

Barnwell School

Dealing with abusive parents/carers policy



Reviewed – November 2022

To be reviewed – November 2024

Statement of principles

This policy has been written considering the DfE Guidance 'Controlling access to school premises' November 2018.

At Barnwell School we value positive communication and mutual respect. All members of our school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of abuse or aggression.

The governing body as employers have a duty of care to protect staff and students from abuse or aggression. In such rare situations when members of staff feel under threat, we expect our members of staff to behave in a professional manner and attempt to defuse a situation. Where this does not prove to be effective, staff are instructed to end communication whether this be in a meeting, on the telephone or via email. Staff are expected to report the incident to a senior member of staff who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

Definition of unacceptable behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent/carer 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
- raising of voice so as to be intimidating
- physical intimidation, e.g. 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.

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 head teacher 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.

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/carer'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's PA. Depending on a safeguarding assessment

of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals and taking GDPR regulations into account statements made by adults may be made available to the parent/carer 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 may include one or more of the following:

Level 1

Clarify to the parent/carer what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school

In some instances, it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent/carer 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 Headteacher with his version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent's/carer's response a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.

Level 2

Invite the parent/carer 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. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements, and care taken to ensure exits cannot be blocked by a parent/carer who could potentially become aggressive.

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.

Level 3

Impose conditions on the parent's/carer'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/carers exceeding this would be trespassing.

Depending of the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on the parent's/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/carer will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Headteacher.

In this case the parent/carer will be informed by letter from the Headteacher 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 Governing Body. The Governing Body would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent/carer in writing within 10 working days of the date of the parent's/carer's letter.

After six months, the school will write to outline the next steps of the process. The parent/carer will be invited to make written representation to the Governing Body. This and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the Governing Body. The Governing Body may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision will be communicated to the parent/carer by the clerk to the Governors within 10 working days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, the Governing Body will give consideration to the extent of the parent's/carer'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/carer's co-operation with the school in other respects.

Level 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/carer from accessing school staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Headteacher 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 Governing Body.

The Governing Body would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent/carer in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the Governing Body's decision is to confirm the ban, parents/carers in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of senior staff.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the Governing Body after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent/carer will be invited to make written representation to the Governing Body; this and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the Governing Body. The Governing Body may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent's/carer's access to the school. The decision will be communicated to the parent/carer by the clerk to the Governing Body within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, the Governing Body will give consideration to the extent of the parent's/carer's compliance with the ban, appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received and any evidence of the parent's/carer's co-operation with the school in other respects.

Level 5

Removal from school

Parents/carers who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed an offense under section 547 of the 1996 Education Act. 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 of person authorised by the Governing Body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent/carer.

Complaints policy

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