

**COMPLAINTS POLICY**

**FOR**

**PORTAFERRY INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**CONTENTS**

1. Foreword
2. Aims of Complaints Procedure
3. School Complaints Procedure – at a glance
4. Scope of Complaints Procedure
5. What to expect under this Procedure
6. Making a complaint
7. **FOREWORD**

Here at Portaferry Integrated Primary School, our Integrated Ethos permeates the whole school community. Our parents, staff, pupils, governors and wider school community are at the heart of all we do and hope to achieve. We value feedback from all our stakeholders, and indeed regularly seek thoughts, opinions and ideas through our grins, grumbles and ideas boxes designed by our pupil council and through our regular surveys.

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 staff and the wide range of users is vital to the effective management of the school.

We welcome open communication with our staff; you can speak to staff by making an appointment for a mutually convenient time. To do this, please contact our school secretary, Mrs Eveleen Conlan on 02842728523.

**If you have any issues please talk to the teacher / head of year as soon as possible. Concerns about matters other than in the classroom should be raised with the Principal. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.**

**Scope of the Complaints Procedure**

A complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction with our work.

**Complaints with Established Procedures**

Our school 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 dealt with:***

* Not following school policy
* Communication delays / lack of communication
* Difficulties in staff / pupil relationships

**This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however 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.**

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms, which are not part of the schools complaints procedure, are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The principal/ chair of governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

|  |
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| **Exceptions** |
| * Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school
* Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
* School Development Proposals
* Child Protection / Safeguarding

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**Anonymous Complaints**

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the chairperson of the board of governors to be of a very serious nature. The decision of dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the chairperson of the board of governors.

1. **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
* 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 Procedure is available from the school on request.

1. ***COMPLAINTS* PROCEDURE –AT A GLANCE**

**Stage Two**

Write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors

**Stage One**

Write to the Principal

**Time Limit**

Please contact the school as soon as possible, unless there are exceptional circumstances, complaints will normally only be considered within 6 months of origin of the complaint to the school.

**Stage One**

When making a complaint, contact the school 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 which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. *(see guidance notes for further information)*

Please provide as much information as possible including;

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

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a response normally made within 10 school working days of receipt of the complaint. This response will be issued in writing by the Principal and will indicate with reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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

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

**Stage Two**

If the complaint is about the principal, or the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors *(care of the school and marked ‘private and confidential’).* Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process. The Chairperson will convene a committee to review the complaint. Please provide as much detail as possible as indicated above.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days by the Chairman of the Committee, and a final response normally made within 10 school working days from date of receipt of the complaint. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the committee.

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

***In the case of the complaint being about the principal, this committee will investigate the complaint.***

Please provide clear information and include the following:

* Reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings
* Any aspect in which you think that the school’s complaints procedure was not fully followed

**Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

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:

**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

**What to expect under this procedure**

**Your rights as a person making a complaint**

In dealing with complaint 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.

**Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint**

In making a complaint it is important to;

* raise issues 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.

**Rights of parties involved during the investigation**

Where a meeting is arranged the complainant may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

*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, colleague[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Pupils:* permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent, guardian or other nominated adult should accompany pupils.

*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.

**Timeframes**

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

**Stage 1** – Normally acknowledge within 5 school working days, response normally within 20 school working days

**Stage 2** – Normally acknowledge within 5 school working days, response normally within 20 school working days

If, for any reason, the review 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.***

**Equality**

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

**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.

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).   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)