

# SHIMNA INTEGRATED COLLEGE

## COMPLAINTS POLICY

### **Introduction**

Shimna Integrated College values very much the contribution that parents/guardians make to their children's education. It is recognised, however, that there are times when parents/guardians are concerned about their child's progress, or some other aspect of their schooling, that they wish to air their concerns. This policy is designed to assist staff and to guide parents/guardians in ensuring that issues are resolved in a timely fashion. The requirement to have a complaints procedure does not in any way undermine efforts to resolve the concern informally. In most cases the class teacher or the individual delivering the service in the case of extended school provision, will receive the first approach from a parent/guardian. In dealing with complaints from any source, the college will ensure that the rights and responsibilities of those involved, parents, students and members of staff are properly considered.

### **College Policy**

#### **1. General Principles**

In Shimna College, parents/guardians and students are encouraged to express their views with regard to any concerns or problems that they might have, so that staff, on receiving an early warning, can deal with them or prevent them from occurring in the future whenever possible. The following are the general principles that govern our approach to dealing with complaints from parents/guardians.

This complaints procedure is designed to:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised;
- be easy to understand and use;
- be impartial;
- be non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary; and
- provide information to college staff so that the quality of its provision can be improved.

#### **2. Communication**

Parents/guardians are fully entitled to contact the college should they feel concerned or unhappy about any aspect of their child's educational progress or treatment by peers or college staff. The college will take complaints seriously; parents/guardians will be listened to carefully and they will have ample opportunity to contribute to discussions

concerning their complaint. They will be informed of the outcomes and any agreed action orally and in writing within an agreed timescale. In circumstances where the complainant is a member of the college staff or the Board of Governors, the principal may suggest the possibility of the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) or other, acting as an intermediary on his/her behalf.

**NB** *To assist parents/guardians, the college has produced a simplified version of its complaints procedure in flow-chart form. [See Appendix 1]*

### **3. Cooperation**

The college needs the active support and cooperation of parents/guardians in resolving problems. Thus, when dealing with complaints raised by parents/guardians, the college staff will work co-operatively and supportively with them to resolve the issues raised, where possible, to everyone's satisfaction.

### **4. Respect and Courtesy**

In seeking to resolve problems and deal with complaints raised by parents/ guardians, the college will treat all those involved impartially and with courtesy and respect.

### **5. Support for Parents**

Should parents/guardians be dissatisfied with the outcomes of their complaints to the college, the principal will inform them of the further steps that they are entitled, or may wish, to take eg writing to the Chair of the Board of Governors via the college; contacting the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) Welfare Department; contacting the Department of Education; and/or approaching the local Citizen Advice Bureau. *[See Appendix 2]*

### **6. Support for Students**

The college will ensure that the child of the parents making a formal complaint is listened to and his/her contributions are taken seriously. It will also ensure that the student, on whose behalf the complaint is being made, along with other students who may be involved, is not discriminated against and is treated fairly, courteously and with respect. Students will be listened to and their various contributions taken fully into consideration prior to decisions being taken. When appropriate or requested, parents/guardians will be invited to accompany their child when being interviewed.

### **7. Support for Staff**

All members of staff are acquainted with this policy. They understand that parents/guardians may make complaints that will involve them or be against them. Complaints against a member of staff may require an investigation of the incident. Consequently, the college will ensure that, at all times, such members of staff are listened to; that their contributions are taken seriously; that they are treated with courtesy and respect; and that they are informed of the outcomes of any complaint involving them and of the action to be taken.

### **8. Confidentiality**

All conversations and written communications relating to a complaint from parents/

guardians or students will be treated with discretion. In some instances, however, it will be necessary to share the information with others involved in the operation of the complaints procedure. The college will generally disregard anonymous complaints unless someone is prepared to substantiate them. It is, however, at the discretion of the principal and/or the Board of Governors to decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants further consideration. In the course of dealing with a complaint, if information about criminality is divulged, the police will be informed. Records of complaints will be stored in a safe place in the college and will be available only on a “need-to-know” basis.

## **9. Staff Awareness And Training**

Members of the college staff, including non-teaching members, are made familiar with the complaints procedure through college-based training. They have access to it via the college intra-net and the staffroom notice board where it is displayed.

## **10. Managing And Recording Complaints**

### **a. Investigating Complaints**

Every effort will be made to keep to the times given at various points in this document. If a situation or problem arises that causes a delay, the parents/guardians will be informed at the earliest opportunity. At each stage of the procedure, the person investigating the complaint will make sure that s/he:

- establishes what has happened so far, and who has been involved;
- clarifies the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- meets with the complainant or contacts them;
- clarifies the parents’/guardians’ concerns and any suggestions for resolving the situation;
- interviews all those involved;
- conducts the interview with an open mind; and
- keeps notes of the interview.

### **b. Recording Complaints**

A record of the progress of the complaint to the final outcome will be kept in the college. This will include a record of complaints made in person, by telephone, or in writing or via the college complaint form [See Appendix 3]. At the end of a meeting or telephone call the member of staff concerned will ensure that the parents/guardians and the college have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls will be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record.

### **c. Governing Body Monitoring and Review**

The Board of Governors, through its committee system, will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make any necessary changes. Complaints information shared with Board of Governors will not name individuals. This process will be a useful tool in evaluating the college’s performance.

As well as addressing an individual’s complaints, the process of listening to, and

resolving complaints should contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, underlying issues that need to be addressed will be identified and addressed by the college management.

### **College Procedures For Dealing With Complaints**

**[See Appendix 1: Flowchart of Procedures]**

The following explains the college procedures for dealing with concerns or formal complaints made by parents/guardians. The college staff involved will endeavour to adhere to them to ensure the best possible service to parents/guardians. The following procedure is set out clearly in the flow chart *[See Appendix 1]*

#### **1. Initial Concerns**

Dealing with the expressed concerns of parents/guardians effectively will reduce the number of formal complaints to the college. Such concerns can often be dealt with quickly and to everyone's satisfaction.

##### **a. College Staff**

- Members of staff will treat seriously concerns raised by parents/guardians.
- They will respond positively to requests to discuss parents'/guardians' concerns, dealing with them as quickly as possible.
- They will inform the principal of any written/verbal request for a college-based meeting with parents/guardians.
- They will keep a written record of any formal discussions with parents/ guardians.
- They will adhere to any action plan agreed with parents/guardians.

##### **b. Parents/Guardians**

- Parents/guardians may at any time request a meeting with the relevant staff member in writing or via a telephone message.
- They may also talk about any concerns they have at formal meetings such as parents' evenings, arranged by the college.
- Should parents/guardians not be satisfied with the response to their initial concerns, they may raise the concern with the principal, or make a formal complaint to the principal.

***NB It is hoped that most concerns expressed by parents / guardians will be resolved at this stage.***

#### **2. Formal Complaint To The Principal**

##### **a. Principal**

- The principal will treat seriously all formal complaints from parents/guardians.
- The principal will acknowledge the receipt of any formal complaint. If possible, he will deal with any such complaints in writing and within ***five college days***.
- If a meeting is necessary, the principal will contact the parents/guardians parents'/guardians within ***three college days*** to make the necessary arrangements.
- The principal will keep a written record of any such meetings.

- The principal will provide the parents/guardians with a written statement of the outcomes of the meeting, within *three college days*.
- In circumstances where it is necessary for the principal to investigate a complaint, he will do so as quickly as possible and inform the parents/guardians in writing or via a further meeting of the outcomes and the measures to be taken to resolve the situation within *three college days* of completing the investigation.
- The principal will inform the chairperson of the Board of Governors of any formal complaints made by parents/guardians.
- In circumstances where the parents/guardians express dissatisfaction with how their complaint has been handled, the principal will inform them as to how they may proceed with a formal complaint to the Board of Governors.

#### **b. Parents/Guardians**

- Parents/guardians are entitled to make formal complaints to the principal.
- They may do so via a letter, the complaints form [*See Appendix 3*] which is available on request from the college office, or a telephone call to the college office.
- When attending meetings with the principal, parents/guardians may be accompanied by another person eg a family member, a friend, the college's Education Welfare Worker (EWO) a Social Worker etc, to provide support or speak on their behalf.
- If parents/guardians are dissatisfied with the response to their complaint, they may proceed with a formal complaint to the Board of Governors in writing.

### **3. Formal Complaint To The Board Of Governors**

#### **a. The Governors**

- The chairperson of the Board of Governors will acknowledge receipt of any formal complaints made to the Board by parents/guardians, within *five college days*.
- The chairperson will arrange for the matter to be investigated by the relevant sub-committee of the Board within a stated time span.
- The parents/guardians will be informed of the nature and scope of the investigation in writing or, if appropriate, via a meeting. Such investigations will include a meeting with the parents/guardians making the complaint.
- When the investigation is complete, the chair of the Board will arrange to meet with the parents/guardians and the chairperson on the investigating sub-committee to discuss the outcomes and provide them with a written record of the outcomes and the action to be taken.
- In circumstances where the parents/guardians are dissatisfied with how their complaint has been handled, the chairperson of the Board of Governors will inform them as to how they may proceed with a formal complaint to the Department of Education.

#### **b. Parents/Guardians**

- Parents may make formal complaints in writing to the chairperson of the Board of Governors.
- When attending meetings with Board members, parents/guardians may be accompanied by another person eg a family member, a friend, the college's EWO, a Social Worker etc, to provide support or speak on their behalf.

- If parents/guardians are dissatisfied with how their complaint has been handled, they may make a formal complaint to the Department of Education.

#### **4. Formal Complaint To The Department Of Education**

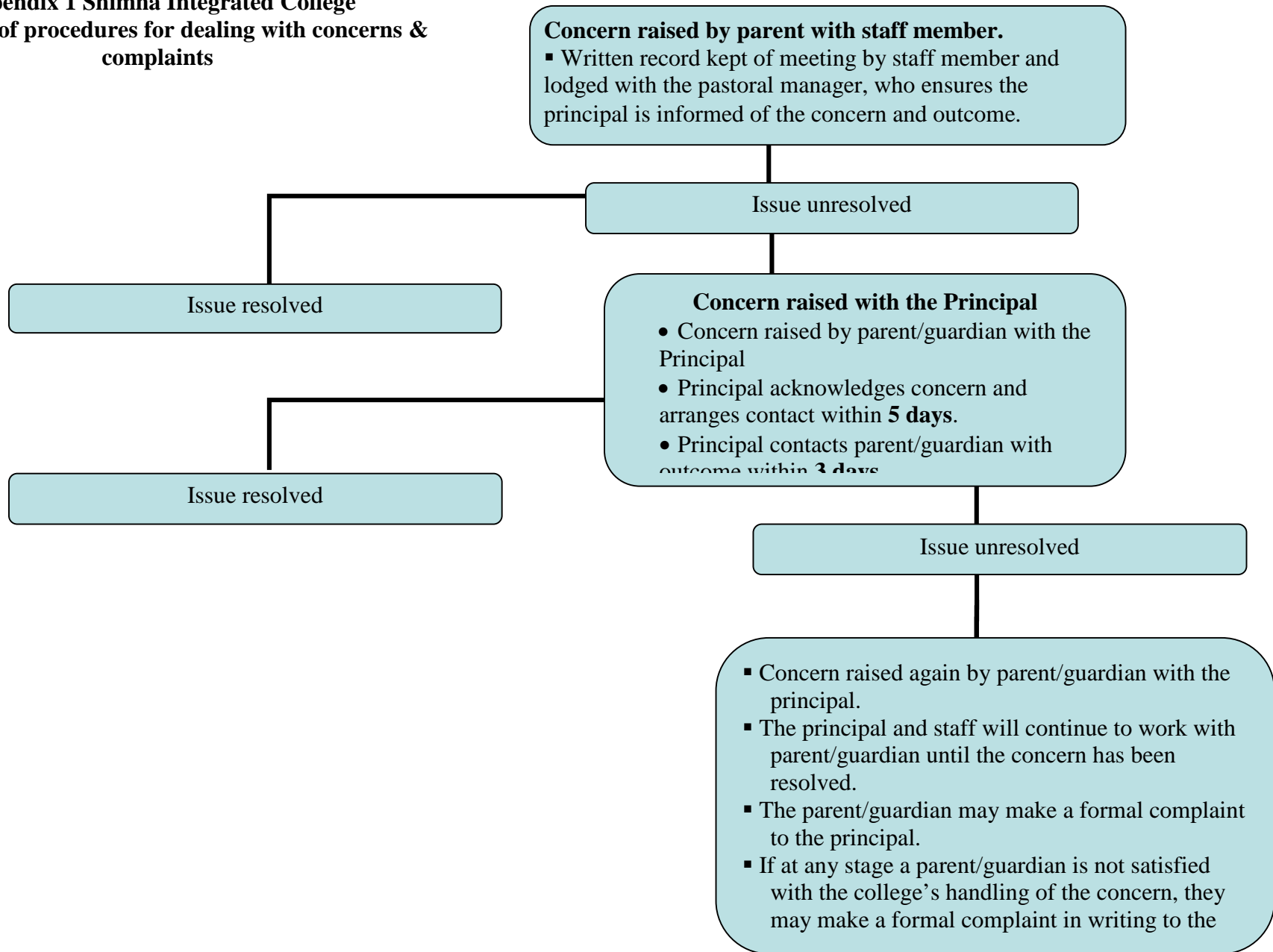
Parents/guardians wishing to make a formal complaint to the Department of Education should do so in writing to the Department of Education, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19 7PR. [Telephone number 028 9127 9279; E-mail: mail@deni.gov.uk]

#### **Conclusion**

The college will implement this policy and review it in the light of experience. It should be noted that the college recognises the right of students to make complaints against their peers or members of staff. They will be informed about their complaints procedure via their pastoral care lessons.

**The Board of Governors agrees with, and fully supports the contents and implementation of this policy.**

**Appendix 1 Shimna Integrated College  
Flowchart of procedures for dealing with concerns & complaints**



## **APPENDIX 2: USEFUL ADDRESSES**

- Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
43 Balloo Road  
Bangor  
Co Down  
BT19 7PR

Tel No: 028 9127 9279

- South Eastern Education and Library Board  
Welfare Service  
Grahamsbridge Road  
Dundonald  
BT16 0DB

Tel No 028 9056 8121

- Children's Law Centre  
Philip House  
York St  
Belfast  
BT15

Tel No 028 9024 5704



### **APPENDIX 3: Complaint Form**

**Please complete and return to the office manager who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.**

**Your name:**

**Student's name:**

**Your relationship to the student:**

**Address:**

**Postcode:**

**Day time telephone number:**

**Evening telephone number:**

**Please give details of your complaint.**

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint.  
(Who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

**What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?**

