

# St. Joseph's Grammar School

## Scoil Iósaeif



## Complaints Procedure

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<b>Seconded by</b>	<i>Gerara McClees</i>
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## **1. Introduction**

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. School Information**

St Joseph's Grammar School/ Scoil Iósaef takes all complaints very seriously and this document sets out how the school will deal with complaints that arise. We aim to place the best interests of the all our pupils and their families at the centre of everything that we do. However, we recognise that there will be occasions when our actions do not meet the reasonable expectations of the members of our school community or members of the public. Our Complaints Procedure is designed to enable due consideration to be given to each and every complaint in a fair and transparent manner.

Many issues can best be resolved by initially talking to the relevant member of staff about your concerns; the school encourages open lines of communication and regular contact.

If you have a concern in relation to your child please direct your query in the first instance to the member of staff concerned. If your complaint is not resolved as a result of this contact, please note the sections below for the next steps you may wish to take in order to resolve your complaint.

### **1.2 Aims of the Complaints Procedure**

When dealing with complaints the school will:

- Encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use
- Provide timely responses to concerns and complaints
- Keep you informed of the 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
- Be non-adversarial
- Be impartial
- Fully address complaints and provide an effective response
- Take appropriate action to rectify the issue and prevent it from happening again where appropriate
- Be responsive to learning from outcomes which will inform and improve practice within the school

A copy of this procedure is available from the school on request.

### **1.3 School Contact Details**

Please telephone the school on 028 8776 1227 and ask for the relevant member of staff to return a call to you. A teacher will not be able to take a call if they are teaching a class when you first telephone the school. He/she will endeavour to return your call as quickly as possible and certainly within 24 hours of you telephoning the school.

Alternatively, you may email using the general school information account, marking your message for the relevant staff member and your email will be forwarded on:

info@stjosephs.donaghmore.ni.sch.uk

## **2.0 The Scope of the Complaints Procedure**

A complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction of 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.

#### ***Examples of complaints covered by the scope of this Policy:***

- Staff member did not follow school policy
- Communication issues/lack of communication
- Difficulties in staff/pupil relationships

This procedure should not be used for complaints with a separate established procedure, 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 procedures, are listed below. This list is not exhaustive. The Principal/Chair of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised with the school.

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

### **2.2 Anonymous Complaints**

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Chair of the Board of Governors to be of a very serious nature. Decisions relating to the treatment of such complaints will be entirely at the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Governors.

### **3.0 Aims of the Complaints Procedure**

#### **3.1 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.

#### **3.2 Availability of Procedure**

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

## 4.0 The Complaints Procedure - At a glance

### Stage One

Write to the Principal, or if the complaint is about the Principal, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors

### Stage Two

Write to the Chair of the Board of Governors who will refer the complaint to the Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

## 4.1 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 original incident taking place.**

## 4.2 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 school Principal, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors to raise your complaint.

Your complaint must be made in writing. This can take the form of a hand written letter or note or an email. If this method of communication should present any difficulty, please contact the school and reasonable arrangements will be made to support you.

Your complaint, if by hand written letter or note, should be addressed to the Principal, Mrs Geraldine Donnelly or alternatively, to the Acting Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr Ciaran Mc Kenna,

St Joseph's Grammar School  
58 Castlecaulfield Road  
Donaghmore  
BT70 3HE  
Telephone: 028 8776 1227  
Email: info@stjosephs.donaghmore.ni.sch.uk

When making your complaint, you should aim to provide as much detail as possible:

- Name and contact details
- What the complaint is about
- What has already been done to try to resolve the matter, and
- What you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint

We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within five working days (except during periods of school closure when it will take longer to address your complaint). We will aim to provide you with a response within 20 working days of receipt of your complaint (except during periods of school closure).

## 4.3 Stage Two

**If your complaint is about the Principal** or if the complaint to the Principal 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 (except during periods of school closure when it will take longer to address your complaint). A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the second letter (except during periods of school closure). 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.

#### **4.4 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) [www.nipso.org.uk](http://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](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)  
Web: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)



## **5.0 What To Expect Under This Procedure**

### **5.1 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.

### **5.2 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

### **5.3 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 in advance 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

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.**

### **5.4 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 (except during periods of school closure)

**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 (except during periods of school closure)

*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.*

## **5.5 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.

## **5.6 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 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.