



ST MARY'S COLLEGE

School Complaints Policy

DATE
AMENDED/APPROVED:

June 2026

REVIEW DATE:

June 2028

PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE:

Brendan McGinn

CHAIRPERSON TO THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
SIGNATURE:

Sarah Kelly

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Appendix A: Complaint Submission Template Stage 1 (13-14)

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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 school, parents/carers and other stakeholders is vital to nurturing positive relationships within the whole school community.

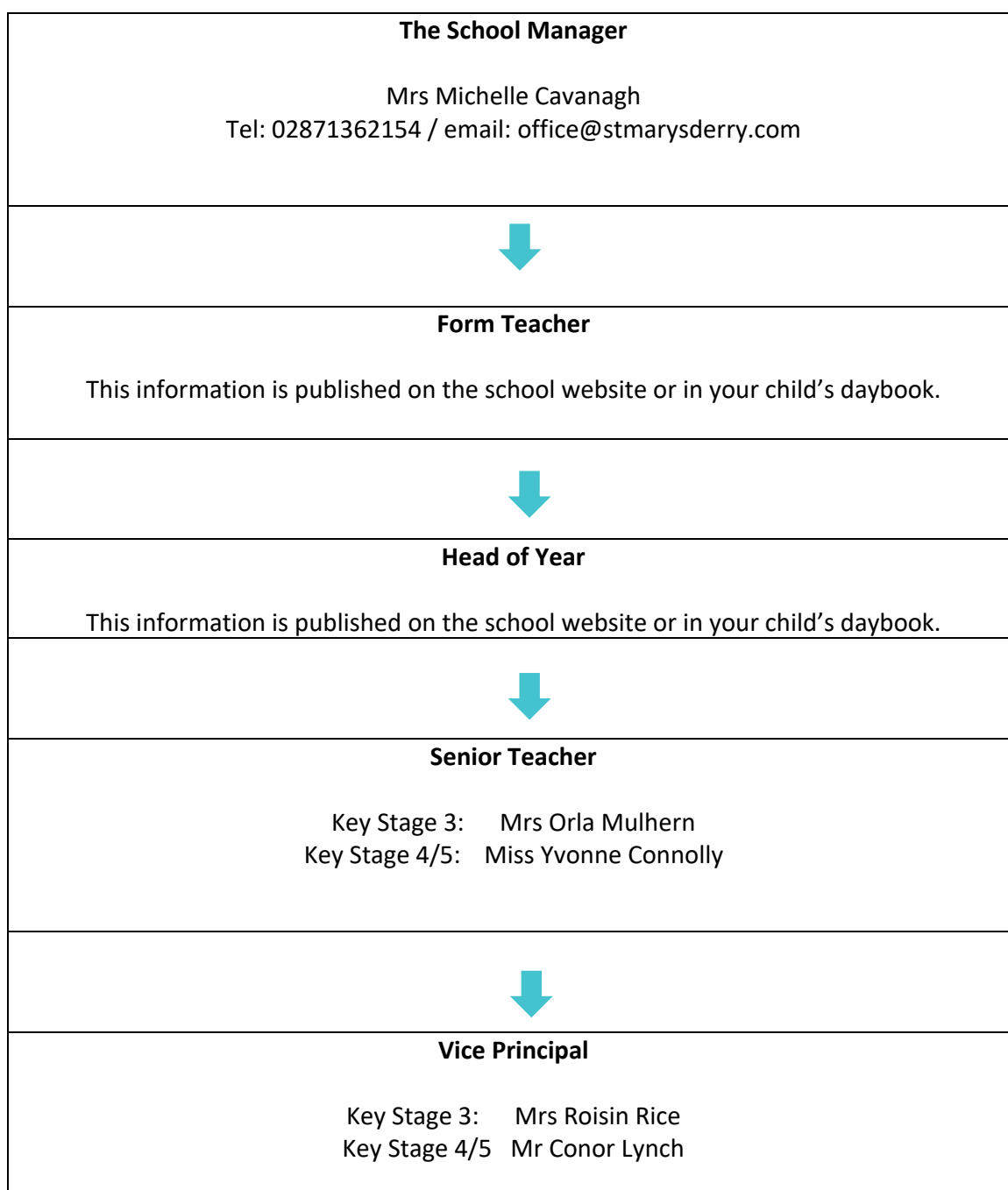
1.1. School Information

- Here at Saint Mary's College, we take complaints seriously. Our vision is to create a safe, vibrant, dignified and inclusive learning community placing at its centre our Mercy Values rooted in the Catholic Faith. We will strive to ensure each child is nurtured spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, physically and socially including responsible citizenship, global awareness and life lasting wellbeing skills. 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. In the first instance, a concern should be raised verbally with the teacher concerned or with your child's Form Teacher, Head of Year, Senior Teacher for the relevant Key Stage or one of the Vice Principals.
- This approach will not prevent you from choosing to enter into the formal process at a later date if you believe that to be an appropriate course of action.
- We take all issues seriously and make every effort to resolve matters as quickly as possible.

Parents / carers can do this by contacting staff as outlined below:



1.2. Communication Chart



If you wish to make a complaint, please follow the School Complaints Procedure on the following pages.

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 school Complaints Procedure sets out how any expression of dissatisfaction relating to the school 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:

- The school not following school policy
- Communication delays / lack of communication
- Difficulties in staff / pupil relationships

This procedure should not be used for complaints with separate established procedures; however, if your complaint relates to the school'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 school's complaints procedure, are listed below. The list is not exhaustive. The Principal/ Chair of Governors will advise on the appropriate procedure to use when a complaint is raised.

Exceptions
• Admissions / Expulsions / Exclusion of children from school • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs (SEN) • School Development Proposals • Child Protection / Safeguarding

2.2 Anonymous and Unauthenticated Complaints

Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated. We will not ordinarily consider complaints where the identity of the complainant cannot be reasonably verified. This includes complaints submitted in a format which appears to be automated, mass-generated or lacks sufficient evidence of authenticity.

However, the school reserves discretion to consider anonymous complaints where the matter is serious, particularly where there are safeguarding or welfare concerns.

The school reserves the right to request confirmation of identity before proceeding. The decision to investigate such complaints remains at the discretion of the Chairperson of the Board of Governors.

2.3 Submission Requirements

Complaints should include relevant information such as key dates, details of the issue, and the outcome sought. Where necessary, the school may request additional information to assist in the investigation.

The school will make every reasonable effort to consider complaints. Where a complaint is unclear, excessively repetitive, or lacks sufficient information, the school may request clarification. If, after reasonable opportunity to provide this, the complaint cannot be progressed, the school will explain the reasons for this decision in writing.

We respectfully ask that complainants refrain from using AI to generate a complaint. In the event you do so, please make explicit reference to this fact. In the event clarification is required about your use or suspected use of AI, the school may arrange a meeting with you.

3. Aims of the Complaints Procedure

3.1. When dealing with Complaints

Saint Mary's College 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;
- 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 school.
- Provide a process that is simple to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial.

3.2. Availability of Procedure

A copy of this Procedure is available on our school's website or is available from the school on request.

4. Complaints Procedure – at a glance

Stage One

Write to the Principal

Stage Two

Write to the Chairperson of Board of Governors

4.1. Time Limit

To enable complaints to be resolved, please contact the school 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.

4.2. Stage One

When making a complaint, contact the school Principal who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated. **If the complaint is about the Principal, proceed to Stage Two.**

We ask that complaints be submitted in writing. In the first instance, address your written complaint to the Principal, who will arrange for it to be investigated. If your complaint concerns the Principal, please proceed directly to Stage Two.

If you experience any difficulty in putting your complaint in writing, you are encouraged to contact the school, which will make reasonable arrangements to support you in completing this process.

Please use the official complaint template (please refer to page 13 & 14) provided as an appendix to the complaints policy to complete your submission, which is designed to support you in clearly setting out your complaint.

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 and/or the school have already done to try to resolve it and
- What you would like the school to do to resolve your complaint

The Principal will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but within 10 school working days. This will be a short response and you will be sent a copy of, (or a link to) the school's complaints procedure. A final response will normally be made within 20 school 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.

These timeframes may need to be reviewed where complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods. Where a complaint does not meet the school's submission requirements and requires clarification or resubmission, the applicable timescales will commence once a

compliant submission has been received.

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.

4.3. Stage Two

The Chairperson will convene a committee to consider the complaint. The same applies as in stage one; complaints must be set out clearly and concisely including supporting evidence.

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 school's complaints procedure was not fully followed

If your complaint is about the Principal or if the complaint is unresolved after **Stage One**, write to the Chairperson of the Board of Governors. (Please use the official complaint template for this - please refer to page 15 & 16). Where this may present difficulties, please contact the school which will make reasonable arrangements to support you with this process. The letter can be left at the school office and marked '*private and confidential*'.

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

The Chairperson of the committee will normally acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible but at least within 10 school working days. A final response will normally be made within 20 school working days from 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.

These timeframes may need to be reviewed where complaints are ongoing during school holiday periods. Where a complaint does not meet the school's submission requirements and requires clarification or resubmission, the applicable timescales will commence once a compliant submission has been received.

4.4. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) www.nipso.org.uk

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 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

5. What To Expect Under This Procedure

5.1. 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.

5.2. 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
- Ensure complaints are proportionate in length and detail and clearly identify the core issue(s);
- Avoid submission of excessive, repetitive or duplicate material;
- Engage constructively and in good faith with reasonable requests to clarify or summarise complaints;
- Not submit multiple versions of substantially the same complaint through different channels;
- Ensure that any supporting material provided is relevant and necessary to the complaint.

Acceptable Conduct in Complaints

St Mary's College requires that all correspondence is conducted in a respectful and appropriate manner. Complaints must not contain language or statements that are abusive, derogatory, defamatory or otherwise inappropriate towards staff, pupils, parents or any member of the school community, including unsubstantiated or unfounded allegations.

St Mary's College will not accept or engage with complaints which contain such content. The school reserves the right to seek legal advice and take appropriate action where necessary in relation to such matters.

5.3. 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 school. (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, colleague¹

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

¹ For information on workers' statutory rights to be accompanied, this should be read in accordance with Section 3 of the LRA's Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures (Paras 110-116).

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.

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

5.4. Timeframes

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

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

5.5. Equality

The school is committed to ensuring accessibility for all. Support will be provided where required, including assistance with written complaints, translation, or other reasonable adjustments.

5.6 Unreasonable, Vexatious and Disproportionate Complaints (see separate policy for more detail and guidance)

St Mary's College is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. However, the School must balance the right of individuals to raise concerns with its duty to protect staff from unreasonable conduct and to ensure that its resources are used effectively for the benefit of pupils.

A complaint may be considered unreasonable where it:

- Is excessively lengthy, complex or unfocused;
- places a disproportionate burden on staff time and resources including numerous correspondences that require excessive time to deal with;
- repeats issues that have already been considered and responded to;
- includes excessive or irrelevant documentation;
- is submitted in a format that appears automated or lacks clarity and a clear factual basis;
- refuses to comply with reasonable requests to summarise or clarify;

- contains abusive, offensive or inflammatory content;
- involves persistent or repetitive contact regarding the same matter.

In such circumstances, the School reserves the right to:

- request that the complaint be limited to key issues;
- decline to consider part or all of the complaint;
- aggregate multiple submissions into a single response;
- restrict the frequency or method of communication;
- close the complaint without further investigation;
- confirm that no further correspondence will be entered into on the matter.

The School will not normally re-investigate matters which have already been fully considered unless new, material evidence is provided.

Any decision to apply these measures will be reasonable, proportionate, and communicated clearly to the complainant.

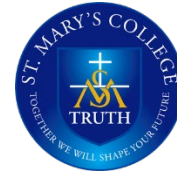
Conclusion

St Mary's College is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service. There may be occasions where, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been completed, including review by the Ombudsman, a complainant remains dissatisfied.

The School must balance the right of an individual to have concerns properly considered with the right of staff to be protected from unacceptable behaviour.

Any decision to treat a complainant as unreasonable will be made only after careful consideration, ensuring that the complaints procedure has been applied fairly and that reasonable efforts have been made to address concerns regarding conduct. Where such a decision is taken, the complainant will be notified in writing, with reasons.

Appendix A



Complaint Submission Template Stage 1

This document should be completed by the complainant and must not be generated or completed using AI or automated tools.

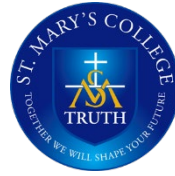
Full Name	
Contact Details	
Child's Name & Class	
Subject of the Complaint: Please provide a clear and specific description of what your complaint is about, including relevant dates, people involved, and key details.	
Steps Already Taken: Explain what actions you have already taken to try to resolve the issue, including who you have spoken to and any outcomes	

Desired Outcome: State what you would like the school to do to resolve your complaint	
Additional Information: Include any further relevant details or supporting information	
Signed:	
Date:	

Please ensure your response is clear, factual, adheres to the policy requirements.

Attach any supporting documents if necessary.

Appendix B



Complaint Submission Template Stage 2

This document should be completed by the complainant and must not be generated or completed using AI or automated tools.

Full Name	
Contact Details	
Child's Name & Class	
Subject of the Complaint: Please provide a clear and specific description of what your complaint is about, including relevant dates, people involved, and key details.	
Steps Already Taken and Reason(s) why you disagree with the Stage One Findings	
Explain what actions you have already taken to try to resolve the issue, and why you disagree with stage one findings including any aspect in which you think that the school's complaints procedure was not fully followed.	

Desired Outcome: State what you would like the school to do to resolve your complaint	
Additional Information: Include any further relevant details or supporting information	
Signed:	
Date:	

Please ensure your response is clear, factual, adheres to the policy requirements.

Attach any supporting documents if necessary