



# Working with Parents & Carers exhibiting abusive behaviour

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## **Statement of principles**

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance 'Advice on school security: Access to, and barring individuals from school premises' December 2012 as well as NAHT guidance on dealing with abusive parents and carers.

At Woodside, we value the positive relationships forged with parents, carers and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents, carers and the community and believe that students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. We also strive to make our school a place where as adults we model for students the behaviour we teach and expect. In general, we place a high importance on good manners, positive communication and mutual respect.

Almost all parents, carers and visitors to Woodside are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on very rare occasions the behaviour of a small number of parents and carers falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the school community. This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents.

In these situations we expect members of staff to behave professionally, attempting to defuse the situation where possible and seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. Staff who face these situations have licence to end any conversation (face to face or on the telephone). They should then refer the incident to a senior manager who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

The overriding principle is, however, that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from parents and carers. The Governors have a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

The progress and well-being of the parent's child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent will have the opportunity to put their views forward at every stage. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from school, robust review processes involving the Chair of Governors and then the Governing Body are in place to ensure fairness.

### **Definition of unacceptable behaviour**

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent presents a risk to staff or students. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff or student feel threatened. 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 be intimidating
- Physical intimidation, e.g. by standing very close to him/her or 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.

### **The school's approach to dealing with incidents**

If a Parent/ Carer/ Visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the head teacher or appropriate senior staff, in liaison with the Safer School's police officer, will assess the level of risk before deciding on a future course of action. The course of action will be reasonable and commensurate with the assessed level of risk.

### **Risk Assessment**

The Headteacher will carry out a risk assessment in order to help make a decision about the level of response. In all cases the response will be reasonable and proportionate. The Headteacher will consider the following questions:

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

## **Recording of Incidents**

Staff/students subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about incident(s) which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters. This file will be kept by the Headteachers PA. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults may be made available to the parent if they request it.

## **The School's response**

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Headteacher will decide the level of action to be taken.

The Chair of Governors has delegated responsibility for this policies application, on behalf of the Governing Body, to the Chair of the Inclusion and Safeguarding Committee.

Actions will include the following:

1. Clarify to the parent 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 letter from the Headteacher. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents. The parent will be invited to write to the Headteacher with his/her version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent's response a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.
2. Invite the parent to an informal meeting to discuss events. This could be helpful to discuss and diffuse the situation. The safety and well-being of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. Members of school staff will always be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, and the Safer School's Police Officer (at the Headteachers discretion) at any such meeting. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements, and care taken to ensure exits cannot be blocked by a parent who could potentially become aggressive.

The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted, and a follow-up letter or e-mail sent to confirm the school's expectations and any agreed actions.

3. Impose conditions on the parent's contact with the school and its staff. Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents and carers of enrolled students have an 'implied licence' to come onto school premises at certain stated times. It is for schools to define and set out the extent of such access. Parents and carers exceeding this would be trespassing.

Depending on the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on the parent's contact with the school. These conditions may include (but are not exclusively):

- Being accompanied to any meeting with a member of school staff by a member of SLT
- Restricting contact by telephone to named members of the senior leadership team
- Restricting written communications to named members of the senior leadership team
- Restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school
- Any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Headteacher.

In this case the parent will be informed by letter from the Headteacher the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Safeguarding governor. The safeguarding governor would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the date of the parent's letter.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the safeguarding governor after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the governor. This and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered. Governors may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the Governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, Governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent's compliance with the conditions, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

#### 4. Imposing a ban

Where other procedures have been exhausted and aggression or intimidation continues OR where there is an extreme act of violence then 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 would be advised in writing by the Headteacher that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the safeguarding governor.

The safeguarding governor would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the safeguarding governor's decision is to confirm the ban, parents and carers in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of senior staff. A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the safeguarding governor after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the safeguarding governor; this and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the safeguarding governor.

Governors may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent's access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the Governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, Governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any

evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

#### 5. Removal from school

Parents and carers who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed a section 547 offence. They will be considered as trespassers. In these circumstances the offender may be removed from school. This may be carried out by a police officer or person authorised by the Governing Body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent.

#### 6. Complaints policy

Any parental complaint that arises from incidents of abusive behaviour will be dealt with under the complaints policy.

#### 7. Monitoring by the Governing Body

This policy is reviewed by the school's Governing Body every two years. All actions taken under this policy are also monitored by the Governing Body. Details of incidents are reported to the Governors as part of the Headteacher's report to the Governors, which take place five times per year. Parents and carers names and details are not identified to the Governing body.

#### 8. Support for Pupils

Pupils of Parents/Carers who exhibit threatening or abusive behaviour towards staff will be supported via the School's inclusion panel, and where necessary via application of the School's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

#### 9. Support for Staff

Staff affected by threatening or abusive behaviour will be offered support via their line manager and the School's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).