POLICY: PARENTAL CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

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VERSION CONTROL

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INTRODUCTION

Norwich Steiner School takes all concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. Any complaint will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a prompt and satisfactory resolution. We recognise that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in practices.

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

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 complaint's procedure.

Who can make a complaint?

Parents and guardians of children registered at the school are able to raise a complaint.

THE SCOPE OF THIS PROCEDURE

This procedure deals with specified day-to-day complaints about the management and/ or operations of the School and Kindergarten. The generic term "School" is used to include all these operations, and "parent" is used as a generic term.

This procedure does not cover complaints that involve allegations of professional abuse, criminal offences, or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues. Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Any such allegations must be

supported by evidence direct from the person making them (i.e., non-speculative). 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.

Where a complaint may involve child protection issues, including any allegations against a member of staff which affect child safety, the school's Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy will be implemented. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) LADO@norfolk.gov.uk who has local responsibility for safeguarding, or the Children's Advice and Duty Service (CADS) 0344 800 8020.

Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures. The school also has a separate whistleblowing policy for school staff.

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.

HOW TO RAISE A CONCERN OR MAKE A COMPLAINT

Informal complaints may be made by telephone, e-mail, in person, or in writing.

If a complaint reaches 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.

Please do not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 2 of the procedure.

Any electronic recording of conversations or meetings, by parents, staff, pupils, or others is strictly prohibited.

Any covert recording by parents will be considered a serious breach of trust/ contract and will be dealt with according to our safeguarding, behaviour and/ or staff discipline procedures.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

The informal and formal stages of making a complaint are described below, with flow charts in Appendix 1 providing a summary of each 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, whether they are seeking information, whether they are wishing to raise a matter, or have 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 or to fill out and hand in one of the 'informal concerns forms' available in the entrance hall.

The administration team will log their concern in the concerns register. If the parent has expressed their concern verbally, a member of staff will put the concern in writing, 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, and may ask that person to contact the parent directly.

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 complaints 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 the 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 be notified in writing, and if considered helpful and appropriate, may also be communicated verbally to the parent by one of the Management Team members. 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 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. The parent may wish to pursue other routes of complaint, which are outlined below.

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.

Other Routes of Complaint

As explained in the leaflet Complaints to Ofsted about schools: guidance for parents and carers, December 2018, Ofsted cannot consider complaints about independent schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) cannot investigate individual complaints about independent 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

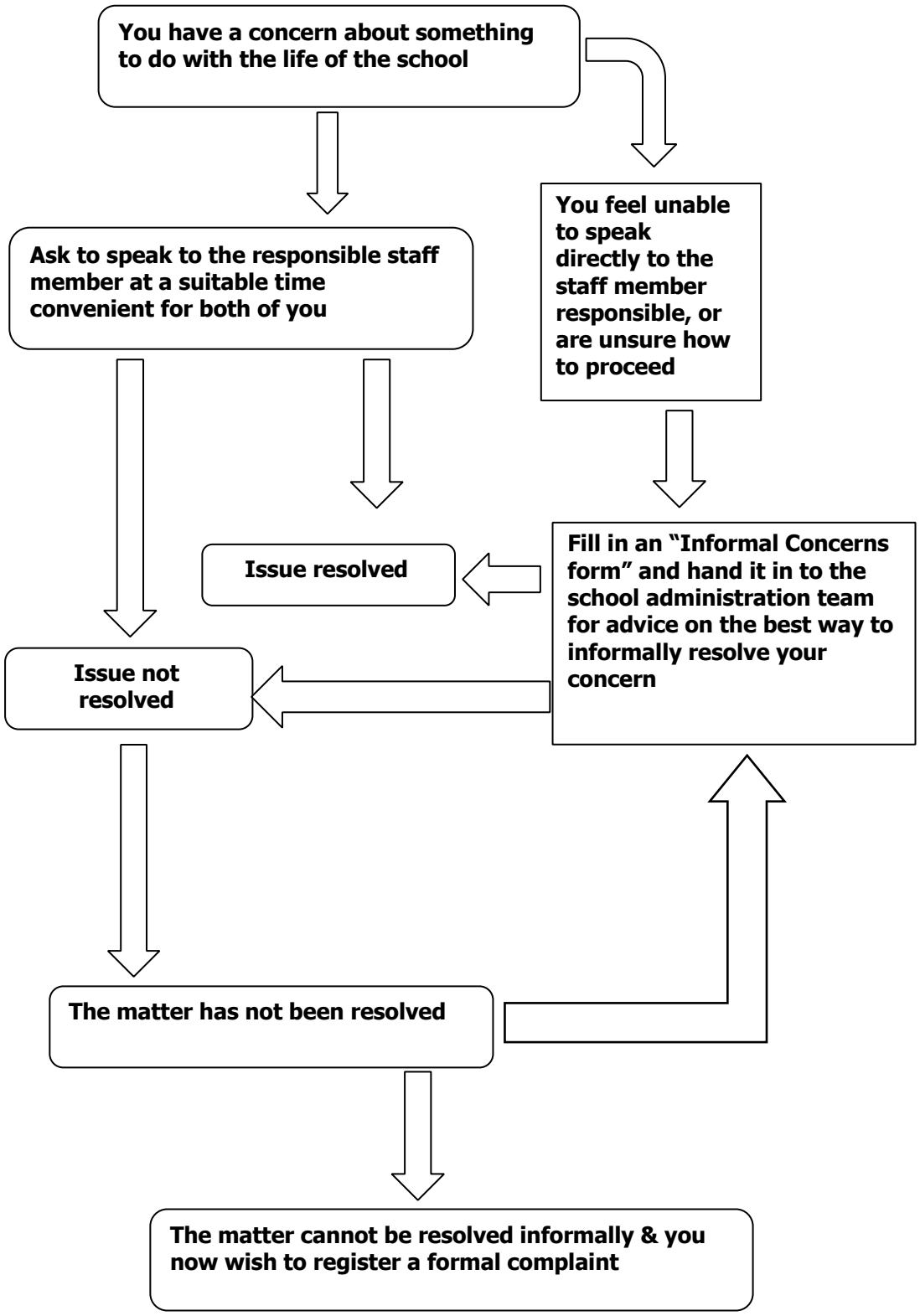
Further guidance on complaints procedures for independent schools can be found here https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools.

Recording of complaints

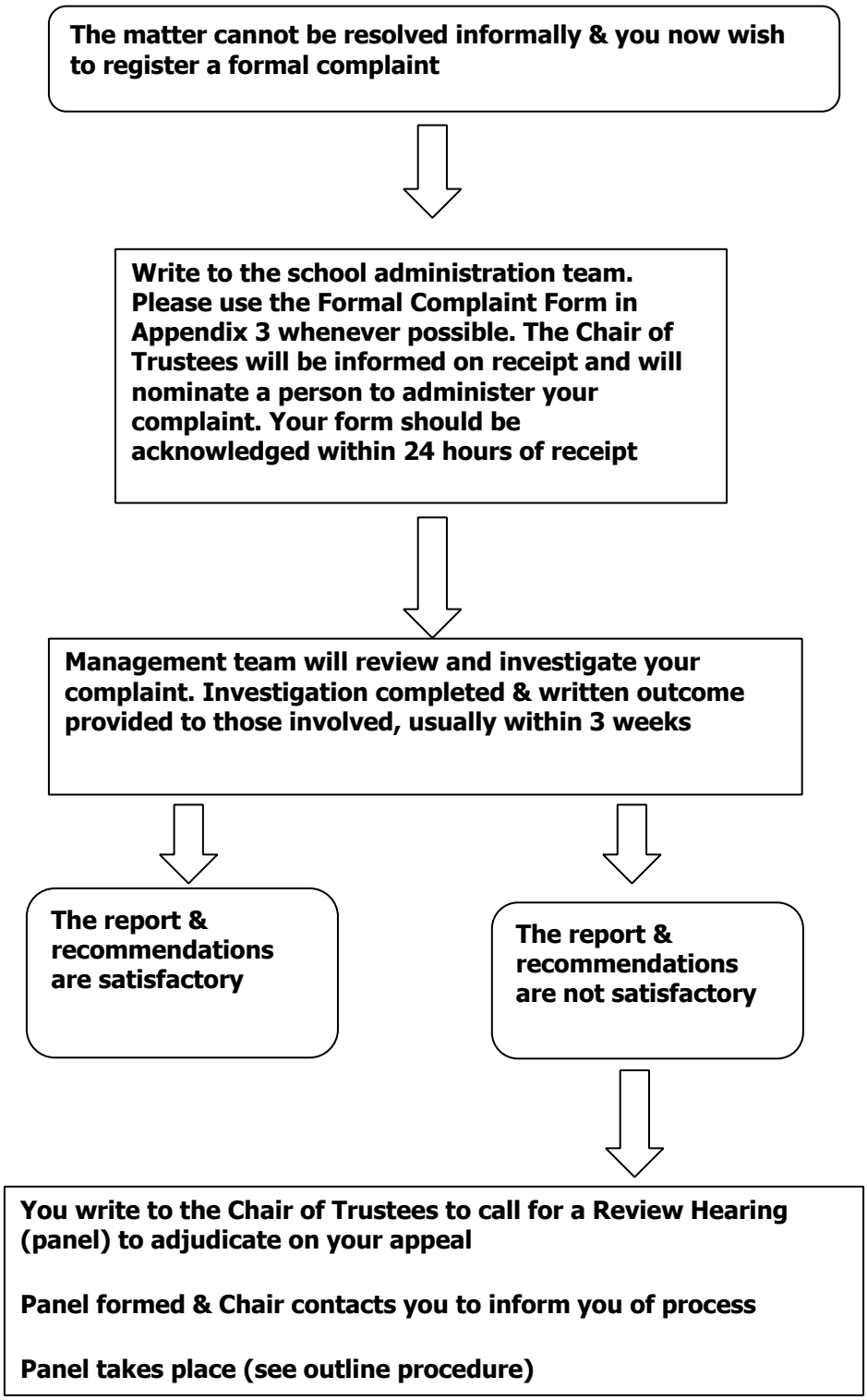
As soon as a concern/ complaint is received by any member of staff, it will be recorded in our confidential complaints register which is kept securely in the administration office and any associated paperwork will be stored in a confidential complaints file. Associated paperwork may for example include 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. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

APPENDIX 1: FLOWCHART OF COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Informal Stage – Overview for Concerns & Complaints



Formal Stage – Overview for Concerns & Complaints



APPENDIX 2: INFORMAL SCHOOL COMPLAINT FORM (STAGE 1)

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:

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 you are 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: FORMAL SCHOOL COMPLAINT FORM (STAGE 2 AND/OR 3)

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

Class ……..…….

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

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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 will ideally consist of 3 people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, including one or more current Trustees. One panel member must be independent of the management and running of the school.

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 panel for a financial complaint must have a suitably qualified person on it.

No member of the Appeals Panel should have had prior involvement with the complaint. 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 Procedure 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 recorded through the recording of minutes.

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.

Parents will be invited to attend and may bring a non-legally trained companion if they so wish.

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. Remote methods, such as zoom may also be appropriate.

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, and will be available at the school for inspection by the proprietor body and School Administrator.

MONITORING, AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE

This policy belongs to Norwich Steiner School, which is the operational name for the Charity the Norfolk Initiative Steiner School, registered charity number 1099377, company number 4815492

Compliance is monitored through internal audits, policy review as part of self-evaluation, and annual reporting to Trustees on concessions awarded, value, and any compliance issues.