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Introduction

It is of paramount importance that our school provides a safe working environment for all adults and children. Relationships with parents, guardians, carers, pupils' relatives and other visitors are valued and the school welcomes input from all sectors of the community. Mutual respect and shared responsibility for pupils underpins all interactions. Parental involvement is recognised and valued as an important factor in educational success and in dealing with emerging problems at an early stage.

All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe and pleasant place in which to work and learn. However, on rare occasions, abusive, aggressive or unpleasant behaviour towards members of the school community can cause severe disruption or worse. Violence, threatening behaviour or any kind of harassment or abuse against school staff will not be tolerated. There is no place for acts of this nature in school. Should such behaviour occur, the school will take action and can expect support from the Local Authority.

It is school policy that all disagreements should be dealt with politely and calmly, so that, wherever possible, any potential difficulty will be diffused before it becomes an incident. This is the best solution for the children in our school, as most complaints are from parents or carers who perceive a situation to be to the detriment of their child/ren. Parents and carers wish for a speedy resolution and this can only be achieved with mutual respect and understanding.

Any meeting between a member of staff and a visitor will take place in an area where the member of staff can access other support should it be needed. Parents and carers known to be a concern may experience a delay in their complaint being addressed, as the school may have to make necessary arrangements to ensure that staff are kept safe.

Key Points

This policy relates to treatment of staff by parents and visitors to the school, what the school considers unacceptable and what action it will take. Physical, verbal and written abuse is covered in this policy, as follows:

Physical violence

- Parents/visitors causing physical pain to a member of staff, no matter to what degree.
- Parents/visitors attempting to cause physical harm, whether a member of staff was actually hurt or not.

Verbal abuse, face to face or via the telephone

- Parents/visitors shouting at staff.
- Parents/visitors swearing at, or using offensive, insulting or generally unpleasant language in conversation with staff.
- Parents/visitors threatening to cause physical harm to a member of staff.

- Parents/visitors threatening to maliciously harm the reputation of a member of staff or the school (slander).

Written abuse and use of language that is insulting, rude or generally unpleasant, via letter, email or on social networking sites such as Facebook. Any written material that is considered to be libellous.

Other intimidating/aggressive behaviours

- Aggressive body language, including thrusting, jabbing or pointing fingers or hands towards a member of staff.
- Invading a member of staff's personal space.
- Attempting to block an exit from a room or preventing a member of staff from leaving a room or an area.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

The school has a zero tolerance policy to all behaviours as stated above.

- Physical violence, attempted or actual, will result in the parent/visitor receiving an immediate ban from school site and the incident will be reported to the police.
- The school reserves the right to not meet or enter into any form of written or verbal dialogue with parents/visitors engaging in inappropriate verbal and/or written behaviour. This could result in a situation where the school is unable to resolve a complaint and address issues. In addition, the school may ban a parent/visitor from school site and take legal action as appropriate.

School staff will remain polite and professional at all times. Despite being put in an unpleasant or threatening situation, staff will try and remain calm and make every attempt to diffuse a situation and help a parent/visitor with their problem. If staff are not able to continue with a meeting or a conversation, they will attempt to give their reasons for ending the meeting/conversation. If this is not possible they will ask the parent/visitor to leave and if necessary they will leave the room/area, or end the telephone conversation without further dialogue.

What constitutes an incident?

An incident is defined as any interaction between a member of staff and another person in which the member of staff feels abused, threatened or unsafe within the working environment. This includes a member of staff being visibly upset by rude and unpleasant behaviour. This may be because of

- Aggressive behaviour – verbal or non-verbal
- Inappropriate language including swearing
- Threats of physical violence to a member of staff or a pupil
- Actual physical violence
- Threatening body language
- Written abuse as previously stated

All incidents will be reported to the Head teacher, reported in the Harassment/Abusive Incident Record File and, where appropriate, further action will be taken.

Incidents involving a member of staff and a parent or adult connected to the school occurring outside of the school grounds and not in working time, will be reported to the Head teacher. The member of staff will contact the police at the time of the incident if deemed an appropriate action. The school will seek legal advice on how to proceed.

Incident Response

Face to face situations

The parent/visitor will be politely asked to calm down and refrain from continuing with whatever behaviour, verbal or physical, that is inappropriate. Another member of staff may be called to support. If the incident happens outdoors in the school grounds the person will be asked to come into the building to a venue where the matter can be discussed quietly.

If the parent/visitor continues to behave inappropriately they will be asked to leave the school premises. This will be followed up by a letter from a senior member of staff. It will be up to the parent/visitor to apologise for their behaviour and request a meeting to address their concerns. The school will meet with the parent to discuss their concerns if an apology is received along with an assurance that the parent/visitor will follow school expectations of behaviour.

If the parent/visitor behaves inappropriately again, they could receive a ban from the school premises. Depending on the severity of the behaviour in the first instance, the parent could receive a ban straight away. The school can issue temporary or permanent bans.

Telephone

The parent/visitor will be politely asked to calm down and refrain from continuing with whatever behaviour they are displaying that is deemed inappropriate. The member of staff may put the telephone on speaker phone so that it can be witnessed by other staff and they can support and advice as necessary.

If the parent continues to speak inappropriately they will be informed that the member of staff they are talking to will end the call. If they continue, the member of staff will inform them that they are going to end the call and will then terminate the conversation. This will be followed up by a letter from a senior member of staff. It will be up to the parent/visitor to apologise for their behaviour and request a meeting or telephone call to address their concerns. The school will meet with or telephone the parent/visitor to discuss their concerns if an apology is received along with an assurance that the parent/visitor will follow school expectations of behaviour.

If the parent/visitor behaves inappropriately again, they could receive a ban from the school premises. Depending on the severity of the behaviour in the first instance, the parent could receive a ban straight away.

In writing

The Head teacher will decide whether to write back addressing the issues in the email or letter, or whether to send a written response, or make a telephone call to the parent/visitor inviting them to write another letter that will be deemed acceptable and one that will allow the school to address the parent/visitor's concerns.

If the school continues to receive inappropriate written communication from the parent/visitor they will receive a letter from the Head teacher. Depending on the content of the written material, the school may take legal action against the parent/visitor.

Via social networking sites (refer to the school Social Networking Statement)

The Head teacher will decide whether to contact the parent/carer to request they remove any inaccurate, abusive or insulting comments and whether to seek legal advice with regards to pressing charges because the comments could damage the reputation of the school (libel).

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school Anti-bullying and Behaviour Policies.