**Knocknagor Primary School**

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**Parental Complaints Procedure**

Date: February 2023

Review Date: February 2026

Signature of Chair of BOG: Philip Mc Grade

Signature of School Principal: Cara Donnelly

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**Foreword**

**Complaints Procedure – Policy Statement**

At Knocknagor Primary School, we are committed to listening about our service. We will use this information, wherever possible, to help maintain and improve our service. We encourage and welcome all comments and views, both positive and negative.

This policy is designed to establish a clear mechanism for the resolution of complaints which can be verbal, written, recorded or e-mailed. Our comments/complaints policy is outlined below.

Many issues can be addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff in school who will be happy to help. Open communications and regular engagement between the school and the wide range of users is vital to the effective management of this school.

**If you have any issues please talk to the teacher or Principal as soon as possible. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.**

This approach will ensure an opportunity to address your concerns immediately, as in many instances, issues can arise through simple misunderstandings. You should observe the school’s existing protocols for arranging and conducting such approaches or meetings and contact the school to make an appointment with the class teacher or Principal.

This approach would not prevent you from choosing to enter the process at a later stage, if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.

**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 involved.
* 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 will be sent out to parents annually and is available on the school’s app or from the school office on request.

**Making a Complaint**

**Complaint about a Teacher (Other than the Principal)**

**Informal Stage**

**Step 1 - Speaking with Teacher**

In the first instance, a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned, so that s/he may have an opportunity to address the issue(s). Please observe the school’s existing protocols for arranging and conducting such meetings and follow the school’s policy with respect to access to members of staff. This approach will not prevent you from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage, if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.

**Step 2 - Speaking with the Principal**

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1, you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately, and s/he may require some time to investigate and respond. If further time is required you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which the Principal will respond.

**Formal Stage**

**Step 3 - Writing to the Principal**

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Steps 1 and 2, or indeed it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures at Step 3. You should write to the Principal, and state the grounds for your complaint, as concisely as possible, addressing specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. 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 response to the issue(s) you raised; or state that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received). The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

**Step 4 - Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors**

If you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner following the completion of Steps 1, 2 and 3, you should write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, including, if applicable, copies of the original correspondence relating to Step 3. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of three voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. 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 response to the issue(s) you raised; or
* State that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

**Stage 5- Appeals Process**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

**TimeScales**

Please contact the school as soon as possible, unless there are exceptional circumstance, complaints will normally only be considered within 6 months of origin of the complaint to the school. ***These timeframes may need to be reviewed*** ***if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.***

**Making a Complaint**

**Complaint about a member of the School’s Support Staff**

**Step 1 - Raising verbally with the Principal**

A complaint concerning a member of the school’s support staff should be raised verbally with the Principal. A meeting should be arranged with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In some circumstances, the Principal may not be able to deal effectively with your complaint immediately and s/he may require some time to investigate and respond. If further time is required, you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which the Principal will respond.

**Formal Stage Step 2 - Writing to the Principal**

Sometimes it will not be possible for you to have your complaint resolved through the informal processes proposed at Step 1 or it might be more appropriate to initiate the procedures formally. You should write to the Principal and state the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible addressing specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. 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 response to the issue(s) you raised; or
* State that your complaint is being investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 20 working days from the date on which your letter was received). The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

**Step 3 - Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors**

If you believe that your complaint has not been dealt with in a satisfactory manner following the completion of Steps 1, and 2 you should write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors, including, if applicable, copies of the original correspondence relating to Step 2. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of three voting members. Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue(s) that are of concern to you. 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 response to the issue(s) you raised; or
* State that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

The investigation may require you to meet the Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Complaints Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

**Step 4 - Appeals Process**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

**Complaint about the Principal**

Where a complaint relates to the Principal the matter will be dealt with formally by the Board of Governors.

**Formal Stage Step 1 - Writing to Chairperson of the Board of Governors**

Where a complaint relates to the Principal you should write to the Chair of the Board of Governors, stating the grounds for your complaint as concisely as possible. The Chairperson will be responsible for referring your complaint to a Complaints SubCommittee of the Board of Governors, which will investigate and respond to your complaint. The Complaints Sub-Committee will have a minimum of three voting members. 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 response to the issue(s) you raised or
* State that your complaint is being fully investigated and indicate when you can expect a response to be issued (normally a maximum of 25 working days from the date on which your written complaint was received).

**Step 2 - Appeals Process**

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors, you may appeal the decision to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

**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 the north. 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](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

**Scope of Complaints Procedure**

The Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression if dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking concerns raised seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that issues 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.

**Complaints with separate established procedures**

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/Chair of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when the complaint is raised.

***Matters may still be referred to NIPSO, is it is felt that maladministration has occurred.***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Exceptions** | **Contact** |
| * Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school
* Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
* School Development Proposals
* Child Protection / Safeguarding
 | Contact [www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk) Director of Operations and Estates Dale HannaContact [www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk) Director of Children and Young People’s ServicesDr Clare ManganContact [www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk) Director of Education Kim ScottContact [www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk) Director of Children and Young People’s Services Dr Clare Mangan |

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Chairperson of the Board of Governors to be of a serious nature. The decision of whether to deal with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors. (*see guidance notes for further information)*

**WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE**

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

 In dealing with the 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 the complaint**

In making the 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 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.
* This Procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

**Staff**

Staff may seek the advice and support from their professional body or Trade Union and may also be accompanied by another person to meetings where it is accepted, by the Board of Governors and the Principal, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint. A member of staff who is the subject of a complaint will be provided with full details of any allegations made against him/her before being required to respond to the matters raised. In many occasions this may be best achieved by providing the member of staff with a copy of the letter. However, the views of the complainant will be sought before doing so.

**Where the complainant is a Governor**

Where the complainant is a member of the Board of Governors, s/he will play no part in the management, or appeal, of the complaint as set out in this Procedure.

**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.

**Record Keeping**

The Principal and Chairperson of the Board of Governors will maintain a record of all correspondence, conversations and meetings, concerning your complaint. These records will be held confidentially in the school and will be kept apart from pupil records. All such records will be destroyed three years after the date of the last correspondence on the issue.

**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 having been reviewed by the Ombudsman, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If they try to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed. If the complainant repeatedly continues to contact the school with the same issue it may choose not to respond.