

LARNE GRAMMAR SCHOOL
COMPLAINTS POLICY AND
PROCEDURE



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Foreword

1. Ethos and Vision

1.1 Ethos

“Larne Grammar School promotes positive moral values in a climate of high expectations and achievement among all the individuals and groups based on mutual respect. Pupils exhibit self-control, personal responsibility and self-worth, developed in the classroom and through a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils learn, grow and succeed in an atmosphere of praise and encouragement which promotes a sense of belonging and enjoyment for everyone.”

1.2 Vision

“Larne Grammar School will strive to be a community-based centre of excellence whereby high quality teaching and learning will serve to enhance the lives of all, enabling pupils to achieve their potential in a spirit of mutual respect and support.”

2 At Larne Grammar School, we aim to work in partnership with pupils, parents/carers and members of the community. As such, we take complaints very seriously. 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.

3 Many issues can be addressed simply by talking to the relevant staff in school who will be happy to help. Open communication and regular engagement between the school staff and parents/carers and other stakeholders is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole school community.
We take all issues seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

4 We welcome open communication with the following members of staff:
Class Tutors and Year Heads - pastoral/general study-related matters;
Heads of Department - academic/subject-related matters;
Vice-Principals or Principal - concerns other than the above.

Scope of the Complaints Procedure

A complaint is described as an expression of dissatisfaction with our work.

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 (see below). However, if your complaint refers to the school’s failure to correctly administer any of these procedures, then you may complain by means of this procedure.

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Complaints with separate established procedures

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/ Chair 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 |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)• School Development Proposals• Child Protection / Safeguarding |

The school will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Chairperson 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 Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

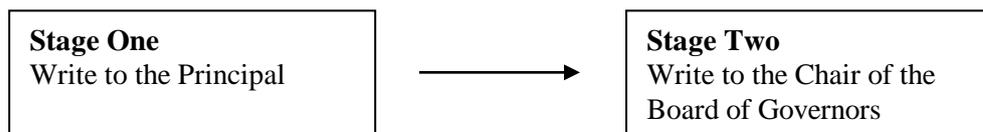
Aims

When dealing with complaints the school will:

- encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible;
- provide timely responses to concerns and complaints;
- 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, 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.

Complaints Procedure – At a Glance



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Time Limit

To enable complaints to be resolved, 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(s) about which you are complaining.

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, proceed to Stage Two.* 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 you with this process.

When writing your complaint, please provide clear information and include the following:

- your name and contact details;
- what your 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 your complaint.

The Principal will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but 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 final response normally made within 20 school working days of receipt of the complaint. This response will be issued in writing and will indicate with reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

If, for any reason, the consideration of a complaint takes longer to complete, you 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.

If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Stage One, the complaint may be progressed to Stage 2, which is overseen by the Board of Governors.

Stage Two

If your complaint is about the Principal, or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (*c/o the school and marked 'private and confidential'*). Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

The Chairperson will convene a committee to consider the complaint. The Committee will have a minimum of 3 voting members. In the case of the complaint being about the Principal, this committee will investigate the complaint.

If the Chairperson of the Board of Governors is the subject of the complaint, you should write to the Vice Chair of the Board of Governors.

Please provide clear information and include the following:

- reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings;
- any aspect of the school's complaints procedure which you think was not fully followed.

The chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from the date of the second letter. The response will be issued by the chairperson of the committee and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

If, for any reason, the consideration of a complaint takes longer to complete, you will be informed of revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

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

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 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: 028 9023 3821
Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

What to expect under this procedure

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with 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.

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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.

Rights of parties involved during the investigation

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

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 the person is 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 (e.g. local MLAs / councillors / Citizens' Advice Bureau / Parenting NI / Children's Commissioner).

Staff Members - should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process e.g. union representative, colleague¹.

Pupils - permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent, guardian or other nominated adult 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.

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

Timeframes

Where concerns are raised with the relevant Teacher or Principal, a response will normally be provided during the meeting or within an agreed timeframe.

Stage One – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

Stage 2 – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days, with final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

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.

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

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.

¹ 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).

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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 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.

Review and Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed and evaluated at least every three years by the Board of Governors, in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team, taking into account changes to legislation and best practice advice and guidance from the Education Authority and/or the Department of Education.