



## Wilson's Hospital School

# Complaints Policy

### Introduction

Procedures are necessary to ensure fair treatment for all in the school and acceptable procedures should be known, agreed, and observed in the interest of good relationships with Parents/Guardians/Students, good industrial relations with Staff, and harmony in the school environment. Throughout the procedures outlined below all communication between the Staff, Parent/Guardian and or Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) must take place in an atmosphere that is calm, dignified and in a climate that respects the viewpoint of either party involved in the Complaints Procedure.

It is to the advantage of the parties to the complaint that a speedy resolution be secured by the complaints process.

Periodic review of all procedures should take place to ensure practices are good and adhere to any developments in employment legislation or other legislation or case law.

### Purpose of Complaints Procedure

To provide a fair, consistent and equitable mechanism for processing complaints by Parents/Guardians or Students (who have reached the age of 18 years) against Staff.

To do so in a manner that affords all concerned full rights in accordance with natural justice.

To outline the procedures, which should be followed by all, School Management Board, Staff, Parents/Guardians and or Students over 18 years of age and or their representatives, in the event of complaints being made against Staff.

To provide a fair, consistent and equitable mechanism for processing complaints by Parents /Guardians or Students over 18 years of age against Staff in relations to decisions of the School, excluding those areas already dealt with by statutory appeal provisions or other School appeal procedures, particularly with regard to suspension or withdrawal of services or expulsion. This procedure may be invoked in this regard when other school procedures have been first exhausted. In regard to this heading stage 1 and stage 2 will be deemed to have been concluded where the Principal makes a determination with regard to a matter he/she has already investigated and determined.

### Exclusions

When complaints are deemed by the Principal//School Management Board to be:

- (i) On matters of professional competence which cannot be dealt with at school level and which may be referred to the Department of Education and Skills for investigation, the Complainant to be informed of any such decision;

- (ii) Frivolous, vexatious or anonymous complaints and complaints which do not impinge on the work of a Staff member in a school;
- (iii) Complaints in which either party has had recourse to law or to another standard procedure, may be excluded from the scope of this procedure.

## **Introduction**

- (i) Verbal complaints may be processed informally through Stage 1 of the procedure. Where the complaint is made in writing initially, the complaint should be processed through Stage 1 but a copy of the complaint should be given to the Staff member at Stage 1.
- (ii) Only those complaints which are written and signed by the Complainants may be investigated through stage three and or stage four of these procedures.
- (iii) The Complainant to be informed if the complaint is amenable to resolution within the terms of these procedures, and if not the reasons for this decision.

## **Stage 1**

- 1.1 Parent/Guardian who wishes to make a complaint should, unless there is good and sufficient reason, in the first instance make an appointment to discuss the matter with the Staff member concerned, with a view to resolving the complaint. A Student attending the school who is over 18 years of age who wishes to make a complaint should in the first instance lodge the complaint through the existing agreed pastoral care structures in the school.
- 1.2 If the Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) is unable to resolve the complaint with the Staff member, she /he should approach the Principal with a view to resolving it.

It is envisaged that most complaints received under Stage 1 would be resolved to the satisfaction of both parties to the complaint.

## **Stage 2**

- 2.1 A Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) who is unable to resolve the complaint at Stage 1 may seek an appointment to report and discuss the matter with the school Principal with a view to resolving the complaint. The Principal will arrange a meeting with a view to resolving the complaint. In some instances, and where deemed appropriate by the Parent/Guardian and the Staff member, it may be necessary for the Parent/Guardian, Staff member and school Principal to meet with a view to resolving the complaint. Such a meeting will take place within a maximum of seven days. Both parties to the complaint may be accompanied at such a meeting by a Trade Union representative or a friend/colleague.
- 2.2 Following the consultation process with both parties to the complaint, the Principal will communicate the outcome verbally to both parties.
- 2.3 If after Stages 2.1 and 2.2 the complaint is still unresolved, the Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) should be advised that they may raise the matter formally with the School Management Board as set out at Stage 3 with a view to resolving it.
- 2.4 In the case of a complaint against a Principal, the Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) should discuss the complaint with the Principal, who may be accompanied by a Union Representative or colleague in the first instance. If the Parent/Guardian/Student is unable to resolve the complaint with the Principal, the complaint may be processed as provided for at Stages 3 and 4 of this procedure.

It is envisaged that the overwhelming majority of complaints will be resolved at either stages 1 and 2.

### **Stage 3**

- 3.1 If the issue is not resolved at Stage 1 or 2 then the Parent/Guardian/Student should lodge the complaint in writing with the Secretary of the School Management Board.
- 3.2 The School Management Board should formally acknowledge receipt of the complaint, note it formally and appoint a member of the School Management Board and the school Principal to deal with the matter. Any member of the School Management Board to whom a complaint refers shall be excluded from discussion/decision of the School Management Board on the matter. If the Secretary to the School Management Board is the subject of the complaint, then correspondence in this instance should be addressed to the Chairperson, School Management Board.
- 3.3 The appointed representatives (if Principal is the subject of the complaint then 2 School Management Board Representatives) must, subject to the general authorisation of the School Management Board:
  - a) supply the Staff member with a copy of the written complaint, and a copy of all other written evidence submitted by the Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years).
  - b) supply the Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) with copy of all written documentation concerning the complaint received by the Principal from the Staff Member or report written by the school Principal following his/her investigation at Stage 2.2.
- 3.4 The duly authorised representatives of the School Management Board should convey the outcome of any discussions / investigation, in writing, to the Staff member, Complainant and the School Management Board and indicate whether or not the matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.
- 3.5 If the complaint has not been resolved at this stage and the Complainant wishes to proceed to Stage 4 she/he shall indicate this in writing to the School Management Board within a maximum of 10 school days of receipt of the letter referred to in 3.4.

### **Stage 4**

- 4.1 If the School Management Board considers the complaint is not substantiated, the Staff member and the Complainant should be so informed within 3 days of the School Management Board meeting.
- 4.2 If the School Management Board considers that the complaint warrants further investigation, it shall proceed as follows:
  - a) both parties to the complaint shall be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage;
  - b) both parties to the complaint shall be supplied with a copy of all written evidence relevant to the complaint;
  - c) the Staff member shall be requested to supply a written statement to the School Management Board in response to the complaint;
  - d) both parties to the complaint shall be afforded an opportunity to make formal presentations of their case/position to the School Management Board. Both parties to the complaint would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend/colleague (non-legal) or Trade Union representative at any such meeting, and
  - e) the meeting/hearing of the School Management Board referred to in 4.2(d) will take place within a maximum of 11 school days of the meeting referred to in 2.2.
- 4.3 When the School Management Board has completed its investigation, the decision of the School Management Board shall be conveyed in writing to the Staff member and the Complainant within 5 school days of the decision being taken. The Board will also outline how its decision is to impact on the student.

A member(s) of the School Management Board who has acted as an authorized representative(s) of the School Management Board in the investigation of the complaint should not participate in the decisions of the School Management Board relating to the application of any disciplinary action.

4.4 The decision of the School Management Board shall be final subject to section 4.5.

4.5 In the event of the complaint being upheld the Staff member will have recourse to Trade Union and Management agreements, where they exist, but all disciplinary procedures undertaken by the School Management Board will proceed in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

4.6 If disciplinary action is to be initiated against a Staff member after stage 4.4 it will be effected in accordance with procedures agreed between ACCS, ASTI, TUI and the DES.

4.7 Where the complaint lodged is proved to be groundless then all correspondence relating to complaint should be removed from the Staff members file except for a statement of the complaints and outcome of the investigation.

If the complaint is upheld, then the relevant file may be removed from the school records following agreement between all the parties involved.

### Notes

- (i) In this procedure a school day means a day on which the school is in operation.
- (ii) At all stages of the Complaints Procedure a written record should be kept of
  - a) the investigation undertaken;
  - b) communications to School Management Board/Parent/Guardian or a Student (who has reached the age of 18 years) and Staff member, and
  - c) the steps and /or decision taken.

Copies of this written record may be made available for inspection to the Complainant and to the Staff member concerned.

- (iii) This Code of Practice for processing Complaints made by Parents/Guardians of Students or Students (who have reached the age of 18 years) against a Staff member shall be reviewed by the ACCS, ASTI and TUI every five years or earlier at the request of any one of the parties.
- (iv) The Complaints procedure will be reviewed by ACCS and PACCS every five years or earlier at the request of either one of the parties.

Approved by the Board of Management on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2019