Northern Ireland Schools' Football Association

Post-Primary Competition Rules 2026/27

Section A — Players and teams

1. Player eligibility and age limits

- **Age cut-off.** All players must fall within the prescribed age limits set by NISFA as of midnight on 1st July prior to the current season.
- **Eligible birth dates** for each age group run from **2nd July to 1st July**, inclusive. The eligible birth dates for each competition are published with the competition entry information each season.
- **School leaving.** Players automatically become ineligible upon leaving school.
- **Dual representation.** A player may only represent a second school during the same season with the consent of the Post-Primary Committee.

2. Teacher supervision

- All teams must remain under the direct and sole management of a schoolteacher.
- A school team must be accompanied by a teacher from that school at every fixture.

3. Safeguarding

- Schools and teams operate in line with Irish FA safeguarding policy and with the child protection policy of the school.
- Any adult other than a teacher who assists with or coaches a team must hold a current enhanced AccessNI disclosure, must have completed safeguarding training within the previous three years, and must work in the presence of a teacher of that school.
- Any person taking photographs or video at a fixture, including a photographer engaged by a school, must hold a current enhanced AccessNI disclosure and must be clearly identifiable. The teachers in charge of both teams must be informed before any photography or filming takes place, and images may only be taken where each school's own consent arrangements allow. Photography and filming are not permitted in changing rooms or toilet areas.
- Any person who is the subject of a statutory child welfare inquiry must stand down from all NISFA activity pending the outcome.
- Any person convicted of an offence involving the welfare of children may not take part in NISFA competitions.
- Conduct that harms a child, or risks harm to a child, brings the game into disrepute and will be dealt with under Rule 13.

4. Codes of conduct

- Players, teachers, coaches, parents and spectators are expected to observe the NISFA Codes of Conduct, published separately.
- Schools are responsible for making the codes known to their players and to parents.
- A breach of a code may be dealt with under Rule 13.

Section B — Matches

5. Kit and equipment

- **Colour clashes.** In the event of similar kit colours, the away team must change.
- Goalkeepers must wear a jersey of a distinctively different colour from both outfield teams.
- **Match balls.** U14 to U18 use size 5, leather or an approved match ball. U12 and U13 use size 4.

6. Playing surfaces and pitch dimensions

- **Surfaces.** All ties must be played on grass or an approved 3G artificial pitch. Play on any other surface requires prior mutual consent from both teachers.
- **Dimensions** are subject to reasonable local conditions and prior agreement between both accompanying teachers.

7. Risk assessment

- Each school must complete a risk assessment ahead of each fixture, in line with Education Authority guidance.
- The home school is responsible for ensuring that the pitch is safe for play and properly marked, with nets and corner flags in place.
- The referee has the final decision on the fitness of the ground for play.

8. Match durations, extra time and penalties

All matches are played under the standard Laws of the Game, subject to the competition-specific durations below. If scores are level at full-time, the specified extra-time period is played. If still drawn, ties are decided by a penalty shootout.

BOYS	Regular time	Extra time		GIRLS	Regular time	Extra time
U18	40 mins each way	10 mins each way		U18	35 mins each way	7 mins each way
U16	40 mins each way	10 mins each way		U16	30 mins each way	5 mins each way
U15	35 mins each way	5 mins each way		U14	25 mins each way	5 mins each way

BOYS	Regular time	Extra time		GIRLS	Regular time	Extra time
U14	35 mins each way	5 mins each way		U13	20 mins each way	5 mins each way
U13	30 mins each way	5 mins each way		U12	20 mins each way	3 mins each way
U12	25 mins each way	5 mins each way				

9. Substitutions

- Teams may name up to 5 substitutes on the match sheet.
- A maximum of 5 substitutes may be used per match.
- All substitute names must be submitted to the referee prior to kick-off. Unlisted players may not take part.

10. Head injuries

- A player with a suspected concussion or head injury must be removed from the field of play immediately and may not return to that match, whatever the player says.
- The same applies to any other suspected serious injury.
- The teacher in charge is responsible for applying this rule and should follow current concussion guidance for grassroots sport before the player returns to any football activity.

11. Match officials and result reporting

- **Referees, rounds prior to quarterfinals.** The away team is responsible for appointing a qualified referee or providing a teacher to referee.
- **Reporting results.** The winning team must report the match result to the designated Competition Organiser within 24 hours of the round's scheduled completion date.

Section C — Conduct and administration

12. Supervision of pupils attending matches

- Pupils attending a fixture who are not playing must be supervised by a responsible adult other than the teacher in charge of the team. A ratio of one adult to every twenty pupils is recommended.
- Spectators must be kept off the touchline and, where practicable, on the opposite side of the pitch from the players and team staff.
- The home school is responsible for taking reasonable steps to keep the ground secure.
- Each school is responsible for the conduct of its pupils and spectators at every fixture.

13. Discipline

- **Red cards.** Any player sent off is automatically suspended from their team's next competition match. The teacher in charge must report the dismissal to the Competition Organiser immediately.
- **Severe misconduct.** Any team that accumulates 3 or more sendings-off in a single match officiated by an officially appointed referee will be automatically eliminated from the competition.
- A school may protest or appeal against a disciplinary decision under Rule 14.

14. Protests and appeals

- A protest must be made in writing to the Competition Organiser within 48 hours of the match, signed by the Principal or a person authorised in writing by the Principal, and accompanied by a deposit of £50 which is returned if the protest is upheld.
- A copy of the protest must be sent to the teacher in charge of the other school at the same time.
- A protest about the pitch, goalposts or equipment will not be considered unless it was raised with the referee before kick-off.
- Protests are decided by three members of the Post-Primary Committee, none of whom may be connected with a school involved, within five working days. The decision is given in writing with reasons.
- A school may appeal a decision to an Appeals Panel appointed by the Board, which will not include any member of the Post-Primary Committee. An appeal must be made in writing within 48 hours of receiving the decision, accompanied by a deposit of £100 which is returned if the appeal is upheld.
- The decision of the Appeals Panel is final.
- A competition continues, and a suspension remains in force, while a protest or appeal is pending.

15. Committee authority

- The Post-Primary Committee is the sub-committee of the NISFA Board responsible for these competitions.
- The Committee may vary match dates and deadlines due to unforeseen circumstances.
- The Committee may remove from a competition any team failing to comply with these regulations.
- Where these regulations do not cover a matter, the Committee will decide, and its decision has effect as if made under these regulations.
- These regulations may be amended only by the Board, on the recommendation of the Committee. An amendment takes effect from the start of the following season.

16. Data protection

- NISFA processes personal data supplied under these regulations in accordance with UK data protection law.

- Information provided by schools is used only for the administration of competitions and is kept no longer than is necessary for that purpose.
- Results, fixtures, team names and competition records may be published by NISFA.