Integrated College Dungannon

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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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 College, parents/carers and other stakeholders is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole College community.

1.1 COLLEGE INFORMATION

At Integrated College Dungannon, we take complaints seriously. We have the best interests of all of our students and their families at the centre of all that we do. We encourage anyone with a concern or 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.
The Board of Governors, together with the Principal, set the direction and tone of the College and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of this Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians which have not been resolved informally.

The procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff employed in the College and the application of College procedures, where they affect individual students. However, College staff, and the Board of Governors, recognise the difference between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

1.2 Informal Stage

Speaking with Teacher – Step 1
In the first instance, a concern/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 College's existing protocols for arranging and conducting such meetings and follow the College's policy with respect to access to members of staff – please arrange appointments with staff by contacting the main office.

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.

Speaking with the Principal – Step 2
If your concern/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 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.

2. Scope of the Complaints Procedure

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

2.1 Complaints with Established Procedures

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

Some examples of complaints dealt with:

- Not following College policy
- Communication delays / lack of communication
- Difficulties in staff / student relationships

This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however if your complaint relates to the College'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 College'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.

Exceptions
• 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 College 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.

3. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

3.1 When dealing with Complaints

Our College 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 College.
- 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 College's website or is available from the College on request.

4 Complaints Procedure – At a Glance

Stage One

Write to the Principal

Stage Two

Write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors

4.1 Time Limit

To enable complaints to be resolved, please contact the College as soon as possible. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, complaints will normally only be considered within 3 months of the date of the incident(s) about which you are complaining.

4.2 Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the College Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. **If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.** The College requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the College 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 College 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 College's complaints procedure. A final response will normally be made within 20 College 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.

4.3 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 College which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. The letter can be left at the College 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 College'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.

4.4 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

5 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 with the College. (*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[1]
Students: permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent; guardian or other nominated adult should accompany students.

[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).

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

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.

5.5 **Equality**

The College requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the College which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

5.6 Unreasonable Complaints

The College 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 Procedurehaving been completed and the complaint has been reviewed by the Ombudsman, the complainant remains dissatisfied. The College 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 Procedureis 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.