



Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment

TVI Learning/Thames View Infants

December 2019

INTRODUCTION

The Headteacher and the Leadership Team deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school in accordance with the School's Concerns and Complaints Procedure.

The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. Where formal complaints are made, the above policy is adhered to and the School prides itself in that complaints are investigated robustly, thoroughly, with rigor and transparency. The outcomes of all complaints are reported to Directors at termly meetings.

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 on 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.

1. AIMS OF POLICY

1.1 The aims of this policy are to:

- 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;
- support the well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents;
- deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

2. PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

2.1 Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- a. regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing:
 - i. how and when problems can be raised with the school;
 - ii. the existence of the school's complaints procedure, and
 - iii. the existence of the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment in Schools;
- b. respond within a reasonable time;
- c. be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint;
- d. respond with courtesy and respect;

- e. attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with DfE guidance, keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised.

3. THE SCHOOL'S EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS/CARERS/MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

3.1 The school can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise problems with the school to:

- a. treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;
- b. respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;
- c. any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
- d. avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;
- e. recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;
- f. recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time;
- g. (in the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Procedure.

4. WHO IS A PERSISTENT COMPLAINANT?

4.1 For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. TVI Learning defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- a. insists 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.
- b. refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- c. refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process or engage in remedial/monitoring/supportive measures put in place following an investigation.
- d. refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- e. insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.
- f. introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
- g. raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- h. makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced.
- i. changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.

- j. repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- k. refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- l. insists upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes.
- m. insists upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner.
- n. makes excessive or unreasonable demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- o. presents with actions that are considered obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious or overly-triangulate information.
- p. insists 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;
- q. uses prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint.
- r. uses threats to intimidate (including threatening with media coverage).
- s. uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably.
- t. uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.
- u. knowingly provides falsified information.
- v. publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

4.2 For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in (a) to (v) above in such a way that they:

- a. appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- b. cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- c. have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
- d. 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 particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

5. THE SCHOOL'S ACTIONS IN CASES OF PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS OR HARASSMENT

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

It might be that the Headteacher assigns a staff member to act as a "Single Point of Contact" to support a complainant during a period of need or unsettlement.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Directors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues, the Headteacher may write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively cause a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

This will be confirmed in writing (**Model Letter 1**).

5.3 If the behaviour is not modified there will be a joint decision between the Chair of Directors/Vice Chair and the Headteacher as to the actions (some or all of the following as necessary) to be taken having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- a. 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 (see Model Letter 2);
- b. 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 (see Model Letter 2);
- c. inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only (see Model Letter 2);
- d. (in the case of physical, or verbal aggression) consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- e. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the school premises and we will take advice from LA HR / Legal Services;
- f. consider taking advice from the LA on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation (see Model letter 3/4);
- g. consider taking advice from the HR / Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Headteacher but only with a third person to be identified by Directors, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern/complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Headteacher accordingly.

5.4 New complaints may still be considered even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment in Schools. However, the school will be advised by HR / Legal Services.

5.5 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. In these circumstances advice may be sought from HR/Legal Services.

6. REVIEW

6.1 The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once every six months, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.

Authorised by	Thames View Infants' Directors
Date	13 th December 2019

Effective date of the policy	13 th December 2019
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MODEL LETTER 1:

INITIAL LETTER INFORMING A COMPLAINANT THAT HIS/HER BEHAVIOUR IS CONSIDERED TO FALL BELOW A REASONABLE/ ACCEPTABLE STANDARD

RECORDED DELIVERY

Dear

This letter is to inform you that the school considers your actions in [describe actions, dates, behaviour] on when you to be unreasonable/unacceptable [delete as appropriate].

We would ask you to bear in mind the fact that such behaviour on a school site can be disruptive and distressing to pupils, staff and parents/carers [delete if behaviour complained of did not occur on school site e.g. persistent use of e-mail, verbally abusive telephone calls].

We are aware that you have raised some concerns, and would advise you that these are usually dealt with most effectively through the School's Concerns and Complaints Procedure.

At the moment we are dealing with these issues by [describe actions being taken to resolve concern].

Please note that the School's Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment sets out standards of behaviour expected of all people in their dealings with the School. These include:

- behaving reasonably;
- treating others with courtesy and respect;
- resolving complaints using the School's Complaints Procedure;
- avoiding physical and verbal aggression at all times.

The Policy also indicates the steps that we may take if these standards are breached.

These include:

- making special arrangements for meetings and communication with the school;
- considering barring you from the school premises;
- considering legal action.

I would ask that you allow school time to resolve the issues according to the correct procedures, and would assure you that we shall take every step to move this process forward as quickly as possible.

MODEL LETTER 2:

INFORMING A COMPAINANT THAT HIS/HER BEHAVIOUR IS NOW CONSIDERED TO FALL UNDER THE TERMS OF THE POLICY FOR DEALING WITH PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS/ HARASSMENT

RECORDED DELIVERY

Dear

You will recall that I wrote to you on [insert date] telling you that I felt your behaviour was unreasonable.

I am now writing to inform you that in view of your behaviour on [date], when you [describe actions/behaviour] it has been decided that the School's Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints/Harassment Policy will apply from the date of this letter.

In the circumstances I have made the following arrangements for your future contact with the school:

[*Delete A or B as applicable]

*A For the foreseeable future, should you wish to meet with any member of staff, I would ask you to note:

- (a) all routine communication, including any request for a meeting between you and the school, will be by letter only. Letters from you need to be addressed to at the school address; email correspondence will not be responded to;
- (b) an appointment will be arranged and confirmed in writing as soon as possible;
- (b) a third party from the school will be present;
- (c) in the interests of all parties, formal notes of this meeting may be made.

*B For the foreseeable future, all meetings arising from any written communication with the school will not be conducted by a member of staff, but will be conducted by representing the school. I would ask you to note:

- (a) all routine communication, including any request for a meeting between you and the school, will be by letter only. Letters from you need to be addressed to at the school address; email correspondence will not be responded to;
- (b) an appointment will be arranged and confirmed in writing as soon as possible;
- (b) a third party will be present;
- (c) in the interests of all parties, formal notes of this meeting may be made.

Exceptionally, these arrangements do not apply to any emergency involving [insert name of pupil] – in which case you should contact the school in the usual way.

While these arrangements are in place, with respect to normal access to information available on parents' evenings, this will be provided in a summary written report.

These arrangements take effect straightaway. If you wish to make a representation about the contents of this letter, which may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances that you are prepared to give about your future good conduct, you can do so by writing to me at the school by [state ten working days from the date of the letter]. If on receipt of your comments I consider that the arrangements outlined above should continue, you will be supplied with details of how to review a circumstance of your case. I do hope that the difficulties we are currently experiencing can soon be resolved.

MODEL LETTER 3:

INFORMING A COMPAINANT THAT HIS/HER BEHAVIOUR IS NOW CONSIDERED TO BE A RISK TO PUPILS AND STAFF AND ACCORDINGLY THEY MAY BE BARRED FROM THE SCHOOL PREMISES FOR A FIXED TERM

RECORDED DELIVERY

Dear

Adopting Our Code of Conduct Policy whilst on School Premises

You will recall that I wrote to you on [insert date] telling you that I felt your behaviour was unreasonable. Unfortunately, I write to inform you that _____ your behaviour has contravened our Code of Conduct Policy.

I understand that you were (worried about etc); however today/across the week/at various times with different staff presence, you presented in a manner which again contravened the School's Code of Conduct Policy.

In particular, _____. Children were present, as well as other Parents and staff members.

I understand that, following meeting/s with _____, you were in agreement that:

1. You must manage your own behaviour whilst on the School's Premises.
2. Should this or a similar incident again (with staff or parents) you may well be excluded from the School's Premises.
3. _____ will be your "first point of contact" designated staff member for all queries or worries that you might have beyond the Class Teacher.

As you know, we ask all parents to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner within a school setting, in the presence of children, other adults and staff. **Just to be clear, once again, your behaviour contravened the Academy's Code of Conduct Policy.** Accordingly, because of this repeated breach, I must reiterate my previous warning for you to observe this Code of Conduct Policy and advise you that should you not observe this on any future occasions, then I may well have to **bar you from the school site** in order to continue to ensure the safety of pupils and staff.

It saddens me greatly to have to remind you about this matter, however you will understand that I would be failing in my own safeguarding duties if I wasn't to address it with you.

My staff and I are committed to working with you to build a trusting and positive relationship with you to the benefit of _____ personal, social, emotional and educational development whilst attending Thames View Infants.

MODEL LETTER 4:

INFORMING A COMPAINANT THAT HIS/HER BEHAVIOUR IS NOW CONSIDERED TO BE A RISK TO PUPILS AND STAFF AND ACCORDINGLY THEY WILL BE BARRED FROM THE SCHOOL PREMISES FOR A FIXED TERM

RECORDED DELIVERY

Dear

Barred from School Premises

Regrettably, I write to inform you that your behaviour has once again contravened our Code of Conduct Policy and I am herewith barring you from the School Premises for a fixed term.

We ask all parents to adopt a common-sense and reasonable code of conduct when on school premises. Further to our previous conversations, I wrote to you on _____ to offer you advice about the manner in which you should conduct yourself when on school premises and the appropriateness of this within a school setting, in the presence of children, other adults and staff.

I remain concerned to note that your behaviour appears to have continued and it appears that you haven't taken on-board the conduct code of the school. To ensure the safety of pupils and staff, Directors have requested that you are barred from the School premises for a fixed term period.

Accordingly, you must refrain from entering the school premises. You should not enter the school site (i.e. cross the blue gates) and instead make alternative arrangements for bringing _____ to school. However, it is important that _____ attendance at school continues.

This disheartens me tremendously, as I value the importance of good communication between home and school. This relationship is vital and harming it can be detrimental to a child's future educational well-being. As I offered previously, we may be able to put you in touch with professionals that can support you with anger-management. If you require this help, please contact _____.

Whilst I regret the unfortunate circumstances of this letter, I hope you understand our duty in needing to take measures to safeguard this code of conduct and the professionalism of adults within it.

Exceptionally, these arrangements do not apply to any emergency involving [insert name of pupil] – in which case you should contact the school in the usual way.

I will review these arrangements within 6 months of the date of this letter and hope by this time your behaviour will have improved as such so that I may be able to lift this bar.