



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Report by the Assembly Commissioner for Standards on a  
complaint against Paul Givan MLA

by [REDACTED]

Assembly-Confidential

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## Complaint

1. I received a complaint from ██████████ on 19 May 2021, alleging that when she sought assistance from Mr Paul Givan MLA with issues relating to a change in uniform policy at Laurelhill Community College, Mr Givan breached Rules 1, 5, 7, 8, 13, and 14 of the MLA Code of Conduct arising in the main to his failure to represent all of the evidence she provided him and his failure to tell her prior to representing her at a meeting on 19 August 2020 that he was a school Governor at Laurelhill Community College and that he was a parent of a pupil due to attend the college<sup>1</sup>.

## Investigation

2. In the course of my investigation, I carried out the following:
  - Reviewed the evidence provided by ██████████<sup>2</sup>
  - Interviewed Mr Paul Givan MLA<sup>3</sup>
  - Telephone conversation with Mr James Martin, Principal of Laurelhill Community College<sup>4</sup>
3. A copy of the complaint and all other documents I have relied on in reaching my decision are at Annex A.

## Allegations

4. Ms ██████████ alleges that Mr Givan, in failing to declare to her that he was a Governor at Laurelhill Community College, breached the following Rules within the Code of Conduct for MLAs<sup>5</sup>:
  - i. Rule 1: You shall base your conduct on a consideration of the public interest, avoid conflict between personal interest and the public interest and resolve any conflict between the two, at once, and in favour of the public interest.
  - ii. Rule 5: You shall declare, whether in Assembly proceedings or in any approach to a Minister, public representative, public body or public official, any relevant interest which might reasonably be thought to influence your approach to the matter under consideration. A relevant interest means an interest to which Chapter 2 of the Guide to the Rules applies, and may include a registrable interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Document 1

<sup>2</sup> Document 2

<sup>3</sup> Document 3

<sup>4</sup> Document 4

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/your-mlas/code-of-conduct/the-code-of-conduct-and-the-guide-to-the-rules-as-amended-on-23-march-2021/>

- iii. Rule 7: You shall not, in return for payment or benefit, advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual. Nor shall you, in return for benefit or payment, urge any other Member to do so.
- iv. Rule 8. You shall not seek to confer benefit exclusively upon a body (or individual), from which you have received, are receiving, or expect to receive a financial or material benefit, or upon any client of such a body (or individual).
- v. Rule 13: You shall not act in any way which improperly interferes, or is intended or is likely to improperly interfere, with the performance by the Assembly of its functions, or the performance by a Member, officer or staff of the Assembly of their duties.
- vi. Rule 14: You shall not use, or attempt to use, your position as a Member to improperly confer an advantage or preferential treatment for either yourself or any other person; or to avoid disadvantage or create disadvantage for someone else.

**Findings of Fact:**

I found the following facts established to the required standard of proof:

- 5. Ms ██████ contacted Mr Givan’s office on 17 August 2020 to seek his help relating to a uniform policy change at Laurelhill Community College which required students to wear their PE kit rather than the uniform.
- 6. Mr Givan telephoned Ms ██████ after being briefed by a member of staff who had taken the call.
- 7. Ms ██████ was distressed at the uniform policy change in relation to the impact on her ██████ who is a pupil at the school.
- 8. Ms ██████ explained the situation in detail during her call with Mr Givan, including the evidence she had in relation to the health and safety impact of the policy as well as financial implications for parents who would have to purchase the PE kit at an approximate cost of £100.
- 9. Ms ██████ alleges that she asked Mr Givan on this call if he had any conflicts of interest—and specifically asked him if he was a member of the Board of Governors or a parent. She alleges Mr Givan replied that he had no conflict of interest.
- 10. Mr Givan asserts that he was never asked if he had any conflict of interest by Ms ██████, and that had he been asked he would not have hesitated to tell her.
- 11. Mr Givan agreed to speak to the school on behalf of Ms ██████ to raise the issues she outlined to him.

12. Mr Givan contacted the principal and the Chairman of the Board (separately via telephone) on August 19<sup>th</sup>.
13. Following from the conversations Mr Givan had with the principal and Chairman, the uniform policy was adjusted to allow pupils to have the choice of wearing either the PE kit or the school uniform.
14. In January 2021, Ms ██████ alleges she became aware of Mr Givan's role as a school Governor and parent of a child at the school when she saw a video on the school's Facebook page relating to the Open Day where Mr Givan mentions his role as Governor ██████ ██████.
15. Mr Givan registered in the Assembly's Register of Members' Interests his role as Governor at Laurelhill Community College on 28 November 2019 and it remains on the Register to date.
16. In accordance with paragraph 7.14 of the General Procedures Direction, Mr Givan was afforded an opportunity to challenge any of these findings before I finalised my report. He did avail of that opportunity and offered a suggestion relating to a typo which was amended.

### **Reasoned Decision**

17. This complaint was not solely related to a service issue (i.e. that Ms ██████ was unhappy with the service Mr Givan provided her); had it been, it would have been beyond the scope of the Code of Conduct and inadmissible. Given the allegations and vast amount of evidence Ms ██████ submitted, an investigation had to be carried out to establish the facts.
18. Having considered all of the evidence, I am satisfied that Mr Givan acted in support of Ms ██████ at all times.
19. Mr Givan agreed to help Ms ██████. He undertook to speak to the principal and chairman to raise the issues she and her ██████ were concerned about.
20. Following from the conversations he had with the principal and chairman, Mr Givan contacted Ms ██████ and explained that the uniform policy was now adjusted to allow a choice for students of wearing either the school uniform or PE kit. Mr Givan understood this to be the adjustment that Ms ██████ was seeking.
21. Ms ██████ said she had expected more. She expected Mr Givan to present the vast amount of information she had compiled in relation to the health and safety concerns relating to students wearing leggings for a prolonged period of time to the principal and chairman. Mr Givan confirmed he did not present that information to them. However, it is clear from the evidence Ms ██████ submitted with her complaint, that she also sent the information to the

principal among many others. The conversation Mr Givan had with the principal and chairman led to a positive outcome (ie the adjustment made to the uniform policy).

22. Ms ██████ also, rightly, asked Mr Givan for written confirmation of the outcome that he explained during the telephone conversation but never received it. Mr Givan admits he did not provide an email to Ms ██████ as she requested, but stated that he believed it was the school's role in providing the formal update in writing to Ms ██████.
23. Ms ██████ is concerned over the health and well-being and financial implications for parents in relation to the impact of such a policy change. However, Mr Givan was under no obligation to provide any of the information Ms ██████ wished the principal to consider. Mr Givan undertook to assist Ms ██████ with the issues she raised with him, chief amongst them the policy change which resulted in pupils having to wear the PE kit instead of the school uniform. The fact that Mr Givan did not present the health and safety information relating to wearing leggings for a prolonged period of time in no way equates to Ms ██████'s assertion that there was some sort of collusion. There is no evidence whatsoever that leads me to believe there was collusion in relation to decisions made or otherwise.
24. In her evidence, Ms ██████ represents the August 19<sup>th</sup> meeting as a Board meeting. During his interview, Mr Givan confirmed this was not a Board meeting. The principal also confirmed to me that the discussions on the 19<sup>th</sup> August were informal, via telephone, and not made as part of a Board meeting.
25. Both Mr Givan and the principal confirmed that the initial uniform decision was made by the Senior Leadership Team of the School and not by the Board.
26. Ms ██████'s assertion that Mr Givan was asked by her if he had any conflict of interest is in dispute as Mr Givan stated (under oath at interview) that he was not asked this question by Ms ██████ and that had he been asked he would have told her. He was not trying to hide this fact; it is an interest he has registered since September 2019 in the Assembly's Register of Members' Interests.
27. Notwithstanding, even if it was the case that Ms ██████ did ask Mr Givan if he had any conflicts of interest and he did not disclose this to her, this would not have been in breach of the Code of Conduct. This is because Ms ██████ is not a Minister, public representative, public body or public official as per Rule 5 of the Code of Conduct for MLAs, and therefore he would have had no duty to declare anything to her. It likely would have offended the Code's principle of honesty—which itself alone would not result in a breach of the Code as only a breach of a Rule would constitute a breach of the MLA Code of Conduct.
28. While it appears the school has not listed Mr Givan as a Governor on its website, that is a matter for Ms ██████ to take up with the School.
29. In Ms ██████'s evidence, it is clear she has made complaints to the Education Authority, Ombudsman and NI Children's Commissioner in relation to the policy itself being passed by the Senior Leadership Team and not the Board, the health and well-being implications of the

policy and the financial disadvantages caused—all of this falls outside the remit of the Commissioner for Standards. I can only consider the allegations made by Ms ██████ that Mr Givan breached the Code of Conduct for MLAs.

**Allegation 1: Rule 1**

30. I am satisfied on the basis of the evidence, that Mr Givan acted in the public interest in providing assistance to Ms ██████ in relation to the issues she raised with him and the help she had asked him to provide. He did not act contrary to the public interest in preference to any personal interest, of which there is no evidence to suggest there was a personal interest.

31. I do not uphold this allegation.

**Allegation 2: Rule 5**

32. Mr Givan is a Governor at Laurelhill Community College. He registered that interest in September 2019 in the Assembly’s Register of Members’ Interests. As Ms ██████ is not a Minister, public representative, public body or public official, he had no duty to declare to Ms ██████ his position as Governor on the Board of the school. His failure to declare this either when asked (which is in dispute) or to provide it voluntarily to Ms ██████ is not a breach of the Code of Conduct.

33. I do not uphold this allegation.

**Allegation 3: Rule 7**

34. Mr Givan did not advocate for Ms ██████ in return for any payment or benefit to himself. On the contrary, he spent much time assisting Ms ██████ in good faith, and more than he would most of his constituents. He did not stand to gain from doing so.

35. I do not uphold this allegation.

**Allegation 4: Rule 8**

36. The people who benefited from Mr Givan’s assistance included Ms ██████, her ██████, the school and the wider student body in that the initial uniform policy change was adjusted because of Mr Givan’s intervention. Therefore, he did not seek to confer any benefit which would be in contravention of the Code of Conduct.

37. I do not uphold this allegation.

**Allegation: Rule 13**

38. Mr Givan does not receive any material benefit from his role as Governor at Laurelhill Community College and he did not help Ms [REDACTED] for any material gain or otherwise. Based on the evidence, it is my view that he was genuinely trying to help Ms [REDACTED] who he found to be very distressed about the uniform policy decision.

39. I do not uphold this allegation.

**Allegation: Rule 14**

40. Based on the relevant evidence, Mr Givan did not attempt to use his position as a Member to improperly confer an advantage to himself or a disadvantage to anyone.

41. I do not uphold this allegation.

**Conclusion**

42. I am satisfied on the basis of the evidence, my analysis and reasoning, that Mr Givan MLA did not breach Rules 1, 5, 7, 8, 13, 14 of the Code of Conduct as alleged by Ms [REDACTED].

**Annex A**

Document	Description
1	[REDACTED] complaint
2	[REDACTED] evidence
3	Paul Givan MLA interview transcript
4	Record of telephone call with Mr J Martin, Principal Laurelhill Community College



Dr Melissa McCullough  
Commissioner for Standards  
283 Parliament Building  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

Dear Dr Melissa McCullough,

I am writing to complaint about Paul Givan MLA.

After receiving a letter from Laurellhill Community College in relation to uniform changes, I contacted Paul Givan on 17 August 2020 to seek his help and support to speak with the school. I sent evidence to him in relation to this and he telephoned me to advise that he was attending a meeting at the school with the principal and Chairperson (Jonathan Craig). I asked him at that point if he had any conflict of interest such as a child at the school, if he was on the PTA, Board or if there were any religious or personal reasons that would prevent him from fairly representing all of the students. He said that the didn't not have any conflicts.

That meeting took place on 19 August 2020. In the 20 August I contacted his office and asked for Paul to email me in relation to what happened at the meeting as I had spoken to the Chairperson after the meeting by telephone who told me that nothing was discussed in relation to the medical issues or religious issues in relation to the uniform policy.

Paul telephoned me that afternoon and he said that the principal was to write to parents to explain to them the health and safety risks and share with them the information the school had been provided about these. To make reasonable adjustments according to the legislation. And to inform parents in writing of their options to get exchanges, credit note or refunds from the stickiest now that the uniform policy was being adjusted. He confirmed that there was going to be leggings allowed rather than branded expensive option. I asked him to put it in writing and he agreed. He never emailed me despite the fact I emailed to remind him again. I have never heard from him since.

In January 2021, the school put out a YouTube video via the Facebook page, which was promoted the School's Open Day, where Paul Givan is on the video and refers to having a [REDACTED] at the school who is settling in very well and he says he is on the Board of Governors. He mentions as a Governor he meets with the staff regularly. This is the first I realised that Mr

Givan had a conflict of interest that he did not declare at the time despite the fact that he should have and that I asked him directly and he said no.

After seeking guidance and gaining assistance, I hope this letter will satisfy your requirements for my complaint to be acceptable to meet the admissibility criteria.

I've compiled a list of the rules of the Code below which I believe to apply to my complaint according to their description, my supporting evidence and events that occurred of which these apply.

#### Code of Conduct Rule 1.

You shall base your conduct on a consideration of the public interest, avoid conflict between personal interest and the public interest and resolve any conflict between the two, at once, and in favour of the public interest.

#### Code of Conduct Rule 5.

You shall declare, whether in Assembly proceedings or in any approach to a Minister, public representative, public body or public official, any relevant interest which might reasonably be thought to influence your approach to the matter under consideration. A relevant interest means an interest to which Chapter 2 of the Guide to the Rules applies, and may include a registrable interest.

#### Code of Conduct Rule 7.

You shall not, in return for payment or benefit, advocate or initiate any cause or matter on behalf of any outside body or individual. Nor shall you, in return for benefit or payment, urge any other Member to do so.

#### Code of Conduct Rule 8.

You shall not seek to confer benefit exclusively upon a body (or individual), from which you have received, are receiving, or expect to receive a financial or material benefit, or upon any client of such a body (or individual).

#### Code of Conduct Rule 13.

13. You shall not act in any way which improperly interferes, or is intended or is likely to improperly interfere, with the performance by the Assembly of its functions, or the performance by a Member, officer or staff of the Assembly of their duties.

Code of Conduct Rule 14.

You shall not use, or attempt to use, your position as a Member to improperly confer an advantage or preferential treatment for either yourself or any other person; or to avoid disadvantage or create disadvantage for someone else.

I hope these better meet your requirements. If so, advise me of what you need from me next and in what format.

Kind Regards,

████████████████████

**From:** [REDACTED] [mailto:[REDACTED]]  
**Sent:** 04 June 2021 13:30  
**To:** +StandardsCommissioner <[standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Email evidence

Morning,

I tried multiple ways to extract and save the details of each email, but my phone wouldn't let me extract more than a third of the text via the app or the desktop version of gmail and having no working computer, this has significantly hampered things. I am so sorry this has resulted in threads being sent as a result and I understand how unideal this is.

However, I hope the information context is helpful because the serious nature of what was being discussed, agencies and professionals contributing, the written processes I correctly followed according to protocols and options made available, as well as the facts relating to the illegalities of the product, lack of consultation with parents, child health and safety, hygiene, wellbeing and welfare; all these he was reading as a board member interest with a role of influence and a personal interest as a parent who's [REDACTED] would have been also told to buy and wear these and aware of letters, fb posts and details being given to parents. His lack of disclosing his Board role and parental position with me advantaged him yet disadvantaged the process due to lack of transparency and correct conduct being followed both as a Board Member and MLA by ways of his communication and lack of communication to all those involved who were made aware of his involvement with this process. At no time did his secretary or office personnel mention his Board role, nor did the suggestion exist or get spoken of by any other politicians who I contacted and/or contacted him. Equally, the lack of mention of his name on the website from then and still today offers no such suggestion that he's on the board.

The nature of the events still on going would not have been likely to occur or carry on this long had he been honest when I asked him if he had a conflict and the office who is now taking his place, was told there was no for them and if they were to be involved, there would be risk of duplicity - which could complicate things. However, duplicity would not have occurred because this other office is my area and would have been representing me, also, they have no role within the school or conflict of interest such as a child or having been a past pupil.

I am to attend a board meeting soon of which I've been emailed a list of possible members attending; Mr Givan is on that list. I have also the same week been informed the Principal is the Board Secretary. This is also a conflict because he is the person of which my complaint was being made against to the board and the Chairperson. This means that when the meeting occurred it did not simply have the Chairperson, a local neutral MLA and the Principal of the school. It actually was a line up of Chairperson, Board Member, and Board Secretary.

Recently I was provided copies of a meeting that took place with the Board in late Aug 2020 of which it refers to the vice chair and chair presenting things - a name it lists as presenting motions includes Mr Givan. This suggests Mr Givan is Vice - Chairperson. This may be a

typo, but if it's correct, the supposedly 3 party divided meeting was actually a collusion of members and secretary conducting a meeting alleging a decision without enough members to satisfy a Quorum - but too many Board Committee Members and persons to not have a minutes/notes taker.

None of these men disclosed Mr Givans role when asked how many Board members where there. It was only this past week the Principal referred to Mr Givan as a member having preciously insisted all names on the website are their active members. Secondly, the DUP office link in the Board and failing to disclose his conflict of interest to the other DUP offices or members contacted about his actions as a supposed Neutral person, nor others of other parties who offered to add support and attend meetings - proves the obstructive element of my complaint and suggestions of personal interest overriding his responsibility to put the interests of the constitutes / families / children he was supposed to represent when attending this meeting and communicating with the Chairperson and Principal.

If facts remain true, the meeting therefore consisted of:

Chairperson / DUP Cllr Jonathan Craig

Vice-Chair/DUP MLA / Parent Mr Paul Givan Secretary to the Board Mr James Martin

The conflict of interests exist in all levels and all persons failing to provide these links (other than the known DUP Cllr and DUP MLA) contribute towards the reasons I believe the codes I mentioned apply and should be considered, investigated until ruled out.

I have also printed the emails so this will allow me to provide hard copies and physically highlight them. This may be too late for your meeting today, but I hope they will be useful when I speak with you and or others relating to this.

I also have downloaded my phone records to show when I made calls to the Lagan Valley DUP office for Mr Jonathan Craig, Mr Paul Givan, Mr Edwin Poots and Sir Jeffrey Donaldson. My phone company would not provide me the details of calls made to me without a court order to release them, so I haven't been able to show the calls I received from Paul on the Morning of the Meeting with the Chair and the Principal, nor the call the afternoon afterwards. I hope that Mr Givan will be able to provide these.

I can't recall if he called me from a mobile number or restricted ID number on each day, but I have checked the mobile numbers I called those days with the possibility he'd called from a mobile and I had at anytime used to call him back.

I also can't recall if it was Mr Edwin Poots who called me or is called him when we'd spoken, so I can also display the numbers I called during that that in case these relate to him.

I have call records to all calls I made during these months to all other offices including Mr Weir MLA office and Education Minister private office - so can provide these if/when need be.

I can also provide all numbers as mentioned above in a separate email to you. If I should not provide these numbers in writing, and only at the time of meeting you for satay protection or privacy reasons, please advise me of this.

Here is the photograph of the list of Governors names according to the website. This is taken today and is the same list that existed in June and since of which I have screen shots dated for.

Kind Regards,

██████████

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 03 June 2021 20:50  
**To:** +StandardsCommissioner <[standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Pt14(b) Fwd: Urgent: School Uniform Health and Hygiene Risks

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Wed, 26 Aug 2020 at 3:34 pm  
**Subject:** Fwd: Urgent: School Uniform Health and Hygiene Risks  
**To:** [paul.girvan.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:paul.girvan.mp@parliament.uk) <[paul.girvan.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:paul.girvan.mp@parliament.uk)>

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Wed, 26 Aug 2020 at 3:25 pm  
**Subject:** Fwd: Urgent: School Uniform Health and Hygiene Risks  
**To:** [paul.girvan.mp@parliament.co.uk](mailto:paul.girvan.mp@parliament.co.uk) <[paul.girvan.mp@parliament.co.uk](mailto:paul.girvan.mp@parliament.co.uk)>

Hi Austin,

Thank you for agreeing to speak on the phone with me today. As promised, here is the email I sent Cllr Jonathan Craig and MLA Paul Givan in preparation for their meeting last week. It has some out of date info now that the meetings has taken place, but it does outline the uniform policy, costs, my initial correspondence at the outset as well as the facts collaborated from others to specify correlation between clothing items and their health risks.

Also, there's the two statements written by female athletes I'd mentioned to you that was provided to the school directly days previously.

Next I'll sent you where things are now and what still needs to be considered and addressed.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Wed, 19 Aug 2020 at 8:34 am  
**Subject:** Urgent: School Uniform Health and Hygiene Risks  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Good morning Mr Craig and everyone who I've CC'd in this email.

I'd like to start by thanking all of you for taking the time to speak with me over these recent weeks and for taking the time to read this email.

This is URGENT because today a meeting will take place with Mr Craig, the head Chairperson on the board of governors for Laurelhill Community College, and Mr Martin the school Principal.

I'll be explaining the topic of concern and why everyone who's received this, has been included. I've CC'd everyone who I've either spoken directly with on this matter, or been advised by a member of your team to email you directly concerning these issues. For those of you who've spoken with me or been contacted already, you'll know what this is about. For anyone who's unsure, I'll specify your purpose for being included individually.

I'll do my best to be as concise and summarised as possible whilst covering what's relevant and why this is marked urgent.

On the 15th of June Laurelhill Community College posted on fb about their school uniform policy change. This was a public post, so I've decided to share the image with you here so you can see it for yourself. I've also included the link to this post in case you'd prefer to view it fully. As of now, there's been 451 comments made, some being from the school, most of them being from the parents stating concerns, frustrations, complaints and asking many questions. This policy has been set to cover year 8 up to yr 14; pupils aged 12-18.

After a very clear fb comment, multiple phone conversations and multiple emails, the school "senior leadership team" are standing by their decision to implement this change in uniform policy. My aim is to stop it and allow parents to let their children wear the normal uniform and focus more on how the school can support the financially struggling parents rather than give them more costs to endure.

The policy has since modified in terms of the 1/4 jacket due to alleged stock issues after so many parental purchases, so I've shared below all items including the new jacket proposed for girls and boys to wear as listed on the school shop website. The costs are size dependant and listed as the smaller, cheaper sizes.

This totals the smallest boys uniform to be £68.27

This totals the smallest girls uniform to be £96.27



These costs are substantial for families struggling due to the COVID-19 impacts on employed workers, self employed business owners, those who have lost their jobs and hundreds of families facing permanent losses of financial or even home stability. For large families like my own, this PE kit for my [REDACTED] would feed my family of 6 for an entire week. For smaller families, this could sustain them for 2 weeks or 1 week of food, electricity and gas. For families with multiple students, they've been forced to compromise even more so.

FOR REFERENCE: The blue 1/4 jacket is usually only advised for students competing in school sports teams (according to the school shop assistant I spoke to) and therefore is a "non essential item" for the majority of students.

The NIKE leggings are also a "non essential item" by definition due to the fact many girls currently opt to only wear the blue Nike skort for PE because of personal and medical reasons. By only permitting the girls to wear these leggings (or the boys trousers which one reply suggests), the school is dismissing the emotional, psychological, medical and financial needs of these students and families.

This has caused many disgruntled parents to voice the cost and practicality issues of purchasing non essential items for the duration of 2 months - including parents of A-Level students who won't be attending any sports or PE lessons whatsoever. Once again, you'll find many of these issues raised and promptly diverted on the fb post.

<https://www.facebook.com/187845547920555/posts/3313457182026027/>

As I've checked again this morning, there's still been no reply to my post.

What's happened since then?

I've been in communications with all of you or a member of your team, plus more that I've not listed for pre-requested privacy reasons.

Here's some places and purposes for contact or information gathered.

Belfast Skin Clinic - Dermatology - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I was advised to send you this in order to discuss the skin health risks of these NIKE women's fitness leggings and them having to be worn for by girls 8-9 hours per day for from next week until Oct 23rd. In particular students like my [REDACTED] who have

[REDACTED] She depends on creams to help skin breakages and dryness often leaving her in a lot of pain. This is why she prefers to wear the skort in order to reduce compression and skin irritations around her joints as well as permitting her skin more breathing space. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] however, when asked, no "reasonable adjustments" were offered to her or the collective of affected students. In addition to this specific issue, wearing Lycra leggings for a long period of time poses increased risk for any female of sweat rash, heat rash, Folliculitis, ringworm, jock itch (topical fungal infection, vaginal thrush and yeast infection (internal and external fungal infection), bacterial vaginosis, dehydration of the skin/excessive dryness of the skin - just to name a few already medically found to be linked to wearing tight fitting fitness leggings.

Hillsborough Private Clinic - to the attention of [REDACTED]

Gyne - The reasons being these leggings pose health risks as I've stated so far, specifically linked to gynaecology is the affects on young women who experience periods. Due to the school ages ranging 12-18, all of these girls fall under pre-menstrual and menstrual age. A period "week" can range from as little as 3 days or even up to 14 days in some cases, varying also in the heaviness of the flow, fluctuations of flow throughout as well as vary also in pain levels and frequency. Unfortunately many girls develop complications in their teens around these known variables in more serious form such as endometriosis, uterine fibroids, polycystic ovaries, vomiting and collapsing and biological predisposed risk to frequent urinary tract infections. And that's just the bleeding! Then there's the weeks before during which a female's body tends to swell and retain more water, abdominally bloat, increased tenderness in and on top of the body, temperature changes often increases in heat alongside sweating more around the pelvic area, increase in mood fluctuations and food/drink cravings (often salt, sugar or dairy which can then cause a skin and/or vaginal fungal infection. The tension and tightness of these high waisted Lycra fitness leggings therefore would be extremely uncomfortable for a young woman leading up to her period and amplified more so whilst on her period. Because the students would be sitting down most is the day, the compression of the waist band on the abdomen, tension in the groin and obvious exposure of the fabric will put young women at risk of health complications and discomfort. In addition to this, the nature of the fabric means any underwear lines would be seen plus any sanitary towels/pads bulking either side of the tightly fitted middle crotch seams.

Gastro - [REDACTED] would best be able to advise the health risks of these leggings from a Gastroenterological view, but I going to name a few I know for sure. Due once again to the compression of the waistband, these leggings pose a multitude of health risks and discomfort if worn too long on internal abdominal organs including the small and large intestine (which can lead to stomach pain and nausea), the kidneys, the urinary tract and bladder, the uterus,

adjoining fallopian tubes and ovaries and potentially the liver. Some complications and issues which have been medically noted are constriction of major and minor blood vessels in the pelvis leading to and from areas of the body, bowel obstruction, severe abdominal pain, abdominal bloating due to restriction on healthy bowel flow through the intestine, pain in the kidneys, bladder pain and increased need to urinate due to the applied pressure. Many of these things are less likely when standing up or in motion due to the alternating state (when moving) and less strain on the fabric (when standing). However, it is not advised that fitness leggings be worn more than 1-3 at a time - certainly not for 8-9 hours a day with most of which the young woman will be sat down with the most highest of compression on her abdomen activated.

Common Youth Belfast - offer Clinical and Support Services for Young People. This is a charity that looks after teens and upwards around a range of medical and personal treatment needs. I had a very successful call with two members of staff here who both agreed and mentioned physical and mental health risks with this uniform as a whole presenting potential problems students will face if this policy were to go ahead. This being for both boys and girls. These included yeast infections, thrush, jock itch, sweat rash, heat rash, Folliculitis, bacterial skin infections, bacterial vaginosis, abdominal pain, abdominal bloating, period complications, increased period pain, period shaming, self esteem concerns, body image concerns plus cost and affordability for families.

National Autistic Society - after speaking with an advisor it was clear this uniform policy presented more than just a comfort and health complication for the general population of the school, it also made no allowance or provided clear directional guidance for students with conditions relating to special physical requirements or those linked to their cognitive processing such as ASD - Autism - Aspergers - ADHD - Sensory Processing Disorder or other medical conditions which will be listed in their book of names known to the SCENCO (special educational needs co-ordinator). [REDACTED], so I'm aware of the support that exists typically for students known to have a condition that impacts on their interaction and learning. [REDACTED] I was unable to get the SCENCO on the phone after this fb in June instead being advised that any parent wishing to complain can do so in writing and a senior team member will review it to decide if my child meets the requirements of alternatives. I was not passed on to the SCENCO and he didn't call me despite me asking him to be contacted with the request to call me. This brings up the wider concern that the school appears to not be making it clear or easily accessible to support parents whose child may need assistance or alternatives due to the distress this change in uniform may cause them.

CAMHS Lisburn and Warren Children Centre Lisburn -

Having called and spoken with members of each of these teams, another vital issue was discussed and raised; the affect on emotional and psychological well-being. As I stated in my original comment on the schools FB post, I understand the importance of adolescent / teen mental health when it comes to their own physical body image, their mental and emotional self esteem and their relatability amongst peers. High school is such a difficult time for children who are developing quickly and steadily out of children's bodies into adult bodies, often with very little emotional preparation on how to cope with the physical and physiological changes that they see on themselves and others. The current band of young people aged under 25 have grown into these phases whilst having access to social media and news outlets, both of which are notorious for warping images and information into unreal, unrealistic and unsustainable body shape goals. Aside from the usual suspects of anorexia,

bulimia and binge eating into obesity, we have generations of young women being motivated by these outlets leading to an increase in self harming, uncertainty of their genders and attraction preferences, early exposure to inappropriate sexual content and encouraged/groomed by peers to participate/contribute to sexual imagery...all the while our young people are still young people, emotionally and mentally, leaving much of these issues causing emotional distress, mental confusion, social isolation, lasting trauma, self inflicted or external abuse and even suicide. This COVID-19 world pandemic has affected children and young adults from every class system, the bracket, social positioning, family unit size or type and most concerning it's caused a surge in mental health issues. This is why I believe it's crucial to take into consideration the impact this girls uniform policy could have on many of the young women who attend this school. My [REDACTED] has already disclosed the opinions of her friends and one having said she looked and felt "fat and disgusting in this". By being forced to wear it they are at greater risk of being harassed by teen boys who are already very sex and body aware no thanks to so many young men accessing porn far below the age of 18. Plus there's the self shame they have, the pre-existing separations of clicks and groups associated with popularity or lack thereof.

The fact the jacket is unflattering and even the new one is modelled by a boy and doesn't cover lengthways the bottom area. The leggings are seamed and therefore go up and in the genital area leaving the girls anatomy on show - which some may choose to do when they're taking lessons with just girls (which is often the case), but wearing them all day every day around boys will make them more exposed to prying eyes and the period issue of wearing a sanitary towel comes back into play. I still believe we can't expect girls from the age of 12 to wear thongs or tampons.

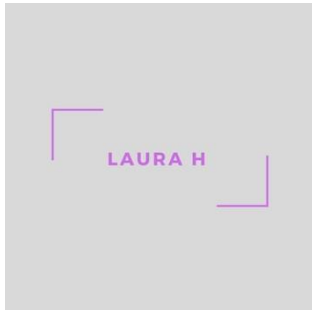
Banardos - From speaking with [REDACTED] I was able to convey this message of concern and the issues raised around this policy being made. I was given permission to relay what she said in response -> She has concerns for the brand use, the costs for families in the surrounding areas who are known to the school to struggle financially and she believes this policy to be inappropriate and detrimental if implemented to the physical and emotional health and well-being of the students.

For anyone else I've not specifically mentioned, hopefully you may have an idea why I was advised to contact you for input and professional opinion in order to ensure this \*Full PE Kit Day Uniform Policy\* does not go ahead.

Please also find attached two statements written by health and fitness sports professionals with extensive and educational insight into this topic.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]



Phone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

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To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to you with regards the suggested change in the Girl's Uniform at Laurel Hill. As a fitness professional with 13 years' experience I was asked by concerned Parents my thoughts on a pair of Gym leggings being used as School Uniform.

I have no connections with Laurel Hill or knowledge of the School other than it is a very well respected and highly recommended establishment. My views on the leggings are speaking from a fitness professional view point and past personal experiences. I have my own business which includes training women as well as being a gymnastics coach to Children from age 4-17 years old. I am also very much a woman who can vividly still remember her teenage years.

My first concern with the suggestion of wearing Gym leggings as School Uniform, is in the name, they are leggings for the Gym, meant to be worn for a hour or two maximum for a training session or class and were created for that purpose.

The style and nature of the fabric is designed to compress the stomach and legs which for hygiene purposes is the reason that they are only meant to be worn for a short period of time.

From a self-esteem and body confidence way they

can be very restricting and revealing for different body shapes and changing bodies going through Puberty or experiencing uncomfortable periods.

I work with Grown Women who do not have the body confidence to wear this Style of leggings and I try to work with them to improve that. It unfortunately can take a lot of time as this low body confidence commonly goes as far back as Teenage and Child Hood Years, as they are so influential. I am very much of the view if we can promote self-esteem and body confidence in Childhood and Teenage Years then we will not have as many Women carrying those experiences with them into later life.

As a Young Woman with your body going through changes there are times you just don't feel great In your body. Changes in your body shape, confusing hormones and the experience of the Up's and Down's with Periods can make you just want to hide away. With this Style of Leggings there is no hiding. There is Visible Panty Line, there is the stress of "Is my pad visible?", bloating and the general Skin Tight feeling of these leggings will lead to a massive distraction throughout a School Day.

I remember too well the thoughts and feelings of these past experiences in a School Skirt but to go through them in a Skin Tight Pair of Leggings in a School environment where you are so conscious of your peers, it would be all consuming.

I am a grown woman but only 3 months ago I had the experience of feeling uncomfortable in a pair of these leggings in a Work Place. Due to Covid 19 shutting down all of the fitness industry, I temporarily took on a job working in a NHS Warehouse. I was one of two women amongst 20 men, I was not provided with suitable work trousers like the male workers had so I

tried to work in an old pair of jeans. I was working upstairs in a very warm Mezzanine area in Belfast's good spell of weather around Easter and one day blacked out from the heat of working in these Jeans. ( I was never provided appropriate Workwear trousers in the time that I worked there).

As a last resort I then made the decision to wear a pair of gym leggings just like the pair suggested for the new School uniform. It is in no way the fault of a pair of leggings but I started to experience sexual harassment with comments on my legs and my body and about how I looked in these leggings. This is the result of a disrespectful individual who was dealt with appropriately by the management but unfortunately women have to deal with these kind of comments and behaviour from a young age.

As a grown woman these comments on my legs in the leggings still wrongly made me feel weak, like my body was an object, like because I was wearing something so tight I was attracting the comments and made me want to hide my body away, I couldn't so I worked my shift with a Hoodie Tied around my waist.

I have the inner strength and maturity now to handle comments like that on the outside and to report it but I still felt all the emotions on the inside. I would not have had that strength as a teenager and I know from working with teenagers many others do not either at that age.

The truth is that Women should be able to wear whatever they want without the lewd comments about their bodies but the fact is there still is a long way to go.

The man I experienced this off was once a Teenager and I'm sure I was not the first woman to experience this from him. I can still think of many other negatives experiences from immature boys in my teenage years and everyone of those comments stay with you. My fear is that with these style of leggings that wrongly they will attract unwanted attention and for young minds it is so

unfortunate how long these unwanted experiences stick with you.

I appreciate that it is a complex matter, if as a School you have felt the need to change the Uniform and I Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

To some what may seem like “Just a Pair of Leggings” have unfortunately in my experience and the experience of the women I work with, they have negatively meant so much more.

Thank you for your time and Best Wishes,  
Laura Hutchinson



August 12, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is [REDACTED], and among my accomplishments, I am a competitive powerlifter. I currently hold an All Time World Record in Powerlifting as well as a World Champion Title in my weight category. In addition, I hold multiple national and international records and titles with several powerlifting federations. As a competitive athlete, I regularly wear athletic apparel, including the leggings that are currently being considered as part of your school uniform. I am also an author, motivational speaker, and personal empowerment and athletic coach. My specialisation is female empowerment and I have been invited to speak to women about my journey of personal transformation, (from a shy self-conscious and body-conscious girl to an empowered woman) across Europe and the United States. I regularly lecture about how the experiences of adolescence can influence and shape an individual's self-esteem and body image for a lifetime.

I am also a friend of the [REDACTED] Family for over a decade. I have always admired [REDACTED] values and the way they encourage their children to unapologetically embrace their own personal values and unique perspectives. With this in mind, when the conversation about [REDACTED] school uniform arose, initially I wondered if their concern was a slight over reaction to imposed restrictions, as would be human nature to anyone that felt like they didn't have a voice in rules that were inexplicably and suddenly introduced. However, after further discussion, I would like to share my own personal concerns about the proposed changes to said dress code. I will also preface these comments with the fact that I am an athlete myself, so I do regularly wear leggings made of a lycra polyester or similar 'wicking' fabric.

- Practicality of the leggings is the first thing that comes to mind. First and foremost, has anyone considered what these young women will do when menstruating if required to wear these leggings? These pants leave absolutely nothing to the imagination, so there's no room for a sanitary towel when wearing leggings. There is a visible panty line as well. Do we expect our children to wear thongs? There are hygiene concerns for spandex lycra polyester blends in active wear. Again, these leggings are an excellent product that I have personally used, however, the fabric does not breathe. If worn for any longer than a training session you're looking at potential hygiene issues, including thrush.
- These skin tight leggings leave nothing to the imagination, and leave the entire body on display. From a child safeguarding perspective, one has to wonder if this attire is appropriate for children. There is enough talk of the sexualisation and victimization of children in the current environment. Does the school really want to be added to the list of institutions that are being accused of this practice?
- As educators, no one has to remind you of the incredible duty of care that rests upon your shoulders when it comes to our children. Their psychological wellbeing must be considered, as they are in the crucial formative years of their life while in your school, and the messages they learn now will have a massive impact on their self-image and self-worth and permeate into every aspect of their lives, for the rest of their lives. From the moment they wake until the moment they close their eyes at

night, there are literally messages bombarding our children from all directions about the way they should look. As educators I don't have to tell you that people only learn develop and progress when they're in a safe and comfortable environment where they are both physically and emotionally relaxed and safe. Many children in the 12-14 year old age bracket are naturally self-conscious as their bodies are changing rapidly. How could they possibly feel safe when they are in a tight uniform where all of their body is on full display? I always thought the purpose of a school uniform was to ensure that a child's modesty and dignity was guaranteed, as well as ensuring that they felt the security and sense of belonging that a uniform brings, thus avoiding unnecessary comparisons. Choosing a uniform that is skin tight will have the opposite effect, as it puts the child on display, drawing unnecessary attention to their ever changing bodies.

In conclusion, I would like to add that I think school uniforms are in fact a wonderful institution, and I wish one was in place in the secondary school I attended, as it would have alleviated a lot of the issues that my classmates and I faced, including being judged based on what we wore, as it was an obvious reflection of our family's socioeconomic status, etc. Uniforms per se are a wonderful idea, as they remove distractions and allow the students to focus on the task at hand, which is learning. And as stated above, the Nike leggings themselves are a great product, when used by the appropriate target market in the appropriate manner. But I do not believe they are the appropriate choice for a school uniform. I would therefore respectfully ask the powers that be to reconsider and review their options on this matter.

Thank you for your valuable time and for considering the views of a concerned friend.

Respectfully Yours,

████████████████████

**From:** V [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 03 June 2021 23:43  
**To:** +StandardsCommissioner <[standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Pt18 Fwd: Proposed action - Laurelhill Uniform Policy Revision

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Tue, 8 Sep 2020 at 2:49 pm  
**Subject:** Re: Proposed action - Laurelhill Uniform Policy Revision  
**To:** Carla Lockhart [REDACTED]

Hi Carla,

Unfortunately not. The school has not been responsive in terms of addressing any of these issues or indeed even acknowledging them. The last email I got from the principal was absenting himself from the situation and topic by means of claiming he'd need a discussion to take place in wider society about the leggings issue - the issue that itself is discussed among girls, women, magazines, medical documents, health forums, discussion forums, medical advice websites and a host of other accessible routes if he took the time to actually look, read and accept these topics are REAL and affect females all over the world.

Again, I feel that if there's not been so many men involved in this process, who cannot fully understand the topics, concerns, impacts and reality of being a teenage girl, there may have been a better and swifter conclusion to this.

I have however been on the phone with NICCY (Northern Ireland Commission for children and young people) who are contacting the school in regards to the ambiguity of the uniform "change", the lack of reasonable adjustments being made and for the students on the SEN register who will have been (and still may be) impacted by the PE uniform policy initially enforced. Not only have they not made it definably clear to all parents what's changed, why it's changed and what their options are, they haven't written or allocated any thing at all for parents of SEN registered students - nor offered a clear path of enquiry for the older students in need of extra support over all these changes.

It's no new news that many [REDACTED] individuals suffer extremely badly over change, even minute or minor alterations. Being told they're HAVE to do something for 10 weeks and then told 12 hours before school the policy has changed again, will be distressing for students suffering already mounting anxiety over returning to school, peer pressure on what to wear and fluctuating hygiene issues which are often commonly difficult for [REDACTED] individuals.

I have asked for the contact information for the parent rep board of governors, but o was told from reception staff "I'm sorry, I can't give you that." And then when I asked her to seek advice please because I was told I can contact the parent reps she then came back and said "Ms, I've been advised to tell you that anything you have to say to the governors, you can send the principal's administrator and it will then be reviewed and decided if it should be sent on to the board of governors. We don't have any contact information for any of the board of governors." Which is a lie of course because they do have the information. Later that day

when the principal called me to tell me he's got my email, I asked him to just reply please so we can keep things on paper and then I told him I'd tried to get the parent reps contact to then be diverted - his response was "well, we don't tend to give out board of governors issues for personal stuff." I said, "Sir, this isn't personal - it is a matter that will affect children and parents and it hasn't been discussed at all according to you with \*ang senior staff or shown and shared amongst the board of governors. If you or the office won't give me the parents reps, then you and Mr Craig need to go back to the table, share the extensive information I've given you and the school for the last 10 weeks and make a fair and informed judgment call. So far, this has been kept from staff, kept from parents and decided upon by just you, Mr Givan and Mr Craig, whom incidentally told me that the matters of the girls health risks weren't even discussed in the meeting."

Mr Craig even told me on the phone (I mentioned here above) "I'm sorry, I'm going to have to disagree with you, although You make a very convincing argument. I'm just not sure these conditions (thrush, BV and yeast infections) or things you've talked about (psychological impact of being body shamed, period shamed or harassed by boys/men from having their body on show) even really exist." He doesn't think they exist? Every woman I know has been impacted or had negative experiences in their life across different topics from childhood up to adulthood - specially in high school- in relation to their period, their body shape, body size, body smell, financial position in turn affecting their clothing brand or lack there of, words said or being touched on their breasts, words said or being touched on their ass, degrading comments about them by staff, peers or even family. It's a hard time for many kids/teens, and the fact that they haven't even discussed what I've sent, let alone acknowledged it or sought outside advice on it, shows me that I'm getting no where fast in terms of educating the educators on how "real" things are and can be for teen girls - and of course so much of it ties in with their policy, lack of communication and lack of supportive direction to support parents who genuinely would've needed that money back - or better yet - to never have had to spend it at all.

Sorry it's so lengthy, it's difficult to condense so much confusion and frustration.

I'd welcome any feedback you have and input you'd be willing to give in relation to this.

Kind regards,

██████████

On Tue, 8 Sep 2020 at 12:10 pm, Carla Lockhart > wrote:

Hello Valerie

Thank you for your emails and I can fully understand your concerns.

Did you manage to get a satisfactory resolve? If not I will forward this to the MP for the area, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson.

Kind regards

Carla

**Carla Lockhart MP**

Member of Parliament for Upper Bann  
Constituency office: 02838 310088 | London office: 020 7219 6952

[31 High Street,](#)

House of Commons  
Lurgan,  
BT66 8AH

London, SW1A 0AA

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**From:** [REDACTED]

**Sent:** 26 August 2020 12:10

**To:** Carla Lockhardt

**Subject:** Fwd: Proposed action - Laurelhill Uniform Policy Revision

Hi Carla,

Here I've outlined the current uniform situation and remaining unresolved issues.

Chris Lyttle asked me to send this because of his Education links, so I hope you don't mind me forwarding this to you. You'll find a brief description of what's happened since the meeting and an itemised list of unresolved issues.

I haven't been informed of any updates yet today by anyone involved, so it's safe to presume these issues remain unaddressed.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I understand that education and indeed neither my area nor the school technically fit your normal criteria of representation. Your involvement would position you as the only female political member in this, which could potentially help to solidify the message and emphasise the importance of prioritising the health and well-being of all the girls at the school.

If you have any questions or would like further clarification on anything, feel free to contact me. Also, if you or someone you know has been affected by this policy or a similar one, I give permission for you to pass my number and/or email

to them so I may provide them useful links, Helpline numbers or support to resolve their particular issue.

My number is  
Look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards  
[REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Date: Wed, 26 Aug 2020 at 4:00 am

Subject: Proposed action - Laurelhill Uniform Policy Revision

To: [chris.lyttle@mla.niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:chris.lyttle@mla.niassembly.gov.uk) <[chris.lyttle@mla.niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:chris.lyttle@mla.niassembly.gov.uk)>

Hi Chris,

I spoke with a few people who I've been working closely with over recent weeks in relation to this issue. We discussed locally known poverty, vulnerable children with limited access to parental care, the presentation of students with Autism

and similar sensory processing difficulties, children under 16's restricted accessibility to health/medical treatments, psychological support for girls suffering complicated Gyne issues and parents' ability to comprehend advice potentially beyond their remit or expertise.

I wanted to be sure I gained accurate insight from their perspective and extensive experience supporting children, teens and young adults across the various physical, emotional and mental health aspects they routinely provide advice, treatment, intervention and support to.

One of the professionals today said they'd searched and not found a single school across the country implementing a PE kit policy as compulsory or optional that issued these Nike (or similar high waisted compression material Lycra women's leggings) to be worn 8-9 hours a day, 5 days a week for any week - let alone 9 weeks.

In light of this, we collectively agreed that the best proposal is to strongly advise the school to revert back to normal uniform entirely. The vast majority of the parents and carers will

have a soles of the 20% discount and purchased both full uniform in preparation for 2 months from now, plus the extra PE kit items.

The issues therefore that remain are:

- The lack of discussion or acceptance amongst senior staff and board of governors of the mental, emotional, physical and medical risks these leggings present when being worn by girls for 8-9 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 9 weeks.
  
- The school's lack of accountability for sharing and providing clear and comprehensible guidance to parents, carers and students around these identified risks if worn for the excessive use of 8-9 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 9 weeks.
  
- The parents, carers and students were not advised in reasonable time about the change in Day uniform policy. In particular, non sport related A-Level students who'd have only had 30 mins on Friday prior to school starting to enter McCall's, exchange or refund their needless PE items, and arrive to their first day on time.
  
- The parents, carers and students have not been offered guidance directly or indirectly via the school on directional advice to what their rights are in relation to exchanges, returns or credit notes from McCall's. The school has a close relationship with the uniform stockist and it would be reasonable for a member of staff to call them, explain the situation and obtain options to forward to the parents via text, email or their Facebook page for example.
  
- The parents, carers and students were not advised why the change in Day uniform policy was made.
  
- The parents of children/teenagers on the SEN register were not and are not being given clear directional advice, guidance or support by any communicational means around "reasonable adjustments" being offered or formulated to assist the social and medical needs of the pupils generally or specific to the conflicting Uniform Policy changes and face mask usage.

To conclude:

The collective advice is that Laurelhill revert to normal day uniform and consider compensating parents who wish to recover lost costs of worn uniform due to lack of shared information, in addition to working in partnership with McCall's to assist parents who wish to return items that have not yet been worn.

The school were made aware of all of these issues by a comment I posted on June 17th, two days after they posted an unapproved by the board of governors Uniform Policy change. I specifically asked them questions concerning this change to which not a single one was nor has been replied to. This simply means the senior staff, board of governors, PTA and Principal had ample time - 9 weeks - to read, share and discuss these presented issues, seek advice and guidance from any of the community trusts, health services, medical clinicians, education authority or clothing manufacturers in order to ensure they're policy was both safe and reasonable for families.



This early intervention would have at least saved thousands of pounds being spent by vocally distressed and financially strained parents and carers. It'd have also more quickly eased confusion from parents, carers and students who remain to be unsure of why it was initially enforced and last minuted changed.

I hope this helps to simplify and clarify the situation at present, what remains to be addressed and what an appropriate plan of action would be. I'm sorry it's still rather lengthy, but considering the time invested and professionals backing this revision/halting of PE Uniform, I don't want to under-value it's presentation of crucial details. Feel free to share this with anyone you see fit or would like to include.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you and hope you'll be able to help us resolve this.

Kind regards

██████████

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 04 June 2021 02:28  
**To:** +StandardsCommissioner <[standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Pt 21 Fwd: Peter weir pt3 Fwd: Pt3 Fwd: Email from Laurelhill's Principal

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Mon, 1 Mar 2021 at 5:24 am  
**Subject:** Peter weir pt3 Fwd: Pt3 Fwd: Email from Laurelhill's Principal  
**To:** NIPSO <[nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)>

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Tue, 25 Aug 2020 at 2:32 pm  
**Subject:** Pt3 Fwd: Email from Laurelhill's Principal  
**To:** [private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk) <[private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk)>

For the attention and consideration of Mr Peter Weir

Hi, better I've forwarded you a concoction of emails. You'll find what I sent to Mr Paul Givan's office and the attached email reply from Mr James Martin (principal) to the lack of PE UNIFORM policy.

Mr Givan was sent all emails, so he and or I may forward more I'd you'd like to see all. This however is the most relevant because it's THIS which instigated Mr Givan to arrange a meeting in the school with Mr Craig (chairperson for board of governors) and Mr Martin.

As you can see, I wrote out each specific issue I asked for clarification and a response to. Equally, you'll then see (from scrolling to read Mr Martin's email), only the \*who made the decision\* was adequately answered.

To this day, Aug 26th, all others remain to be unanswered except for the "were the governors involved..." to which Mr Craig told me "No, we were not told or in attendance and that in itself is against school policy"

Kind regards,

Valerie

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Mon, 17 Aug 2020 at 7:45 pm  
**Subject:** Fwd: Email from Laurelhill's Principal  
**To:** [REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED], here is the reply I received from the principal.

He actually called me first and I asked him to put what he had to say on email. The things I requested clarification on were:

- Who was informed of the concerns I brought forward to him last week on our phone call.
- Who was included and involved in the decision making process of this continuation of PE uniform policy.
- Were the governors included in the decision making and if so were they informed of the concerns I brought to him on the phone call last week.
- Why was this decision made.
- Was it made given the concerns I brought forward or not.
- What reasonable adjustments were being put in for students with sensory, medical or physical issues with wearing the uniform.
- What support is being provided to the parents who stated concerns on the original fb page about uniform.

Given that this very brief and limited detail reply was all I received to my requests for clarification and answers, I just don't think the issue is being taken seriously or being conveyed clearly enough to other decision makers within the school.

Given that the "senior team" made this decision, I don't know if or what I've said and the gravity of the situation was made clear. If it was, I'm still no closer in understanding why it was made nor what they intend to do to address the issues implementation will present to the students and families.

I hope to get answers some how or way to the questions I asked him to address and answer.

Please can you include this communication (including this email I've written myself to you) with Mr Givan and anyone else who's relevant to this investigative process already.

Thanks!

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **J Martin** <[jmartin697@laurelhill.lisburn.ni.sch.uk](mailto:jmartin697@laurelhill.lisburn.ni.sch.uk)> [REDACTED]

Date: Mon, 17 Aug 2020 at 4:49 pm

Subject: RE: Hi [REDACTED] - urgent for attention of Mr Martin

To: [REDACTED]

██████

Thank you for the email.

The Senior Team have made the decision to allow pupils to wear their PE Uniform until 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2020.

I understand that this is contrary to the written submissions you have provided.

I appreciate your strongly held views and I have forwarded the letters to the SLT.

The matter will be kept under review.

Many thanks

J Martin

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 04 June 2021 02:21  
**To:** +StandardsCommissioner <[standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:standardscommissioner@niassembly.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Pt 20Fwd: Peter weir pt4 Fwd: Pt4 Fwd: Return to School Uniform Policy

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Mon, 1 Mar 2021 at 5:24 am  
**Subject:** Peter weir pt4 Fwd: Pt4 Fwd: Return to School Uniform Policy  
**To:** NIPSO <[nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)>

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Tue, 25 Aug 2020 at 2:41 pm  
**Subject:** Pt4 Fwd: Return to School Uniform Policy  
**To:** [private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk) <[private.office@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:private.office@education-ni.gov.uk)>

For the attention and consideration of Mr Peter Weir

Hi,

Here as mentioned before is what Mr Martin sent out to parents after their review meeting last week. This was 1 hour he'd received my email with the statements from the female sports professionals I'd mentioned to you in the first email.

I then sent this to Mr Givan's office, as you can see, to which enabled a response by Mr Martin later that day by phone call. Next I'll sent you his and my last emails about the matter.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Tue, 25 Aug 2020 at 2:36 pm  
**Subject:** Fwd: Return to School  
**To:** [REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Mon, 17 Aug 2020 at 3:25 pm

Subject: Fwd: Return to School

To: [REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED],

Please find enclosed the email I received this afternoon from Laurehill - my [REDACTED]'s school.

The email which mentions the uniform in specific is the word document titled "Letter to parents".

I will send the next email I sent to him after I send this.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Laurehill Community College** <[donotreply@teachers2parents.co.uk](mailto:donotreply@teachers2parents.co.uk)>

Date: Mon, 17 Aug 2020 at 2:48 pm

Subject: Return to School

To: [REDACTED]

Please find attached information regarding return to school, letter from Principal and letters from Department of Education.



Home

Photos

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Posts

Community



### Laurelhill Community College



15 June · 🌐

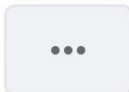
#### Uniform Guidance

Due to the current pandemic it has been agreed that college uniform for September and October will be as pictured below. All items are available from McCalls . Discount applies for June and July. As restrictions and guidelines change we will keep you updated however ALL pupils are required to wear the 1/4 zip and leggings/track bottoms. The 1/4 zip will form part of the 2020/21 full college uniform when we return to normality . Students will be permitted to wear this under their blazers travelling to and from college and if necessary in college.

Should you have any queries regarding this please contact the college between 9am and 3 pm .



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Laurelhill Legging

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Education Authority, South Eastern Region

## Laurelhill Community College

22 Laurelhill Road | Lisburn | BT28 2UH

Tel: 028 9260 7351

E-mail: [info@laurelhill.lisburn.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@laurelhill.lisburn.ni.sch.uk)

Principal Mr J G Martin BA MEd MA PGCE PQH

17 August 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

Thank you for the support you have given to the school and your child in this period of uncertainty. I hope this letter will address many of your concerns that you as a parent may have regarding returning to school. **These rules must be followed stringently by everyone.**

### COVID 19

**Any pupil who exhibits symptoms of COVID 19 should not attend school or if anyone in the household displays symptoms of COVID 19 then the pupil should not attend school.** They can return to school when everyone in the household has tested negative and has not had a raised temperature for 48 hours.

When pupils are in school they should keep 2m from staff.

Pupils who require medical attention will be isolated until a parent or designated adult comes to collect them.

Any pupil who has been out of the country must follow Government Guidelines.

### Parental contact with School

- Parents will not be allowed to enter the school building
- If you need to speak to any member of staff it must be via the telephone or via email. Your call will be returned as soon as possible
- There should be a parent or designated adult contact available during the school day to receive a phone call from school
- Please ensure that all emergency contacts are current and updated if required through your child's form tutor

### ARRIVAL and DEPARTURE AT SCHOOL

- **Pupils can use either the front door or the back door but should not enter the building until the specified time. Parents must not enter the school grounds.**
- **Year 8 pupils** are asked to arrive at 8.45am either through the back or front door and go straight to their form room. School will finish at 3pm.
- **Year 9/10 pupils** are asked to arrive at 8.50am either through the back or front door and go straight to their form room. School will finish at 3:05pm.
- **Year 11-14 pupils** are asked to arrive at 9.00am either through the back or front door and go straight to their form room. School will finish at 3:10pm.



LEARNING AND ACHIEVING TOGETHER

[www.laurelhillcollege.org](http://www.laurelhillcollege.org)



All pupils will return to full-time education from Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. In order to support pupils in their return to school we are planning a familiarisation session. **Each pupil must attend their familiarisation session.** You will be sent a text message to confirm whether your child is in Group A (9.30am-11.30am) or Group B (1pm – 3pm). The focus of the familiarisation will be pastoral administration and google classroom.

Familiarisation Day for Year 12 and 14

Friday 21 August

Group A 9.30 – 11.30

Group B 1.00 – 3.00pm

Familiarisation Day for Year 9

Monday 24 August

Group A 9.30 – 11.30

Group B 1.00 – 3.00pm

Familiarisation Day for Year 13 and 11L Band  
(Year 11 will be completing their Access Test)

Tuesday 25 August

Group A 9.30 – 11.30

Group B 1.00 – 3.00pm

Familiarisation Day for Year 11 H Band and SERC  
(Year 11 will be completing their Access Test)

Wednesday 26 August

Group A 9.30 – 11.30

Group B 1.00 – 3.00pm

Familiarisation Day for Year 10

Thursday 27 August

Group A 9.30 – 11.30

Group B 1.00 – 3.00pm

Familiarisation Day for Year 8

Friday 28 August

Group A 9.30 – 11.30

Group B 1.00 – 3.00pm

Pupils will wear their PE Uniform until 23rd October 2020. Uniform should be kept fresh each day. It is expected pupils will return to school uniform at the end of October. All pupils will be expected to carry one bag. The bag should contain necessary books, a packed lunch, unless you are entitled to a Free School Meal, and your stationery in a sealed plastic folder. **NO EQUIPMENT will be loaned or shared between pupils or between staff and pupils.**





Education Authority, South Eastern Region

## Laurelhill Community College

22 Laurelhill Road | Lisburn | BT28 2UH

Tel: 028 9260 7351

E-mail: [info@laurelhill.lisburn.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@laurelhill.lisburn.ni.sch.uk)

Principal Mr J G Martin BA MED MA PGCE PQH

**Face coverings** must be worn in the corridors and social areas of the school but will be optional in the classroom. The college face covering must be purchased from the college at a cost of £2.00. All pupils are encouraged to bring their own hand sanitiser and a packet of tissues for personal use.

#### School Lunches

- Only Free School Meals will be available in the Canteen until mid-September.
- Pupils will need to bring water and a break-time snack.

#### Sanitisation

- Pupils should wash hands before leaving their home and sanitise when they arrive in the school building and regularly throughout the day
- School cleaning will take place regularly throughout the day

#### Transport

- It is mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport. It is also strongly recommended that all pupils regardless of age should wear a face covering on all buses, trains or taxis for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.

I attach documents from the Department of Education.

My aim is to ensure all pupils are safe and feel comfortable in the environment as quickly as possible. We rely on all parents to adhere to our guidelines and I expect the full co-operation of all pupils.

Kind regards

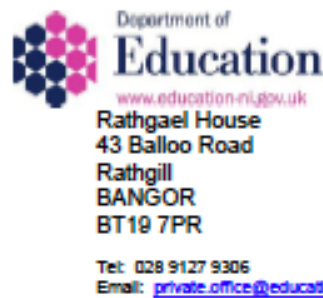
J G Martin  
Principal



LEARNING AND ACHIEVING TOGETHER

[www.laurelhillcollege.org](http://www.laurelhillcollege.org)

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



13 August 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I recognise the past number of months have been challenging for every part of society, not least for you as parents and carers, many of whom have been balancing working from home and supporting your child's learning. I would like to put on record my thanks to you for supporting your child throughout the period of time they have not been in school.

My aim has always been for all pupils to return full-time to school as soon as possible, when it is safe to do so. One of my main concerns is the long-term well-being and educational impact on children and young people as a result of the prolonged absence from school. I am also conscious that many young people are worried about completing their programmes of study and the impact this may have on their futures.

I previously said that if circumstances allowed I would like to see all children back in school as soon as possible. Based on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor, the prevailing scientific advice provided by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), and the recent decision by the Executive to approve relaxed social distancing in schools, I have decided that schools will reopen for key groups of pupils from 24 August 2020. This will include those pupils who are going into Primary 7, Year 12, Year 14 and pupils who are vulnerable. All other pupils will then return from the week commencing 31 August 2020. This return will be on a full-time basis of 5 days a week for every child.

#### **Why is it now safe to do this?**

I have consistently stated that the re-opening of schools will be led by evidence, this remains the case. The scientific evidence is consistent that with proper risk mitigations, schools are safe to open.

Indeed, a recent paper published in mid-July by SAGE details the risks associated with reopening settings in England in September. Some of the key messages from that paper include;

- There is relatively low immediate risk to children’s health from SARS-CoV-2<sup>1</sup>, with some evidence indicating that children/adolescents have lower susceptibility to SARS-CoV-2 infection and clinical disease than adults.
- There is some evidence that children play a lesser role in transmission than adults.
- In countries where schools have been open for some time, data suggests that school opening has made little difference to community transmission.

Whilst Covid-19 is still here in Northern Ireland, you will be aware of the gradual relaxation of restrictions in many other areas of society. Governments in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland have all signalled their intention to re-open schools with normal patterns of attendance for all pupils in the coming weeks, in time for the new school term.

However, this does not mean a return to business as usual. We are still operating in a pandemic and everyone will have a role to play in ensuring that hygiene and public health measures are followed to allow a safe return to school.

**Do not send your child to school** if your child or anyone you live with has any of the following symptoms:

- a high temperature – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature);
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual);
- a loss of or change in sense of smell or taste.

If your child or anyone in your household has any of the symptoms above you should get a test for Covid-19. Details on how to do this can be found [here](#).

Covid-19 is still in our communities and we need parents, pupils and wider society to stay vigilant to “Keep It Out” of our schools.

#### **What is being done to make schools safe?**

To make sure that schools remain safe for our children, young people and staff, a number of measures will be put in place. These include;

- **Keeping Covid-19 out of schools.** Anyone displaying any Covid-19 symptoms **must not** attend school.

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<sup>1</sup> Covid-19

- **Enhanced hygiene and cleaning measures** will be in place. All cleaning will be carried out in accordance with PHA Guidance. Regular cleaning of door handles, desk tops etc. will take place throughout the day.
- Children will wash their hands as soon as they arrive at school and regularly throughout the school day.
- Public health guidance with respect to **social distancing of 2 metres (2m) will remain in place between adults** and as far as possible between adults and pupils.
- Whilst the stringent application of social distancing requirements between pupils will be relaxed, as far as is practicable, **social distancing should be maximised for both children and adults who are not from the same household.**
- **Protective bubbles will be used as a key mitigating action where possible.** The protective bubble arrangements will be used to segment pupils into a consistent group or groups that arrive together, learn together, play together and eat together, reducing contact throughout the school with other children.
- **Classroom space will be maximised** as far as possible with unnecessary items removed and schools will make use of all space including outdoor space.
- Children will not sit facing each other where possible and seating plans can be used to aid contact tracing in the event of a positive Covid-19 case.
- PHA guidance under the Test and Trace and Protect programme will be applied for all staff or pupils in contact with someone who tests positive for Covid-19
- **Lunch and break times may be staggered** with more sittings, take away services and / or delivery to classrooms.
- **Staggered arrival and pick up times** may be introduced to limit interactions and avoid gatherings at the school gates.
- Given the risk mitigations in place in schools to limit and contain the spread of COVID-19, **face coverings are not generally recommended for routine use in schools.** Staff and pupils may wish to use them during the routine school day and this is acceptable.
- With the exception of those who are exempt, it is **mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport.** It is also strongly recommended that **all pupils regardless of age, should wear a face covering on all buses, trains or taxis** for the journey to school where it is appropriate for them to do so and they are able to handle them as directed.

### **Home to School Transport**

I know that the provision of transport is key in enabling children and young people to return to school. I realise that many of you will want to personally transport your children to school. While I would ask that you encourage your child to use other means of travelling to school for example, walking or cycling where it is safe and reasonable to do so, I recognise that for many children the home to school transport network may be the only available option.

Pupils on all buses should always seek to maintain a social distance from others wherever possible, however the guidance for public transport on social distancing will not apply on dedicated school transport in the new school year. The department considers this to be reasonable as:

- pupils will usually face forward on a vehicle except in a small number of cases such as some pupils with Special Educational Needs;
- pupils on dedicated school transport do not mix with the general public on those journeys;
- dedicated home to school transport often carries the same group of children and young people on a regular basis, and those children may also be together in school; and
- the predictability, which public transport does not afford, will allow for planning so that protective measures can be put in place.

It is mandatory for all pupils aged 13 and over to wear a face covering on public transport and it is strongly recommended that all pupils should wear a face covering on any form of home to school transport where it is appropriate for them to do so. Pupils should bring a plastic bag for storing their face covering if they have used one on home to school transport. You are asked to ensure that your child(ren) clean their hands before boarding any home to school transport vehicle.

Where capacity on a vehicle allows for additional space to be put between pupils, that should be done, however it is recognised that this will not always be possible. Where it is not possible, other measures to protect pupils will be implemented.

Home to school transport will run from 1 September except for those pupils in years 7, 12 and 14 who will have access to a limited home to school transport service from 24 August. Further details will be available on the Education Authority website.

Pupils using public transport services that are also used by members of the public will continue to adhere to social distancing guidelines for the general public.

### **School Meals**

The Summer Food Payment scheme will end on 31 August 2020 and it is my intention that school meals will be available in schools from the 1 September 2020. It

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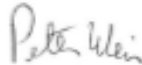
is expected that where possible a hot meal will be available for those entitled to free school meals and any other pupils who wish to avail of them.

**A packed lunch will be required for those pupils returning to school from the week commencing 24 August 2020.**

**Summary**

A successful return to school requires the continued support of schools, parents, pupils and wider society to be vigilant and act responsibly within the overarching public health guidelines. My Department has produced a leaflet which is enclosed emphasising the key public health message and I would ask for your help in supporting your children with the changes we all have to carry out. Further information on Education Restart can be found [here](#).

Finally, I would like to thank you for the support you have provided to your children over the last number of months. I have no doubt that with your continued support we will ensure a safe return to school for all our children and young people to continue their education.



**PETER WEIR MLA  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**



Transcript: Commissioner Interview with Paul Givan MLA  
Date: 11 June 2021  
Time: 10.00am  
Venue: Online via Zoom  
Present: Melissa McCullough, Commissioner for Standards  
John Devitt, Second Interviewer  
Paul Givan MLA

**[0:00:02.9] Melissa McCullough: I'm Melissa McCullough, Assembly Standards Commissioner, and the other person present is John Devitt. This interview is being recorded. We're interviewing via Zoom, and the date is 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021. The time by my clock is ten o'clock. I'm interviewing Mr Paul Givan, MLA, and no one else is present with Mr Givan. I'm going to ask you now to formally take the oath, which due to the virtual platform today, is an affirmation. I'm going to share a slide if you bear with me, one second. Okay, can you see that okay, Paul?**

[0:00:38.3] Paul Givan: Yes.

**[0:00:39.0] Melissa McCullough: Okay, if you can just speak that out loud please.**

[0:00:41.6] Paul Givan: I do solemnly, sincerely, and truly declare and affirm that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

**[0:00:50.5] Melissa McCullough: Great, thank you so much. Okay, if for any reason our technology fails us, we'll just wait for each other to get back on board. For the purpose of clarity and for the transcript, the matters that I'm investigating relate to the complaint made by ■■■■■■■■■■ relating to when she sought your assistance with an issue she outlines in her complaint. That complaint I sent to you on 19<sup>th</sup> May. You've also received, from ■■■■■■■■■■, a pack, which contains all the evidence that she submitted. In her complaint, ■■■■■■■■■■ alleges that you breached rules one, five, seven, eight, thirteen, and fourteen, all flowing from your failure to tell her, prior to representing her, her issues to the board on August 19<sup>th</sup>, that you were a governor on the board at Laurelhill Community**

**College and that you were also a parent of a pupil due to attend the college. That's just me giving a summary overview.**

**[0:01:43.8] I suppose, the first thing I wanted to ask was, in your own words, explain your engagement with ██████, and you're free to refer to any documents or whatever, but just so I understand. I know we haven't received anything written from you. I just wanted to get your understanding of these, the engagement you had with her.**

[0:02:04.3] Paul Givan: My recollection of dealing with ██████, I think it initially came through emails to my constituency office. I knew she had got in contact in terms of the issues around her ██████ and the school, at Laurelhill, it was around her uniform. She was, I think, pretty upset and concerned about what was coming in terms of the new policy that the senior management team in the school had instigated. I think it came about from my staff saying, 'Can you speak to ██████?' In any event, my main contact with her was via a phone call that took place. I think she subsequently refers to that in an email. I certainly can remember the phone call because she was pretty distressed at the prospect of her child having to wear a, not the uniform, but the PE kit and the leggings. Obviously, you can see by all of the evidence that she's provided to you, she provided that to me in terms of the impact that that has on girls in particular and why it shouldn't be done. I had a fairly lengthy conversation with her on the telephone, where she talked through to me all of these concerns, and I had a fair degree of sympathy for her in terms of it. I can get to, I suppose, that, on the substance of the complaint around the school in due course.

[0:03:30.8] My recollection of it was my main contact with her was via a telephone conversation. She did email my constituency office and my staff had those emails as well, but I think my main contact was one, fairly lengthy telephone conversation that took place.

**[0:03:54.4] Melissa McCullough: Then you understand all of her concerns and her issues, and you stated you felt sympathy towards them. At what point then did you agree, how did it come to pass that you were going to advocate for her issues at a board meeting at the school?**

[0:04:14.4] Paul Givan: I said to ██████ that I would speak to the principal of the school about the issues of concern that she had raised with me. I did. James Martin is the principal at Laurelhill. I ascertained that the decision was actually taken by the senior management team of the school, around the uniform policy. It wasn't something that had been referred to the board

of governors for a decision to be taken on. I expressed a view to James that I felt that should have been a decision that was referred to the board of governors, as much to...

**[0:04:52.1] Melissa McCullough: What did he say to that when you said that?**

[0:04:56.0] Paul Givan: The school was acting in a situation around COVID and what to do, and a lot of schools were changing their policy, and the senior management had taken this decision because they felt that that was the right thing to do in the circumstances that they were having to face. I indicated that I felt, for the benefit of the senior management team, that that, at least, if that had been approved by the governors, that would give the senior management protection in my view, that that was a policy then that the governors could have stood over on behalf of the teaching staff. I said to James that I had been speaking to ██████. I know she had been trying to get in contact with the school. I had said to James if he was able to speak to her, and that we would look into this issue around the uniform policy. I subsequently spoke to Jonathan Craig, who is the chairman of the board of governors, about this issue as well, and what could we do to address these concerns?

[0:05:56.0] I suppose my concerns were twofold. One, I did have sympathy on the arguments that ██████ was making, but two, as a governor, why were we, as governors, not the group of people that were taking a decision on a fairly significant policy? I spoke to him on those two issues and Jonathan, again, had some sympathy, from my recollection, on the points that I was making. I suppose, the out-workings of that, and this is the thing that, from ██████'s point of view, I got the policy changed, so ██████'s ██████ was able to actually wear school uniform. The school advised pupils that you could come to school in September either in your school uniform or in your PE kit. Now, it transpired that the overwhelming majority of the school children actually wore their PE kit. In any event, the concern that was raised with me by ██████, around the school policy, I got changed in terms of allowing her to make the choice. I suppose, from my perspective, I had fixed the problem that had been brought to my attention. That was, in my view, the matter resolved, so that's, hence, why I was quite surprised with the subsequent complaint that she made.

**[0:07:22.7] Melissa McCullough: Can I just clarify, that James Martin and Jonathan Craig conversation, did that happen on 19<sup>th</sup> at a meeting or was this ad hoc? How did this, was it a...?**

[0:07:33.4] Paul Givan: No, I rang them. I spoke to them. After speaking to ██████, I followed up on the issues that she had raised with me on the phone. I knew she was distressed about the prospect of her child having to wear a PE kit rather than school uniform, and I wanted to actually get this resolved because I could sense from the conversation that she was distressed about all of this and...

**[0:07:58.1] Melissa McCullough: It wasn't at a board meeting, Paul? Was it a board meeting?**

[0:08:00.1] Paul Givan: No.

**[0:08:01.2] Melissa McCullough: Okay, it was just a meeting. Well, it was a few phone calls you made, to two separate people.**

[0:08:07.2] Paul Givan: Yes, I followed up on it with telephone conversations that took place and, yes, that was how we took the issue forward.

**[0:08:17.9] Melissa McCullough: Were you also aware at the time that you were having, from ██████, were you aware that she was actually representing a number of parents, not just her own - she was obviously upset herself, but that there was a lot of parents that were upset about it?**

[0:08:32.2] Paul Givan: No. I knew she was upset about it. I don't recall her saying it was on behalf of a collective group of parents about it.

**[0:08:46.2] John Devitt: Paul, you have said that as far as you're concerned, you thought you had resolved ██████'s issue. That's not reflected in her emails that she sent to the commissioner, is it?**

[0:09:01.8] Paul Givan: Well, no. When I look through all of her documentation, in terms of how she feels the issue has been resolved - the policy, ultimately, was changed, John, so that parents were given the choice for their children to wear school uniform. She, obviously, had remained dissatisfied in that respect.

**[0:09:24.5] John Devitt: How do you address the other issues that are contained within her documentation, the fact that she wasn't aware that you were on the board of governors and that you didn't disclose that?**

[0:09:35.9] Paul Givan: At no stage did she ask me that and again, I was surprised by the nature of her complaint, that she said that she had put this to me. She didn't. At no stage was I asked, was I on the board of governors? At no stage was I asked, did I have a family member who attended the school? That wasn't put to me.

**[0:09:56.2] John Devitt: She wasn't coming to you as a board of governors, she was coming to you as an MLA, and I suppose that would have been your opportunity to say, 'As it happens, I also sit on the board of governors, so I'm able to speak directly to the principal.'**

[0:10:10.4] Paul Givan: Well, I suppose, John, on that, ██████ actually isn't a constituent of mine, she doesn't live in the Lagan Valley area. I was aware of that and, usually, I refer cases that aren't in my constituency to other colleagues to deal with it, but because when I spoke to her I could hear her distress about what was going to happen to her ██████, I decided to take on the case. Indeed normally in these situations, I would allow my constituency office staff to deal with these issues, but again, I recognised that she was distressed, so I personally decided that I would try and deal with this. I suppose, lesson learnt on my part. Sometimes, you actually go the extra mile for people and you engage personally, and now, you're subject to a complaint, and then you're being scrutinised about whether I should have actually volunteered information, which I wasn't asked about. There's an issue there that I think, for the commissioner to consider. Do I need to be telling people without having been asked? I declared the interest, it's registered in the interests, that's publicly available, I can...

**[0:11:18.6] John Devitt: That's absolutely right, you did.**

[0:11:21.6] Paul Givan: Somebody comes to me - and there's about 1000 children at Laurelhill. I'm also a board of governor at Pond Park Primary, Ballymacash Primary. There's over 2000 children that I sit on the boards of governors. If every parent that comes to me about an issue, whether they know or not that I'm on the board of governors, that I'm now going to be required to say, 'By the way, I know you haven't asked this question, but I sit on the board of governors.'

I have a child that goes to Pond Park Primary. I have a child that goes to Laurelhill Community College', and I need to volunteer that information up front... I'm not so sure that that's something that public representatives would be doing as standard practice. I suppose, I would be curious to know, is that the policy, that we are to be expected to do that? I think what you're going to find, quite a number of public representatives won't just go on these board of governors any more and carry out this public service if we're going to be held to this level of scrutiny.

**[0:12:23.5] Melissa McCullough: Well, I can clear that up for you in terms of when you look at rule five, you shall declare any approach to a minister, public represent, public body, public official, or any relevant interest that might reasonably be thought, so she does not fall within those categories. Rule five, in my view, in my reading of it, is not applicable here. However, she has a prima facie case in the facts that she presented, which is why we're interviewing, and we're at this stage of the investigation. You say she never asked, and she clearly says she did ask. Now, in terms of that, I suppose, it's about openness and transparency if she did ask and you didn't say. There's, clearly, you're saying she didn't ask you, and she's saying she did ask you. That's just two different sides of a story that I'm going to have to look at. What I am saying is that, no, but if you are, I'd say that if an MLA is asked something, I'd say it's in their duty to be transparent and open with their answers.**

[0:13:28.4] Paul Givan: A hundred per cent.

**[0:13:29.3] Melissa McCullough: That's all I'm saying.**

[0:13:31.3] Paul Givan: There's nothing to hide around being on the board of governors. For me, it's an honourable commitment that people make in public life, to try and help voluntarily. If I was asked, I wouldn't hesitate in saying, 'I'm on the board of governors.' I've referred to it in speeches in the Assembly when I talk about education, I'll always put that on the record. A stock and trade practice, dealing with constituents day in, day out, if I'm asked, I would say, and there would be no reason to hide that. I wasn't asked about being on the board of governors and I wasn't asked about my ██████ who was planning on attending the school either. I suppose, as a parent as well, I could tell that ██████ was very concerned about this. I took it on, despite her not being a constituent of mine, rather than referring it to a colleague because I recognised that. I knew in the way in which she was engaging with me that she was quite

intensely concerned about this. I suppose there's a judgement call. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**[0:15:08.7] John Devitt: I think, Paul, there's probably three strands to what you're saying. She has retrospectively established these facts if I can put it that way. She didn't know that you were on the board of governors and you didn't tell her. You're not on the official website of the school as being on the board of governors, which she finds strange, and I have to say, I also find strange. Maybe that's a matter for the principal to address and not you. Then she also found out that your [REDACTED] may have been thinking of going to that school. It's a cumulation of facts that she believes should have been more, you should have been more up front with. Those are the core issues, as I see it.**

[0:15:54.2] Paul Givan: I absolutely reject any of that. If you take it on the basis that I was contacted, she's not a constituent of mine, but I took it on because I recognised her genuine concerns and I wanted to resolve them, as you would want to resolve any issues as a parent of a child who's concerned about it. I then made sure that actually, she was able to have her child go to the school in September wearing a school uniform. I resolved the problem. I wasn't asked, was I on the governors? [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The issue about the school, what they do by way of their website, not my, that's a matter for the school. I actually took part in a broadcast for the school, promoting it, to do with its enrolment. I'm not hiding that I'm an active member of Laurelhill. I'm a former pupil. The school is a brilliant school, I publicly promote it at every opportunity. Why would I hide that from a constituent, my close affinity?

**[0:17:03.8] Melissa McCullough: Could I just ask you though, do you understand? I think, you probably do get what's happening here. She has found out retrospectively and, immediately, goes to a point where she thinks she might not have been fully represented for a various number of reasons, including that you're on the board and that there was this collusive thing going on or collusion in deciding, not to mention that you did get the**

**outcome of the uniform in one respect. In another respect, she's unhappy because it didn't highlight the medical reasons and all of this for parents to understand why, etc., so it wasn't, in her view, I guess, a full reading of the materials. Now, that's really neither here nor there when it [over speaking 0:17:47.6].**

[0:17:47.3] Paul Givan: Well, I was going to ask, you would need to be a medical expert to stand over her arguments that's being made, as to whether - we can go into the arguments that she's making about how, the PE kit's impact upon a woman's abdomen area and all of that. Do you know, I'm not sure that's what the basis of the complaint relates to, whether or not I've given a scientific, medical assessment on it.

**[0:18:13.7] Melissa McCullough: No, and I'm not suggesting it's her full complaint, but she adds to it that she doesn't know what happened at that meeting, she didn't hear back from you. I think once she's realising that, she claims she asked you, did you have any conflicts of interest?**

[0:18:29.1] Paul Givan: She didn't.

**[0:18:29.8] Melissa McCullough: She didn't. In view of the fact that she says that, and then, months later, sees that you're a board of governor and thinks that you didn't disclose it to her, that's her story. My question is then, you can almost understand why she then looks back retrospectively and thinks, wait a second, and starts rethinking everything that happened, in light of the fact that it looks, to her, as if you didn't disclose this information. You can see what's happening on that side of the fence, correct?**

[0:19:05.9] Paul Givan: No, I don't actually accept the premise on which she is making the complaint and any of the complaints that she has made. I acted in good faith. From day one, I acted in good faith, and I went the extra mile to help somebody who actually isn't a constituent of mine. To be honest, having a complaint put in, in the nature that it is, I'm quite disappointed that somebody would have put a complaint in of this nature against me. I sorted out an issue, I done it to the best of my ability, and I done it in a way that - now, lesson learnt to me then if I'm going to be, have a complaint of this nature upheld against me, you come off boards of governors. You don't then deal with constituents who aren't in your constituency. You don't pick up the phone call and deal with people at a personal level, you allow your constituency



staff to do it and then [signal breaks up 0:20:03.7] complaint of this nature. I think you then have public representatives starting to withdraw from engaging if we're going to be subject to this type of complaint that has been put in.

[0:20:17.7] There's nothing here that I feel, at any stage, that I acted in bad faith. I wasn't asked. If I was, I wouldn't have hesitated. I didn't see the need, as I don't see the need with my constituents, every conversation I have, to volunteer this type of information. I also feel that I have a duty, as a father, to protect the right of a private life to my own children.

**[0:20:39.9] Melissa McCullough: As I have said to you, you are under no obligation to declare that in general. It's not in your code of conduct, so it's not that it's falling on that, I can tell you that, so you understand. Sorry, John, go ahead.**

**[0:20:55.3] John Devitt: ██████ has gone to great lengths to document her beliefs, her feelings. How did you explain to ██████ that you were going to manage her expectations? I appreciate you say you got the matter resolved, but clearly, there are issues where she thinks it's not resolved, and that you have been disingenuous in the process, by her finding out that you were on the board of governors. The meeting that took place, the topics of discussion didn't take place as she thought they were going to take place. She has lost faith in how you were supposed to represent her.**

[0:21:40.9] Paul Givan: Well, I can't answer how ██████ feels in that respect, John, that would be accepting the premise of her complaint, and I don't. I wasn't disingenuous at any stage. In fact, I went the extra mile at every stage. I wasn't disingenuous in how I behaved or acted. I put myself in her shoes, as a father of children, and I said if I was her, and I was concerned about my ██████ in terms of this policy, I would want to see what can be done. I sought to actually effect change, to address the problems. The fact that she feels that I didn't do it, and acted in a way that's disingenuous, you need to make the call on that if you think that the evidence substantiates the complaint. I don't, and I refute entirely the basis in which she has put a complaint in.

**[0:22:31.7] John Devitt: Well, I refer you, Paul, to her email of 20<sup>th</sup> August, at 4:46 pm, where she says, 'Hi Mr Givan, thank you for taking time to speak with me and explain where you believe things to be, in addition to hearing my concerns in regard to the PE uniform policy at Laurelhill Community College.' Then she goes on to say, 'Please would**

**you be able to put in email where your standpoint is?' I don't think you've ever put anything in writing to ██████, is that correct?**

[0:23:06.2] Paul Givan: No, I didn't go back, in terms of putting in writing, an email on a standpoint in respect of that. I had dealt with the matter in conversation with her and, ultimately, this was a policy for the school. If there was going to be a policy articulated, it was for the school to do that on behalf of the school. I can't unilaterally put into the public domain my views. You would expect in a corporate body that, ultimately, it's the school that has to do that. No, I didn't put in writing in terms of email because I'd spoken to the lady on the phone.

**[0:23:43.7] John Devitt: I suppose, in relation to her latest email of 4<sup>th</sup> June, where she compiled everything and contextualises it, she clearly articulates, in that email, her disappointment that she has found out, retrospectively, as I say, that you were on the board of governors, Jonathan Craig is the vice-chair, and Mr Martin is the chair. Did you ever act as a vice-principal of the board of governors?**

**[0:24:17.5] Melissa McCullough: Vice-chair.**

[0:24:18.5] Paul Givan: No.

**[0:24:18.4] John Devitt: Vice-chair.**

[0:24:20.4] Paul Givan: Jonathan Craig's the chairman of the board of governors, James Martin's the principal, John, so that's not accurate.

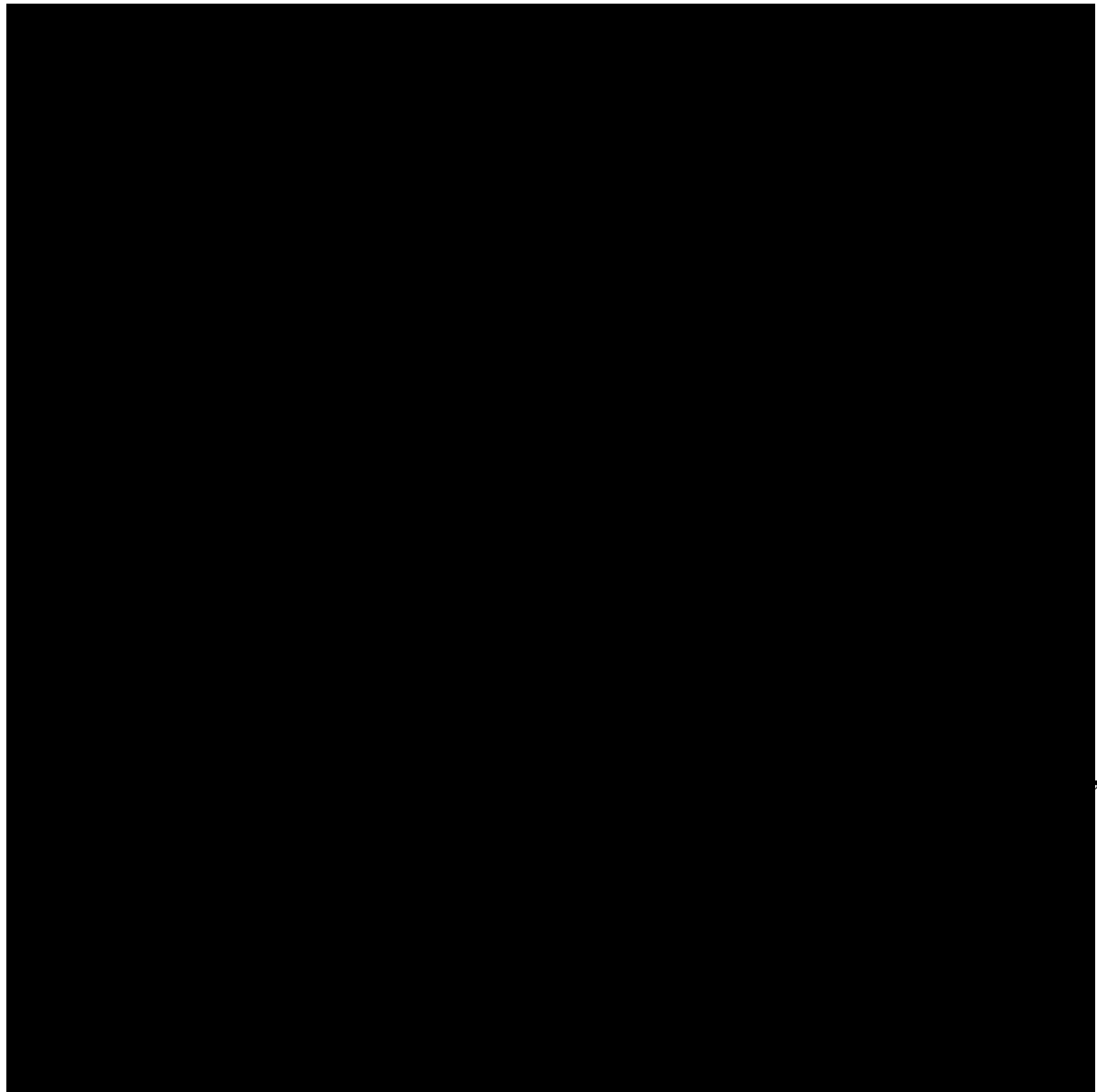
**[0:24:27.7] John Devitt: Have you ever acted as vice-chair, in your capacity?**

[0:24:30.4] Paul Givan: No.

**[0:24:33.4] John Devitt: I have to ask the questions because she's posed them.**

[0:24:36.7] Paul Givan: Yes. No.

[0:24:48.0] Melissa McCullough: She's under the impression, this is what we're on, you have to understand, we've only first, we're only hearing from you now, so all I had was her - I've spoken to her too because she is, she had, we had to get through some of the volumes and stuff to distil it. Just to say that she's under the impression this was a board meeting. It seems from what she writes that 19<sup>th</sup> August, which maybe I'm reading it wrong, but it made me believe there was some board meeting, that she's claiming was



the school to try and find a way forward for this. I spoke to the chairman of the board of governors. I've actually discharged my duties as a public servant, above and beyond, I think, what other people would do in this situation. Now, I'm being subject to a complaint on a retrospective basis, that an individual has found out that I was actually on the board of governors - I wasn't asked about it -



life for my [REDACTED]. I don't accept the premise of the complaint in any of its shape or form that it's been based. You're asking me to say, can I not accept and understand now that [REDACTED] somehow is right in what she's saying? No, I don't, I don't accept that she's right.

**[0:27:34.8] John Devitt: Explain to me then how you concluded your engagement with [REDACTED]. You say that you solved the problem. How did you relay that to [REDACTED]? How did [REDACTED] know that you solved her problem?**

[0:27:49.0] Paul Givan: I can't remember if I had a subsequent follow-up call with [REDACTED] to say - I think I may have - to say that I'd engaged on this issue, that we were trying to find a way forward on that. In terms of the principal, I had indicated to the principal in a telephone call for him to make contact and to speak to [REDACTED]. Ultimately, he's the principal of the school, I'm not. It was a decision that was taken by the senior management team of the school, it wasn't a decision that was taken by the board of governors. I've already indicated that I felt that it should have been and I relayed that to the principal that, to me, a decision like this should have been. They make the point that they were acting in an environment to do with COVID, unsure of, they felt that what they were doing was the right thing to do and that it was a decision that the senior management team took in good faith.

[0:28:47.7] Yes, listen, I'm not sure I can say much more on this. I think I've acted properly throughout. In fact, I think I would be an example for yourselves to be able to say, here's actually somebody who went above and beyond and didn't say, 'Pick it up with your local MP or your MLA in South Antrim', because that's actually where she resides. I took it on, to try and fix myself. I've learnt my lesson. I've learnt my lesson big time on that one.

**[0:29:17.0] John Devitt: When you read all her documentation, Paul, her situation is that she feels, somewhere along the line, that there's been a lack of openness and transparency, and that she has found out things after the events.**

[0:29:36.2] Paul Givan: Yes, but is that, is part of [REDACTED]'s frustration entirely with me or is it with the school? There's issues there about engagement with the principal, engagement with the school, how often - and I haven't, because I don't, I haven't asked James, and haven't asked the school, how often has [REDACTED] been contacting the school? How many emails does she send? I think you found out, Commissioner, she sends a fair amount of documentation and emails and so on. If there's frustration there in terms of how much of a response there's been from the

school, that's an issue to take up with the principal. The principal will say to me, 'Paul, I've got 1000 children, I've got about 2000 parents, and they're always contacting me about school policies and decisions that are being taken.' This isn't related to this case, but in a general sense, put yourself in the shoes of a principal and a school that is navigating all of the dynamics that take place in that environment, and the level of complaints that come in from parents. All of this is very challenging for the public service to deal with.

[0:30:45.1] You're now taking out a complaint, you have to do that, I accept that's part of your job and you're asking these questions. I'm trying to explain, from my perspective, as a public representative, here's the pressures that we're under, here's the commitments that we enter into in public life. I don't need to sit on three schools of board of governors, but I do because I see it as a way to contribute to society. Do schools always get it right in the decisions that they take? No. Do parents always agree with those decisions? No. In this case, I had a concern about a constituent who was worried about her child. I put myself in her shoes and I thought, I would want to have this sorted out. I went about trying to do that. If ██████ feels that I haven't dotted every I and crossed every T, to the level in which she thinks it should have been responded to, then I can't, obviously, satisfy her in that respect.

[0:31:43.6] If I look at how I deal with all of my constituents when they bring concerns to me, the level of engagement that I put into ██████ is way beyond that I would put into a normal constituency case that comes my way because I recognised her concerns in the way she articulated that to me. If you looked at a standard practice of somebody that contacts me about an issue, you'll find, in this case, I have done way more than what I would usually do, but now I'm being subject to an investigation and a complaint, which I find unfair, not based upon evidence that I was asked questions. If I had been asked, on that call, 'Are you a board of governors of Laurelhill?' I would have said yes. It's not a secret. If I had been asked, did I have any children at the school? Even though I would find that an unfair question, I still would have said yes because that's, my family have to put up with the fact that I'm a politician and I'm in public life and, therefore, my family get caught in that. Even though I feel I have a duty to try and protect them, I still would have said yes.

[0:32:54.0] I wasn't asked that, I didn't try to hide it, it's no secret. I publicly promote the school, I publicly associate with the school, and I just don't accept the basis of ██████'s complaints. I don't think that there's an evidence base for it and I don't think there's substance to the way that she feels that I acted in a way which was disingenuous. I didn't.

**[0:33:16.3] Melissa McCullough: Can I just, for the record, ask you a question, and you can answer yes or no. Was there any form of collusion between you and Mr Martin and the other, Jonathan Craig?**

[0:33:27.3] Paul Givan: Absolutely not. I suppose if anything, my own personal - I'm telling you my own personal view - I didn't agree with the decision of the senior management team to change the policy. That was my own personal view. I personally felt that the school should have been wearing a school uniform and I didn't agree. I said to James, I didn't agree that that was a decision that should have been left for the senior management, it should have been referred to the board of governors, for us to consider because I believe that that would have been a significant policy change for governors, not a [unclear word 0:33:59.9] management decision that teachers have to take. I said to James on that call - I didn't relay this to [REDACTED] because that's a private, this is a, I'm a board of governor, I have to act as part of a corporate body. My conversations with the principal, I don't then go on to Facebook and say, 'I've just told the principal of the school their decision was wrong, it shouldn't have happened, and now, the policy is going to be changed.' That would be unprofessional for me to do that, as a board of governor of the school.

[0:34:27.7] I'm saying, as part of this, personally, I didn't agree with that decision. It wouldn't have been one that I would have supported had it come to the board of governors before the policy came in. Not using the evidence that [REDACTED] subsequently provided on a medical basis, I would have had different reasons for taking a different position. I explained to James, in that call, that I didn't agree with it and that, on the substance of why they had done it, I didn't accept that that was the right decision. I also said that the school and the teachers have left themselves now open to criticism because that criticism was being played out on Facebook. The school has a Facebook page and there was comments coming in, around why has this policy been changed? I have to buy a PE kit for my child, who isn't even going to play PE this year, they're in sixth form. It's adding costs to them. I got the reasons why parents at large, some of them weren't happy with this. My own personal view was that that wasn't the decision that should have been taken by a senior management team, it should have been for the governors.

[0:35:37.9] I'm not going to relay all of that in an email to [REDACTED] and start spelling out the internal conversations that I have with the principal. I don't think that's professional for me to do that.

**[0:35:51.2] Melissa McCullough: I understand where you're coming from and thank you for providing that information. I honestly do understand exactly where you're coming from. I do understand where ██████ is coming from and I think we, as I said to you in my letter, we wanted to focus on exactly, did you declare, did you not declare, were you meant to declare? Whether or not all of that, I just needed to confirm everything there. The school issue, clearly, is a totally different issue to us. Yet, we've been provided with all this contextual information, which is fine, but it is a lot of information to digest. The one thing I would say is that she did make clear that she was bringing this to the Children's Commissioner and to the education department, Department of Education, I think, and that there's - Education Authority, is it? That's all something that she is obviously looking at. I guess, in that sense, it might really actually match into what you're saying, you're not agreeing with that decision being taken by the SMT themselves and not being brought to the board.**

**[0:37:01.6] That is something, to tell you the truth, is really not in my remit. But for this whole case that she's made, it may not have been as easy to get to the point of an investigation phase, but this is where we are. I actually don't have any more questions. I'm glad that you were very honest and frank with us today. I think there may or may not - I need to think this over - I think there just may have been some confusions on the side. If I was confused if there was a board meeting or wasn't a board meeting, do you see what I'm saying? There's ways people interpret things and I'm not so sure that there's some misunderstandings here, but at any rate...**

[0:37:46.3] Paul Givan: I don't think - again, you're trying to go by memory - I'm pretty certain there wasn't a governors' meeting held to deal with this issue. Again, that was in the middle of the whole COVID thing too, so we wouldn't have...

**[0:38:00.0] Melissa McCullough: It would have been online, no matter.**

[0:38:01.2] Paul Givan: Probably, if it had been, it would have been online. My recollection of this is that on the back of me having picked up the phone to James Martin, and I spoke to Jonathan, I think that was, the principal then, on the back of that, put out a - I can't remember if it was an advisory note on Facebook or there was... In any event, the policy was changed to allow a choice for parents.

**[0:38:26.6] Melissa McCullough: Yes, I saw that.**

[0:38:28.3] Paul Givan: I don't think that that, yes, I'm pretty certain that change in policy wasn't authorised by a board of governors meeting because the original decision wasn't authorised by a board of governors meeting. I think James decided that he would sort this out himself. That's my recollection of it.

**[0:38:51.4] Melissa McCullough: Well that's, yes, it's trying to consolidate these two things. To be quite frank, many parts of this, as I said in the letter, are not really to do with our code of conduct and so it's almost immaterial to us, but it gives us context. John, have you any further questions?**

**[0:39:09.7] John Devitt: No. Just to recap, Paul, and in fairness to you, it's apparent that you did fully understand what her issues were. Whatever conversation you had with ██████, you took them on board, and in your own words, you said that you, as far as you're concerned, resolved the issues and dealt with the uniform issue on her behalf. Your engagement with her thereafter didn't occur and she then has, retrospectively, done her own homework, found out a whole lot of things, and is clearly upset and disappointed that you didn't declare your interest of the school, the board of governors. As you quite rightly say, you've declared that at the Assembly, it's not a secret, and that you don't feel that you have to declare that anyway. Is that a fair summary of where you stand?**

[0:40:12.1] Paul Givan: In the round, yes, in terms of when I - I have asked myself, on the back of seeing the complaint, I've said to myself, is there something here I could have done different so that ██████ doesn't now feel aggrieved? What did I do that has led her to feel that I didn't discharge my duty in the way that she felt was appropriate?

**[0:40:37.5] John Devitt: Do you think she's entitled to an apology?**

[0:40:40.7] Paul Givan: Well, I'm not sure on what basis. If I've done wrong, I'll put my hands up and say I've done wrong. I think there's a judgement call to be made too as public representatives and, obviously, slightly as a side issue and it would be good to have a chat outside of an investigatory conversation about this because...



**[0:41:04.0] Melissa McCullough: Yes, it probably would be.**

[0:41:05.7] Paul Givan: Obviously, the whole ministerial code thing is going to come into focus for me now too, and there's a big [over speaking 0:41:11.4].

**[0:41:11.4] Melissa McCullough: Actually, if you have five minutes after this, I'll turn off the thing because I need, I would like to talk to you about that.**

[0:41:16.5] Paul Givan: Yes. It's getting that balance of... I know the code of conduct, I know it well in terms of what's expected of me and having to make declarations of interests and so on, and I discharge my duty in that faithfully because integrity is important to the whole political process. If you're not asked by a constituent, 'Are you on the board of governors?' I wasn't trying to hide that, so I'm not sure, John, on what basis I would need to say sorry for. That, to me, an apology needs to be something meaningful and based upon wrongdoing. I suppose my genuine question here is, what did I do wrong?

**[0:42:02.9] John Devitt: Well, I'm not saying that you should or shouldn't, Paul, I'm simply posing the question because clearly, ██████ thinks that something has gone awry here and that there's been some sort of cover up. I suppose, you haven't clarified with her, '█████', I'm not sure why this complaint is here. I actually resolved your issue for you. I'm a busy man, I've got lots of other things, you're actually not a constituent of mine', and she knew that, and she's documented that within her correspondence. I suppose, I'm trying to seek a resolution to this and I don't know...**

**[0:42:47.0] Melissa McCullough: Can I also just add to that, Paul, I can't insist on, I'm not, I don't provide any sanctions and I'm not suggesting you're in breach of the code either. I'm just, John's just throwing that out there because having spoken to her and read all this stuff, it seems to me somebody who's very upset - as you said, you've picked up on her distress. Maybe two and two is five right now with her and so the clarity of that is missing, maybe. I'm not making a judgement or anything, I'm just, I think that's what John's trying to articulate.**

[0:43:18.1] Paul Givan: I get that, and listen, I have the, we all do, have to manage professional and personal relationships, and you always seek to find paths of least resistance and seek to

accommodate people. There's also then judgement calls. I'm not saying it in respect of ██████, but I think you also have to be careful not to validate somebody's grievances by acknowledging that, actually, you've done wrong. If you don't, and if you can stand over the way in which you've conducted yourself, to then validate somebody's grievance by saying, 'Listen, for the sake of harmony here, I'm going to accept and say sorry'...

**[0:43:56.7] Melissa McCullough: No, I don't suggest that.**

[0:43:59.2] Paul Givan: That can also then fuel somebody that thinks that they have a genuine grievance, whenever in this case, I don't think that she does.

**[0:44:06.8] Melissa McCullough: I'm just [over speaking 0:44:07.0] Paul between, there's been cases where someone has decided to, when it's all said and done, just because it was in a professional manner to do so, even if they haven't done wrong, not to say you're sorry, but to, if there has been a misunderstanding. I haven't made a judgement, but if there has been, which clearly, there's two sides to this right now and it seems that maybe there was a misunderstanding. Compared to what you're saying and she's saying, there's clearly two different things going on here. I don't know if two and two made five and we now, and because of what she remembers asking about a conflict, and you don't remember being asked, has led to this whole situation and this complaint. That's totally separate from the school. Part of what I believe is my job in the Assembly, is to make sure you guys have as much trust as you deserve, and to make sure that complainants feel like they've been listened to and heard, and justly heard. I'm bringing that up as something that might be something you'd consider, depending on what the outcome of this case is, of course.**

[0:45:17.9] Paul Givan: I've always tried, if there has been genuine fallout with anybody, in my own walk of life, you've got to try and draw a line under things and see if you can move forward and put people at ease. That, to me, is the right thing to do. That's without prejudice to that specific, this specific case with ██████. I suppose there's always that fine line, and this is your own professional judgement, as the commission and the commissioner that looks into complaints. In terms of politicians being able to do their job and they're protected from unwarranted criticism - and like I was subject to an investigation before, which Douglas Bain looked into, when I chaired a Justice Committee meeting. Douglas dismissed the complaint out of hand. He said that there was an evidence session that took place at that Justice Committee,

the individual witness wasn't happy with the line of questioning that I had taken, and Douglas Bain said, 'Well, sorry, when you come to a committee, expect to be scrutinised, expect to be called into question if you're giving evidence that people want to interrogate', and he dismissed that complaint out of hand.

[0:46:24.0] I'm not saying that ██████'s complaint should be dismissed out of hand, I'm not suggesting that, but that's more a wider point. I look at it, and I say to myself, to be in politics, you put yourself rightly subject to a much greater level of accountability and transparency than other people. You should be subject to all of that, but if there are complaints that come in, which, in my view, ██████'s complaint has come in, it really then puts a question mark over, why should you be involved in some of these aspects of political life? The safer option for some people would be, don't be on boards of governors, don't allow yourself to be subject to this kind of criticism. I think we need to try and...

**[0:47:08.5] Melissa McCullough: Well, it's hurtful when you help somebody and you feel that you're being treated in an unjust way on your side of the fence.**

[0:47:14.3] Paul Givan: It just makes it harder to get more people involved in public life. Yes, we're to be subject to accountability, transparency, and absolutely, that needs to be done, but if there are complaints that come in that have no substance to them, those people in public life have also a right to be protected then, and not be subject to vexatious, all those complaints that come in from people.

**[0:47:41.4] Melissa McCullough: Well, you see, I have a problem with the word vexatious because, in this case, it doesn't, you won't know if it's vexatious if even, you often won't know if a complaint is vexatious unless you look into it. That's going to be a difficult one.**

[0:47:54.4] Paul Givan: I meant, my commentary on that is on the wider aspect of public life. That doesn't relate to ██████'s complaint, that's not meant about that, it's in the more general sense of there are people who do complain regularly about things, and that can drain things.

**[0:48:10.5] Melissa McCullough: Yes.**

[0:48:14.4] Paul Givan: I say that to someone who has to deal with complaints, yes.

**[0:48:19.4] Melissa McCullough: I agree. John, you've nothing more?**

**[0:48:22.9] John Devitt: No, Paul, thanks for your engagement. You've been very open and frank, so I appreciate that, and I wish you well.**

[0:48:29.9] Paul Givan: Thank you, John.

**[0:48:30.6] Melissa McCullough: Yes, and thank you Paul. I'm just going to stop the recording for one...**

[Recording ends abruptly at 0:48:36.5]

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**

**Document 4: Call Log, Telephone conversation with Mr J Martin, Principal Laurelhill College**

Date: 14 June 2021

Time: 5.20pm

I spoke with Mr Martin, who returned my phone call of 14 June at 9am.

Mr Martin explained that the conversation between himself and Mr Givan on 19 August was informal and took place over the telephone. This was not part of any formal Board meeting. He also confirmed this was the same in relation to the telephone conversation Mr Givan had on the same day with the Chairperson.

Mr Martin confirmed that the original decision made in relation to the school uniform policy was made by the Senior Leadership team at the school and not the Board.

M McCullough