



Woodlands Primary School Formby
Working together, achieving more

**Policy for Managing Inappropriate Behaviour
by Parents and Visitors**

Reviewed: March 2023
Next review date: March 2024

Aims

Woodlands Primary School recognises the rights of all, and promotes relationships that are founded on the principles of tolerance and mutual respect. It also values the positive and supportive relationship that develops with the parents of children at the school.

This policy aims to foster these good relationships and protect members of staff and children from being subjected to abuse or threats from parents or other visitors to the school.

This policy considers the DfE Guidance '*Controlling access to school premises*' (November 2018) and the National Association of Head teachers' (NAHT) guidance on dealing with abusive parents.

Policy Statements

- Members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from parents or visitors.
- At Woodlands Primary School, we value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and the local community, and believe that children benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one.
- We strive to make our school a place where adults model the behaviour we teach and expect for children, and where high importance is placed on good manners, positive communication and mutual respect.
- On very rare occasions the behaviour of some parents and visitors falls short of what is expected. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression, abuse or other unreasonable behaviour towards members of the school community. This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents.
- The Governing Body is committed to protecting staff and children from abuse and/or aggression or where complaints are vexatious and persistent in nature.
- Where a member of staff is placed in a situation where he/she experiences abuse or aggression, we expect him/her to behave professionally, attempting to defuse the situation where possible and seeking the involvement of other colleagues as appropriate. He/she is, however, entitled to end any conversation of this nature (face to face or on the telephone).
- Where a member of staff has experienced abuse or aggression or other unreasonable behaviour, he/she should refer the incident to a member of the Senior Leadership Team who will take appropriate action and/or invoke the provisions of this policy.
- Where it is necessary to take action against a parent or visitor, it will be reasonable and proportionate, and the parent or visitor will have the opportunity to put his/her views forward at every stage.
- Where certain conditions or a ban from school premises are imposed upon a parent or visitor, the Governing Body will ensure a review process is in place to ensure that any conditions do not go further than reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

Parents Expectations of the School

Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing:
 - how and when problems can be raised with the school;
 - the existence of the school's complaints procedure, and
 - the existence of the Policy for Managing Inappropriate Behaviour by Parents and Visitors;
- respond within a reasonable time;
- be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint;
- respond with courtesy and respect;
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with advice from the Local Authority (LA) keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised.

The School's Expectations of Parents/Carers/Members of the Public

The school can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise problems with the school to:

- treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;
- avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
- avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;
- recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time;
- (in the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Procedure.

Definition of Unacceptable Behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent or visitor presents a risk to staff or children. This can be through face-to-face contact, on the telephone or in written communication (including social media).

The following is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour:

- any kind of insult as an attempt to demean, embarrass or undermine.
- any kind of threat.
- raising of voice so as to intimidate.
- physical intimidation (for example, by standing very close, the use of aggressive hand gestures).
- use of foul or abusive language.
- any kind of physical abuse.
- allegations which turn out to be vexatious or malicious.

What Constitutes a Persistent Complainant?

For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- a) actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- b) prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- c) vexatious or excessive repeated Freedom of Information requests;
- d) an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- e) an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- f) an insistence on only dealing with the headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- g) an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in (a) to (g) above in such a way that they:

- a) appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- b) cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- c) have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
- d) are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

Investigating and Recording Incidents

Any allegation of abuse, aggression or insulting behaviour will be investigated by the Head teacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

- The parent or visitor will be informed of the investigation and will be given the opportunity to provide an account of the incident.
- Staff/children subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about the incident(s) which will be kept in a file with any subsequent documents produced in the investigation. This file will be kept by the Clerk to the Governors. If the parent or visitor requests to see any of the statements the Head teacher will determine whether this information will be shared.

Risk Assessment

If it is determined that a parent or visitor has behaved in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the Head teacher or appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team will assess the situation before deciding on a future course of action. In all cases, the response will be reasonable, proportionate and commensurate with the assessed level of unacceptable behaviour.

The risk assessment will help inform the level of response and will consider the following questions:

- What form did the behaviour take?
- What evidence is there?
- What do witnesses say happened?
- Are there any previous incidents to take into consideration?
- Do members of staff/students feel intimidated by the parent's or visitor's behaviour?
- Is there any evidence of provocation or mitigating factors?
- How high is the assessed risk that this will be repeated or there will be retaliation against the school's action?

The School's Response

Following the completion of the investigation and risk assessment, the Head teacher will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include the following:

1. Clarify to the parent or visitor what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school

In some instances it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This could be explained by a letter from the Head teacher. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents.

2. Invite the parent or visitor to an informal meeting to discuss events

This could be helpful to discuss and diffuse the situation. Members of school staff will always be accompanied by at least one other colleague at any such meeting. The main points of discussion and any agreed actions will be noted and confirmed in writing to the parent or visitor.

3. Impose conditions on the parent or visitor

Where the matter concerns the conduct of a parent, depending on the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on his/her contact with the school. Schools are private places and members of the public have no automatic right of entry. Parents of enrolled children have an 'implied licence' to come onto school premises at certain stated times and it is for the school to determine the extent of such access. Parents exceeding this would be trespassing. These conditions may include the following (which is not an exhaustive list):

- being accompanied to any meeting with a member of school staff by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- restricting contact by telephone.
- restricting written communications.

- restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Head teacher.

Where conditions are imposed, the parent will be informed by letter from the Head teacher the details of the conditions that are being imposed. He/she will be given 10 school days from the date of the letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Governing Body. The Governing Body will then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions and will communicate its decision in writing within 10 school days of the date of the letter. If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the Head teacher and representatives from the Governing Body after six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate) who will decide whether to amend, extend or remove the conditions. The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Governing Body and Head teacher in advance of any decision being made. This, and any subsequent decisions, will be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 school days of the decision.

4. Imposing a Ban

Where other procedures have been exhausted and unacceptable behaviour continues OR where there is an act of violence, the school may consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent from accessing school staff by written communication or telephone. In these circumstances, the individual will be advised in writing by the Head teacher that a ban is being imposed. The parent will then be given 10 school days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the Governing Body who will decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. The decision will normally be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 school days of the receipt of their letter. If the Governing Body's decision is to confirm the ban, parents in these circumstances will still be offered an annual meeting to discuss their child's progress, usually with a member of Senior Leadership Team. The decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the Head teacher and representatives from the Governing Body after six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate) who will decide whether to amend, extend or remove the ban. The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Governing Body and Head teacher in advance of any decision being made. This, and any subsequent decisions, will normally be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 school days of the decision. During a ban, the parent may only communicate with school by letter or email, addressed to a designated member of the Senior Leadership Team, unless in the event of an emergency.

5. Removal from school

Parents who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be considered as trespassers and deemed to have committed a Section 547 offence under the Education Act 1996. In these circumstances the offender may be removed from school by a police officer or other authorised person and may be subject to legal proceedings.

Similar measures to those outlined above for parents may be implemented for visitors to the school who behave inappropriately towards staff and/or students.

Social Media

Social media websites are used increasingly to fuel campaigns and complaints against schools, their staff and parents or children. The use of social media websites in this way is unacceptable and not in the best interests of members of the school community. Any concerns that parents or visitors have should be made through the appropriate channels so they can be dealt with fairly, appropriately and effectively for all concerned.

Any child, parent or other member of the public found to be posting libellous or defamatory comments on social media sites will be reported to the appropriate 'report abuse' section of the site(s). All social network sites have clear rules about the content which can be posted and they provide robust mechanisms to report contact or activity which breaches this. The school will also expect that any student, parent or other member of the public removes such comments immediately.

In serious cases the school will also consider its legal options, including informing the police, when dealing with any such misuse of social networking and other sites.

Strategy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complainants

Where complainants have been identified as habitual or vexatious under the scope of this policy, taking account of the above criteria, the Authorising Officers (Headteacher and Chair of Governors or if unavailable the Vice Chair of Governors) will determine what action to take. The Clerk will implement such action and will notify complainants, in writing, of the reasons why they have been classified as habitual or vexatious and what action will be taken. They will also be notified of the review procedure.

It may be decided to deal with complainants in one or more of the following ways:

- (a) Withdraw contact with the complainant either in person, by telephone, by email, by fax, by letter or any combination of these, provided that at least one form of contact is maintained. If staff are to withdraw from a telephone conversation with a complainant there will be an agreed statement available for them to use at such times.
- (b) To restrict contact to liaison through a designated member of staff.
- (c) Notify the complainant in writing that the Governing body has responded fully to the points raised and has tried to resolve the complaint but there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. The complainant should be notified that any form of contact, either orally or in writing, in relation to their complaint, or any further complaints relative to the same period of time, or the same or similar issues as an earlier complaint, is at an end, and that further contact received will be acknowledged but not responded to.
- (d) Temporarily suspend, for a period to be specified to the complainant, all contact with the complainant, provided that the Governing body shall not, without the consent of the LA, withdraw or not provide any services to which the complainant or his/her family are entitled to receive.

Review Decisions and Withdrawing 'or Vexatious' Status

Once a complainant has been determined, as habitual or vexatious, such status needs to be regularly reviewed, and, where appropriate, withdrawn at a later date. Such action may be appropriate where a complainant subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach or submits a further complaint for which the normal complaints procedures would appear appropriate.

Governors should review their decisions to categorise a complainant as habitual or vexatious every six months, they may either withdraw the categorisation of a person as habitual or vexatious or amend the strategy being applied to that person.

If governors consider it appropriate to withdraw the status of habitual or vexatious complainant, normal contact with the complainant and application of the school's complaints procedure will be resumed. The complainant will be given notice of this decision forthwith.

Copies of all decisions relating to the categorisation of a person as a habitual or vexatious complainant will be sent to the clerk who will hold and maintain a central register of such decisions.

Review

The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once in a school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy

