



Parental Engagement Policy

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Introduction

- 1 The Headteacher and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day to day management of the school in accordance with the School Complaints Policy. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and will be resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant.
- 2 However there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day to day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall well-being of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

Aims of Policy

- 3 The aims of this policy are to:
 - 3.1 Uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint
 - 3.2 Support the well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school including governors and parents
 - 3.3 Deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school whilst ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment

Parents/Carers expectations of the school

- 4 Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:
- 5 Communicate to parents/carers/members of the public:
 - 5.1 How and when problems can be raised with the school
 - 5.2 The existence of the schools Complaints Policy
 - 5.3 The existence of this policy for dealing with persistent or vexatious complaints and/or harassment in schools
 - 5.4 Respond to the complaint within a reasonable time
 - 5.5 Be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the students within the school and the nature of the complaint
 - 5.6 Respond with courtesy and respect
 - 5.7 Attempt to solve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's Complaints Policy, other policies and practice and keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised.

The school's expectations of parents/carers

- 6 Alderbrook School encourages close links with parents and the community. We believe that students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. This view is one that is shared by other stakeholders within our community, as identified through our parental surveys.
- 7 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, threatening behaviour, verbal and or physical abuse towards a member of the school community. The use of social media falls under the remit of this policy. The School expects the same level of respect and courtesy to be applied on social media as it expects to be used in direct contact with the School community.
- 8 Our school expects and requires staff to behave professionally in these difficult situations, and to attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. However, all members of the school community have the right to work without fear of violence and abuse, and the right in an extreme case, of appropriate self-defence.
- 9 We expect parents/carers and other visitors to behave in a reasonable way towards other members of the school community. This policy outlines the steps that will be taken where parent/carer/visitor behaviour is unacceptable.
- 10 Alderbrook School would expect parents/carers who wish to raise problems with the school to:
 - 10.1 Treat all staff with courtesy and respect
 - 10.2 Respect the needs and well-being of students and staff in the school
 - 10.3 Avoid any use or threatened use of violence to people or property
 - 10.4 Avoid any aggression or verbal abuse
 - 10.5 Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond
 - 10.6 Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time
 - 10.7 In the case of a complaint, follow the school's Complaints Policy

Types of behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will not be tolerated towards any member of the school community:

- 11 This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour:
 - Shouting, either in person or over the telephone
 - Speaking in an aggressive/threatening tone
 - Physically intimidating, e.g. standing very close to her/him or pushing/throwing furniture aggressively
 - The use of aggressive hand gestures/exaggerated movements
 - Physical threats
 - Shaking or holding a fist towards another person
 - Swearing

- Pushing
- Hitting, e.g. slapping, punching or kicking
- Spitting
- Racist, sexist or homophobic comments or ANY discriminatory language
- Breaking the school's security procedures

Unacceptable behaviour may result in the Police being informed of the incident.

Procedures

- 12 When a parent/carer behaves in an unacceptable way during a telephone conversation, staff at the school have the right to terminate the call. The incident will be reported by staff to the Senior Leadership Team. The school reserves the right to take any necessary actions to ensure that members of the school community are not subjected to verbal abuse. The school may warn the aggressor, apply specific lines of communication with specific staff, ban them from the school, and/or contact the police.
- 13 When a visitor behaves in an unacceptable way in person towards a member of the school staff a member of the Senior Leadership Team will seek to resolve the situation through discussion and mediation. If necessary, the school's Complaints Policy should be followed. Where all procedures have been exhausted, and aggressive, intimidating or unacceptable behaviour as exemplified in 11 continues, or where there is an extreme act of violence, the discussion will be terminated and the visitor will be asked to leave the school immediately. The police will be called if necessary. A visitor may also be banned from the school premises for a period of time or permanently, which will be determined by the school.
- 14 Prior to being banned the following steps will be taken:
- 14.1 The parent/carer will be informed, in writing, that she/he is banned from the premises, subject to review, and what will happen if the ban is breached.
- 14.2 The Chair of Governors will be informed of the ban.
- 14.3 Incidents of verbal or physical abuse towards staff may result in the police being informed, and may result in prosecution.

Vexatious and Persistent Complaints

Rationale

- 15 Vexatious is defined legally as "denoting an action or the bringer of an action that is brought without sufficient grounds for winning, purely to cause annoyance to the defendant"
- 16 This policy aims to cover the exceptional occasions in which a complaint becomes unreasonable to the extent that it impacts negatively on the overall well-being of the school community or members of the community.
- 17 Standards of courtesy must be maintained by all and staff must act professionally if the need arises to implement this policy

Definition

- 18 For the purpose of this policy, acting in an unreasonable manner following a complaint includes:

- 18.1 actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
 - 18.2 prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint, or repeated concerns or complaints
 - 18.3 an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantiated complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
 - 18.4 an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
 - 18.5 an insistence on only dealing with the Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
 - 18.6 an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful or not in line with school policies.
- 19 For the purpose of this policy harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in 18 in such a way that they:
- 19.1 Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one of more members of school staff and/or
 - 19.2 Cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
 - 19.3 Have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
 - 19.4 Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms whilst not undermining confidence, well-being and health.

The school's actions in cases of persistent or vexatious complaints or harassment

- 20 In the first instance the school will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.
- 21 If the behaviour is not modified the school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:
- 21.1 inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy.
 - 21.2 inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
 - 21.3 inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only and to a single point of contact;
 - 21.4 in cases of physical, or verbal aggression, the school will take advice on banning the complainant from the school site;

- 21.5 consider taking advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- 21.6 if a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date, within a reasonable period of time the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level.
- 21.7 the school will review as appropriate and at a minimum once in a school year any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.
- 21.8 The Headteacher and Chair of Governors must be informed if this part of the policy is enacted.

Monitoring

- 22 The Headteacher will inform the Governing Body of all incidents in which this policy has been followed.

Conclusion

- 23 If a parent/carer is intimidating, threatening or aggressive towards a member of the school community any interaction will be terminated immediately and the person will be instructed to leave the premises. Further action may be taken by the school.

Model letters

- 24 Model Letter 1 – Initial letter informing a complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to fall below a reasonable/acceptable standard
- 25 Model Letter 2 – Informing a complainant that his/her behaviour is now considered to fall under the terms of the policy for dealing with persistent or vexatious complaints/harassment
- 26 Model Letter 3 – Informing the parent/carer of the details of a ban from school premises and the forms of future communication with the school