



## **POLICY FOR HANDLING UNREASONABLE COMPLAINTS including Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and Harassment**

The headteacher and governing body are fully committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to raise a concern or make a complaint to the school (see Complaints Procedure, available on the school website).

Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour towards any members of the school community. Nor will we accept unreasonable, persistent or vexatious complaints that are not seeking to have a situation remedied but instead are determined to extract retribution for some real or imagined wrong.

### **What do we mean by an unreasonable, persistent or vexatious complainant?**

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- actions which:
  - are out of proportion to the nature of the complaint
  - are personally harassing
  - introduce trivial or irrelevant information which is then expected to be taken into account and responded to
  - raise large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, with the expectation that they are fully answered, often to unrealistic timescales
  - make excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint - in person, in writing, by email or by telephone.
  
- an insistence on:
  - pursuing unjustified complaints
  - pursuing complaints even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted
  - unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
  - repeatedly making the same complaint or raising the same issue within a complaint, despite that being addressed by previous investigations or responses
  - pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner e.g. using abusive or threatening language
  - making complaints in public
  - publishing unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.
  
- a refusal to:
  - attend appointments to discuss the complaint.
  - co-operate with the complaints investigation process
  - accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure

## **What is ‘harassment’?**

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be vexatious, in a deliberate attempt to targeted one or more members of school staff or others without good cause
- the way in which a complaint or other issue is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

## **What does the school expect of any person wishing to raise a concern?**

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
- avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
- follow the school’s complaints procedure.

## **Schools’ responses to unreasonable, persistent or vexatious complaints or harassment**

In cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy;
- require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through the Local Authority.
- inform the complainant that his/her behaviour might indicate a mental health issue that could impact on the welfare of their child. In some cases, this may constitute a safeguarding concern that warrants a referral to the LA Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.

## **Physical or verbal aggression**

The governing body will not tolerate **any** form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect.
- issue a final warning that the individual will be banned from the school site.
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO).
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonable, Persistent or Vexatious Complaints or Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to this policy.