

CARRICKFERGUS MODEL SCHOOL



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Date of Rewrite of Policy	September 2024
Date of Governor Ratification of Policy	October 2024
Review Date of Policy	September 2028
Person (s) Responsible for review and update of Policy	Mrs J Miller and BoG

CARRICKFERGUS MODEL PRIMARY SCHOOL

Complaints Policy

The Board of Governors together with the Principal set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of the Complaints Policy is to address complaints raised by parents or guardians.

The Procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff, employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils.

We hope that issues can be addressed by talking to the 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.

Here at Carrickfergus Model Primary School, we take complaints seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. We encourage anyone with a worry to speak to us as soon as possible. If issues are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved leaving no unnecessary dissatisfaction.

The school will not deal with anonymous complaints (except for those concerning child protection matters and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints).

AIMS

In operating the Complaints Procedure we aim to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Allow swift handling of a complaint within established time-limits for action, keeping people informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair consideration of the complaint;
- Have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- Respect confidentiality;
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- Provide information to the school's Senior Leadership Team, Board of Governors and Education Authority, so that services can be improved.

The procedures are designed to be:

- Easily accessible and publicised. A copy of the procedures is available on request from the school;
- Simple to understand and use;
- Impartial; and
- Non-adversarial

WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THESE PROCEDURES

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
- Reasons for our decisions

Where the complaint is upheld, we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised, If, after consideration, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A PERSON MAKING A COMPLAINT

In making your complaint we would expect you to:

- Raise issues in a timely manner;
- Treat our staff with respect and courtesy, including phone calls, emails, letters or face to face meetings;
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues you raise; and
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels.

Abusive behaviour of any kind toward any member of our school staff will not be tolerated and the Board of Governors may write to an individual if their behaviour is considered unacceptable. This includes, shouting, showing aggression, gesturing, hanging up on a phone call, threatening, goading other parents or spreading rumours about the staff or the school.

RIGHTS OF THE PARTIES INVOLVED DURING THE CONSIDERATION

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

Person making the complaint

The complainant may only be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and the Board of Governors, that this will assist the consideration and resolution of the complaint.

Staff

Staff may seek the advice and support from their professional body or trade union and may also be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the consideration and resolution of the complaint.

A member of staff who is directly referred to in a complaint will be provided with a written copy of the complaint and details of any information brought by the parent/carer before being required to respond to the matters raised.

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.

WHO WILL DEAL WITH YOUR COMPLAINT?

At the informal stage, your complaint should be raised and dealt with by the class teacher if appropriate, Head of Key Stage, Vice-Principal or Principal. If the complaint does not relate to a teacher in the school, but to a member of the non-teaching staff, it should be referred to the Principal. If you

proceed to the formal part of the process, the Principal will assume responsibility for the process, unless he / she is the subject of the complaint, in which case the Chairperson of the Board of Governors will assume responsibility.

The Chairperson will make a decision as to whether to do the following:

- **Instruct the Principal to respond in some way;**
- **Respond to the matter in person;**
- **Conduct a preliminary investigation with the Principal; or**
- **Establish a Complaints Sub-Committee to consider and resolve the matter.**

TIMESCALES

Every effort should be made by all parties to resolve complaints in a timely manner. The entire procedure, should a complaint proceed right to the Appeal Stage, should be dealt with within 40 working days, where possible.

MAKING A COMPLAINT – AT A GLANCE

Step 1: Speak to the Class Teacher

Step 2: Speak to the Principal

Step 3: Write to the Principal

Step 4: Write to the Chair of Board of Governors

Step 1: Informal Stage: Speaking with the teacher concerned or the Principal

In the first instance, a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned (whether that be a classroom teacher, Head of Key Stage, Vice-Principal or Principal), so that she / 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.**

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.

Step 2: Informal Stage: Contacting the Principal

If your complaint is against a member of the non-teaching staff or 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 he / she be in a position to resolve the problem without further delay. This may be done in the form of an email but the Principal will only respond to an email if / when it is appropriate to do so.

In some circumstances, the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and she may require some time to consider 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. This stage may take the form of a phone call between a parent and the Principal and a meeting may be scheduled. It is our hope that most issues will be resolved at this stage.

Step 3: Formal Stage: Making a formal written complaint to 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. **If your complaint is against the Principal you should write directly to the Chairperson at stage number 4.**

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

You will then receive a written acknowledgment of your letter from the Principal or Chairperson within 10 working days of the receipt of the complaint. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and either:

- Provide a response to the issue(s) you raised, or
- State who is considering your complaint and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued.

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.

Step 4: Formal Stage: Initial Investigation of the written complaint by the Chairperson of the Board of Governors and / or Complaints Sub-Committee

If your complaint is about the Principal, please send your letter via the Principal for the confidential attention of Mrs Vicky Watson.

If your complaint is to be dealt with by the Chairperson, he / she will make a decision as to the next course of action.

If it is deemed appropriate for a Sub-Committee to be set up this will consist of 3 governors. The Chairperson will acknowledge in writing your complaint. This will confirm that your complaint has been received, and:

- Provide a response to the issue (s) you raised, or
- State who is considering your complaint and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued.

In some cases you may be required to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub-Committee may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint. You should expect a written response. This will indicate the findings of the Complaints Sub-Committee, the reasons supporting its decisions and any recommendations, if applicable. Any recommendations will be brought to the full Board of Governors for ratification.

The response timings included in Step 3 will also be accurate of step 4 of the process.

Step 5: Make an official complaint to the Ombudsman Service of Northern Ireland

If you are still dissatisfied and the complaints handling procedure above has been invoked and exhausted, the complaint may be taken to the Public Services Ombudsman for N. Ireland. The complaint must be made within 6 months of the day that the notice was given, in which school procedures have been exhausted. In otherwards, at Step 5 of the process. The Ombudsman will then make a decision as

to whether or not to conduct an investigation into how the complaint was handled. The Ombudsman cannot investigate the actual complaint but will investigate if policy and procedure has been followed.

“In investigating a complaint, NIPSO is primarily concerned with an examination of the administrative actions by the school. It is not NIPSO’s role to investigate every decision of a teacher, principal or school. Rather it is to consider whether the relevant standards were followed in how the school operates and the decisions it takes.”

(Taken from School Complaints - a best practice guide for complaints handling).

Details of how to contact the Ombudsman are provided below:

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**

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 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.

MALICIOUS OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS

Where a Board of Governors consider the actions of a parent / group of parents to constitute malicious, frivolous or vexatious behaviour, they will seek advice from the relevant Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOW CHART

