



Management of Abusive Parents and Carers

March 2023

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 ethos of Seven Hills School encourages close links with parents, carers and the community. The staff and governors believe that pupils benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one.

The vast majority of parents, carers and others visiting our school are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on the rare occasions when a negative attitude towards the school is expressed, this can result in aggression, verbal and physical abuse towards members of school staff or the wider school community.

This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents.

The governing body expects and requires its members of staff to behave professionally in these difficult situations and attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. However, all members of staff have the right to work without fear of violence and abuse, and the right, in an extreme case, of appropriate self-defence. We expect parents, carers and other visitors to behave in a reasonable way towards members of school staff. This policy outlines the steps that will be taken where behaviour is unacceptable.

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
- physical intimidation, eg 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.
- shouting at members of the school staff, parents or children either in person or over the telephone
- abusive or aggressive emails
- swearing/using abusive / offensive language
- racist, sexist, homophobic or transgender comments;

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 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.

Abusive phone calls will be terminated with notice and a reason from the recipient, e.g. 'I am going to terminate this call because you are shouting at me, please ring back later when you are calmer, if you need my help'

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 Headteacher. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults these 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. Actions can 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 / carer will be invited to write to the Head teacher 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 at least one other colleague at any such meeting.

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 / 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 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 / carer'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 Head teacher.
- In the event of abusive behaviour towards a member of the senior leadership, email communication may be via a named governor or social worker (if the student has a social worker)

In this case the parent / carer will be informed by letter from the Head teacher the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent / carer would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors 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 governing body after approximately three months (and every three months after that, if appropriate). 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 Head teacher that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent / carer 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. The Chair of Governors 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 Chair's 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, in addition to their EHCP Annual Review.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the governing body after approximately three months (and every three months after that, if appropriate). 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 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 / carer.

6. Responding to comments made on social media

In some instances, parents / carers could make false or malicious comments about staff online. These could range from racist, sexist or homophobic comments on social media. On some occasions images or videos could be posted and shared online.

If staff are aware that this is happening, they can take the following steps:

- Keep any records of abuse by taking screenshots and logging the time and date
- Do not retaliate or respond to any comments or posts
- Inform the Headteacher immediately

The Headteacher will ask for the parent to remove the offending comments online. If the parent refuses, the matter can be reported to the social networking site if it breaches their terms and conditions. Seven Hills could also seek advice from the local authority, legal advisers or other agencies such as the UK Safer Internet Centre.

Depending on the comments made, the Headteacher will follow the appropriate actions stated above.

7. Complaints policy

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