

SACRED HEART GRAMMAR SCHOOL



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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1. Foreword

At Sacred Heart Grammar School we aim to work closely with parents/guardians in supporting all aspects of the child's development and well-being. Any concerns a parent/guardian may have will be taken seriously and dealt with in a professional manner. We have the best interests of all our students and their families at the centre of all we do. In this regard, we encourage anyone with a concern to speak to us as soon as possible. If concerns are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved and there is no unnecessary dissatisfaction.

Many issues can be addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff member in school who will be happy to help. Open communication and regular engagement between the school staff and the wide range of users is vital to the effective management of the school.

If a parent/guardian has any issue, then they should talk to the Form Teacher / Year Head as soon as possible. In some instances, it might be appropriate for a parent/guardian to raise their concern directly with the Principal. We take all concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

2. Aims of Complaints Procedure

Our school ethos promotes open communication with parents/guardians and encourages a continuing dialogue between home and school throughout a student's education. The aim of this policy is to ensure that a complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. We will try to resolve every complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.

When dealing with complaints the school will:

- encourage resolution of all concerns and complaints as quickly as possible
- provide timely responses to concerns and complaints
- keep parents/guardians informed of progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation of a complaint where appropriate
- have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved
- respect confidentiality
- fully address concerns and 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.

Policy Statement

Any issues which arise are normally dealt with informally through discussion and parents /guardians are fully involved in key decisions which affect their daughter's career. We publish contact details for pastoral and academic staff on our school website and school app and further details are available from the school office. We encourage parents/guardians to use these channels should an issue arise as we need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction or concern. Parents/guardians can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where there is a legal requirement to share this information.

Complaints will always be dealt with in accordance with this policy. Parents/guardians and students should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a student or her opportunities at this school.

3. The Complaints Procedure – At a Glance

Timescales

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.

We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to working days, we mean Monday to Friday, when the School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.

Acknowledgement

We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within five working days of receipt during term time. In the holidays the acknowledgement will be made as soon as is practicable and not later than five working days beyond the start of the next term or half term. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the appropriate member of staff will arrange to either speak with the parent/guardian over the phone or invite them to a meeting, within ten working days.

The Three Stages of the Complaints Procedure:

This policy describes a three stage procedure:

Stage 1: Informal raising of a concern/complaint notified orally or in writing to a member of staff

Stage 2: A formal complaint in writing to the Principal

Stage 3: A formal complaint in writing to a Chairperson of Board of Governors

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

It is hoped that all complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If a parent/guardian has a concern or a complaint, they should normally first contact their daughter's Form Teacher. It is anticipated that Form Teachers themselves will be able to resolve the majority of concerns to the parent's/guardian's satisfaction, although it might be necessary to consult the subject teacher if the concern is of an academic nature or with the Year Head if the concern is of a pastoral nature. Similarly, Form Teachers might need to refer to the Vice Principal or Principal if the concern is about a disciplinary matter. In some instances, it might be appropriate for a parent/guardian to raise their concern directly with the Principal.

The Form Teacher will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within a reasonable period of time (normally 14 days), or in the event that the Form Teacher and the parents/guardians fail to reach a satisfactory solution, then parents/guardians will be advised to proceed to Stage 2 of the complaints procedure.

Stage 2: A formal complaint in writing to the Principal

If the concern or complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then parents/guardians should put their concern in writing to the Principal.

Parents/guardians should provide as much information as possible including;

- name and contact details
- what the complaint is about
- what has already been done to try to resolve it and
- what the parent/guardian would like the school to do to resolve the complaint.

Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged, and the Principal will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. In most cases, the Principal will meet with the parents/guardians, normally within 14 working days of receiving the complaint if it is in term time, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

The School aims to resolve all complaints within 21 working days of receiving the complaint. It might be necessary to carry out further investigation, for example where there are other parties involved. Once the Principal is satisfied that all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents/guardians will be informed of this decision during a pre-arranged meeting or directly in writing. The Principal will also give reasons for his/her decision. If parents/guardians are still not satisfied, they should proceed to Stage 3 with their complaint.

These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

Stage 3: A formal complaint in writing to a Chairperson of Board of Governors

This stage of the Complaints Procedure will only be necessary should the matter not be resolved at the former two stages.

If this stage has been reached, parents/guardians should write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (*care of the school and marked 'private and confidential'*). Where this may present difficulties, they should contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 working days. The Chairperson will convene a committee as soon as practicable and normally within 21 days to review the complaint.

If possible, the committee will resolve the parent's/guardian's concern immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the committee will decide how it should be carried out. After due consideration of all the relevant facts, the committee will, within 7 working days of the ending of the hearing, consider whether to uphold the complaint, in whole or in part, or dismiss the complaint. The Chairperson of the committee will write to the parents /guardians informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within 28 working days from the date of receipt of the complaint.

If following Stage 3 of the complaints procedure, parents/guardians should remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, they 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. Parents/guardians have the right to complain to the Ombudsman if they feel that they have been treated unfairly or have received a poor service from the school and their complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction. A complaint should normally be referred to NIPSO within six months of the final response from the School.

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

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. 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.

A copy of this Complaints Procedure is available on the school website/school app or is available from the Main Office on request.