

SCHOOL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

For

**Saint Patrick's Primary School
Derrygonnelly**



Date approved by
Board of Governors: June 2023

Signed by Chairperson
of Board of Governors: Anna M Conry

Signed by Principal: A. McGarrigle

Review Date: 2026

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1. Introduction

We hope that issues can be addressed by talking to relevant staff. Open communication and regular engagement between the school, parents/carers and other stakeholders is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole school community.

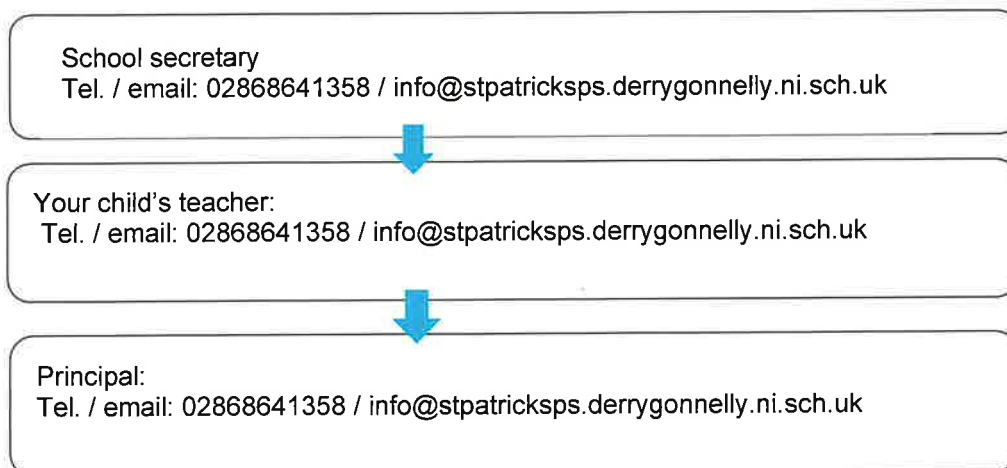
1.1. School Information

At St. Patrick's Primary School, we take complaints very seriously and make every effort to resolve concerns as quickly as possible. 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 communication with our staff. Parents/carers can do this by contacting staff as outlined below:

1.2. Communication Chart



If you wish to make a complaint, please follow the **School Complaints Procedure** ("Complaints Procedure") as detailed below.

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 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:

- Not following school policy;
- Communication delays / lack of communication; or
- Difficulties in staff / pupil relationships.

This Complaints Procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures.

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms, which are not part of this Complaints Procedure, are listed below:

Exceptions

- Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school;
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- School Development Proposals; and
- Child Protection / Safeguarding.

The above list of exceptions is not exhaustive. The Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Governors will advise if there is a separate established procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

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.

2.2 Anonymous Complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Chairperson of the Board of Governors as requiring investigation due to the nature and seriousness of the complaint. The decision of dealing with such complaints will solely be at the discretion of the Chairperson 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 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.

3.2. 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; and
- 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, parties may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

The 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, colleague¹

If a meeting is required with a **pupil**, permission should be sought from parents/guardians, and parent/guardian or other nominated adult should accompany the pupil to the meeting.

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.

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).

3.4. Equality

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

3.5. 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 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.

4. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

4.1 When dealing with Complaints

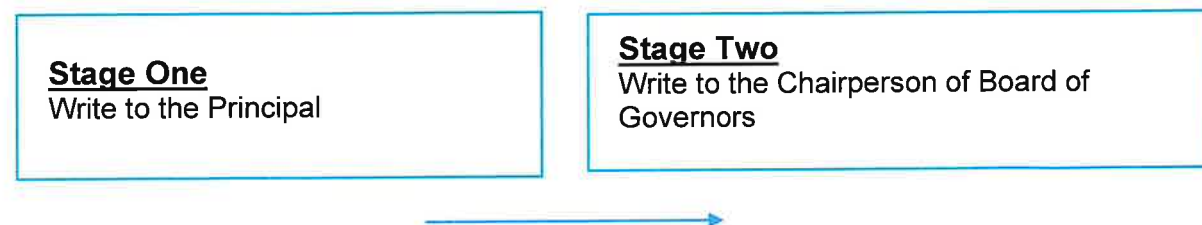
Our school aims to:

- Encourage resolution as quickly as possible;
- Provide timely responses;
- Keep complainants informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of the 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; and
- be non-adversarial.

4.2 Availability of Procedure

A copy of this Complaints Procedure is available on the school website or is available from the school on request.

5 Complaints Procedure



5.1 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.

5.2 Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the 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 and it 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) this 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.

5.3 Stage Two

If your complaint is about the Principal or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, you must write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school and it will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process.

In your letter, please provide clear information and include the following:

If your complaint is unresolved after Stage One:

- A copy of your letter of complaint;
- A copy of the Stage 1 final response letter;
- Reason(s) why you disagree with the Stage 1 findings; and
- Any aspect in which you think that the Complaints Procedure was not fully followed.

If your complaint is about the Principal and therefore was not dealt with under the Stage 1 process:

- 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 letter should be sent by 'signed for' post or hand-delivered to the school office marked *"For the Attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors", "private and confidential"* and *"To be opened by addressee only"*.

On receipt of the letter, the Chairperson will convene a committee of governors (the "Committee") to consider the complaint. This will take place as soon as reasonably practicable taking into account the seriousness and nature of the complaint in addition to any school holiday periods.

The Chairperson of the Committee will normally acknowledge the complaint in writing within 10 school working days from the date that the Committee is convened.

The Committee will review the Stage 1 findings and the issues identified in your letter to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. In the case of the complaint being about the Principal, the Committee will investigate the complaint.

A final response letter will normally be issued to the complainant within 20 school working days from date of acknowledgement of the complaint by the Chairperson of the Committee.

The final response letter will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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

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

5.4 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