



Ashfield Girls' High School



“Each different. Each talented. All valued.”

Complaints Procedure Policy

Author:	Mrs L Hanvey - Principal
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Contents Page

Executive Summary

Section A – Aims of the Policy

Section B – Legislative Context Guidance and Linked Policies

Section C – Policy and Procedure

Section D – Roles and Responsibilities

Section E – Consultations, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation



Executive Summary

While the work of the school is very positive and pupils, parents and staff work in partnership to focus on developing young people as individuals, contributors to society, the economy and the environment; on occasion there can become a need to have procedures to enable a complaint to be investigated.

Complaints can be upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. It is in the best interests to all stakeholders to ensure that these procedures are clearly outlined in a policy document.

The Complaints Procedure Policy outlines the two stage complaints procedure as recommended by the Public Service Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.



SECTION A – Aims of the Policy

The aim of the Complaints Procedure Policy is to provide a point of reference document for all stakeholders with regard to raising a complaint, to ensure that procedures and timeframes are clear.

Objectives of the Policy are to:

- Provide timely responses to all complaints.
- Ensure a full and fair investigation process.
- Have due regard for the rights of all persons involved.
- Where appropriate, be responsive to learning from outcomes which may have the potential to improve provision within the school.



SECTION B – Legislative Context Guidance and Linked Policies

The Department of Education or the Education Authority do not manage any aspect of the schools complaints policy. Although, they do have their own complaints policy relating to their own public sector service.

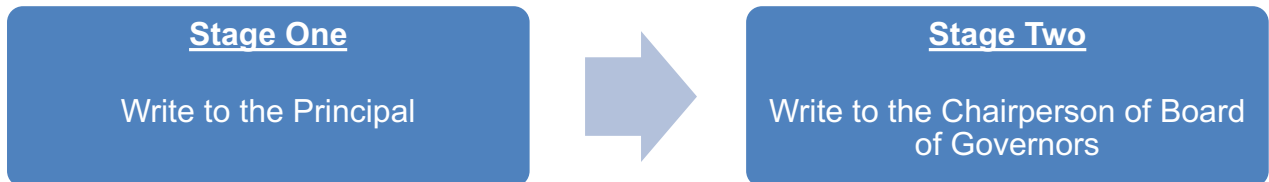
All schools in Northern Ireland have their own complaints policy. This is a two stage procedure as indicated by the Public Service Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

The Complaints Procedures Policy is linked to all other school policies as it covers the work of the school.



Section C – Policy and Procedure

Complaints Procedure – At a Glance



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.

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.

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) the school's 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 Chair of the Board of Governors.

Stage Two



If your complaint is about the Principal or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the chairperson of the Board of Governors. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. The letter can be left at the school office and marked '*private and confidential*'. The chairperson will convene a sub committee to consider the complaint.

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

The chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the second letter. The response will be issued by the chairperson of the committee and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

If, for any reason, the review of a complaint takes longer to complete, complainants 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.

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.

A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the school. The school will advise in its concluding letter that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied. Contact details for NIPSO are provided.



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 complaints we will ensure:

- Professional
- Courtesy;
- A timely response;
- 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

When making a complaint it is important that you:

- Raise issues in a timely manner
- Treat 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 parties 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, colleague¹

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 will 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.

Timeframes

Stage One – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

Stage Two – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

If, for any reason, the consideration / review of a complaint takes longer to complete, complainants 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.

Specific Issue Statements

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.

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).



Expectations

Where a complaint has alternative statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms it will be redirected back to the complainant, giving the below advice.

Statutory Procedures and Appeal Mechanisms	Contact Person
Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of Children from School	Contact www.eani.org.uk - Director of Operations and Estates
Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact www.eani.org.uk - Director of Children and Young People's Services
School Development Proposals	Contact www.eani.org.uk - Director of Education
Child Protection / Safeguarding	Contact www.eani.org.uk - Director of Children and Young People's Services

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. The Teachers Negotiating Committee (TNC) Bullying of Teachers including Principals and Vice Principals Policy and Procedures will be evoked as necessary.

Anonymous Complaints

The school will not investigate anonymous complaints. The only exception will be if the anonymous complaint was of a potential Safeguarding or Health and Safety nature. In this instance both the Principal and the Chair of the Board of Governors will make the discretionary decision in relation to the investigation.



Section D – Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant should read the Complaints Procedure Policy prior to making a complaint. Complaints should be in writing and addressed to the Principal (stage one) or the Chair of the Board of Governors (stage two).

Principal

The Principal is responsible for receiving, investigating and responding to all complaints at stage one; in line with the Complaints Procedure Policy.

Chairperson of the Board of Governors

The Chairperson of the Board of Governors is responsible for receiving, investigating and responding to all complaints at stage two; in line with the Complaints Procedure Policy.



Section E – Consultations, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Complaints Procedure Policy follows the guidance from the Northern Ireland Public Service Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. The policy is communicated through the school website. The policy is monitored and evaluated regularly.





Challenging girls today; creating women of value in the future



Principal: Mrs Louise Hanvey BSc (Hons) PGCE, PQHNI, PGDH

Hollywood Road, Belfast
BT4 2LY

Tel: 028 9047 1744

www.ashfieldgirls.org
info@ashgirls.belfast.ni.sch.uk