

# Coleraine Grammar School Complaints Procedure



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This document sets out how Coleraine Grammar School (CGS) will normally deal with complaints about the school.

## **1. Informal Resolution of Complaints**

Many issues can be addressed informally by talking to the relevant staff in school who will be happy to help. Open communication and regular engagement between school staff and parents/carers or the wider school community is vital to the effective management of the school.

It is normally appropriate to communicate promptly with a pupil's Pastoral Leader. If your concern is of a particularly serious or sensitive nature you may prefer to discuss it with a more senior member of staff or the member of staff who is responsible for the area you are concerned about, for example the subject Curriculum Leader, the Vice-Principal for Pastoral Care or the academic Vice-Principal. Contact with staff can be made via school reception.

Many concerns can be resolved by a simple clarification, or the provision of information, and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved at this informal stage. Members of staff will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong and will explain the school's actions to you. This does not mean that in every case they will agree with your point of view, but it will help both you and the school to understand the issue and may prevent a similar problem arising again. If you are dissatisfied with the response you receive, you can informally bring the matter to the attention of the senior member of staff with responsibility for the particular area in which you have a concern, either the Pastoral Leader, Curriculum Leader, Senior Teacher or Vice-Principal. You may be invited to come into school to discuss your concern and it may be appropriate for another member of staff to be present. The senior member of staff may carry out an informal investigation where this is necessary or would prove helpful and will seek to resolve the matter to your satisfaction. If you are uncertain about whom to contact, please seek advice from school reception. If you wish to make a formal complaint, please follow the procedure described within this document.

## **FORMAL PROCEDURE**

### **2. AIMS OF THE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

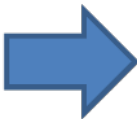
When dealing with complaints our school aims to

- 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 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.

### **3. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

<p><b>Stage One</b> Write to the Principal or if the complaint is about the Principal write to the President of the Board of Governors.</p>		<p><b>Stage Two</b> Write to the Secretary of the Board of Governors who will refer the complaint to the Appeals Committee of the Board of Governors.</p>
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#### **3.1 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 the date of the incident or issue about which you are complaining.

#### **3.2 Stage One**

When making a complaint, contact the school Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. If the complaint is about the Principal, write to the President of the Board of Governors. The school requires complaints to be made in writing, by letter, email or fax. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school and reasonable arrangements will be made to support you with this process.

Your complaint should be addressed to:

Dr D Carruthers                      or                      The President of the Board of Governors  
Principal/Headmaster

Coleraine Grammar School  
23-33 Castlerock Road  
Coleraine  
BT51 3LA

Telephone    028 7043 4331

Facsimile    028 7035 2632

Email                      [info@colerainegrammar.com](mailto:info@colerainegrammar.com)

**3.3** Please provide as much information as possible including

- your name and contact details
- what the complaint is about – please try to be specific
- what you have already done to try to resolve it and
- what you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint.

**3.4** The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 10 school working days. This will be a short response and you will be sent a copy of, (or a link to) the school's Complaints Procedure. A response will normally be issued in writing within 20 school working days of receipt of the complaint. If the school is unclear on any point, it will contact you to seek clarification in order that all the points raised can be fully considered. In some circumstances, for instance where the issues are particularly complex, the Principal will write to you with a revised time-scale at the earliest opportunity.

**3.5 The definition of a school day in this procedure will be any day on which there is a timetabled session and the pupils are in attendance. These exclude school holidays and SDDs or training days when the pupils are not present.**

**3.6** The 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.

**3.7** If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Stage One, the complaint may be progressed to Stage Two which is overseen by the Appeals Committee of the Board of Governors.

**3.8 Stage Two**

If the complaint is unresolved after Stage 1 and you wish to progress to Stage 2 of this procedure, write to the Secretary of the Board of Governors (care of the school and marked 'private and confidential') within 20 school days of the date of issue of the Stage 1 response to the complaint.

Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school and reasonable arrangements will be made to support you with this process. The Secretary of the Board will refer the matter to the Appeals Committee which will form a panel to review the complaint or investigate your complaint about the principal. Please provide as much detail as possible as indicated above and include the following

- reason(s) why you disagree with the Stage One findings
- any aspect in which you think that the school's Complaints Procedure was not fully followed.

If the panel unclear on any point it will contact, you to seek clarification in order that it can consider all the points raised. Once again, for instance where the issues are particularly complex, the chair of the panel will write to you with a revised timescale if it is considered necessary in the circumstances.

**3.9** A Stage Two complaint will be acknowledged as soon as possible and within 10 school working days, and a final response normally made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the Stage Two complaint. The response will be issued in writing by the chairperson of the panel and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

### **3.10 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)**

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 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

Telephone: 02890 233821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)

Web: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

Freepost: FREEPOST NIPSO

## **4. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

**4.1** The Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school will be managed. By taking concerns raised seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that issues can be resolved quickly and effectively.

Some examples of complaints dealt with

- not following school policy
- communication delays/lack of communication
- difficulties in staff /pupil relationships.

This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however if your complaint relates to the school's failure to administer any of these procedures correctly, then you may complain by means of this procedure.

## 4.2 Complaints with separate established procedures

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms are not covered by the school's Complaints Procedure. Some of these procedures are listed below. The list is not exhaustive.

Some complaints may be dealt with under alternative school policies. The Principal or President of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when the complaint is raised.

Matters may still be referred to NIPSO, if it is felt that maladministration has occurred.

Exceptions	Contact
• Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Operations and Estates
• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Children and Young People's Services
• School Development Proposals	
• Child Protection / Safeguarding	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Education
	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Children and Young People's Services

## 4.3 Anonymous Complaints

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the President of the Board of Governors to be of a very serious nature. The decision of whether to deal with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors. Even where in the Board's opinion an anonymous complaint should be investigated, this policy accepts that a panel may determine that the anonymous complaint does not provide adequate information for an investigation to be conducted.

## 5. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

### 5.1 Your rights as a person making a complaint.

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.

## **5.2 Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint.**

In making a complaint it is important to

- 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.

We kindly ask that all communication regarding concerns or complaints is conducted in a constructive and respectful manner. While we value open dialogue, we must ensure that any form of aggressive behaviour, whether verbal or written, directed at the Headmaster, staff, pupils or governors is unacceptable, will not be tolerated and the school may invoke the Unacceptable Behaviour Policy.

## **5.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation**

Where a meeting is arranged you may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

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

Those involved in the complaint may be interviewed. These might include the following.

**Complainant:** - will be informed that they may be accompanied but not represented by another person during the process, for example 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 school. (*Local MLAs / Councillors / Citizens' Advice Bureau / Parenting NI / Children's Commissioner*).

**Staff Member, including non-teaching staff:** - should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process; for example, union representative, colleague<sup>1</sup>.

**Pupils:** permission should be sought from parents/carer and pupils should be accompanied by parent, carer or other nominated adult.

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.

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<sup>1</sup> (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).

## **5.4 Timeframes**

Where concerns are raised prior to a written complaint, a response will normally be provided during the meeting or within an agreed timeframe.

**Stage One complaint** – Normally acknowledged as soon as possible but within 10 school working days and a response normally given within 20 school working days

**Stage Two complaint** – Normally acknowledged as soon as possible but within 10 school working days and a response normally given 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 school requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school and reasonable arrangements will be made to support you with this process.

## **5.6 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. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the Complaints Procedure having been completed, including where the complaint has been reviewed by the Ombudsman, a 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 complainant 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 has been taken, the complainant will be advised accordingly.