



Complaints Policy and Procedure

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1. Introduction

We hope that issues can be addressed by talking to the relevant staff. Open communication and regular engagement between the Naíscoil and persons with parental responsibility is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole Naíscoil community.

Naíscoil na Seolta aims:

- To strengthen the growth of an Irish-speaking community in the east Belfast area;

- To encourage holistic development of children within the Naíscoil;
- To provide Integrated Irish-medium education at preschool level for the children of the East Belfast area and in doing so promote the growth of Irish-medium Education and Integrated Education;
- Enhance the development of the Irish language and Irish-medium education of children under statutory school age in preparation for education in an Irish-medium primary school;
- To offer appropriate play facilities, and to assist parents/carers to take responsibility for and to become involved in the activities of the Naíscoil, ensuring that the Naíscoil offers opportunities for all children, regardless of religion, culture, race or means;
- To encourage the study of the needs of such children and their families and promote public interest in and recognition of such needs of such children and their families in the local area;
- To support the values and principles of all relevant associated bodies.

Here at Naíscoil na Seolta, we take complaints seriously. We have the best interests of all our pupils and their families at the centre of all we do. We encourage anyone with a worry to speak to us as soon as possible. If issues are dealt with at an early stage, then they are more likely to be resolved leaving no unnecessary dissatisfaction.

We welcome communication with our staff. Parents / carers can do this by contacting staff as outlined below:

We take all issues seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

1. Communication Chart

Naíscoil Leader/Leader - Ms Gerardine Monroe

Tel no. 07786782083

Email- naiscoil@scoilnaseolta.org

If the complaint refers to Safeguarding of Children, please refer to the Safeguarding Policy, and contact, if appropriate the Gateway Team (contact details in Section 4)

If you wish to make a complaint, please follow the Naíscoil Complaints Procedure below.

Complaints Procedure

2. Scope of the Complaints Procedure

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

2.1 Complaints with Established Procedures

Our Naíscoil Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the Naíscoil will be managed. By taking complaints seriously at the earliest possible stage, it is hoped that they can be resolved quickly and effectively.

Some examples of complaints dealt with:

- Not following Naíscoil policy;
- Communication delays / lack of communication;
- Difficulties in staff / child relationships.

This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures, however if your complaint relates to the Naíscoil’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, which are not part of the Naíscoil’s complaints procedure, are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Chair of the Committee will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

Exceptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN)● Naíscoil Development Proposals● Child Protection / Safeguarding

2.2 Anonymous Complaints

The Naíscoil will not normally investigate anonymous complaints, unless deemed by the chairperson of the board of governors to be of a very serious nature. The decision of dealing with such complaints will be at the discretion of the chairperson of the Committee.

3. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

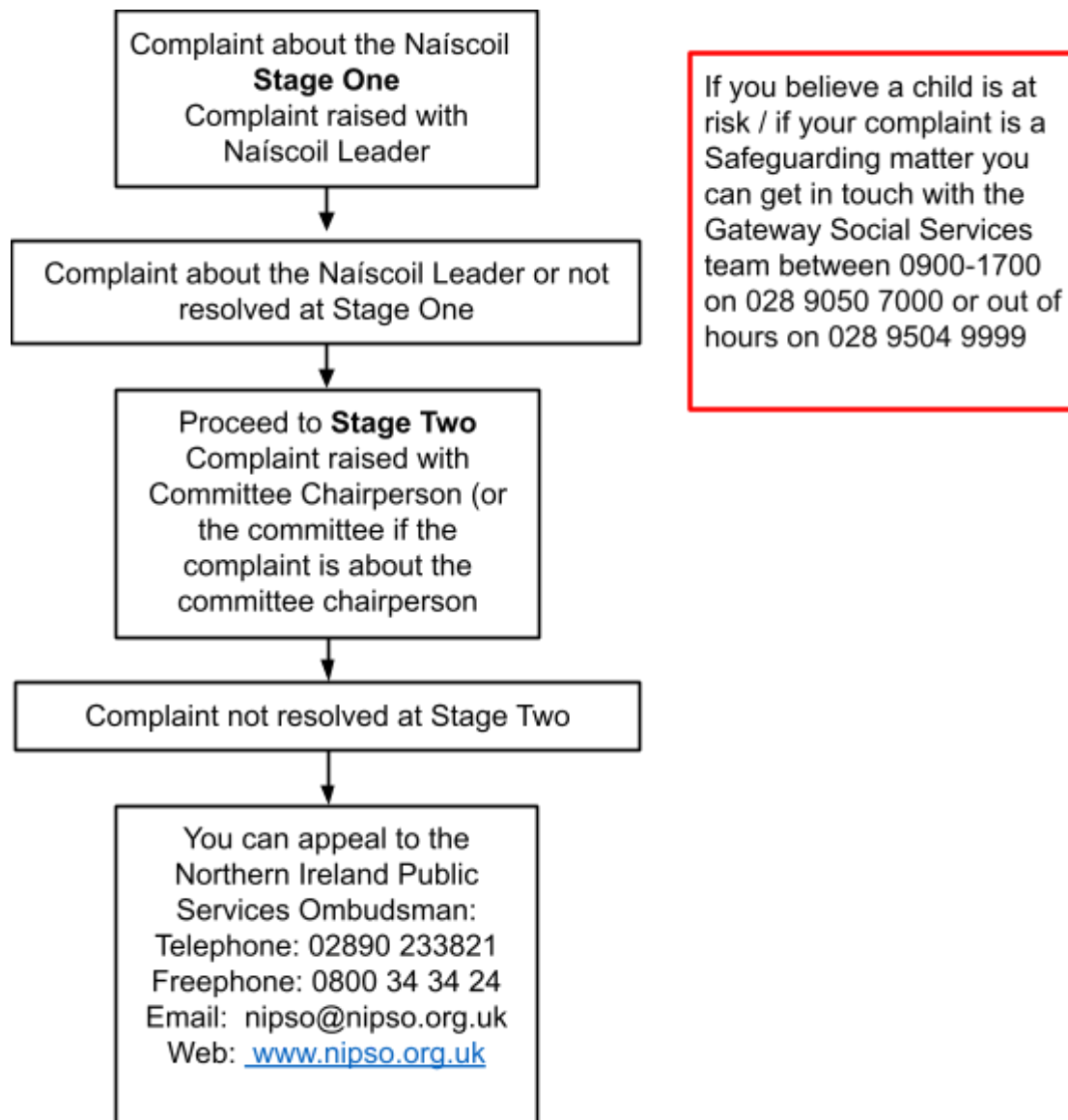
When dealing with Complaints Naíscoil na Seolta aims to:

- Encourage resolution as quickly as possible;
- Provide timely responses;
- Keep complainants informed of progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation of your complaint;
- Have due regard for the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved;
- Respect confidentiality, where appropriate;
- Fully address complaints and provide an effective response;
- Take appropriate action to rectify the issue and prevent it happening again;
- Be responsive to learning from outcomes that will inform and improve practice within the Naíscoil;
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial.

Availability of Procedure

A copy of this Procedure is available on our Naíscoil website or is available from the Naíscoil on request.

4. Complaints Procedure – At a Glance



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Time Limit

To enable complaints to be resolved, please contact the Naíscoil as soon as possible. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, complaints will normally only be considered within 6 months of the date of the incident(s) about which you are complaining.

Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the Naíscoil Leader who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. If the complaint is about the Leader, proceed to Stage Two. The Naíscoil requires complaints to be made in writing. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the Naíscoil which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process.

When writing your complaint, please provide clear information and include the following:

- Your name and contact details
- What your complaint is about – please try to be specific
- What you have already done to try to resolve it and
- What you would like the Naíscoil to do to resolve your complaint

The Leader will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but within 10 working days. This will be a short response and you will be sent a copy of, (or a link to) the Naíscoil's complaints procedure. A final response will normally be made within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint. This response will be issued in writing and will indicate with reasons whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld. If, for any reason, the consideration 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 Naíscoil holiday periods.

If you remain unhappy with the outcome at Stage One, the complaint may be progressed to Stage Two which is overseen by the board of governors.

Stage Two

If your complaint is about the Leader or if the complaint is unresolved after Stage One, write to the chairperson of the Committee. Where this may present difficulties, please contact the Naíscoil which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. The letter handed to the Leader and marked 'private and confidential'. The chairperson will convene a committee to consider the complaint.

In the case of the complaint being about the Leader, this committee will investigate the complaint.

Please provide clear information and include the following:

- Reason(s) why you disagree with the stage one findings;
- Any aspect in which you think that the Naíscoil's complaints procedure was not fully followed.

The chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within 10 working days. A final response will normally be made within 20 working days from the date of receipt of the second letter. The response will be issued by the chairperson of the committee and will indicate, with reasons, whether the complaint has been upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

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

These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during Naíscoil holiday periods.

Outside Agencies:

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 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 Naíscoil must advise in its concluding letter that the complaint may be referred to the NIPSO if you remain dissatisfied.

Contact details for NIPSO are provided below.

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

At Naíscoil na Seolta we work closely with Social Services. In the event of a complaint where you believe a child is at risk, please refer the matter to the Gateway Team

Anyone can contact this service directly in one of the following ways:

By phone:

During office hours (9.00am – 5:00pm) – you should contact Gateway on 028 9050 7000

At all other times (all through the night, at weekends and over Bank Holidays) – you should contact the out-of-hours Emergency Service: 028 9504 9999

In person:
Speak to a Duty Social Worker at
Gateway Services
110 Saintfield Road
BELFAST
BT8 6HD

5. What To Expect Under This Procedure

Your rights as a person making a complaint

In dealing with complaints 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.

Your responsibilities as a person making a complaint

When making a complaint it is important that you:

- 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 parties may be accompanied but not represented by another person.

Complainant: - should be informed that they may be accompanied but not represented by another person during the process e.g. spouse, friend, family member or interpreter, provided this person is not offering legal representation or acting in an official capacity.

If the complainant feels unable to speak on their own behalf, they may avail of support from outside agencies as agreed with the Naíscoil. (Local MLAs / Councillors / Citizens' Advice Bureau / Parenting NI / Children's commissioner)

Staff Members: - should be informed that they may be accompanied or represented by another person during the process e.g. union representative, colleague

Children: permission should be sought from parents / guardians and parent, guardian or other nominated adult should accompany pupils.

It may be appropriate to seek a written statement if a person is unable to meet for any reason.

Parties should normally be informed when a complaint is made against them and be able to see relevant correspondence. Exceptions may be made when the nature of the complaint falls within the remit of a separate policy.

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

Timeframes

Stage One – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within 10 working days, with final response normally provided within 20 working days

Stage Two – Normally acknowledge as soon as possible but at least within 10 working days, with final response normally provided within 20 working days

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

These timeframes may need to be reviewed if complaints are ongoing during Naíscoil holiday periods.

Equality

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

Unreasonable Complaints

The Naíscoil 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 has been reviewed by the Ombudsman, the complainant remains dissatisfied. The Naíscoil must balance the rights of an individual to make a complaint and have it fairly investigated with the rights of staff not to be subjected to unacceptable actions or behaviour.

Any decision to treat a complainant as unreasonable must take into account the need to ensure that the complaints procedure is being fairly applied and every attempt has been made to communicate and address concerns about behaviour/conduct with the complainant. In the event that such a decision has been taken, the complainant will be advised accordingly.

This policy links with the following:

- Allegations against staff policy
- Data protection policy
- Grievance procedure
- Records policy

Whistleblowing policy