

Norwich Steiner School

Policy and Procedure for dealing with Parental Concerns & Complaints

Reviewed May 2014

Parental Concerns & Complaints Procedure May 2014.doc

Purpose of the Parental Complaints Procedure

This procedure aims to reassure parents that:

- Any complaint will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a prompt and satisfactory resolution; and
- This organisation recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in practices.
- This Complaints procedure does not cover habitual or vexatious complaints, which are covered by a specific and separate policy.

Scope of this Procedure

A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the work of this organisation. It deals with specified day-to-day complaints against the management and/or operations including the School, Kindergartens, and Afternoon Care. The generic term "School" is used to include all these operations as part of the School.

Complainants may be current parents and guardians of children within the school. The term "parent" is therefore used throughout this document as a generic term. In this document, the term 'school' is used to embrace the school, kindergarten and afternoon care.

Informal complaints may be made by telephone, e-mail, in person, or be written. Specific forms are provided in the Appendices both for Informal and Formal complaints. Once a complaint has got to the Formal Stage, a Formal Complaints Form must be completed and signed to confirm that a Formal Complaint is now being made. If a letter or email has already fully outlined the complaint this can be referred to on the form, although the complaint form must still be signed.

As soon as a concern/complaint is received by any member of staff, it will be recorded in a confidential complaints register kept in the administration office and any associated paperwork will be stored in a confidential complaints file. Associated paperwork may for example include the original complaint and any record of meetings, discussions, and outcomes. This is to ensure proper records are kept, that the procedure is carried out correctly, and the procedure can be monitored and reviewed.

Where a complaint may involve child protection issues, including any allegations against a member of staff which affect child safety, the relevant external agency will be informed.

This procedure does not cover complaints that involve allegations of professional abuse, criminal offences, or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues. Allegations of this nature will by-pass the informal stage and will be dealt with directly by a nominated Trustee as an employment issue. Any allegations must be supported by evidence direct from the person making them (i.e. non-speculative) and will normally be dealt with through implementation of the Schools Employer/Employee Concerns process. However, any disciplinary action is strictly a matter between the employer and the relevant employee(s).

If at any stage in the procedure it becomes apparent that the complaint falls outside of this general complaints procedure, the parent will be informed.

There may be rare occasions when despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a parent remains dissatisfied. If the parent seeks to re-open the same issue, the organisation reserves the right to inform him/her in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

There are other routes a parent can follow after this procedure has been carried out which are explained later.

Flow charts on pages 5 & 6 (Appendix 1) provide a summary of the informal (page 5) and Formal stages of this Concerns process.

Stage 1: Informal Stage

On occasion, a parent may raise a concern or make a complaint directly with teaching or administration staff without any formality. Initially, it may be unclear whether the parent is making a complaint, seeking information, wishes to raise a matter, or has misunderstood a situation. In any event, the aim would be to address the concern.

At this early stage, the parent may approach any relevant staff member who they think may be able to help them address their concern. However, if they are not sure who to approach, parents are advised to speak to a member of the administration team.

The administration team will log their concern in the formal concerns register and put the concern in writing, if the parent has not already done so, so that the parent can check that their concern has been correctly represented.

The administration team will advise the parent of the most appropriate person to speak to. In some cases they will ask that person to contact the parent directly, and in other situations they may suggest that the parent makes the first approach. Once an informal concern has been registered in this way, the parent can expect under normal circumstances to hear from or be directed to the relevant person within 5 days.

Within a month, and after the parent and the relevant member of staff have spoken, either that member of staff or the administration team will check in with the parent to ascertain whether or not they are satisfied with the response they have received, and if not, guide them to the more formal stages of the complaints procedure.

It is envisaged that with goodwill, most matters will be dealt with at this Informal Stage.

Stage 2: Formal Stage

If wishing to proceed with a formal complaint, the parent will be asked to write to the school administration team within two weeks of expressing their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the informal procedure. At this stage, parents are asked to complete a Formal School Complaints Form (see Appendix Three), outlining the full details of the complaint (taking into consideration the response from the informal stage). The original complaint should also be appended. Help with documenting the complaint will be offered if the parent wishes.

If a formal letter of complaint has been received, and if the parent is not satisfied with the outcome from the Informal Stage, the complaints register and files will be updated as such.

The designated Trustee for Parent Complaints will be notified and will nominate a member of staff (usually from the school administration team) to administer the formal stage of the procedure. This person will arrange a Complaints Meeting of the management team, so that everyone is aware of the complaint as soon as possible, with the aim of having a written response sent within three weeks of receipt of the formal complaint. If the complaint involves or implicates a member of the management team, that person will not attend the complaint's meeting and will only be involved in so far as they may need to be questioned as part of the investigation.

At the first Complaints Meeting, it will be determined what information and evidence needs to be gathered to investigate the complaint, and this task will be delegated to the nominated administration person. This may include the need to gather more information from the parent submitting the complaint.

Once the relevant documentation has been gathered, a subsequent meeting or meetings will need to be organised in order for management team to consider and evaluate the situation.

The nominated administration person will attend the Complaints Meeting to take proper records of discussions and agreed actions, outcomes and timetables of implementation, but will not otherwise participate in the meeting.

Once a decision has been taken, the outcome will normally be communicated verbally to the parent by one of the Management Team members and confirmed in writing. The aim is that such a letter should be issued within three weeks of the written formal complaint being received. If for some reason because of holidays or complexity of the complaint there is a delay, a letter will be sent by the nominated administration person explaining the reason for the delay and giving a revised date.

The verbal and written response will provide reasons for the conclusions reached at the Complaints Meeting and what action, if any, will be taken to address the matter.

If the parent still remains dissatisfied, they may ask for an appeal or may write directly to the Chair of the Trustees, requesting a review/appeal hearing. This should be initiated within 3 weeks of the date of the written response.

Stage 3: Appeal Panel

We hope that Complaints rarely reach this level. However, if the need arises, an objective and professional Appeal Panel (established according to the suggested composition detailed in Appendix 3) will consider complaints at this stage.

The role of the panel is to act with and on behalf of the trustee body to ensure and verify that the school has acted appropriately, and to judge whether or not there is any need for changes to procedures or policies governing the school.

Once a signed formal Letter of Appeal has been submitted, the nominated administration person will issue a written acknowledgement-of-receipt. This letter will also confirm to the parent that the Appeal will be heard by the Appeal Panel within 4 weeks of the submission of the Appeal. The right to call witnesses to the meeting (which is subject to the approval of the Chair of the Appeal Panel), and the right of the parent to be accompanied by a companion of his/her choice, will also be explained in this initial letter.

The Appeal Panel will review all the information from both the informal and formal stages of the procedure.

The date, time, and venue for the meeting of the Appeal Panel will be confirmed, at least one week in advance, to the parent and all relevant staff who may need to attend.

The Appeal Panel meeting will be held following the procedures detailed in Appendix 4.

A written decision will be sent by the Chair of the Appeal Panel within two weeks of the meeting to the parent, the relevant staff against whom the complaint was made and the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

This letter will explain that this decision is final. If the parent wishes to pursue other routes of complaint, these are outlined below.

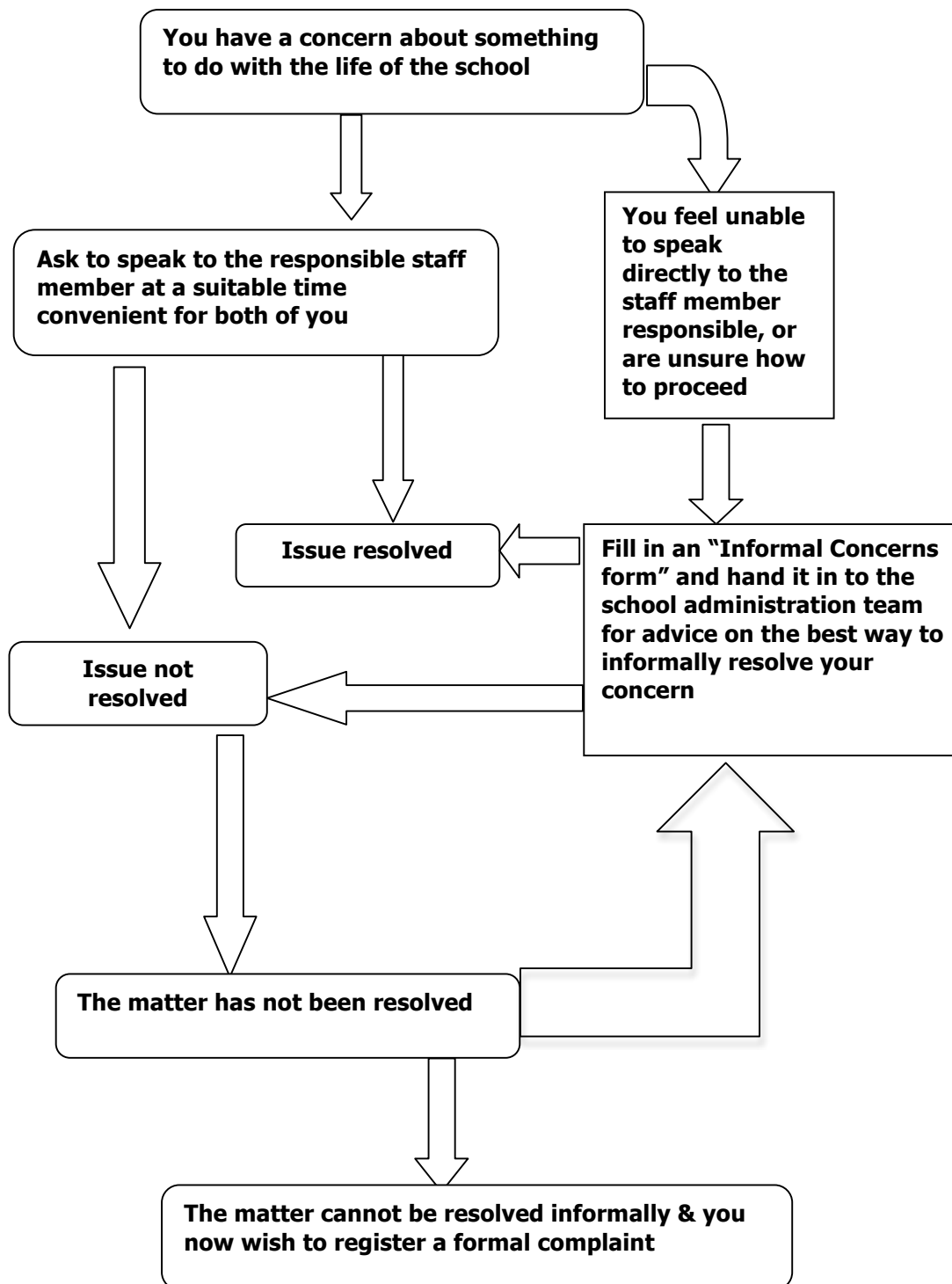
Other Routes of Complaint:

As explained in the leaflet "Complaints to Ofsted about Schools", Ofsted cannot consider complaints about independent schools in the first instance. However, once the School's own Complaints Procedure has been followed, a parent can send their complaint in writing to the relevant government department:

Independent and Boarding Team
Dept. for Children Schools and Families
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington
DL3 9BG.

Appendix 1: Flowchart of Complaints Procedure

Overview for Concerns & Complaints Informal concerns



**Overview for Concerns & Complaints
Formal Complaint**

The matter cannot be resolved informally & you now wish to register a formal complaint

Write to the school administration team. Please use the Formal Complaint Form in Appendix 3 whenever possible. The Chair of Trustees will be informed on receipt and will nominate a person to administer your complaint. Your form should be acknowledged within 24 hours of receipt

Management team will review and investigate your complaint. Investigation completed & written outcome provided to those involved, usually within 3 weeks

The report & recommendations are satisfactory

The report & recommendations are not satisfactory

**You write to the Chair of Trustees to call for a Review Hearing (panel) to adjudicate on your appeal
Panel formed & Chair contacts you to inform you of process
Panel takes place (see outline procedure)
Final adjudication issued**

Appendix 2: Form to notify informal School Complaint (Stage 1)

NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL & KINDERGARTENS

INFORMAL CONCERNS FORM

(For the first/informal stage of a complaint)

The informal stage of our complaints procedure for parents/guardians is where we encourage you to try to address any concerns you may have by talking to the appropriate person.

So, if you have got something you are worried about but don't know whom you should talk to, or if you would like some guidance/support to try to address your concern, please do come and speak to someone in the administration team (ask at reception) and we will offer you guidance. If your concern is at all complicated, it's really helpful for us if you would outline it below, so that we can be sure we understand and find the right person to address it properly.

Please briefly outline your concern:

Name:

Date:

Thank you. Now please pass this form to the school administration team. We will log your concern in our confidential concerns book and advise you of the most appropriate person to speak to. In some cases, we will ask that person to contact you directly, and in other situations we may suggest that you make the first approach. We will offer this advice or ask the relevant person to contact you normally within 5 days.

Once you have spoken to the relevant person about your concern and within a month of your raising your concern, either that person, or a member of the administration team, will check with you whether you are satisfied with the response you have received, and if not we will guide you through the more formal stages of the complaints procedure.

.....Section below to be completed by member of school staff.....

Complaint referred to..... Date.....

Action taken..... (Append details if necessary)

Parent satisfied that complaint has been addressed? YES/NO

If **YES**, parent signature to confirm..... Date.....

If **NO**, next steps (further informal or formal?).....

Form completed by..... Date.....

Appendix 3: Form to notify formal School Complaint (Stage 2 and/or Stage 3)

Child's Name (to whom the issue relates).....Class Group.....

Parent/Guardian.....

Contact Details

.....

Details of Complaint:

(Please be as specific as possible e.g. giving dates, who was involved and where etc.)

Please attach a continuation sheet/additional information if you wish

What outcome do you now seek?

Signed.....Date.....

Please return the completed form to the nominated administration person at the School.

Appendix 4: Composition of Appeals Panel.

The Appeals Panel should consist of 3-4 Members, at least one of whom is a current Trustees with no prior involvement in the case, and one or two other professional and independent persons. Panel members should collectively possess the necessary skill to review and investigate all information and evidence associated with the complaint.

The external person(s) should also be relevant to the complaint; thus, for example, if the complaint is educational in nature, the panel must have at least one member who is knowledgeable and qualified appropriately; likewise a financial complaint must have a suitably qualified person on it.

No member of a Appeals Panel should have had prior involvement with the complaint, which is why the Chair of the Board of Trustees should not sit on Panels. If in exceptional cases the whole Board of Trustees has had prior involvement with the complaint, they should choose an entirely external panel.

A member of the administration team will be nominated to provide the necessary administrative support for the procedure, and will have responsibility for ensuring members of the panel have all the necessary information, as well as helping to coordinate meeting dates etc, so that the panel are free to concentrate on resolving the complaint. The nominated administration person will be present to take notes, but will not participate in the meeting.

The Board of Trustees will also choose the person who is to be the Chair of the Appeal Panel.

All of the Appeals panel and the nominated administrative person will respect confidentiality. Failure to do so will be considered as professional misconduct and will be dealt with accordingly.

Appendix 5: School Appeal Panel: Procedures for Hearing the Appeal

Introduction

The aim of the meeting is to review the complaint.

The Chair of the Panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

Although the meeting will follow the structured order below, the Chair will endeavour to ensure that all parties are put at their ease as much as possible.

Each party involved in the procedure (i.e. parent/companion and relevant member(s) of staff against whom the complaint has been made) will wait in different rooms.

Order of Meeting

1. The Chair of the Panel welcomes the parent and their companion and introduces the rest of the Appeals Panel.
2. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
3. The parent explains the complaint and why they are bringing an appeal.
4. The Panel may question the parent.
5. The parent and companion leave the meeting room.
6. The Chair welcomes the teacher or other member of staff representing the Formal Complaints Meeting that occurred at Stage 2, and any other relevant members of staff with respect to the complaint.
7. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
8. The member of staff representing the response from the Complaints Meeting explains the original response to the complaint, including actions taken to address the complaint at Stages 1 and 2 of the procedure.
9. The Panel may question the member of staff.
10. These people then leave the meeting room.
11. The parent (and their companion, if applicable) are invited back into the room to make a final statement, then once again leave the meeting room.
12. The member of staff representing the Complaints Meeting at Stage 2 is invited back into the room to make a final statement, and then they leave the meeting room.
13. The Appeals Panel considers the complaint and aims to make a unanimous decision. If this is not possible, the panel aim for a 2/3 majority, and if this is not possible, then a simple majority. The simple majority is the minimum level of agreement; if this is not possible then the procedure must be started again with the appointment of a new Appeals Panel. The Panel also decides what action (if any) to take and, if appropriate, recommends changes to help ensure similar complaints are not made in future.
14. Where possible, a decision will be made at this Hearing and once a decision has been made, the Chair recalls the parent, then the member of staff and each is informed of the outcome and any action to be taken.

15. If a decision is not possible without further consideration and without keeping people waiting for a long period of time, then this will be explained by the Chair to both the parent and member of staff, and informed that they will be contacted within one week.
16. The Chair will arrange to meet both parties within one week to communicate the decision and any action to be taken.
17. The outcomes will be confirmed in writing to both parties.