures will not be released.
- ✓ The matter has been fully investigated and that the appropriate procedures are being followed which are strictly confidential.

The complainant will be told that consideration of their complaint by the Principal is now concluded.

5.3 Step 4 - Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors

If you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner following the completion of steps 1 – 3, or if your complaint concerns the Principal, you should write to the Chair of Board of Governors, including, if applicable, copies of the

original correspondence relating to Step 3. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Com-plaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of 3 voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of concern to you. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and;

- provide a response to the issue(s) you raised;

or

- state that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

5.4 Step 5 - Appeals Process – Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board of Governors Sub Committee you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within 10 working days of receiving written feedback from the Complaints Sub-Committee, appealing their decision. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your appeal.

The Chairperson will be responsible for establishing an Appeals Sub-Committee comprising of at least three members of the Board of Governors who were not involved in the original investigation. You will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where your appeal will be heard.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will con-firm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting with the Appeals Sub-Committee at which you will have an opportunity to explain the grounds for your appeal. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal re-quest having been received.

Within 10 working days of this meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governors' findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions. The complainant, and the Principal or Chair, as appropriate will be informed in writing of the outcome. This may be to the effect that:

- ✓ There is insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld.
- ✓ The concern is not substantiated by the evidence
- ✓ The concern was substantiated in part or in full but that the procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly, so the matter is now closed.
- ✓ The concern was substantiated in part or in full and the Board of Governors will take steps to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation (where this is practical)

The complainant is not entitled to access any details of the investigation except for any statements that may have been provided by their child. Any information relating to the application of disciplinary procedures is strictly confidential.

The decision of the Appeals Sub-Committee is final. At the end of the process the Chairperson will inform you, in writing, that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is considered closed.

6. RECORD KEEPING

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

POYNTZPASS P.S. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

INFORMAL Stage : Step 1
Contact the Principal (verbally) to arrange a meeting.



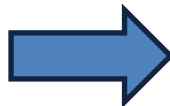
Discuss the complaint with the Teacher. Implement any agreements. Complaint resolved – No further action required.

FORMAL Stage : Step 2 If complaint is unresolved following Step 1 or procedures are to be initiated at Step 2 write to the Principal.



Schedule Meeting with Principal to discuss the issue. Discuss the complaint. Implement any agreement, Complaint resolved – No further action required.

FORMAL Stage Step 3
If complaint remains unresolved following Steps 1 and 2 write to Chairperson of Board of Governors for referral to Complaints Sub-Committee



Principal to examine complaint. If complaint is from a member of staff or relates to a Child Protection issue it will no longer be dealt with under the Parental Complaints Procedure, but will be dealt with under the relevant Employee Relations Policy or Child Protection Policy. Principal to acknowledge receipt of letter of complaint (within 10 working days) Investigate the complaint. Implement any agreements/changes. Principal to confirm outcomes in writing (within 20 working days) No further action required

FORMAL Stage Step 4 If complaint remains unresolved following Steps 1, 2 and 3 write to Chairperson of Board of Governors for referral to Complaints



Chairperson to acknowledge receipt of letter (within 10 working days) Investigate the complaint/meet with complainant. Implement any agreements/changes. Confirm outcomes in writing (within 25 working days). No further action required.

APPEALS PROCESS Step 5
Written request to Chairperson to have case heard by Appeals Sub-Committee of Board of Governors



Chairperson to acknowledge receipt of letter (within 10 working days) Meet with complaint (within 30 working days) Consider the complaint Implement any agreements/changes Confirm outcomes in writing (by 40th working day)

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

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If following Stage 5 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

1. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1.1 The Complaints Handling Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking concerns raised by parents or others seriously at the earliest possible stage, we hope to resolve issues quickly and effectively.

1.2 Complaints with separate established procedures

Some examples of established procedures or appeal mechanisms are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. Your Principal/ Chair of Governors will advise you on the appropriate procedure to use when you first raise your complaint.

You may still take your complaint to NIPSO, should you remain dissatisfied upon completion of one of these procedures.

Exceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) • School Development Proposals • Child Protection / Safeguarding

- Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
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1.3 The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Chair of the Board of Governors to be of a serious nature. The decision of dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors.

3. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

3.1 Your rights as a person 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 – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint; and
- Clear reasons for our decisions.

3.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In making your complaint you should:

- Raise issues in a timely manner
- Treat our staff with respect and courtesy
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels

3.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation

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. 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 the person making the 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.

3.4 Timeframes

The timescales are clearly set out on the flow chart on the previous page.
These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

3.5 Equality

The school requires complaints to be made in writing. However, where this is not possible, please contact the Principal who will make reasonable arrangements.

3.6 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 complaint's procedure having been completed and the complaint has 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, we may choose not to respond.