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Concerns and Complaints Procedure

1. Aims

This Complaints Policy and Procedure is designed for those with children at Ringwood Waldorf School. It is intended to help sustain a positive ethos within our school and Kindergartens so that problems can be listened to appropriately and resolved wherever possible.

We believe that the education of our children can be most effective when there is close co-operation, mutual trust and respect between all those involved in their upbringing and education.

Our core purpose is to offer high quality Waldorf education for all our children and in order to improve our work, we seek to learn from our mistakes and correct them whenever this is possible.

We offer the following opportunities for communication: weekly newsletter, class evenings, SMT conversations, whole school community meetings and more. We encourage all members of the community to contribute to the life of the school through these channels. We also welcome practical suggestions that can help us improve our communication and the way we work.

Our Concerns and Complaints Procedure aims to deal with issues in a fair and open manner. We intend to respond to questions and criticisms promptly and to do all we can reasonably do to resolve any problems amicably.

This procedure may be supplemented where the issue involves allegations of professional misconduct, criminal offences, including matters covered by our Safeguarding and Child protection procedure or others that might result in a member of staff facing disciplinary action. In cases of that sort, an urgent investigation will take place and evidence will be gathered as appropriate from all parties. We are obliged in such matters to maintain confidentiality, without which due process, legal procedure and/or natural justice would be compromised

In rare circumstances where the behaviour of the complainant gives reason for it, the Trustees reserve the right to handle a complaint according to its Habitual and Vexatious Complaints Policy and Procedure.

2. Legislation and guidance

This policy is based on the following legislation:

- Part 7 of the schedule to the [Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), which places a duty on academies and independent schools to have drawn up and effectively implemented a Complaints procedure

3. Definitions

A **concern** may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*. Concerns will be expressed 'informally', usually in person.

A **complaint** may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*. Complaints will be addressed formally following the procedure outlined below in Section 6.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Ringwood Waldorf School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

The School will only investigate complaints made within three months of the incident.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Office staff are available to talk through concerns regarding school administration, communication and finance.

Class teachers and guardians are available to listen to and deal with concerns. Please contact them initially.

The SMT has put in place 'SMT conversations', where concerns may be discussed with two members of SMT in the event that the previously mentioned staff are unable to deal with the concerns, or if the parents would prefer to speak to SMT initially.

The school has also appointed a Complaints Officer – **Liz Tomkins** (CO will be used forthwith), who will ensure correct record keeping and facilitate the Concerns and Complaints procedures.

The Board of Trustees will lead the investigation of a complaint only in the unlikely event that it is against the whole School Management Team. In addition, the Trustees will lead a review panel hearing in the unlikely event that a complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily.

5. Concerns Procedure: What to do if you have a concern?

If you have a concern about any aspect of the school, please speak to the person directly responsible for the subject of your concern. Normally this would be:

- Concerns about teaching or aspects of the education – your child's early years' practitioner, class teacher or upper school guardian.
- Concerns about general administrative aspects of the school – the school office staff
- If for any reason you feel unable to speak directly to the person concerned, please contact the school's CO, who will facilitate a meeting with the member of staff involved or arrange an 'SMT conversation', as appropriate. You will be able to request two members of SMT to discuss your concern with. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is important.

You should receive acknowledgement within 48 hrs of a concern, and we will offer a meeting if required within 5 school days.

Members of staff will record the reason for any concern as well as next steps that may be identified during the conversation (i.e. actions arising. Where this is agreed to be unnecessary, the note will state the nature of the concern and “no further action required”). You will be asked to sign the note and this will be filed for review by the schools’ CO. It is the CO’s responsibility to follow-up concerns and to ensure that agreed further action is implemented. The CO may contact you to check that your concern has been dealt with.

If concerns remain, the CO at your request, will arrange a further facilitated meeting to help explore your concern informally.

We keep the following records of concern:

- The date it was first raised
- The nature of the concern
- Dates of meetings, communications and those attending them, and meeting notes
- Whether the matter was resolved
- Copies of all documentation

Concern records are kept confidential and secure in the Concerns Log, kept in the Office.

It is our aim to deal with any issues that may arise through our concern procedure. However, if the matter cannot be resolved informally you should raise it as a formal complaint:

6. Complaints Procedure: Formal procedure if concern cannot be dealt with informally.

You should put your complaint into writing addressed to **the Complaints Officer and for the attention of the Chair of SMT**. Please use the Formal Complaint form.

Please note, the school’s Trustees will be informed that a formal complaint has been logged, but will take no part in dealing with the matter at this stage, except in the unlikely event that the complaint is made against the whole School Management Team.

You should receive acknowledgement of a formal complaint within 24 hours and we aim to offer an investigative meeting within 5 working days.

The CO will ensure that a full investigation is carried out into the circumstances of the complaint, alongside members of the SMT. Once the CO is satisfied that all the relevant facts have been established, you will be informed in writing of the outcomes. All parties will receive copies of the relevant documents.

This process will normally take no more than 10 working days .

We keep the following records of complaint:

- The complaint will be listed with the date it was first raised
- The nature of the complaint
- Dates of meetings, communications and those attending them, meeting notes
- Whether/How the matter was resolved
- Copies of all documentation

Complaint records will be kept confidential and secure.

The school will publish the number of complaints dealt with each year, as required by regulation. This record will be made available to school inspectors when they conduct inspections in accordance with the law. Personal details of the complainant will be kept confidential.

6.1. Review Panel Hearing

If you do not agree with the report or recommendations of the CO, you can call for a **Review Panel Hearing** by writing directly to the Chair of Trustees. The Trustees will then appoint the panel. Normally two members of the Panel would be Trustees who have not been involved in handling the complaint. The third member of the panel would be a suitably qualified person independent of the schools' management or governance. The appointment of the panel is the responsibility of the schools' Trustee/governance team.

The panel will make themselves familiar with the procedure and information relevant to the complaint and convene a Panel Hearing as soon as possible.

Once appointed, the Panel Chair will contact you within 48 hours to inform you of the procedure and composition of the Panel, this will include

- the date and time of the hearing - normally within 14 days
- the process and aim –
- members of the panel will review the complaint confidentially, with objectivity and without fear or favour
- the Panel will hear your concerns and may call for the staff members against whom the complaint has been made
- The role of the panel is to verify whether the school has acted appropriately and to judge whether there is a need to change any of its procedures in the light of this complaint
- You have the right to be accompanied to a panel hearing by one other person, who may be a relative, friend or supportive acquaintance (legal representation will not normally be accepted)
- If you want to supply any further information you should do so within one week of the date of the panel hearing. All further information will be made available to all those involved. Any new information supplied at the time of a Panel Hearing may result in a delay of a final decision or the need to reconvene the meeting at a later date
- The decision of the Panel will be final. The school offers no further appeal to the decision of a Review Panel

Following the hearing, the Panel Chair will inform you and the subject of the complaint of their decision in writing, normally within 10 working days

N.B. No part of this procedure should be understood in the nature of a staff disciplinary or grievance procedure. As employers, the Trustees are constrained to act under rules of confidentiality in such cases.

7. Other Complaints

Non-Parental

At the discretion of the Trustees, this procedure will also be used in an adapted form, as appropriate, for concerns or complaints from neighbours or members of the general public affected by some aspect of the operation of the school.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Chair of SMT, or Chair of Trustees, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of services by RWS other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Please refer to our Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters directly with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain directly to the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	<p>Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them directly.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against RWS in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

8. Monitoring Arrangements

This policy will be updated every two years, or as needed. The Complaints Officer will ensure that procedure is known and followed by all involved.

Please contact the Complaints Officer for details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the previous school year.

9. Other Agencies

9.1 DfE

The Department for Education (DfE) cannot investigate individual complaints about private schools. But it has certain powers as a regulator if the school is not meeting standards set by DfE for:

- education
- pupil welfare and health and safety
- school premises
- staff suitability
- making information available to parents
- spiritual, moral, social or cultural development of students

DfE will consider any reports of a major failure to meet the standards. It can arrange an emergency inspection to look at pupil welfare and health and safety, and make sure serious failings are dealt with.

DfE can ask the school inspectorates to take minor complaints into account when the school is next inspected.

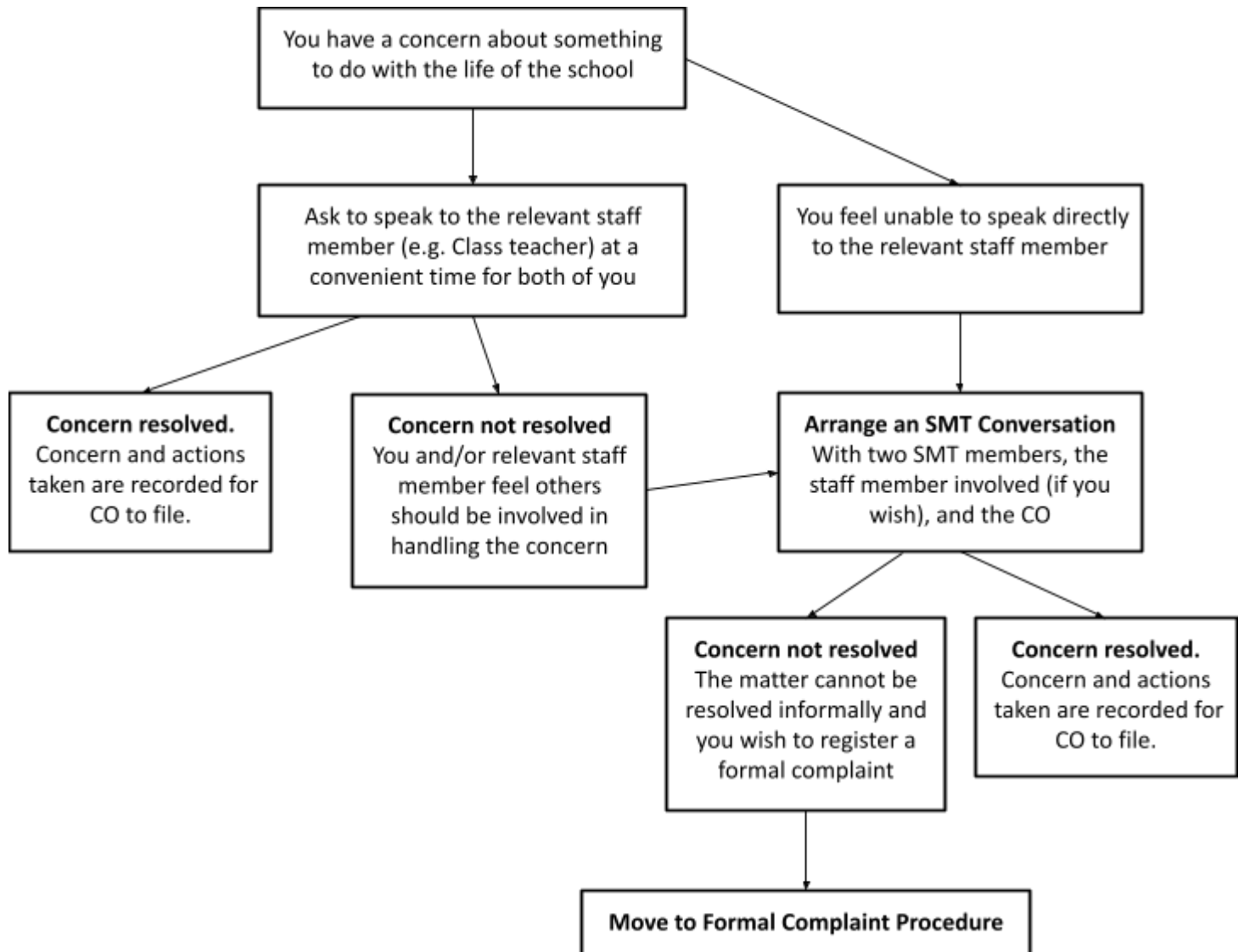
9.2 Ofsted

Ofsted is the body which inspects our school at least once every three years. Schools are required to notify parents of the inspection, and to include details of how they can pass their views to inspectors. Parents can also speak to inspectors during the inspection. The school would like to emphasise all the means of communicating concerns to us before speaking to Ofsted during an inspection. Ofsted will not usually investigate a complaint if the parents have not gone through the School's Complaints Procedure.

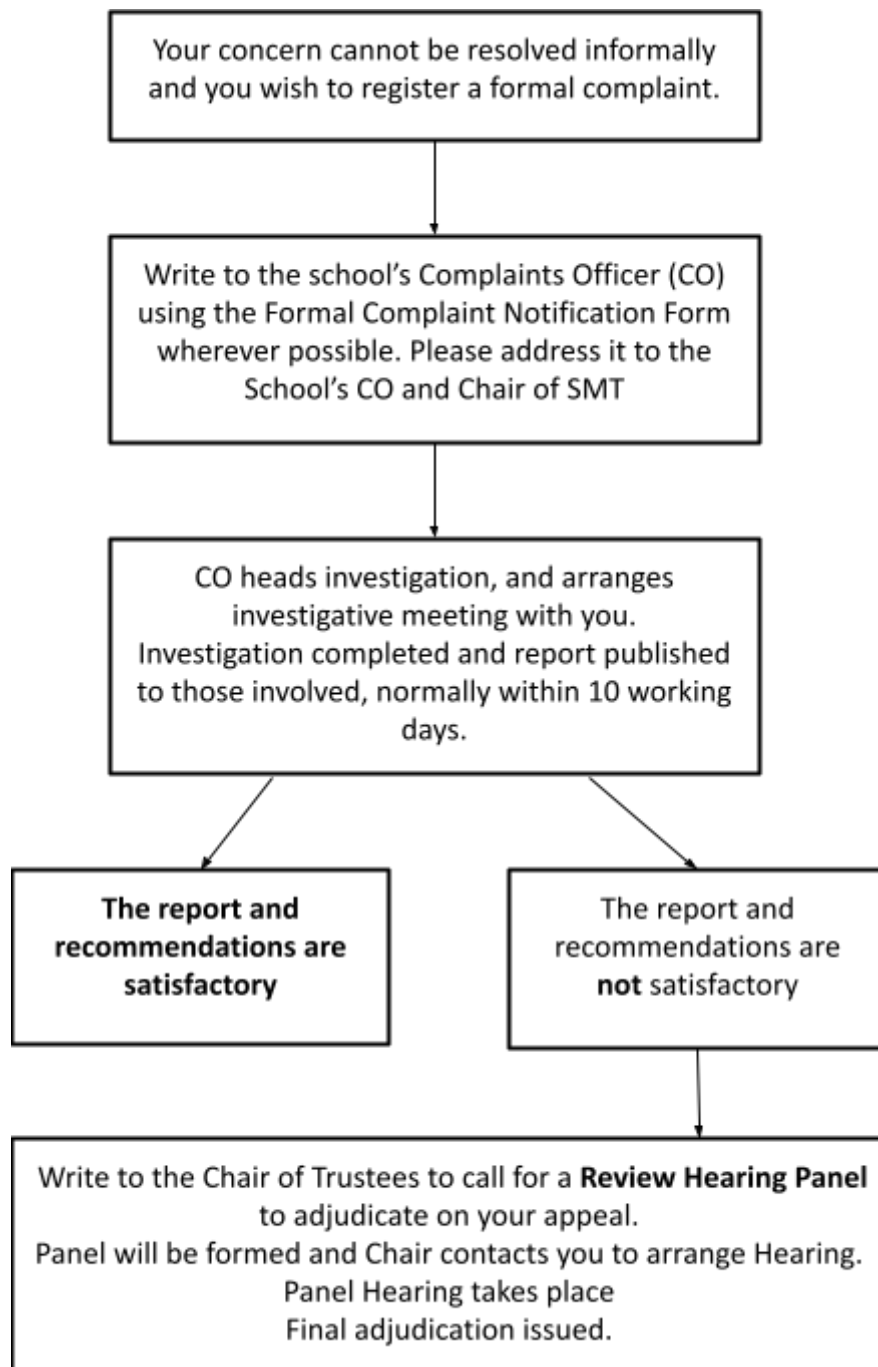
In addition, parents have a legal right to complain to Ofsted on the work of our EYFS.

Parents of children aged between 3 and 6 years old attending the early years' department can contact Ofsted directly, quoting the EY Reference Number and contact number: 835/6022, 01425 472664.

Flowchart Overview for Concerns Procedure



Flowchart overview for Formal Complaint Procedure



Concerns Record Form

(To be completed by the member of staff dealing with the concern)

Name of person bringing the concern:

Date:

Summarise the nature of the concern(s):

Are there any further actions, or agreed next steps following this meeting? Please list.

Other observations:

Name (member of staff):

Date resolved:

Please attach all meeting details, notes, and other relevant information.

Formal Complaint Notification

Your name and contact details:

Please set out the issues of your complaint and who it is addressed against. Be as specific as possible, giving dates, sequence of events etc.:

Are you attaching paperwork? If so, please list it here

What do you feel needs to be done to resolve this matter?

Signed:

Date:

Review Hearing – Guidelines for Conduct

The Panel Chair is responsible for the conduct of the hearing. The following notes provide a general overview of the way a hearing will normally be conducted:

The role of the Panel Hearing is to verify whether the school has acted appropriately and to judge whether there is a need to change any of its procedures in the light of this complaint.

The Panel Chair will ensure that the proceedings are accurately recorded.

Normally, no new information, witnesses or other evidence can be allowed at the time of the Panel Hearing. New information should be made available 7 days prior to the hearing so that everyone has time to consider and respond to it. New evidence supplied later than this may lead to an adjournment of the hearing.

1. Prior to the hearing, the parties should wait in separate rooms. The Review Panel will hear evidence from the parties separately
2. The Chair welcomes the complainant and companion, introduces the Review Panel and outlines the process that will be followed
3. The complainant is asked to explain their objections to the conclusions of the investigation
4. Agreed witnesses may be called (normally witness evidence will be provided in written form)
5. The Panel may ask questions for clarification
6. The complainant and companion leave the meeting room
7. The Chair welcomes the member of staff representing the recommendations of the investigation, introduces the Review Panel and outlines the process that will be followed
8. The staff member explains the original response to the panel: steps 4, 5, 6 follow as above
9. The panel considers what it has heard and the evidence and may recall either party for to answer further questions
10. The panel considers its decision – either to
 - o give a verbal summary of its unanimous decision
 - o reserve its decision for to 36 hours, at the end of which a final judgement will be issued in writing
 - o state that it is unable to arrive at a decision, in which case the procedure should be restarted with a different panel¹
11. The deliberations of the panel are confidential. If there is a split decision, the Chair has the casting vote.
12. The panel decision will –
 - o uphold or deny the complaint according to the evidence available. In addition -
 - it may recommend changes to school procedure or other measures to help ensure similar complaints do not reoccur
 - it may require the school to take action to redress the complaint, e.g. to issue an apology, or statement of correction
13. The parties will be recalled to the meeting room for either to -
 - o hear a brief summing up from the panel, or
 - o to be told of the decision to reserve judgement
 - o to be told that the panel, having been unable make a decision, will dissolve with a new panel to be convened at the earliest possible opportunity

¹ While the final option should be available, in reality, a non-decision of this type ought to be rare. To record a non-decision is, in effect, a panel is passing a vote of no-confidence in itself...

14. If there is to be a summing up, the panel Chair should explain that they will give their view of what they have heard, that this is not an opportunity for either party to 'argue the matter' further, however, after the verbal summary has been made the parties may put a limited number of questions to the panel to assist their understanding of the adjudication.
15. The outcome of the panel will be confirmed in writing within 10 working days
16. The school's internal procedure is complete