

NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL & KINDERGARTENS

Policy and Procedure for dealing with Parental Concerns & Complaints

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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 organization recognizes that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in practices.

Scope of this Procedure

A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the work of this organization. It deals with specified day-to-day complaints against the management and/or operations including the School, Kindergartens, Afternoon Care and Parent and Child Groups. 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, afternoon care and parent & child groups.

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, must be supported by evidence direct from the person making the allegations (i.e. non-speculative) and will be dealt with directly by a Complaints Panel as outlined in Stage 3 of this Procedure. If it is decided by the Complaints Panel to instigate a disciplinary procedure to investigate the alleged actions of a member of staff, then we will let you know that that is the case. 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 organization 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.

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 should be offered a one-to-one meeting with the appropriate person, depending upon the nature of the complaint – this may be the relevant class, kindergarten, afternoon care or parent & child group teacher or with a member of the school administration team. The meeting should take place within one week of the parent raising the concern and the relevant member of staff should make a response to the parent within a week. This may be verbal or in writing, but if given verbally, the member of staff should check with the parent as to whether they would also like the response in writing or not. The form in Appendix 1 has been developed to support the informal stage of the Complaints procedure and is readily accessible in the School entrance.

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

All complaints, however informal, should be registered in the confidential complaints register in the administration office.

However, if the parent is not satisfied with the outcome, the parent will be asked by the member of staff dealing with the complaint whether they wish the complaint to be considered formally at Stage 2 of this procedure.

If wishing to proceed with a formal complaint, the parent will be asked to write to the school administration team within two weeks, completing a Formal School Complaints Form (see Appendix Two), including the original complaints form, and outlining the full details of the complaint (taking into consideration the response from the informal stage). Help with documenting the complaint will be offered if the parent wishes.

Stage 2: Formal Stage

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.

A person will be nominated by the Chair of Trustees from the school administration team to administer the formal stage of the procedure, and this person will arrange a Complaints Meeting of the relevant staff to discuss and investigate the complaint as soon as possible, with the aim of having a written response sent within three weeks of receipt of the formal complaint.

The relevant staff present will be that teaching or other group which is appropriate to the subject of the complaint.

School:- This will be the Class Teachers and depending on the complaint, the relevant Subject Teacher.

Kindergartens:- The meeting will involve the Kindergarten Teachers, and appropriate Assistant.

Afternoon Care:- The Afternoon Care Supervisor and Assistant and if necessary a Class or Kindergarten Teacher (e.g. if the complaint is from one of their parents).

Parent and Child Groups:- The Leaders and the relevant Assistant.

School Administration:- The School Administration team.

For the Complaints Meeting, the nominated administration person will gather all other information surrounding the complaint, the details of the Informal Stage that was carried out, and any other relevant evidence and information.

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.

Following the Complaints Meeting, the agreed results will be communicated verbally to the parent by the member of staff representing the Complaints Meeting 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 include full 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 will be advised that in order to progress the complaint further at Stage 3, they must notify the nominated administration person in writing within two weeks, who will ensure that the parent is offered the opportunity of taking the complaint to a Complaints Panel at Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3: Review by Complaints Panel

We hope that Complaints rarely reach this level. However, if the need arises, an objective and professional Complaints 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 complaint has been submitted, the nominated administration person will issue a written acknowledgement-of-receipt. This letter will also confirm to the parent that the complaint will be heard by the Complaints Panel within 4 weeks of receiving the complaint. It will also inform the parent of the right to submit any further documents other than the Formal Complaint Form. Any further information supplied by the parent must be submitted to the nominated administration person within one week of the receipt of this acknowledgement letter. The right to call witnesses to the meeting (which is subject to the approval of the Chair of the Complaints 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 Complaints Panel will review all the information from both the informal and formal stages of the procedure so far, and any additional information submitted by the parent or the relevant staff against whom the complaint is made.

The date, time, and venue for the meeting of the Complaints Panel will be confirmed, at least one week in advance, to the parent and all relevant staff who may need to attend. At this time, any additional information submitted by either the parent or the staff against whom the complaint is made will be copied to all parties.

The Complaints Panel meeting will be held following the procedures for hearing a complaint detailed in Appendix 4. Any new information submitted at the Complaints Panel Meeting by the parent may result in the deferment of any final decision and the need for the Complaints Panel to reconvene at a later date.

A written decision will be sent by the Chair of the Complaints 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 appeal or to pursue other routes, these are outlined below.

Appeals Procedure

This School is a sponsored school within the Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship (SWSF).

If having followed the whole Parent's Concerns & Complaints procedure through to its conclusion, a parent wants to appeal against a decision made by the Concerns Panel, then they should contact the SWSF on 01342 822115 or email info@swsf.org.uk

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: Form to notify informal School Complaint (Stage 1)

NORWICH STEINER SCHOOL & KINDERGARTENS

CONCERNS FORM

(For the 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. Once you have spoken to the relevant person about your concern, either they, or the administration team, will check with you whether you are satisfied with the response you have received, and guide you through the more formal stages of the complaints procedure if you are not satisfied.

We aim to either deal with your concern directly or advise you of whom you should speak to very quickly. However, we can sometimes be extremely busy (e.g. at times of staff sickness), so please allow us up to five working days to respond.

Appendix 2: 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 3: Composition of Complaints Panel.

The Complaints Panel should consist of 3-4 Panel Members, two of whom are 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 Complaints 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 Complaints Panel.

All of the complaints 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 4: School Complaints Panel: Procedures for Hearing the Complaint

Introduction

The aim of the meeting is to address 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.

The introduction of new information or witnesses, previously not notified to all parties, would be a reason to adjourn the meeting so that everyone has time to consider and respond to the new information.

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 Complaints 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, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
4. The Panel may question the parent and witnesses.
5. The parent and companion leave the meeting room.
6. The Chair welcomes the teacher or other member of staff representing the 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. Witnesses can be called if appropriate.
9. The Panel may question these members of staff and witnesses.
10. These people then leave the meeting room.
11. The parent and their companion 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 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 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 in accordance with Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure within 2 weeks of the decision of the Complaints Panel being made. This letter will explain that they may appeal against the decision to the SWSF or follow other routes as outlined
18. earlier in this document.