

Commonswood Primary & Nursery School Dealing with Abusive Parents/Visitors Policy



Approved by Governors: Summer 2021

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.

The Local Authority are responsible for protecting the health and safety of their staff and pupils in schools. All members of the school community have the right to expect that their school is a safe place in which to work and learn. There is no place for violence, threatening behaviour or abuse in schools.

At all times the common purpose remains clear, to achieve a zero tolerance of violence, threatening behaviour or abuse in school, and to ensure all members of the school community, and all visitors to the school, can be confident that they are operating within a safe environment.

At Commonswood School we value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that pupils 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 pupils 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 Commonswood School 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/visitors 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 emails and 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 member of staff 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. The board of governors has a requirement to protect staff and pupils 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 a committee of three 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 pupils. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff or pupil 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 written or spoken personal insult as an attempt to demean, embarrass or undermine (including the use of social media)
- 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 governing body also considers harassment of school staff to be unacceptable. Examples of harassment may include, but are not limited to:

- Requiring a response to a query in an unreasonable timeframe
- Repeatedly raising issues which have already been dealt with and where no new information has come to light.
- Requiring a specific member of senior staff to deal with problems which could be more appropriately dealt with the someone else.
- Refusing to speak with members of school staff who have a legitimate reason to discuss issues.

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 headteacher or appropriate senior member of staff 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/pupils 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/pupils 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 Headteacher.

The school's response

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

- *Letter to the parent sharing concerns about the events*
- *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 at least one other colleague 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.

Clarify to the parent what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school (Code of Conduct)

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. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Chair of Governors. 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.

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

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 of enrolled pupils 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 exceeding this would be trespassing.

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 Headteacher.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by Headteacher. The Headteacher may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions.

The Headteacher will meet with the parent to review the conditions. The outcome of this review will be communicated to the parent by letter.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, the Headteacher 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.

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 also 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 Chair of Governors. A panel of three Governors will decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent in writing by the clerk to the Governors within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the Governors' decision is to confirm the ban, parents 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 committee after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Governors; this and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the Governing Body. 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.

Removal from school

Parents 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. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent.

Complaints procedure

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

Linked documents:

- Home/school agreement
- Parent/visitor code of conduct
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2020