



St. Michael's School

Parental Complaints Policy for Parents of Pupils currently enrolled

Introduction

This policy provides guidance for staff in the management of complaints received and in the process of complaint management for pupils and their parents/guardians. The date of this review is May 2019.

Rationale

The need for this policy arises from:

- Section 28, Education Act 1998 – procedures for processing complaints by parents prescribed for all schools under the Act.
- The obligation to document the policy and procedures which staff at St. Michael's School will follow when dealing with complaints from parents/guardians.

Relationship to School Ethos

*St. Michael's School strives to build an educational system which is based on respect for persons, on the recognition of their potential and the acceptance of human limitations.
Enrolment Policy.*

*We believe in an active partnership between home and school.
Mission Statement.*

All staff strive to create an environment where respect and integrity between pupils, parents/guardians and staff underpin everything that happens in St. Michael's School. We endeavour to enhance the self-esteem and environment of everyone within the school community. Parental support is vital to our success and their involvement is always welcome.

We value good relations with parents/guardians based on a mutual respect and a willingness to listen to other points of view. Whilst parents have a positive relationship with our school, sometimes difficulties may arise. It is therefore in the best interests of all parties that any concern is expressed and resolved quickly and at the earliest possible stage.

Aims and Objectives

We aim to:

- Foster trusting relationships between school and parents/guardians.

- Afford parents/guardians an opportunity to express opinions/grievances through the framework of a defined procedure.
- Minimize the opportunity for conflict.
- Be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint.
- Resolve any complaint through dialogue and mutual understanding and in all cases to put the interests of the pupil(s) above all other issues.
- Take complaints seriously in the first instance and conduct an honest and open review of the processes and outcomes involved, when deemed necessary.

This policy does not cover:

1. Complaints that are being dealt with through legal channels.
2. Matters of professional competence which comes under the remit of the Teaching Council /Department of Education and Skills.
3. Complaints which do not relate to the work of a particular teacher/special needs assistant.

Complaints are taken seriously and we conduct an honest and open review of processes and outcomes when we feel it necessary.

General Principles of Complaints

Initial Concerns

We need to be clear about the difference between a concern and a complaint. We endeavour to take all concerns seriously at the earliest stage, without the need for formal procedures. The requirement to have a complaints procedure need not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally.

Formal Procedures

The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

Framework of Principles

Fairness of procedures is important for all parties concerned. An effective Complaint Procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by **informal** means whenever possible.
- Be **clear** and **easy** to understand and implement.
- Be **impartial**.
- Allow **swift** handling with established **time limits** for action.
- **Keep** all affected parties informed in the progress of the investigation.
- **Investigate** the **details** of a complaint as far as possible and at the relevant stages of the investigation **take** the appropriate action.
- Respect people's desire for **confidentiality**.
- **Provide** information to the relevant members of the In-School Management Team so that **amendments** to relevant policies can be made when necessary.

In- School Procedures

The INTO and CPSMA reached agreement in 1993 on a procedure for dealing with complaints by parents/guardians against teachers. The purpose of this procedure is to facilitate the resolution of difficulties where they may arise in an agreed and fair manner. The agreement lays out in five stages the process to be followed at each stage. Only those complaints about teachers which are written and signed by parents/guardians of pupils may be investigated by the Board of Management. Unwritten complaints may be processed informally as set out in Stage 1 of this procedure.

In this procedure "days " means school days.

If a parent/guardian has a complaint the following steps are to be followed:-

Stage 1

1. The parent/guardian meets with the teacher on appointment. An appointment must be made through the school office as teachers cannot leave pupils in classrooms unsupervised. Parents should not contact teachers at home.
2. If the complaint is not resolved the teacher informs the Principal of the nature of the complaint. The Principal/Deputy Principal meets with the parent/guardian and/or teacher to seek resolution.
3. If the complaint remains unresolved the parent/guardian may raise the matter with the Chairperson of the Board of Management with a view to resolving it. Telephone details of the Chairperson are available from the Principal.

Stage 2

1. If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further, she/he should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
2. The Chairperson should bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the teacher and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3

1. If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Chairperson should, subject to the general authorisation of the Board, and except in those cases where the Chairperson deems the particular authorisation of the Board to be required:
 - a) supply the teacher with a copy of the written complaint,
 - b) arrange a meeting with the teacher and, where applicable, the Principal with a view to resolving the complaint. This meeting should take place within 10 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 4

1. If the complaint remains unresolved, the Chairperson should make a formal report to the Board of Management within 10 days of the meeting referred to in Stage 3.
2. If the Board of Management considers that the complaint is not substantiated, both parties will be informed within 3 days of the Board of Management Meeting.

3. If the Board of Management considers that the complaint is substantiated or warrants further investigation, it proceeds as follows:
 - a) the teacher should be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage,
 - b) the teacher should be supplied with any written evidence in support of the complaint,
 - c) the teacher should be requested to supply a written statement to the Board of Management in response to the complaint,
 - d) the teacher should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation to the Board. The teacher is entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting,
 - e) the Board may arrange a meeting with the complainant if it considers such to be required. The complainant will be offered a similar opportunity of bringing a friend at any such meeting,
 - f) the meeting of the Board of Management referred to in point d) and e) above will take place within 10 days of the meeting referred to in Stage 3, Point 1 b).

Stage 5

1. When the Board has completed its investigation, the Chairperson should convey the decision of the Board in writing to the teacher and the complainant within 5 days of the meeting of the Board.
2. The decision of the Board shall be final.

Investigating Complaints

It is suggested that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint, ensures that they:

- Establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary).
- Clarify what the complainant feels would resolve the matter.
- Interview those involved in the matter, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish.
- Conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning.
- Keep notes of the interview.

Resolving Complaints

At each stage in the procedure it is important to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient where appropriate to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. It may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- An apology.
- An explanation.
- An admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better.
- An assurance.
- An explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure *as far as is possible and within reason* that it will not happen again.
- An undertaking to review the relevant school policies in light of the complaint.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation differently is not the same as an admission of negligence.

Recording Complaints

The process of the complaint and the final outcome will be recorded. It would be helpful if the Principal/ Deputy Principal/ Relevant Staff Member ensured that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A record of meetings and telephone calls can be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

The Principal/Deputy Principal is responsible for the records which are held in the school office.

Success Criteria

- Swift and efficient resolution of grievances.
- Parent/Guardian/Staff satisfaction.
- Positive school community feedback.

Review

The level and nature of complaints will be monitored by the Principal/Deputy Principal if and when necessary. The outcomes will be reviewed during each school year in order to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure. Changes where necessary will be addressed.

Implementation

This policy has been in operation since 21st November 2008 and current review date, May 2020.

Signed: Sr. Bernadette Carron
Chairperson, Board of Management

Date: 20.05.2020.

Additional Information

Query e-mail to CPSMA

A chara

In our Parental Complaints Policy we have stated the following:

*This policy provides guidance for **staff** in the management of complaints received etc.*

Under the section In-School Procedures, if a parent/guardian has a complaint, the following steps are to be followed:

1. The parent/guardian meets with the **teacher** on appointment. Throughout these steps, the word **teacher** is used.

Given that we have a compliment of 18 Special Needs Assistants and in the event of a complaint against one of them, as the INTO and CPSMA reached an agreement in 1993 on a procedure for dealing with complaints by parents/guardians against teachers, does this procedure also apply to Special Needs Assistants and do you think it would be acceptable to their Union as they were not part of the original agreement?

Please advise.

Is mise le meas,

Sr. Bernadette Carron
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Response received from CPSMA on 3rd November 2008

As of now as we have no agreed procedures in relation to issues re SNAs we are using what is there under positive staff relations

There are moves afoot ongoing to have disciplinary procedures in place for SNAs agreed with their unions

In the absence of agreement there is a Statutory Instrument 146 of 2000 attached which is instructive.