



Rathfriland High School Concerns & Complaints Policy & Procedures

Policy Details

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1. Introduction

At Rathfriland High School we aspire to provide the best possible educational and service experiences for our learners and create meaningful and enduring partnerships with families and other stakeholders.

Sometimes however there may be times when stakeholders will feel less than satisfied with an aspect of the service provided by school. If this happens, we would like to be informed. That enables school to work with families to reach consensus, which is the essence of the home school partnership and is in the best interests of our pupils.

This Concerns and Complaints Policy is intended to assist stakeholders who are dissatisfied with school and provide a clear framework for the management of expressions of concern and complaints.

Parents or carers who voice concerns, make comments or complaints should feel confident in doing so, knowing that it will in no way have any negative impact on their children or on the school's commitment to developing a positive home school partnership for the future.

This policy should be read and interpreted in the context of the school ethos which values each person as unique, calls on all members of the school community to show respect for all and to take responsibility for their own words and actions.

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.

1.1 Definitions

For the purpose of this policy Rathfriland High School feels it is useful to establish a common understanding of the following terms.

Comment

An expression of praise or appreciation directed at staff, or a service delivered by the school, a suggested service improvement, or an anonymous complaint where the school has no way to respond to the stakeholder.

Concern

An expression of unease about any matter related to school. The concern may be about the wellbeing of a pupil, an aspect of school life or the exercise of the school's function. Concerns require attempts at resolution with the objective of restoring the relationship between the person expressing the concern and school.

Complaint

Any expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the school. Complaints require investigation with the objective of restoring the relationship between the complainant and the school.

1.2 School Information

Here at Rathfriland High School, we take concerns and 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.

We take all issues seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

We welcome communication with our staff. Parents / carers can do this by contacting staff as outlined below:

1.3 Below is a guide to how to effectively voice your concerns:

General concerns: Any problem or concern should be raised promptly with your son or daughter's Form Tutor. If your concern is of a particularly serious or sensitive nature, you may prefer to discuss it with a member of staff responsible for the area you are concerned about, for example, the relevant Year Tutor, Head of Department or Teacher in Charge of a subject.

Staff will make every effort to resolve the problem or concern promptly at this informal stage. Experience shows that most concerns can best be resolved through informal discussion.

If you suspect the concern is of a Safeguarding or Child Protection nature, then please follow the Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures immediately.

Concern about the quality of learning or teaching: This may be brought in the first instance to the Head of Department or Teacher in Charge of a subject. They will listen to your concern, follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale. If the concern is about the Head of Department or Teacher in Charge of a subject you may bring it directly to the Vice Principal.

Concern about relationships with a teacher: This should be brought in the first instance to the Year Tutor. The Year Tutor will listen to your concern, follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale. If the concern is about the Year Tutor you may bring it directly to the Vice Principal.

Concern about how a behavioural matter has been dealt with: This should be brought in the first instance to the Year Tutor or, if the concern is about the Year Tutor, to the Vice Principal. The relevant member of staff will listen to your concern, follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale.

Concern about how a Head of Department or Teacher in Charge of a subject or Year Tutor has responded to or dealt with a matter: This should be brought to the Vice Principal. The Vice Principal will listen to your concern and may ask a Senior Teacher to investigate it as appropriate. The Vice Principal will respond to you within an agreed timescale.

Concern about how a Vice Principal has responded to or dealt with a matter: This should be brought in the first instance to the Principal. The Principal will listen to your concern follow it up as appropriate and respond to you within an agreed timescale.

If having taken your concern through the appropriate channels you still feel that the matter has not been dealt with satisfactorily you may wish to initiate a formal complaint.

Scope of the Complaints Procedure

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

2.1 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.

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 school's complaints procedure, are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal or Chair of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

Exceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)• School Development Proposals• Child Protection / Safeguarding

2.2 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.

2 Aims of the Complaints Procedure

2.1 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 your 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
- be non-adversarial

2.2 Availability of Procedure

A copy of this Procedure is available on our school's website or is available from the school on request.

3 Complaints Procedure – At a Glance

Stage One

Write to the Principal

Stage Two

Write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors

3.1 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.

3.2 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 Board of Governors.

3.3 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 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.

3.4 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

4 What To Expect Under This Procedure

4.1 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
- Clear reasons for decisions

4.2 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
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels

4.3 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 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).

4.4 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.

4.5 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.

4.6 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 consider 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.

Appendix 1: Concern & Complaints Process Flowchart

