



Methodist College Belfast

Complaints Policy and Procedure

June 2021

Last reviewed: June 2021
Next review: June 2025

Responsibility for review within College: School Business Manager
Sub Committee review by: HR Committee

1. Introduction

At Methodist College Belfast we take all complaints seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. In this regard we encourage anyone with a concern to speak to us as soon as possible and we will make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

2. Informally raising a concern

Many issues can be addressed informally 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.

It is normally appropriate to communicate promptly directly with your pupil's Form Tutor.

If your concern is of a particularly serious or sensitive nature you may prefer to discuss it with a member of staff responsible for the area you are concerned about, for example a Head of Form, Head of Department or Deputy Head of Pastoral Care. This may be by letter, by telephone or in person by appointment requested via School Reception.

Many concerns can be resolved by a simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved at this informal stage. Members of staff will make sure that they understand what you feel went wrong and will explain the College's actions to you. This does not mean that in every case they will come round to your point of view but it will help both you and the College to understand both sides of the issue and may prevent a similar problem arising again.

If you are dissatisfied with the response you receive, you can informally bring the matter to the attention of the senior member of staff with responsibility for the particular area in which you have a concern, either the Head of Department, the Head of Section or the Head of Pastoral Care. You may be invited to come into school to discuss your concern and it may be appropriate for another member of staff to be present. The senior member of staff will carry out an investigation where this is necessary or would prove helpful and will seek to resolve the matter to your satisfaction.

If you are uncertain about who to contact seek advice from School Reception.

If you wish to make a formal complaint, please follow the procedure described within this document.

3. Scope of the Complaints Procedure

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

The College will not normally investigate an anonymous complaint, unless deemed by the Chair of the Board of Governors to be of a very serious nature. The decision to deal with such complaints will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Governors.

A number of complaints have separate, established external procedures. This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however if your complaint relates to the College'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 are listed below. This list is not exhaustive.

Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from the College	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Operations and Estates via www.eani.org.uk
Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Children and Young People's Services via www.eani.org.uk
Child protection / Safeguarding	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Children and Young People's Services via www.eani.org.uk
School development proposals	Contact the Education Authority's Director of Education via www.eani.org.uk

4. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

When dealing with complaints the College aims to:

- 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 College.

5. Complaints procedure

After raising an issue informally, if you are dissatisfied with the outcome the following procedure should be followed.

Time limit

Unless there are exceptional circumstances complaints will only be considered within 6 months of the date of the incident(s) about which you are complaining.

Formal Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the College Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. If the complaint is about the Principal proceed to Stage Two. The College requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this presents difficulties, please contact the College 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, try to be as specific as possible;
- What you have already done to try to resolve the complaint informally;

- What you would like the College to do to resolve your complaint.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged by the College as soon as possible but within 10 school working days. This will be a short response. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from receipt of the complaint in writing. This response will be issued in writing and will indicate whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. If the complaint takes longer to complete you will be informed in writing of revised time limits and kept updated on progress. These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during College holiday periods.

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

Formal Stage Two

If your complaint is about the Principal, or is unresolved after Stage One, please write to the Chair of the Board of Governors, care of the College and marked Private and Confidential. Where this presents difficulties please contact the College which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process.

Please provide clear information. If your complaint is about the Principal you should include the information listed under Stage One. If you are unhappy with the outcome at Stage One you should include the following:

- 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 Chair will convene a committee to review the complaint.

The complaint will normally be acknowledged by the Chair as soon as possible but within 10 school working days. This will be a short response. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from receipt of the complaint in writing. This response will be issued in writing from the Chair of the Committee convened to review the complaint and will indicate whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. If the complaint takes longer to complete you will be informed in writing of revised time limits and kept updated on progress. These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during College holiday periods.

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 response to a Stage Two complaint will in its concluding letter advise that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied.

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 College.

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 233 821
Free phone 0800 34 34 24

Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Web: www.nipso.org.uk

6. What to expect under this procedure

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with the 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;
- Clear reasons for decisions.

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 (for example by a spouse, friend, family member or interpreter) but not represented by another person.

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

7. Equality

The College requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties please contact the College which will make reasonable arrangements to support the complainant with this process.

8. 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 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 College with the same issue the College will consider this to be a vexatious complaint and will not respond further.

9. Review of procedure

The Complaints Policy and Procedure will be reviewed every four years by the HR Committee to ensure it remains workable and appropriate.