

Our Lady and St Patrick's College, Knock



Complaints Procedure

Procedure Details

Legal Status	Adopted	Version Date	Last Review	Next Review	Responsible
Non-Statutory	30 th September 2025	August 2025	June 2021	June 2029	Miss McLaughlin

Related Documents

1. Guidance on Using the School Complaints Procedure - Education Authority
2. Handling School Complaints (Support for School Governors) - Education Authority
3. Communications Policy

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1. Introduction

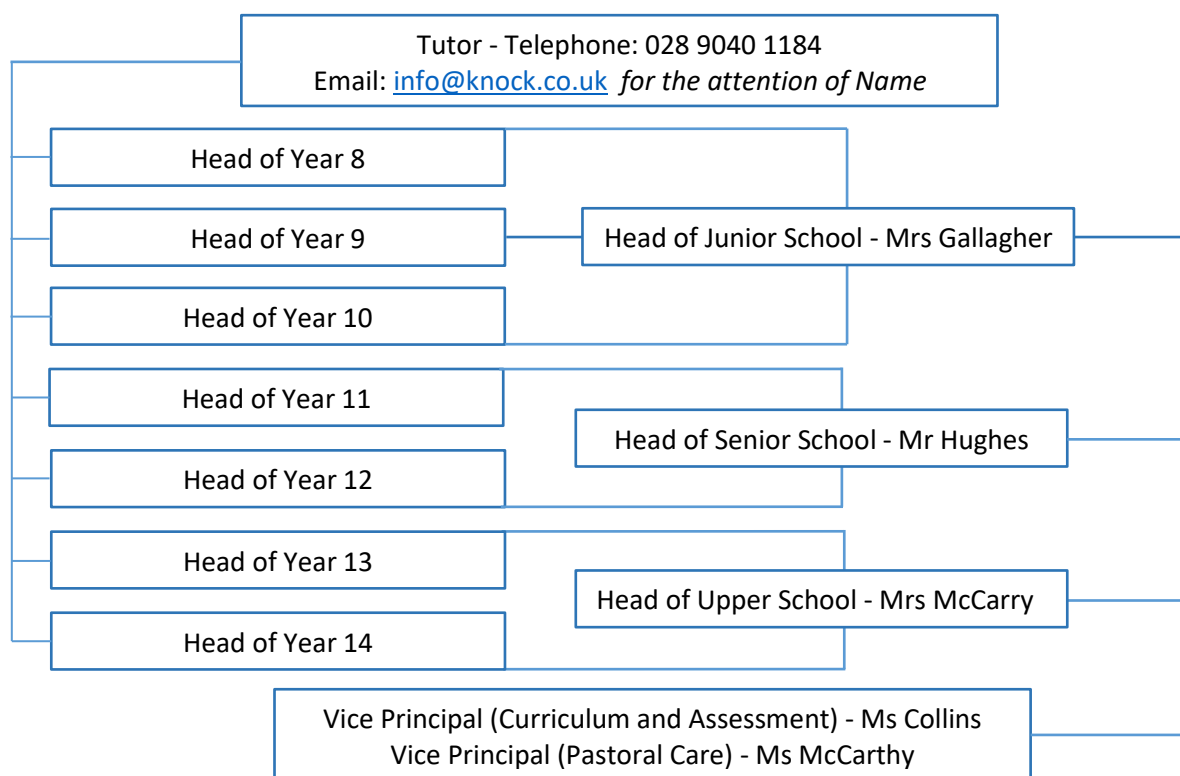
1.1 School Information

Mission Statement: “Our Lady and St Patrick’s College, Knock cares for young people in a way that encourages them to develop to their full potential within a supportive Christian community. We seek to prepare our students to play an active and responsible role in society, and to use their talents for the service of others.”

In Our Lady and St Patrick’s College, Knock we value the opinions and feedback of our school community. We take complaints seriously as we have the best interests of our students and their families at the centre of all we do. We encourage anyone with a school-related issue to speak to a member of staff (see 1.2) as soon as possible. Open communication and regular engagement between the College, parents and other stakeholders is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole school community. This procedure reflects Guidance on Using the School Complaints Procedure (Education Authority).

1.2 Communication Chart

We welcome parental communication with our staff (see below). In the first instance, issues should normally be raised by parents via telephone (028 9040 1184) or email (info@knock.co.uk), marked for the attention of your child’s Tutor/Head of Year/Head of School or a Vice Principal. The College takes all issues seriously and makes every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.



Parents should observe the College’s arrangements for making any appointments. College staff will endeavour to arrange an appointment within 10 working days. This approach will not prevent you from choosing to enter the formal process at a later stage, if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.

Other users of this Procedure should telephone Reception (028 9040 1184) or email: info@knock.co.uk for the attention of a Vice Principal.

If you wish to make a formal complaint, please follow the College’s Complaints Procedure (Pages 6-9).

2.0 Scope of the Complaints Procedure

A complaint is described as a formal, written expression of dissatisfaction with our work.

2.1 Complaints with Established Procedures

The Board of Governors, together with the Principal and staff, are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. The College's Complaints Procedure sets out how any formal expression of dissatisfaction relating to the College will be managed. By taking complaints seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that they can be resolved quickly and effectively.

Examples of such complaints may include: not following school policy; communication delays or lack of communication; difficulties in staff/student relationships.

2.2 Complaints with Separate Established Procedures

This Complaints 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 Procedure.

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms which are not part of the College's complaints procedure are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/Chairperson of the Board of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

Exceptions: Admissions
 Child Protection/Safeguarding
 Statutory Assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 Suspensions and Expulsions

2.3 Anonymous Complaints

The College 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 dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

3. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

3.1 When Dealing with Complaints, the College Aims to:

- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use;
- Encourage resolution as quickly as possible;
- Provide responses within the set timeframes;
- Keep the complainant informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of the 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 help prevent it happening again;
- Be responsive to learning from outcomes that will inform and improve practice within the school;
- Be impartial and non-adversarial.

3.2 Availability of Procedure

A copy of this Procedure is available on the College website or from the Reception on request.

4. What to Expect under this Complaints Procedure

4.1 Your Rights as a Person Making a Complaint

In dealing with your complaint, we will ensure that you receive:

- Fair treatment;
- Courtesy;
- A timely response within the timeframes;
- Accurate advice;
- Respect for your privacy - complaints will be treated as confidentially as possible, allowing for the possibility that we may have to consult with other appropriate parties about your complaint;
- Clear reasons for our decisions.

Where the complaint is upheld, we will acknowledge this and address the complaint you have raised. If, after investigation, it is judged that there are no grounds for your complaint, you will be advised accordingly.

4.2 Your Responsibilities as a Person Making a Complaint

When making a complaint it is important that you:

- Raise issues as soon as reasonably practicable in a timely manner;
- Treat our staff with respect and courtesy;
- Provide accurate and concise information in relation to the issues raised; and
- Use these procedures fully and engage with them at the appropriate levels.

4.3 Rights of Parties Involved during the Investigation

Complainant - Where a meeting is arranged, the complainant should be informed that he/she 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.

If the complainant feels unable to speak on his/her own behalf, he/she may avail of support from outside agencies, e.g., local MLAs/Councillors/Citizens' Advice Bureau/Parenting NI/Children's Commissioner, as agreed with the College.

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

Students: if applicable, permission should be sought from parents/guardians, and a parent, guardian or other nominated adult should accompany students.

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.

4.4 Legal Representation

Legal representation, or representation by a person, or persons acting in an official capacity, is not permitted within this Complaints Procedure.

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

¹ For information on workers' statutory rights to be accompanied, this should be read in accordance with the LRA's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures.

4.5 Timeframes

Stage One - The College will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and in any event within 10 school working days, with a final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

Stage Two - The College will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and in any event within 10 school working days, with a final response normally provided within 20 school working days.

Stage Three - The College will normally acknowledge the appeal as soon as possible and in any event within 10 school working days, with a final response normally provided within 30 school working days.

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

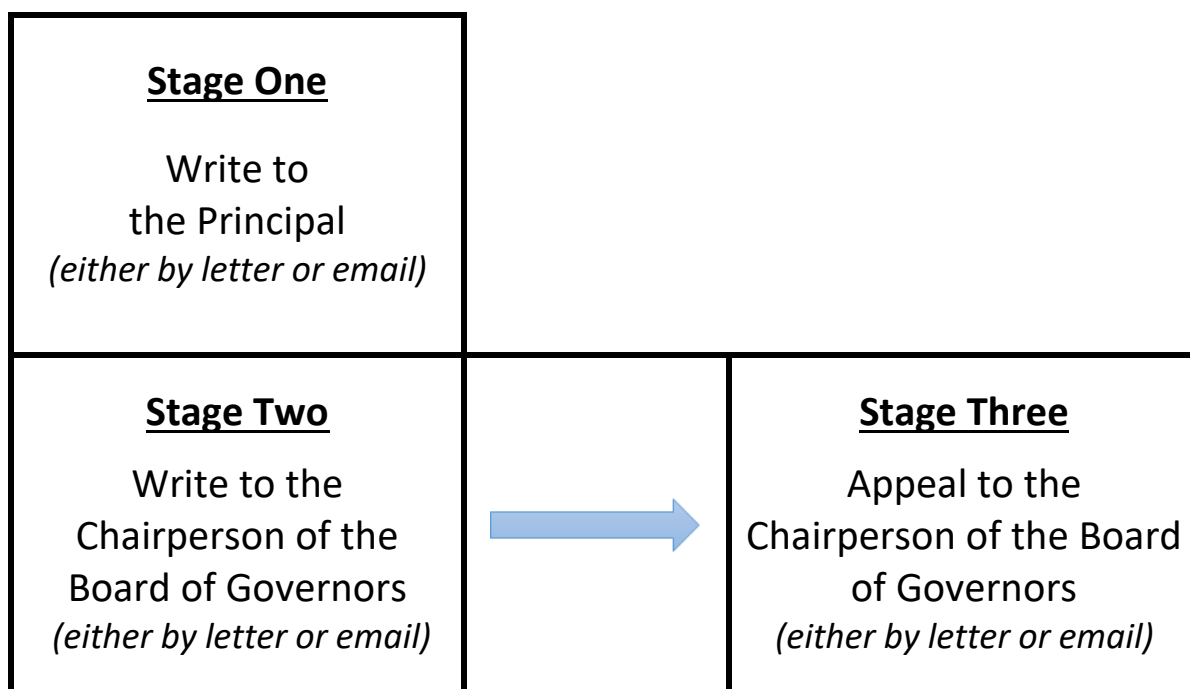
Timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods.

4.6 Equality

The College requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the College so that reasonable arrangements can be made to support the complainant with this process.

5. Making a Complaint

5.1 Complaints Procedure at a Glance



5.2 Time Limit

To enable complaints to be resolved, please contact the College 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.

5.3 Stage One

When making a complaint, write to the College Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. The investigation may require you to meet the Principal and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Principal may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint. If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.

The College requires complaints to be made in writing, either by letter or email. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the College 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
- What you would like the College to do to resolve your complaint

The Principal will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and in any event within 10 school working days. This will be a short response and you will be sent a copy of, or a link to, the College's Complaints Procedure. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days of receipt of the complaint. The 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, the complainant will be informed of the revised time limits and kept updated on progress.

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 Two which is overseen by the Board of Governors (Complaints Committee).

5.4 Stage Two

If your complaint is about the Principal or if you feel your complaint is unresolved after Stage One, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors who will convene a Complaints Committee of the Board of Governors to consider the complaint. The Complaints Committee will have a minimum of three voting members. The investigation may require you to meet the Committee and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Committee may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

The College requires complaints to be made in writing. Your letter can be left at the College Reception and marked '*Private and Confidential*' for the attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors or emailed for the attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors via info@knock.co.uk. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the College which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process.

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

In the case of your complaint being unresolved after Stage One, the Committee will investigate the complaint. Please provide clear information and include the following in writing:

- Reason(s) why you disagree with the Stage One findings
- Any aspect in which you think that the College's Complaints Procedure was not fully followed

The Chairperson of the Complaints Committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and in any event within 10 school working days. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days of receipt of the Stage Two complaint. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the Complaints Committee and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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

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

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

5.5 Stage Three

If you feel your complaint is unresolved after Stage Two, you may write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors who will convene an Appeals Committee of the Board of Governors to consider the complaint. The Appeals Committee will have a minimum of three voting members. The investigation may require you to meet the Committee and due notification will be given of such meetings. The Committee may also talk to the parties relevant to the complaint.

The College requires appeals to be made in writing. Your appeal can be left at the College Reception and marked '*Private and Confidential*' for the attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors or emailed for the attention of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors via info@knock.co.uk. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the College which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process.

In the case of your complaint being unresolved after Stage Two, the Committee will investigate the complaint. Please provide clear information and include the following in writing:

- Reason(s) why you disagree with the Stage Two findings
- Any aspect in which you think that the College's Complaints Procedure was not fully followed

The Chairperson of the Appeals Committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible and in any event within 10 school working days. A final response will normally be made within 30 school working days of receipt of the Stage Three appeal. The response will be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the Appeals Committee and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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

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

5.6 Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

If, following Stage Three, 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 the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman are provided below:

Telephone: 028 9023 3821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Website: www.nipso.org.uk

Freepost: Freepost NIPSO

Address: Office of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN

Office Hours: 9.00am - 5.00pm Monday to Friday

6. **Unreasonable Complaints**

The College 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 has been reviewed by the Ombudsman, the complainant remains dissatisfied. The College must balance the rights of an individual to make a complaint and to 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.

Signed: **Mr Leo O'Reilly**
(Chairperson of Board of Governors)

Date: **30th September 2025**

Signed: **Miss Deborah McLaughlin**
(Principal)

Date: **30th September 2025**