

St. Joseph's Grammar School

Scoil Ghramadaí Naomh Iósaef



Parental Complaints Procedure 2016-2017

Date Approved by Governors	June 2016
Date of Next Review	June 2017

St Joseph's Grammar School

Donaghmore

The Scope of the Complaints Procedure

The Board of Governors and Principal of St Joseph's Grammar School, Scoil Ioasef, set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do. They are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of this policy is to set out how parents can raise a concern or a complaint if they are unhappy about an aspect of the school's provision.

For clarity, this policy defines a **concern** as an issue that a parent/guardian raises and which they wish to have dealt with under the informal procedures set out below;

a **complaint** is an issue that will immediately merit a more formal response by the school or which may have begun as a concern, but was not resolved informally and thus is subsequently dealt with as a formal complaint at the request of the parent/guardian.

The complaints procedure pertains to all matters relating to actions of all staff employed by the school, both teaching and non-teaching staff members, but does not apply to tutors who use the school premises to provide tuition and who are employed in a private capacity by parents; or who are tutors employed by the EA and who use the school premises to provide tuition. The exception in both instances relates to Child Protection matters which applies to all adults in school who are in direct contact with our pupils (please see Child Protection Policy).

The Board of Governors and Principal recognise the difference between a concern and a complaint. By taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage, the school aims to reduce the number of concerns that subsequently develop into formal complaints.

Where it becomes obvious at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of a more appropriate alternative procedure such as Child Protection, SEN, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Disciplinary, Bullying and Harassment, Dignity at Work or Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.

The school will not investigate anonymous complaints other than those deemed to fall under the scope of DENI Circular 2014/27.

AIMS OF THE POLICY:

- to facilitate a swift resolution to any concern raised by a parent or legal guardian of a pupil currently enrolled at St Joseph's Grammar School, Scoil Ioasef by informal means as far as possible. **Please note**, complaints which refer to pupils who have left the school will not be considered except where this complaint falls under the remit of the Child Protection Policy
- to address concerns or complaints within the time frames set out in this policy
- to keep all parties concerned informed of progress
- to provide a full and fair hearing for all parties to the concern or complaint
- to have due regard to all the rights of all involved including the right to confidentiality where appropriate
- to address all aspects of the concern or complaint and to provide and an effective response and appropriate resolution.

SECTION 1: WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

1.1 As the person raising the concern/complaint you will be entitled to:

- fair treatment
- courtesy from all our staff
- a timely response
- accurate advice and information
- respect for your privacy (but we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality if we need to consult with others in order to resolve your concern or complaint)
- setting out the reasons for our decision

1.2 In raising your concern or complaint, you are expected to:

- treat our staff with courtesy and respect at all times*
- raise issues in a non-threatening way
- raise issues within a reasonable time
- provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issue you raise
- use these procedures to achieve a satisfactory outcome

* **PLEASE NOTE** - our staff will not engage with anyone by phone or in person who is verbally or physically aggressive and will bring a meeting to an end if they become concerned about the behaviour of a parent/guardian in such a meeting. The meeting will be re-convened when assurances about the conduct of participants in any future meeting have been given and accepted. The Board of Governors seeks to guarantee the safety and well-being of all staff at all times in the exercise of their duties on behalf of the school.

1.3 Rights of all Other Parties

The Right to be Accompanied

The aim of this Policy is to resolve issues through non-adversarial means as far as possible. It is recognised that in some cases, especially where the formal procedures have been invoked, that attendance at an investigatory meeting may be daunting for either the complainant or the member of staff against whom the concern or complaint is raised. Where a meeting is arranged to resolve a formal complaint, the Board of Governors recognises that a complainant and/or staff member may prefer to be accompanied by another person. Where an issue is being addressed as a formal complaint and a parent wishes another person to attend a meeting with them, the request for accompaniment, noting the name and designation of the person, should be made in writing and addressed to the Principal or Chair of the Board of Governors' investigatory sub-committee at least five days in advance of the date of the meeting. The Principal/Chair will consider whether or not this request will advance the fact-finding and /or resolution of the complaint and make a determination accordingly about whether it is permissible to have the third party attend the meeting. The decision will be communicated in writing to the parent/guardian making the request prior to the meeting.

1.4 Right to be advised in advance of the complaint against a staff member

A member of staff who is the subject of a complaint will be provided with full details of any complaint made against him/her before being required to respond to the matters raised against them. In most instances, this will be best achieved by providing the member of staff with a copy of a Parent Contact Form or copy of a written letter or email.

1.5 Legal representation

Legal representation, or representation by a person or persons acting in a professional capacity is not permitted within this procedure. This procedure does not diminish the statutory rights of any participants.

1.6 Where the complaint is about the Principal

A parent/Guardian may exercise their right to raise a formal complaint in writing about an action or decision of the Principal. Parents/Guardians should in the first instance ask to speak to the Principal to air their concern. If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved with the Principal, Parents/Guardians may then choose to elevate their complaint to a sub-committee of the Board of Governors. Such a sub-committee will use the procedures set out elsewhere in this document for the investigation of a formal complaint against the Principal. In any such investigatory meeting to be held by a sub-committee of the Board of Governors, the panel may take written and oral evidence from both the complainant and the Principal. The sub-committee will invite both parties to make representations to them separately. The sub-committee will then make a determination on the basis of the evidence put before them. The decision of the sub-committee of the Board will be communicated to all parties in writing within 10 working days of the sub-committee having sat for the final time to consider the matter.

1.7 Where the complainant is a Governor of the School

Where the complainant is a Governor of the St Joseph's, Scoil Ioasef, s/he will play no part in the management and resolution of or appeal against the complaint set out in this procedure.

SECTION 2: Raising a Concern - the Informal Procedure

In the interests of the child, the Board of Governors recognises that issues are best resolved in an informal manner and would thus always encourage Parents/Guardians and all school staff to use the informal method to solve any difficulties that may arise. The steps below set out how Parents/Guardians and school staff should aim to fix a concern informally.

- 2.1** In all instances of a concern about the decision or action of a member of the teaching staff, the matter should always be raised directly by the parent or guardian with staff member concerned.
- 2.2** A parent Guardian should identify the initial action or decision against which they wish to raise a concern, indicating the preferred outcome so that the matter may be dealt with as swiftly as possible.
- 2.3** Parents/Guardians who telephone the school wishing to talk to a member of staff should note that office personnel are required by the Board of Governors and the Principal to obtain details of the reason for the contact so as to ensure that the issue is forwarded to the correct member of staff; so that all necessary details are taken down and forwarded to the relevant teacher in order that they may be fully briefed and enabled to investigate the concern; and so that the matter may be resolved as efficiently as possible.
- 2.4** Office personnel are fully conversant with all school procedures and the need for privacy. Calls will not be put through to teachers who are teaching a lesson at the time the call is made; in such instances, a message via email will be sent to the teacher with all relevant details of the initial telephone contact. Teachers will return a call to a parent guardian within 24 hours during the school week unless the caller identifies that the issue relates to a Child Protection matter; in which case a senior member of staff will speak to the parent as quickly as possible and certainly within the same school day.
- 2.5** Where a concern involves a member of the non-teaching staff, the matter should be raised directly in the first instance with Mrs A Mc Call, School Bursar who may consult with the Principal on the concern. Where a parent believes the matter pertains to Child Protection, they should ask to speak directly to the school Principal, Mrs Geraldine Donnelly or in her absence, the Vice-Principal, Mrs Annette Mc Gleenan.
- 2.6** Where a concern or complaint relates to the action or decision of the Principal, please see point 1.6.

SECTION 3: Investigating a Concern or a Complaint – Informal and Formal Procedure

3.1 The school has clear procedures for investigating matters and school staff will always follow the protocols set out below:

- the teacher will record notes when taking a call from a parent/guardian to assist them in dealing with their concern or complaint.
- parents who contact school requesting that a matter is dealt with should note that if the concern involves a member of staff, that staff member will always be informed of the concern raised against them and s/he may be asked to record a written account of any incident to provide factual clarity to the member of staff investigating the concern.
- pupils involved will also be asked to make a written account of any incident or concern as soon as possible after it has been notified to school staff so as to provide factual clarity.
- Parents/Guardians should note that in the interests of fairness, assurances of anonymity for Parent/Guardian or child involved in any concern or complaint cannot be given by the school.

3.2 Requesting a Meeting with School Staff

In some instances, a parent or guardian may prefer to speak to a staff member in person and will request a meeting. The teacher will endeavour to arrange a time and date for the meeting within 5 working days of the request for such a meeting. If the matter to be discussed relates to a child's immediate safety or well-being, the staff member will make every effort to facilitate a meeting on the same day as the request is made either with themselves or alternatively with a senior member of staff.

3.3 Conduct of a Meeting

It is school policy that teachers meeting with a parent or guardian will always conduct the meeting with another member of the teaching staff present. Notes will be made during the meeting and a summary of the matter, including agreed actions will be recorded afterwards by the teacher conducting the meeting on a Parent Contact Form (PCF). A copy of this will be circulated to relevant staff such as Year Head and a copy will be retained on file in the school office.

3.4 Speaking with the Principal

Parents/Guardians may feel that having first exhausted the informal process with the relevant teacher/s that the outcome they had hoped for has still not been achieved. They may then wish to continue to have the matter considered further under the informal process by discussion with the Principal. Parents/Guardians will be asked to clarify if they are contacting the Principal to use the Informal or Formal Procedure. In either case, the Principal will first seek to identify what the initial concern was and the steps that have already been taken to address it. The Principal may require some time to investigate and respond and if further time is necessary, Parents/Guardians will be informed of the likely timescale required by the Principal to investigate and the likely date by which the Principal will respond to their concern.

Parents wishing to meet with the Principal should contact her PA, Ms Angela Mc Girr who will make an appointment for a date and time suitable to both parties. In the absence of the Principal, an arrangement to meet with the Vice-Principal, Mrs Annette Mc Gleenan can be made by Parents/Guardians by contacting Ms Mc Girr.

SECTION 4: Making a Formal Complaint

On some occasions it may not be possible to resolve a concern under the Informal Procedures and a Parent/Guardian may then wish to have the matter considered under the Formal Procedures set out below. In other instances, a Parent/Guardian may feel that the matter should be dealt with in the first instance under the Formal Complaints Procedure from the outset. The steps that should be followed for using the Formal Procedures are set out below:

- 4.1** Where a formal complaint is being made about the action or decision of a member of staff other than the Principal, this should be done in writing by the Parent/Guardian to the Principal.
- 4.2** You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within ten working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and either;

Provide a written response to the issues you have raised; or

State that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally 20 working days, term-time, from the date on which your letter was received)
- 4.3** The Principal (or designated deputy) may provide an opportunity for the complainant (Parents/Guardians only) to meet with her so as to supplement any information that has been provided in writing.
- 4.4** The Principal will conduct any further investigations she deems necessary with due regard to Section 3 of this Policy. Records of any telephone conversations, meetings and emails and all relevant documentation will be retained by the Principal.
- 4.5** When all the relevant facts have been established by the Principal, she will communicate the outcome to the Parents/Guardians. The Principal may meet with Parents/Guardians to inform them of the outcome of their exercise of the Formal Complaints Procedure within 20 days of the matter having first been raised with the Principal. In some exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to meet this timeframe and in such instances the Principal will inform the parents of the likely timescale required and the likely date by which the Principal will respond to their concern or complaint. The Principal's response will explain the outcome and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, the response may also include the action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The Complainant will also be advised that should s/he wish to take the complaint further s/he should notify the Chairman of the Board of Governors in writing within two weeks of receipt of the outcome of the Principal's response.
- 4.6** Any member of staff against whom a concern of complaint is raised, will be treated in a fair way and will be given the opportunity to put their case. The staff member's rights and reputation will be protected while the complaint is investigated thoroughly and impartially.

SECTION 5: Appeal to the Governors' Committee

- 5.1** If a complainant is not satisfied by the Principal's response to the outcome of a formal complaint, s/he may write to the Chairman of the Board of Governors asking the Governors to review the decision. This request will be considered by a sub-committee of three members of the Board of Governors.
- 5.2** Individual governors will avoid becoming involved in the complaint prior to the sub-committee stage. If a parent approaches a Governor, the Governor will inform the parent of the school's complaints procedures.
- 5.3** The correspondent to the Governing Body will write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the written request for a sub-committee to consider the complaint and/or the Principal's decision. The matter will normally be heard by the sub-committee of the Board within 20 working days (during term-time) of receipt of the letter from the Parent/Guardian.
- 5.4** The panel members will have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- 5.5** All relevant correspondence and documentation will be sent to each panel member as soon as possible by the Correspondent to the Governors. A hearing will be arranged and any witnesses the panel considers it necessary to hear from at the meeting will be informed of the date, time and location of the meeting at least 5 days in advance of the proposed meeting.
- 5.6** The panel will invite the complainant and the Principal as well as any relevant witness that have been invited by the Chair to attend the meeting in order to present their case to the panel. The panel will meet with the Principal or other member of staff where relevant and the Complainant separately. (*please see Section 3 – the right to be accompanied)
- 5.7** The Chair of the sub-committee will ensure that its proceedings are properly recorded and minutes are drawn up after the meeting has concluded. The aim of the hearing will be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.
- 5.8** The meeting should permit:
- The complainant to express the complaint
 - The Principal to explain the school's response
 - Any witnesses by the Chair to respond to the panel's questions
 - Each party will be given the opportunity to respond to questions from the panel
- 5.9** The normal procedure for the hearing will be as follow:
1. The Chair will introduce all parties present and explain their role
 2. The Chair will explain that the purpose of the hearing is to review the complaint and to try to resolve it and achieve reconciliation between the school and complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations about future action.
 3. The complainant will be given the opportunity to describe his/her complaint. The Chair may invite witnesses for whom the Chair of the sub-committee has previously given consent to attend the meeting, to give oral evidence at the meeting.
 4. Questions for clarification may be posed to the complainant by the panel members.

5. The Principal will then be invited to present the school's to the panel and the panel may ask further questions for clarification.
 6. Neither party to the complaint, nor witnesses will be before the panel at the same time.
- 5.10** The panel will consider the evidence and deliberate before reaching its decision in private. If necessary, the panel will reach a majority decision by vote so as to decide on the most appropriate actions to resolve the complaint and where appropriate, make recommendations to re-visit the school systems of procedures to ensure issues of a similar nature do not re-occur as far as is possible.
- 5.11** A written statement, outlining the panel's decision will normally be sent to both the complainant and the Principal within 15 working days (during term-time) of the sub-committee having sat to consider the matter.
- 5.12** If the complainant is dissatisfied with the decision of the sub-committee, s/he may appeal against that decision by writing to the Chair of the Board of Governors within ten working days (during term time) of receipt of the sub-committee's decision, requesting that the matter be reviewed by a second sub-committee of the Governors. The second sub-committee will operate under the same protocols that apply to the original sub-committee as described above in terms of time-scale and conduct of the meetings and communication to all parties.