



WELLINGTON COLLEGE BELFAST

General Complaints Procedure

Reviewed by The Board of Governors October 2020

CONTENTS

	PAGE
<u>SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION</u>	
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Rationale	3
<u>SECTION 2: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE</u>	
2.1 Complaints Procedure	3
2.2 Stage 1 – The Initial Approach	3-4
2.3 Stage 2 – Formal Complaint	4-5
2.4 Stage 3 – Appeal to the Governors’ Committee	5-6
2.5 Referral to the Public Services Ombudsman	6
2.6 Dissemination of the Policy	6
2.7 Policy Review	6
<u>SECTION 3: APPENDICES</u>	
3.1 Appendix 1 – Ombudsman Contact Details	7
3.2 Appendix 2 – Summary Guidance Notes for Parents	8

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication between parents and school is a vital component in the education provided to the pupils of Wellington College. The School makes every effort to answer queries from parents and address concerns raised. It is important that parents are aware of the lines of communication existing in School and it is also important that the School responds appropriately and effectively to parental concerns.

1.2 RATIONALE

The School exists to serve the pupils and parents and it is important that their views are always considered and acted upon where appropriate. Suggestions for improvement, or concerns about policy and procedures, will always be taken seriously. When such views are expressed the concern will be noted, the issue will be considered at the appropriate level and a verbal or written response will be given to the complainant, where practicable.

Parents should always be aware of how they can raise concerns or lodge a formal complaint. A summary of how the school deals with complaints is available upon request from the Principal's Personal Assistant.

Concerns about school admissions and exclusions have specific appeal rights. In addition, allegations of child abuse or other criminal activities will be dealt with through different procedures.

In general, anonymous complaints will normally be disregarded unless substantiated by another party. It is at the Board of Governors' discretion to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants its further investigation. If the anonymous complaint involves a Child Protection issue the advice given by DENI in 'Pastoral Care in Schools – Child Protection' and the School's Child Protection Policy will be followed.

SECTION 2: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

2.1 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This complaints procedure has three stages:

1. The Initial Approach
2. Formal Complaint (to Principal or Chair of Governors for Investigation)
3. Appeal (to Governor Committee)

2.2 STAGE 1 – THE INITIAL APPROACH

- (i) The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally.
- (ii) Parents should feel able to raise concerns with the appropriate member of staff without any formality, either in person, by telephone or in writing.

(iii) During discussion the member of staff will clarify with the parent the nature of the concern.

(iv) It will be important to establish whether the parent is asking a question or expressing an opinion rather than making a complaint. It may be appropriate to identify the sort of outcome or action the parent is looking for.

(v) If a complaint is being made the member of staff approached should deal with the complaint informally ensuring a written record of date, name, nature of complaint, action taken and outcome is made.

If necessary, the matter should be referred to the appropriate senior member of staff.

2.3 STAGE 2 – FORMAL COMPLAINT

(i) Where a formal complaint is made it should be done so in writing to the Principal. The Principal (or designated deputy) acknowledges the complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving a written complaint. (If the concern refers to the Principal, the parent will be advised to contact the Chair of the Board of Governors.) The Principal will pass the complaint to the Vice Principal who will investigate the issues raised. If the complaint is about the Vice Principal, the Principal will investigate the complaint.

(ii) The Vice Principal will provide an opportunity for the complainant to meet with him/her to supplement any information provided previously. The complainant may be accompanied to the meeting by a friend or relative.

(iii) If necessary, the Vice Principal will interview witnesses and take statements from those involved. If the complaint centres around a pupil, the pupil may also be interviewed. Normally pupils will be interviewed with a parent or guardian present but in some circumstances this may not be possible e.g. where this would cause serious delay in the investigation of an urgent matter. In such cases a member of staff with whom the pupil feels comfortable will be asked to attend.

(iv) If a member of staff is complained against they will be treated in a fair way and be given an opportunity to put their case. The staff member's rights and reputation will be protected while the complaint is investigated thoroughly and impartially.

NB: If the complaint involves a Child Protection issue the advice given by DENI in 'Pastoral Care in Schools – Child Protection' and the School's Child Protection Policy will be followed. The complaints procedure is distinct from formal disciplinary proceedings for staff. A complaint may lead to disciplinary action and the complainant will be informed where this occurs.

(v) The Vice Principal will keep written records of meetings, telephone conversations and other documentation.

(vi) When all the relevant facts have been established, the Vice Principal will make a written response to the complainant, or may wish to meet the complainant to discuss any outcomes and actions directly.

(vii) The response will include an explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, it will also include the action the school will take to resolve the complaint. The complainant will be advised that should s/he wish to take the complaint further s/he should notify the Principal within two weeks of receiving the outcome letter.

(viii) The Principal will review the material associated with the complaint and may decide to interview those involved. When all the relevant facts have been established, the Principal will make a written response to the complainant, or may wish to meet the complainant to discuss the matter directly.

2.4 STAGE 3 – APPEAL TO THE GOVERNORS' COMMITTEE

(i) If a complainant is not satisfied by the Principal's response s/he may write to the Governing Body asking them to review the decision. This will be considered by a sub-committee consisting of three members of the Board of Governors.

(ii) Individual governors must avoid getting involved prior to this stage. If a parent approaches a governor, they should be informed of the school's complaints procedure. It may be appropriate to direct the parent to a particular member of staff.

(iii) The Chair of the Board of Governors will write to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the written request. The complaint will normally be heard by this sub-committee of the Board within 20 working days of receipt of the letter.

(iv) The Panel members should have had no prior involvement with the complaint. Normally the panel will be chaired by the Chair or Vice-Chair. The Principal will not have a place on the Panel.

(v) All relevant correspondence will be sent to each Panel member as soon as possible. The hearing will be arranged and any relevant witnesses, the Principal and the complainant will be informed of the date, time and place of the hearing at least 5 days in advance.

(vi) Written evidence may be submitted to the Panel and all relevant documentation will be sent to all concerned, including the complainant, in advance of the meeting.

(vii) The Chair of the Panel will ensure that its proceedings are properly minuted. The aim of the hearing should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant.

(viii) The meeting should permit:

- The complainant to express the complaint;
- The Principal to explain the school's response;

- Each party to respond to questions; and
- Subject to the approval of the chair, member(s) of staff or other witnesses may be called and asked questions.

(ix) The normal procedure for the hearing is described below:

- The Chair will introduce all parties and explain their role.
- The Chair will explain that the purpose of the hearing is to review the complaint and try to resolve it and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations about future action.
- The complainant is given the opportunity to describe his/her complaint and may call witnesses.
- Clarification may be sought by members of the governors' panel or by the Principal.
- The Principal will respond to the complaint and may call witnesses.
- Clarification may be sought by members of the governors' panel or the complainant.
- The Principal will be given the opportunity to sum up.
- Both parties will leave the room to allow the panel to deliberate.

(x) The Panel will consider the complaint and the evidence presented and reach a majority decision regarding the most appropriate action to resolve the complaint and, where appropriate, make recommendations to change the school system or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not happen again.

(xi) A written statement outlining the Panel's decision will normally be sent to both the complainant and the Principal within 15 working days.

2.5 STAGE 4 – REFERRAL TO THE PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

Having exhausted the internal complaints procedure, parents of pupils may refer their complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) if they remain dissatisfied. Upon receiving written notification by the School that the full internal complaints procedure has been completed, parents who remain dissatisfied are required to make any complaint to the Ombudsman within 6 months of the date of receiving written notification. The NIPSO contact details are provided in Appendix 1.

2.6 DISSEMINATION OF THE POLICY

This policy is available through the School's website. Copies are available from the School office.

2.7 POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years from the date of publication.

APPENDIX 1

Contacting the Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

The full text of the Public Services Ombudsman Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 can be accessed at www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/4/enacted

Contact Details:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
BELFAST BT1 6HN

Freepost:

Freepost NIPSO

Telephone:

028 9023 3821 or Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Text Phone:

028 9089 7789

Email:

nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website:

www.nipso.org.uk

APPENDIX 2

Summary Guidance Notes for Parents

If you have a concern or complaint

Please let us know your concerns as soon as possible since it becomes difficult to properly investigate an incident or problem which has happened some time previously.

What to do first

Most concerns or complaints can be sorted out quickly by speaking with your child's Form Teacher, Head of Year, subject teacher or Head of Department. College reception staff can help you find the right member of staff.

You will need an appointment to discuss your concerns, and can make one by telephoning or calling at school reception.

All staff will make every effort to resolve your problem informally. They will make sure that they understand what you feel is wrong and they will explain their actions to you. They will ask what you would like the school to do to put things right. This does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the school to understand both sides of the question. It may also help prevent a similar problem arising again.

If you have a complaint which you feel should be considered by a more senior member of staff you should contact the Principal directly. You should outline the nature of your problem. Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing and will be investigated by the Vice-Principal (unless the complaint is about the Vice-Principal). After the Vice-Principal has fully investigated the complaint, which may include interviewing staff, pupils and parents, you will be invited to receive feedback on any outcomes and actions, and where necessary a written response. If your complaint is about the Principal then you should refer it to the Chair of the Board of Governors.

What to do next

If you are dissatisfied with the response you can contact the Principal directly who will re-investigate the complaint.

If your complaint is about the action of the Principal personally, then you should refer it to the Chairman of the Board of Governors. You may write to him/her at the school address.

If you are still unhappy

The problem will normally be resolved at this stage. However, if you are not satisfied you may wish to contact the Chair of the Board of Governors to ask for a referral of your

complaint to a Governors' Complaints Panel. It will then be heard by a group of three governors who have no previous knowledge of the problem and so will be able to give a fresh assessment. You will be invited to attend and speak to the panel at a meeting which the Principal will also attend.

The General Complaints Procedures explains how these meetings operate.