



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Belfast High School

Date: November 2023

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Ratified by: Board of Governors

Responsibility: Board of Governors

Author: Principal

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Introduction

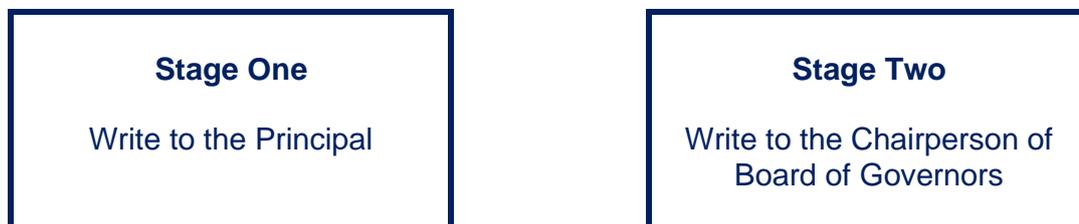
At Belfast high School, we take all complaints seriously. This policy and the procedures reflect the School's ethos and is intended to establish clear mechanisms for the resolution of complaints. We encourage anyone with a concern to speak to us as soon as possible. Many issues can be addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff. Open communication and regular engagement between the School staff, parents/carers or the wider school community is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole school community. We outline the clear lines of communication for contacting staff at the School which are shared at parental information events and summarised in Appendix 2 of the School's Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy (see Appendix 1).

When dealing with a complaint the School aims to:

- encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible;
- provide timely responses;
- keep you 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;
- provide an effective response;
- Take appropriate action to rectify the issue and prevent it happening again, where possible;
- 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.

If you wish to make a complaint, please follow the School Complaints Procedure outlined below.

Complaints Procedure – At a Glance



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 the date of the incident(s) about which you are complaining.

Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the 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.

Please provide as much information as possible including:

- your name and contact details;
- what your complaint is about – please try to be specific;
- what has already been done to try to resolve it; and
- what you would like the School to do to resolve your complaint.

The School 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. The response will be issued in writing and will normally be made within 20 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.

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.

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.

Stage Two

If your complaint is unresolved after Stage One, or is about the Principal, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (c/o the School and marked Private and Confidential). Where this may present difficulties, please contact the School which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. 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 Board of Governors 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 complaint. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the Board of Governors 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.

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

Scope of the Complaints Procedure

Our School Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the School will be managed. By taking concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that they can be resolved quickly and effectively.

Some examples of complaints that would be dealt with under this Complaints Procedures:

- 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 School's complaints procedure, are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/Chairperson of the Board of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

EXCEPTIONS

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

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 on dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

What To Expect Under This Procedure

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.

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.

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 eg 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.
Timeframes

Stage One

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

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).

If, for any reason, the consideration or review of a complaint takes longer to complete, the School will inform you of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

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 by the School, the complainant will be advised accordingly.

Availability of Procedure

A copy of the Complaints Policy and Procedure is available on our school's website or is available from the School on request.

Review and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed and evaluated at least every 3 years by the Board of Governors. This review will take into account changes to legislation, best practice advice and guidance from relevant organisations such as EA, DENI and NIPSO.

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

	Pastoral	Academic	Special Educational Needs	Safeguarding and Child Protection	General Enquiries	Financial Enquiries
1	Form Teacher	Class Teacher	HoD or HoY	Deputy Designated Teacher	School Office	Bursar/ Assistant Bursar
	↓	↓	↓	↓		
2	Head of Year	Head of Department	SENCo	Designated Teacher		
	↓	↓	↓	↓		
3	Head of Key Stage	Departmental SLT Link				
	↓	↓	↓	↓		
4	Vice Principal	Vice Principal	Vice Principal			
	↓	↓	↓	↓		
5	Principal	Principal	Principal	Principal		