



Parental Complaints Policy

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1. Introduction

Castlebar aims to provide an excellent education for all pupils. The Headteacher and other staff work hard to build positive relationships with all parents. The school rarely receives complaints but when they do, senior staff, and if needed, Governors will aim to resolve the matter as swiftly as possible.

Complaints fall into two categories - informal and formal. Most complaints will begin as an informal concern. If a complainant is not satisfied with the informal outcome they have recourse to the process below.

2. Aims and objectives

- The school aims to be fair, open and transparent when dealing with any complaint. Careful consideration is given to all complaints and staff will carry out a full investigation.
- We aim to resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and in all cases we put the interests of the child above all other issues.
- We require both parties to the complaint to be respectful and courteous at all times, avoiding any discriminatory and offensive comments
- We will provide sufficient time and resources for any complaint to be fully discussed and resolved.
- Complaints are monitored and the information received is used by the School's Senior Leadership team to ensure that services are improve and to provide information for ongoing reviews so that action can be taken to improve processes and procedures.

3. Exceptions

This Policy does not apply to the following complaints for which there are separate procedures:

- Admissions to the school
- Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- School re-organisation proposals
- Transport to school
- Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation
- Exclusion of children from the school
- Whistleblowing
- Staff grievances and disciplinary procedures
- Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use the school premises or facilities

4. Time Limits

The school expects complaints to be made as soon as possible after the occurrence of the incident being complained about and usually will not consider complaints made more than three months after any incident.

5. Raising a Concern and Making a Complaint

- **Step 1 Talking the problem through informally with the Class Teacher**
- In the first instance complainants should discuss the matter with the Class Teacher, this can be in person or by phone. If preferred a letter or note in the diary can be sent in which will be followed up by a call from the teacher. Most concerns can be dealt with in this way. A response (which may be a call, a face to face meeting, or a written response) will be sent within 2-3 working days.

- Complainants are required to remain calm when stating their concerns and complaints. Failure to do so may result in any meeting being brought to a close until emotions are under control.
- All staff are committed to ensuring that each child is happy at school and is making good progress. Staff want to know if there is a problem so that they can provide any support needed.

- **Step 2 What to do if the matter is not resolved through informal discussion**

Where a complainant feels that the situation has not been resolved through contact with the Class Teacher, or that their complaint is of a sufficiently serious nature, they should make an appointment to discuss it with the Assistant Head of the relevant department. The Assistant Head will consider any such complaint seriously and will investigate the complaint thoroughly. It is very rare for complaints not to be resolved at this stage. The Assistant Head will aim to meet with the complainant within 2-3 working days of the complainant's request. Following this meeting, a written response will be sent to the complainant within 2-3 working days of the meeting.

- If the Assistant Head is unable to resolve the matter then the complainant may raise the matter with the Deputy Head teacher or Headteacher. The Deputy Headteacher or the Headteacher will then review all the information relating to the complaint and will meet with complainant within 5 working days of the complainant's request to discuss any remaining concerns. Complainants may bring a representative or person to support them to this meeting. The Deputy or Head will respond in writing to complainant within working 5 days of the meeting.

- **Step 3 Review by the Governing Body and the Complaints Panel**

If the complainant is not happy with the decision of the Deputy Headteacher or Headteacher they may complain to the Governing Body. The complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors or another nominated Governor may invite the complainant to resolve the issue informally. If this is not successful the Chair of Governors will convene a formal Governing Body Complaints Panel.

The Governing Body Complaints Panel will consider the complaint within 15 working days of receipt if there is no attempt at informal resolution, or within 15 working days of failure of any informal resolution. It will arrange a meeting to discuss the complaint, and invite the complainant to attend to explain their complaint in more detail. The school will give the complainant at least three working days' notice of the meeting.

After hearing all the evidence, the Governors will consider their decision and inform the complainant about it in writing within 5 working days of the meeting. The Governors will do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint

- **Step 4 Appeal to the Local Authority**

If the complainant believes that the Governing Body has not acted properly in carrying out its investigation into the complaint they can complain to the Local Authority (LA). The LA has a responsibility to ensure that Governing Bodies act appropriately. The LA does not have the power to instruct the Governing Body to reverse its decision but will want to satisfy itself that the Governing Body has conducted the investigation fairly.

In the unlikely event that a complaint needs to be made to the LA about the Governing Body's handling of the complaint the complainant should write to the Director for Education, London Borough of Ealing, Perceval House, London W5 2HL.

However, the LA can only act when the complainant has been through all the stages of the complaints procedure.

- **Step 5 Appeal to the DfE**

If a complainant thinks that the school's Governing Body or the LA is acting unreasonably or unlawfully they can write to the Secretary of State for Education. Complaints to the Secretary of State are handled by the Schools Complaints Unit (SCU) at the Department for Education (DfE). (www.education.gov.uk)

The Secretary of State has a duty to consider all complaints raised but will only intervene where the governing body has acted unlawfully or unreasonably and where it is expedient or practical to do so.

Further information can be obtained from the SCU by calling the National Helpline on 0370 000 2288 or by going online at: www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus or by writing to: Department for Education School Complaints Unit 2nd Floor, Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester M1 2WD

6. Complaints Regarding the Head Teacher or a member of the Governing Body

Complaints regarding the Headteacher should be made to the Chair or Vice Chair of Governors, who will first try to resolve the matter on an informal basis. This should be done:

- By the complainant initially contacting the school.
- If the complainant has not submitted a written complaint, or the written complaint is unclear, the Deputy or Assistant Head will seek clarification on the exact nature of the complaint against the Headteacher. They can also suggest meeting the complainant if that would help the situation, but the complainant has the right to refuse this offer. If the complainant does not want to meet, this will then be passed onto the Chair of Governors
- The Chair of Governors will speak to the Head and to the complainant and make a response to the complainant within 10 working days.
- The Chair (or a nominated Governor) may also arrange a meeting to resolve the issue with both parties. One way of doing this might be to arrange a meeting between both parties in the presence of a nominated governor, where the matter can be discussed with a view to resolving it. The complainant will receive a response to their complaint within 10 working days.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response a Governing Body Complaints Panel will be convened.

However, if the complaint pertains to a child protection issue, child protection arrangements must come into force, involving the social services and police.

A complaint about the Chair of Governors or a member of the Governing Body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body, who will refer this to the Local Authority for a response.

7. Complaints regarding community use of the school site

Concerns or complaints regarding community use of the school site must be brought to the attention of the School Business Manager.

All hirers of school facilities are required to have their own complaints policy and procedures.

8. Recording complaints

The school will keep records of the progress and outcome of all complaints. Records of these will be filed in the main school office.

9. Monitoring and review

The Headteacher is responsible for monitoring all complaints about the school, to ensure that all complaints are handled properly.

This policy is published on the school's website so that parents/carers and the general public are properly informed about the complaints process.

Governors regularly monitor and review the Complaints Policy taking into account any local or national decisions that affect the complaints process. Modifications are made as necessary to this policy.

10. Unreasonable Complaints

Castlebar defines unreasonable complainants as 'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:-

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and 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 into that complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:-

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

11. Conduct During the Progress of a Complaint

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with the school while a complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as this could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before the complainant is treated as 'unreasonable'. If the behaviour continues the Headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Castlebar School causing a significant level of disruption, the school may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Castlebar School.

12. Barring from the School Premises

Although it fulfils a public function the school is a private place. The public has no automatic right of entry and the school will always act to ensure that it remains a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of the community.

If a parent or carer's behaviour is a cause for concern, the school may ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority may notify them in writing that their right to be on the school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent/carer may wish to make.

The school will give the parent/carer the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing. The decision to bar will then be reviewed; taking into account any representations made by the parent/carer, and will either be confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent/carer will be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

Castlebar School

RATIFIED BY THE GOVERNING BODY ON:

REVIEW DATE: Summer 2021

Appendix I: Dealing with Complaints Flowchart

(For details on how to complain about the Headteacher or a member of the Governing Body please see section 4 above)

