LAGAN COLLEGE BELFAST

Parental Complaints Procedure

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CONTENTS

1 Scope of complaints procedure
2 Aims
3 What to expect under these procedures
4 Who will deal with your complaint.
5 Making a complaint
6 Record keeping
7 Malicious or Vexatious Complaints
Annex 1 Complaints Procedure Flow Chart

THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

1. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Board of Governors together with the Principal set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by parents/guardians.

1.1 The procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of staff employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils. However, schools need to be clear about 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 **Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of the agreed procedure such as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline, Bullying and Harassment or Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.**

1.3 The school will not deal with anonymous complaints (except for those concerning child protection matters) and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints.

2. AIMS

2.1 In operating this Complaints Procedure we aim to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- allow swift handling of a complaint within established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of progress;
- keep people informed of progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- respect confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- provide information to the school's Senior Management Team and Board of Governors so that services can be improved.

2.2 The procedures are designed to be:

- easily accessible and publicised. A copy of the procedures will be placed on the school's website or available on request from the school;
- simple to understand and use;
- impartial; and
- non-adversarial;

3. What to expect under these procedures

3.1 Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with your complaint we will ensure that you receive:

- fair treatment;
- courtesy;
- a timely response;
- accurate advice;
- respect for your privacy – complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint; and
- reasons for our decisions.

Where the complaint is justified we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after investigation, it is judged there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

3.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

In making your complaint we would expect 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 you raise; and
- use these procedures fully and engage in them at the appropriate levels.

3.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation

The process is non-adversarial and does not provide a role for any other statutory or non-statutory body.

Complainant

The complainant may be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

Staff

Staff may seek the advice and support from their professional body or trade union and may also be accompanied by another person where it is accepted, by the Principal and Board of Governors, that this will assist the investigation and resolution of the complaint.

A member of staff who is directly referred to in a complaint will be provided with a written copy of the complaint and details of any information brought by the parent/carer before being required to respond to the matters raised.

Legal Representation

Legal representation or representation by person(s) acting in a professional capacity **is not** permitted within this procedure

This procedure does not take away from the statutory rights of any of the participants.

3.4 Where the complainant is a Governor

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

4. Who will deal with your complaint?

At the informal stage your complaint should be raised and dealt with by the teacher concerned. If you proceed to the formal part of the process, the Principal will assume responsibility for the process, unless s/he is the subject of the complaint, in which case the Chair of the Board of Governors will assume responsibility. Should it be necessary, the Board of Governors will be responsible for establishing a Complaints Sub-Committee to investigate and resolve the matter.

5. Making a Complaint

5.1 Informal Stage

Step 1 - Speaking with the Teacher concerned

In the first instance a complaint should normally be raised verbally with the teacher concerned (whether that be a classroom teacher, Vice-Principal or Principal), 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 teaching staff.**

This approach would 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.

If the complaint does not relate to a teacher in the school, it should be referred to the Principal.

Step 2 - Contact the Principal if your complaint is against a member of staff other than the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1 you should arrange a meeting with the Principal to discuss the issue(s). In advance of this meeting you should inform the Principal in writing, of the nature of your complaint so that s/he may be in a position to resolve the problem without further delay.

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 prepare a response. If further time is required you will be informed of the timescale and the likely date by which a response will be issued.

Step 2 - Contact the Chair of the Board of Governors if your complaint is against the Principal

If your complaint remains unresolved following Step 1 you should write to the Chair of the Board of Governors. Step 4 of the procedure will then commence.

5.2 Formal Stage

Step 3 – Writing to the Principal if your complaint is against a member of staff other than 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 10 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.

5.3 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 – 3, or if your complaint concerns the Principal, you should write to the Chair of 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 3 voting members.

Your written complaint should be as concise as possible and address specifically the issue or issues that are of concern to you. You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received, and:

- 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.

5.4 Step 5 - Appeals Process – Appeals Sub-Committee of the Board of Governors

If you are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board of Governors Sub Committee you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors within 10 working days of receiving written feedback from the Complaints Sub-Committee, appealing their decision. Your written request should be as concise as possible and set out specifically the grounds for your appeal.

The Chairperson will be responsible for establishing an Appeals Sub-Committee comprising of at least three members of the Board of Governors who were not involved in the original investigation. You will be invited to a meeting of the Appeals Sub-Committee where your appeal will be heard.

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your letter within 10 working days. This will confirm that your letter has been received and provide you with the date and time of the meeting with the Appeals Sub-Committee at which you will have an opportunity to explain the grounds for your appeal. This meeting will normally take place within 30 working days of your appeal request having been received.

Within 10 working days of this meeting, you should expect a final written response. This will indicate the Governors' findings, their recommendations and the reasons supporting their decisions.

The decision of the Appeals Sub-Committee is final. At the end of the process the Chairperson will inform you, in writing, that the Complaints Procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is considered closed.

5.5 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If 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:

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

6. Record Keeping

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

7. Malicious or Vexatious Complaints

Where a Board of Governors consider the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute frivolous or vexatious behaviour, they will seek advice from the relevant Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.

8. Lagan College Chairman

Lagan College Chairman is Mr Francis Martin

Annex 1

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOW CHART

(With timescale for responses)

