

# St Paul's High School, Bessbrook

## Complaints Policy

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### Contents

1. Mission Statement.....	2
2. Introduction .....	2
3. Scope of the Complaints Procedure .....	3
4. Complaints with Established Procedures .....	3
4.5 Anonymous Complaints.....	4
5. Aims of the Complaints Procedure.....	4
5.2 Availability of Procedure .....	5
6. Complaints Procedure – At a Glance .....	5
6.1 Time Limit .....	5
6.2 Stage One.....	5
6.3 Stage Two .....	6
6.4 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).....	7
7. What to Expect Under This Procedure.....	8
7.1 Your rights as a person making a complaint .....	8
7.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint.....	9
7.3 Rights of parties involved.....	9
7.4 Timeframes .....	10
7.5 Equality .....	11
7.6 Unreasonable Complaints .....	11

## 1. Mission Statement

- 1.1 We at St Paul's High School are committed to providing a loving and caring atmosphere which embodies our Catholic ethos in which the children can grow and develop to their full potential in all aspects of their lives.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1. **At St Paul's High School, we take 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 We welcome communication with our staff. Parents / carers can do this by contacting staff as outlined below.

	Telephone Number	Email
<b>Via the School Secretary</b>	(028) 3083 0309	info@stpauls.bessbrook.ni.sch.uk
<b>Directly to the Principal</b>	(028) 3083 0309	principal@stpaulsbessbrook.org

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

### **3. Scope of the Complaints Procedure**

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

### **4. Complaints with Established Procedures**

4.1 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.

4.2 Some examples of complaints dealt with:

- Not following school policy
- Communication delays / lack of communication
- Difficulties in staff / pupil relationships

4.3 **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.**

4.4 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/Chair of governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

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



#### **4.5 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.

### **5. Aims of the Complaints Procedure**

5.1 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.

## 5.2 Availability of Procedure

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

## 6. Complaints Procedure – At a Glance

<b>Stage One</b>	Write to the Principal
<b>Stage Two</b>	Write to the Chair of the Board of Governors

### 6.1 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 six months of the date of the incident(s) about which you are complaining.

### 6.2 Stage One

6.2.1 When making a complaint, contact the Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated.

6.2.2 **If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.**

6.2.3 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.

6.2.4 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.

6.2.5 The Principal will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but within ten 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 twenty 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.**

6.2.6 **These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.**

6.2.7 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.

### **6.3 Stage Two**

6.3.1 **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.

**6.3.2 In the case of the complaint being about the Principal, this committee will investigate the complaint.**

6.3.3 The Chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within ten school working days. A final response will normally be made within twenty 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.

**6.3.4 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.**

6.3.5 These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

**6.4 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

[www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

6.4.1 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).

6.4.2 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.

6.4.3 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.

6.4.4 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](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

Web: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

## **7. What to Expect Under This Procedure**

### **7.1 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; and
- Clear reasons for decisions.

## 7.2 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.

## 7.3 Rights of parties involved

7.3.1 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, colleague<sup>1</sup>

Pupils: permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent, guardian or other nominated adult should accompany pupils.

7.3.2 It may be appropriate to seek a written statement if a person is unable to meet for any reason.

7.3.3 Parties should normally be informed when a complaint is made against them and be able to see relevant correspondence.

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

## **7.4 Timeframes**

7.4.1 **Stage One** – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within ten school working days, with final response normally provided within twenty school working days.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

**7.4.3 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.**

7.4.4 These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

## **7.5 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.

## **7.6 Unreasonable Complaints**

7.6.1 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.

7.6.2 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. If such a decision has been taken, the complainant will be advised accordingly.