



# Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School

## Board of Governors Complaints Procedure

### Reviewed September 2022

#### Introduction of a revised Model School Complaints Procedure

Please note that from 1st April 2017 the remit of the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) has included the investigation of complaints from members of the public in relation to maladministration in publicly-funded schools. In order to support schools, the Education Authority has been working with the Ombudsman's office and a range of other education bodies to review the current model School Complaints procedure and guidance documents, in order to ensure that these are compliant with the new powers associated with the Ombudsman's office. Consequently Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School has implemented an update of the Current School Complaints Policy that will include the alterations recommended by the "Revised Model School Complaints Procedure". This is an issue that has been previously discussed by the Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Board of Governors and School Staff. Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School notes the following main changes in the revised Model Policy: The previous complaints procedure was a 5 stage procedure. Under guidance from NIPSO, this has been revised to a 2 stage procedure. After conclusion of the second stage of this procedure, complainants may choose to refer the complaint to NIPSO.

#### 1. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The Board of Governors of Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School together with the School Principal set the direction and tone of the school in all that they do and are committed to working with parents in the best interests of their children's education. **The purpose of the Complaints Procedure is to address complaints raised by Parents/Guardians. This document is "linked" to the Home/School Communication Policy.**

The Complaints Procedure covers all matters relating to the actions of Staff (Teaching and Non-Teaching) employed in the school and the application of school procedures, where they affect individual pupils. However Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School is cognisant of the requirement to be clear about the "difference" between a concern and a complaint. Taking informal concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage will reduce the numbers that develop into formal complaints.

Where it becomes evident at an early stage that a matter should be dealt with according to other established procedures or appeals mechanisms, this Complaints Procedure will be set aside in favour of the agreed procedure such as Child Protection, Special Education, Admissions, Suspensions and Expulsions, Grievance, Discipline, Bullying and Harassment or Unsatisfactory Teaching Procedure.

The school **will not** deal with anonymous complaints (except for those concerning Child Protection matters) and therefore these procedures do not provide for a resolution of anonymous complaints.

## 2. AIMS

In operating this Complaints Procedure Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School will aim to:

- ✓ encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible
- ✓ 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.

The Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Complaints Procedures are designed to be:

- ✓ easily accessible and publicised. A copy of the procedures will be available on request from the school
- ✓ simple to understand and use
- ✓ impartial
- ✓ non-adversarial

## 3. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES (REVISED 2 STAGE PROCEDURE)

### Complaints Procedure – At a glance



### Time Limit

Please contact Harding Memorial Integrated Primary 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.

### Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Principal (Mr S Cumper) 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.

Please provide as much information as possible including;

- ✓ name and contact details
- ✓ what the complaint is about
- ✓ what has already been done to try to resolve it and
- ✓ what you would like the school to do to resolve the complaint.

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.

- ***These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Holiday Periods.***

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**

Write to the Chairperson of the Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Board of Governors – Mr Gerry Fleming (*care of the school and marked 'private and confidential'*) using the Harding Memorial Primary School Contact Information Address – 105 Cregagh Road, Belfast, BT6 8PZ.

### **Stage One**

Write to the Principal

### **Stage Two**

If the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors (*care of 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 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.

- ***These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during Harding Memorial Integrated Primary 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: 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)

**4. SCOPE OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

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.

**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	Contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school</li> </ul>	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Operations and Estates Sara Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)</li> </ul>	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Children and Young People’s Services Dr Clare Mangan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Development Proposals</li> </ul>	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Education John Collings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child Protection / Safeguarding</li> </ul>	Contact <a href="http://www.eani.org.uk">www.eani.org.uk</a> Director of Children and Young People’s Services Dr Clare Mangan

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

## 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.

#### Stage 1

Normally acknowledge within 5 school working days, response normally within 20 school working days

#### Stage 2

Normally acknowledge within 5 school working days, response normally within 20 school working days

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.

- ***These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Holiday Periods***

### 5.5 Equality

- Harding Memorial Integrated Primary 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.

## 5.6 Unreasonable Complaints

- Harding Memorial Integrated Primary 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 Chair of Governors 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.
- Where the Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School Board of Governors consider the actions of a parent/group of parents to constitute frivolous or vexatious behaviour, they will seek advice from the relevant Employing Authority in order to protect staff from further such actions.
- The information contained within this policy should be read in connection with the Harding Memorial Integrated Primary School – Parent/Guardian Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff Home and School Communication Policy that makes reference to The School Board of Governors is fully supportive of the Teacher Negotiation Committee (TNC) 2011/2 policy statement on **Tackling Violence and Abusive Behaviour against Teachers.**
- The TNC 2011/2 document is available to view using the web link below:  
<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/policy-statement-on-tackling-violence-against-teachers-tnc2011-2.pdf>
- TNC 2011/2 clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Employing Authority, the Board of Governors, the Principal and teachers when dealing with issues of violence or abusive behaviour against teachers in schools
- The aim of this TNC 2011/2 policy statement, which has been agreed by the employers and teachers' side of the teachers' salaries and conditions of service committee, is to affirm that violence and abusive behaviour against teachers is totally unacceptable.
- The Board of Governors has statutory obligations to provide a safe working environment and safe working practices for all their staff. The Board of Governors will not accept or condone violence or abusive behaviour against staff and acknowledges that no member of school staff **should work in fear of violence or abuse.**
- **Definition of Work Related Violence** - The Health and Safety Executive of Northern Ireland's definition of work related violence is '*any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.*'
- Where the approach of a parent/guardian might amount to harassment of school staff in person or on the phone this will not be tolerated.
- Under no circumstances should school staff be contacted at home or approached outside school concerning matters to do with school. Only parents or legal guardians have the right to request an interview with school teaching staff concerning a child.
- Under no circumstances should children be approached by an adult, other than school staff or their parents or guardian, while in school relating to any incident which has occurred in school.