

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

(Pastoral Care)

2024



Ashgrove Primary School

PASTORAL CARE

AGREED DATE	REVIEW DATE	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
2024	2027	PRINCIPAL

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WHO CAN MAKE A COMPLAINT?

This complaints procedure is mainly aimed at parents or carers of children who are registered at the school, but it is not limited to them.

Any member of the public may make a complaint to Ashgrove Primary School about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as admissions or appeals relating to exclusions), the school will use this complaints procedure.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CONCERN AND A COMPLAINT

A concern may be defined as 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.'

A complaint may be defined as 'an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or lack of actions.'

Most often, issues are addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff in school. Open communication and regular engagement between the school staff and the wide range of users is vital to the effective management of the school.

THIRD PARTY PROVIDERS

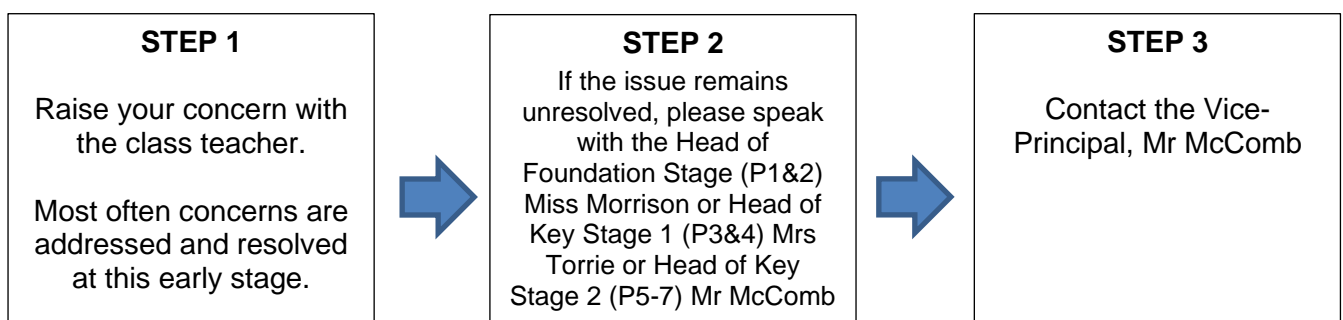
It is the responsibility of third-party providers using the school premises or facilities to have their own complaints procedure in place, for example, external after school Sports Coaches who facilitate after-school provision.

INFORMAL STAGES & APPROACH

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest opportunity. Most issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of this Complaints Procedure. Ashgrove Primary School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Before escalating to a concern to a complaint, or formal complaint, the complainant should raise their concern firstly with the class teacher. Most often concerns are resolved at this stage. Following this, concerns should be raised with the head of Key Stage or Vice Principal. This approach ensures that your concern is heard by more than one person in a fair and consistent way.

INFORMAL STAGES



Teachers are unable to speak to you during teaching time. It may be necessary to schedule an appointment for staff to give you the time required.



Communication Chart

**We welcome communication with our staff.
You can do this by contacting staff as outlined below...**

**The School Secretary (Mrs O'Donnell)
Tel: 028 9084 8734**

**Your child's teacher(s)
Tel: 028 9084 8734 email: info@ashgroveps.newtownabbey.ni.sch.uk**

**Vice-Principal – Mr McComb or Principal – Mr Smith
Tel: 028 9084 8734 email: info@ashgroveps.newtownabbey.ni.sch.uk**

SCOPE OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Our Complaints Policy and Procedure is based on an 'investigatory approach' rather than an 'adversarial approach' to complaints. It does not therefore include a forum where complainants can cross-examine others i.e. staff or those involved in the complaint.

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.

Some examples of complaints:

- Not following school policy e.g. Positive Behaviour Policy
- Difficulties in staff/ pupil relationships
- Breach of Staff Code of Conduct

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 POLICY

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms, which are not part of the school's complaints procedure are listed below. This is not an exhaustive list. The principal or chair of governors will advise of the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

EXCEPTIONS

- Admissions/Expulsions/Exclusion of children from school
- Statutory Assessments of children with Special Educational Needs
- School Development proposals
- Child Protection/Safeguarding

Issue	Procedure or policy to follow
Admissions to school	Concerns about admissions to Ashgrove Primary School for primary one should be raised with the Education Authority primary admissions. Please note there is a separate appeals procedure for primary school admissions.
Statutory assessments of children with special educational needs	Refer to SEN Policy.
Matters likely to require a child protection investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance. Refer to our Child Protection Policy.
Whistleblowing	<p>We have an internal whistle blowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should refer to the schools complaints procedure. Visitors to school are expected to adhere to our visitors code of conduct.</p>
Staff Conduct	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, as appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint.</p> <p>However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
Recruitment	Refer to EA recruitment policies and procedures.
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the school premises or facilities.	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about their service. Please contact them directly.

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, safeguarding teams or tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the time scales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Ashgrove Primary School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have been concluded.

ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Principal or chairperson of the board of governors to be of a serious nature. The decision of dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Principal or chairperson of the board of governors.

COMPLAINT CAMPAIGNS

If we receive what we consider to be a large volume of complaints, all based on the same subject and possibly from complainants not connected to the school, then we will treat these complaints as being part of a campaign and respond in one of the following two ways, depending upon the nature and scale of the complaint:

- Send the same response to all complainants; or
- publish a single response on the school's website.

COMPLAINTS RECEIVED OUTSIDE TERM TIME

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

AIMS

When dealing with complaints Ashgrove Primary aims to:

- encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible;
- provide responses to concerns and complaints in a reasonable timeframe;
- keep you 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 where appropriate;
- be responsive to learning from outcomes which will inform and improve practice within the school;
- provide a process that is simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial.

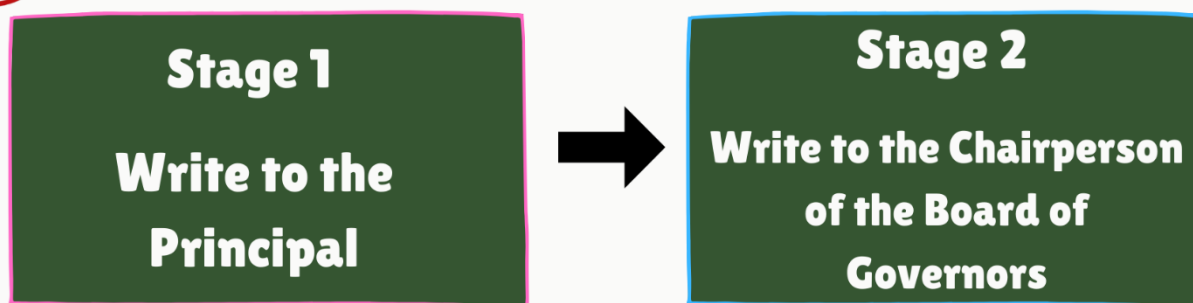
A copy of this Procedure is available on the school's website or is available from the school on request.

Before a complaint is made formal by writing to the Principal or Chairperson of the Board of Governors, the complainant should, if appropriate, raise their concerns with the class teacher. Most often concerns or complaints are resolved at this early stage.

If a child has a difficulty at school, the matter should normally be addressed through discussion with the child's teacher or the appropriate member of staff. **If parents/carers feel dissatisfied after initially talking to the teacher or member of school staff, then they should be referred to the complaints procedure.**



Formal Complaints Procedure at a Glance



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 origin of the complaint to the school.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS, STAGE 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Principal (unless the complaint is about the Principal) via the school Office. This should be done in writing, preferably using the Complaint Form in this Policy. The Principal will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint in writing (by letter or email) within 10 school days. Within this response the Principal will;

- Clarify the nature of the complaint;
- Ask what the complainant has done to try to resolve the issue;
- Ask what remains unresolved; and
- Ask what outcome the complainant would like to see.

When making a complaint, contact the school Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. ***If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.*** The school requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, contact the school and we will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process.



Please provide as much information as possible including;

- **Your name and contact details**
- **What the complaint is specifically about**
- **What you have already done to try to resolve it**
- **What you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint**

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 10 school working days (term time) and a response normally made within 20 school working days (term time) of receipt of the complaint.

This response will be issued in writing by the Principal and will indicate with reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

TIMEFRAMES WILL BE REVIEWED IF COMPLAINTS ARE ONGOING DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAY PERIODS OR OTHER EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

FORMAL COMPLAINTS, STAGE TWO

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the Board of Governors Complaints Committee, which will be formed of three impartial governors. This is the final stage of the Complaints Procedure.

Please provide clear information and include the following:

- Reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings; and
- Any aspect in which you think that the school's complaints procedure was not fully followed

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Chairperson of the Complaints Committee, via the school Office within 10 school days (term time) of receipt of the Stage One response (correspondence should be marked 'private and confidential'). The Chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days (term time) on the receipt of the written complaint.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations. If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days (term time) 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 was upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

In the case of a complaint being about the Principal, the Complaints Committee will investigate the complaint.



**At Stage 2, please provide clear information,
including the following:**

Reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings

Any aspect in which you think the school's complaints procedure was not fully followed

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.

TIMEFRAMES MAY NEED TO BE REVIEWED IF COMPLAINTS ARE ONGOING DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAY PERIODS OR OTHER EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (NIPSO)

If following Stage Two you remain dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you may 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

PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE

If complainants frequently contact the school, causing a significant level of disruption, but refuse to engage in the complaints procedure, Ashgrove Primary School can:

- Restrict the complainant to a single point of contact via an email address; and/or
- Limit the number of times the complainant can contact the school.

This restriction will be limited to the complainants capacity to complain. For other issues the complainant may contact the school as normal.

WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

In dealing with a complaint 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.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A PERSON MAKING A COMPLAINT

In making a complaint it is important to:

- raise issues in a timely manner;
- adhere to the timeframes outlined in this policy and refrain from requesting persistent updates before this schedule;*
- treat our staff with respect and courtesy;
- provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues raised;
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media;
- respect confidentiality; and
- use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels.

RIGHTS OF PARTIES INVOLVED DURING THE FORMAL INVESTIGATION

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

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.

STAFF MEMBERS: should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process e.g. union representative or colleague**.

PUPILS: permission should be sought from parents/guardian or other nominated adult who 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.

* The school may choose not to reply if persistent requests for updates are made before schedule.

** For information on workers statutory rights to be accompanied, this should be read in accordance with Section 3 of LRA's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures (Paras 110-116).

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.

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 having 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 complaint 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 is taken, the complainant will be advised accordingly. If they try to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant repeatedly continues to contact the school with the same issue it may choose not to respond.

POLICY FOR MANAGING SERIAL AND UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS

Ashgrove Primary School is committed to dealing with complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school.

However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Ashgrove Primary School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint, or the outcome sought by raising the complaint despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information that they expect to be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they're fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- make unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and/or seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;

- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation in to the complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, and writing, by e-mail and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- Uses threats to intimidate;
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information; and
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, text or e-mail) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

For complainants who excessively contact school causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate her actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from entering the school grounds or premises (a withdrawal of licence to enter the school premises or grounds).

COMPLAINT FORM

Please complete and return to Ashgrove Primary School, Office, marked 'private and confidential' for the attention of the Principal.

Your name:

Pupil's Name (if relevant):

Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):

Address:

Postcode:

Day telephone number:

Evening telephone number:

Email address:

Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anyone in school about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Signature:

Date:

Official Use

Date Acknowledgement was sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Action Taken:

Date: