
Belfast Royal Academy

per vias sapientiae



Complaints Policy
September 2025

Title	Complaints Policy
Summary	Guidance for all stakeholders regarding procedures to be undertaken when making a complaint to the school
Purpose	To ensure that complaints are dealt with effectively and in a reasonable timescale
Review Date	April 2025
Version Number	5
Supersedes previous	Yes
Author	Principal
Frequency of Review by Board of Governors	Every 3 years
Date last Reviewed and Approved by Board of Governors	September 2024
To be posted on School website	Yes

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1. FOREWORD

At Belfast Royal Academy, we take all complaints 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, they are more likely to be resolved efficiently and quickly.

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 or the wider school community is vital to the effective management of the school.

All parents should be aware that, regardless of the nature of a complaint and whether or not it is upheld, parents are not entitled to details of any related sanctions imposed on staff, pupils or parents for reasons of data protection and confidentiality.

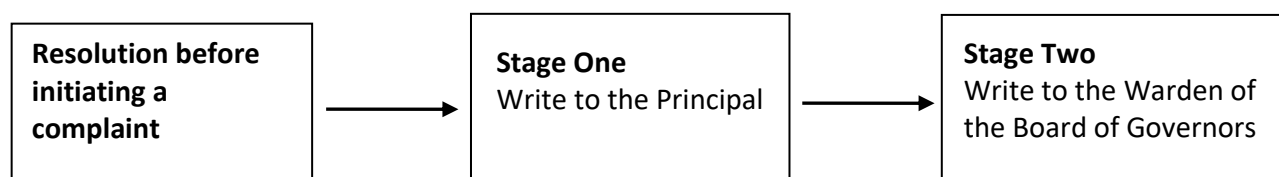
2. AIMS

When dealing with complaints the School will:

- encourage resolution of all concerns as quickly as possible
- provide timely responses to concerns and complaints
- keep you informed of progress
- ensure a full and fair investigation of your complaint where appropriate
- 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.

A copy of this Procedure is available on the School's website or is available from the school on request.

3. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE –AT A GLANCE



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 origin of the complaint to the school.

Who can make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Belfast Royal Academy about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

Resolution before initiating a complaint

Belfast Royal Academy takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. If you have a concern about any aspect of your child's education or pastoral wellbeing, you should first address this through discussion with your child's Head of Year or the school Principal. Many issues can be resolved without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns are resolved at the earliest possible stage. However, staff do not access their emails immediately while they are working with pupils. For urgent matters, a call to the General Office during office hours will ensure that the parent's concern receives appropriate attention.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Principal will refer you to another appropriate staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Principal will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

Where concerns are not successfully resolved, a complaint procedure is available as set out below.

How to make a Formal Complaint

Stage One

Complainants who are not satisfied with an informal resolution are now asked to put their complaint in writing using the template form in Appendix 1. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. *(see guidance notes for further information)*

Complaints against school staff (except the Principal) should be made in the first instance, to the Principal via the School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Principal should be addressed to the Chair of Governors (the Warden), via the School office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole Board of Governors should be addressed to the Head of Finance and Corporate Services (the Clerk to the Governing Body) via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask third party organisations like Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable complainants to access and complete this complaints procedure. For instance, providing information in alternative formats, assisting complainants in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

There may be occasions when it is necessary to deviate from this Complaints Policy if this is reasonable and justified. Complainants will be notified of the changes.

If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Stage 1, the complaint may be progressed to Stage 2 which is overseen by the Board of Governors.

Stage Two

If the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (The Warden) *(care of the School and marked 'Private and Confidential')* within ten working days. 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 review the complaint. Please provide as much detail as possible as indicated above.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working days and a final response normally made within 20 school working days from date of receipt of the complaint. The response will

be issued in writing by the Chairperson of the Committee. The decision of the Committee in respect of the complaint will be final and binding

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

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: 02890 233821

Freephone: 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints.

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.

4.2 Complaints with separate established procedures

Some examples of statutory procedures and appeal mechanisms are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/ Warden 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 www.eani.org.uk Director of Operations and Estates.
• Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services.
• School Development Proposals	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Education.
• Child Protection / Safeguarding	Contact www.eani.org.uk Director of Children and Young People's Services.

- 4.3** The School will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the Warden to be of a serious nature. The decision of whether to deal with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Board of Governors. *(see guidance notes for further information)*

5. WHAT TO EXPECT UNDER THIS PROCEDURE

5.1 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.

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.

5.3 Rights of parties involved during the investigation

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

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

5.4 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.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged within 5 school working* days and a response normally made within 20 school working* days of receipt of the complaint. This 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.

*working days for the purposes of this policy mean a day other than a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday. Term dates can be found on the School website. Any complaints raised during school holidays will be acknowledged and this policy will commence when the School re-opens. In calculating the number of days, the day of receipt of the complaint and the day of the despatch of the response will not be counted.

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

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

6. MAKING A COMPLAINT

6.1 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.

6.2 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 Warden 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.

6.3 Withdrawing a complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

7. 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.

Other relevant policy:

- Code of Conduct for Parents (September 2025)

APPENDIX ONE
Belfast Royal Academy – Complaint Form

Please read the School's Complaints Policy before completing this form. It provides information on when and how this form should be completed.

The person who experienced the problem should normally fill in this form. If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, please fill in Section B also. Please note that before taking forward the complaint, we will need to be satisfied that you have the authority to act on behalf of the person concerned.

This form should be completed and returned to the Principal either as a hard copy or via email to info@bfsra.belfast.ni.sch.uk or, if the complaint is against the Principal, the Warden of the Board of Governors via kholland303@c2ken.net

SECTION A	
Your name(s)	
Contact telephone day	
Contact telephone mobile	
Contact email address	
SECTION B	
If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else, what are their details?	
Name (in full)	
Address & Postcode	
What is your relationship to them?	
Why are you making this complaint on their behalf?	

SECTION C About your complaint	
Please give details of your complaint.	
Action taken to date (including staff member(s) who has/have dealt with it so far) and solutions offered.	
The reason(s) why this was not a satisfactory resolution for you.	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	

