

Deansbrook Infant School

Policy for Handling Unreasonable, Persistent, Harassing or Abusive Complainants

Updated: Summer 2017

Review date: Summer 2019

Rationale

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. Deansbrook Infant School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

There is a separate policy for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint (See school Complaints Policy).

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.

The aim of this document is to provide information about our school policy on unreasonably persistent complainants or harassment of staff.

What do we mean by 'an unreasonably persistent 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, or
- Persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
- Personally harassing, or
- Unjustifiably repetitious

An insistence on

- Pursuing unjustified complaints and/or
- Unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints
- Pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (e.g. using abusive or threatening language); or
- Making complaints in public or via a social networking site such as Facebook; or
- Refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

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 deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- The way in which a complaint or other issues 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 unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty.

However, 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 this 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.

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;*
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO);
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.

(See also 'Dealing with Unacceptable Parent Behaviour Policy' 2017).

*If a parent is banned from the school site, alternative arrangements will be put in place for drop off and pick up procedures. Parent consultations will be delivered through a telephone call/conference call.

Barring from the school premises

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Schools will therefore act to ensure they remain a safe place for pupils, staff and other members of their community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, a school can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headteacher or the local authority can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on school premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make. Schools should always give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to ban in writing.

The decision to ban should then be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent should be notified in writing, explaining how long the ban will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being banned can do so, by letter or email, to the Headteacher or Chair of Governors. However, complaints about banning cannot be escalated to the Department for Education. Once the school's own complaints procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts; independent legal advice must therefore be sought.

New complaints

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