

MANAGING ABUSIVE PARENTS/CARERS OR VISITORS TO THE SCHOOL POLICY

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Signed by Chair of Governors:	

THE WEALD SCHOOL

MANAGING ABUSIVE PARENTS/CARERS OR VISITORS TO THE SCHOOL

Statement of Principles and Values

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance “Controlling access to school premises” November 2018 as well as NAHT and ASCL guidance on dealing with abusive parents.

At The Weald, we value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. We also strive to make our school a place where as adults we model for students the behaviour we teach and expect. In general, we place a high importance on good manners, positive communication and mutual respect.

Almost all parents, carers and visitors to The Weald are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on very rare occasions the behaviour of a small number of parents falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the school community. This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents.

In these situations we expect members of staff to behave professionally, attempting to defuse the situation where possible and seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. Staff who face these situations have licence to end any conversation (face to face or on the telephone). They should then refer the incident to a senior manager who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

The overriding principle is, however, that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from parents. The progress and well-being of the parent’s child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent will have the opportunity to put their views forward at every stage. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from school, review processes involving senior staff are in place to ensure fairness.

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. It is enough for a member of staff or a pupil to 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.

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 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 an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults may be made available to the parent if they request it.

The School's response

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Headteacher or other appropriate senior member of staff will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will 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 a letter from the Headteacher. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents. The parent will be invited to write to the senior member of staff with his/her version of events within 5 working days. Depending on the parent's response a telephone conversation 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 normally 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 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.

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 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'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 Headteacher.

In this case the parent will be informed by letter from the Headteacher the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent would then be given 5 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Headteacher who would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 5 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 Headteacher after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Headteacher. This and any other evidence will be considered by the Headteacher to decide whether to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, the Headteacher 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 Headteacher that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent would then be given 5 working days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing. The Headteacher would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 5 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the Headteacher'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.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the Headteacher after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Headteacher; this and any other evidence will be considered by the Headteacher in order to decide whether to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on the parent's access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent within 5 working days.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, the Headteacher 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 of the Education Act 1996. They will be considered 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 school. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent.

6. Complaints policy.

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

Appendices

Warning

Model letter 1: This is an initial letter from a senior member of staff to ensure the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This letter contains a warning about further action if there are other incidents. The letter invites a written response and suggests a telephone conversation to discuss the incident.

Imposing conditions on the parent's attendance at school events

Model letter 2: This is a letter from the Headteacher informing parents of the school's decision to impose conditions on the parent's attendance at school events.

Imposing a ban

Model letter 3: Letter from the Headteacher informing parents of the school's intention to impose a ban on their attendance at school premises.

Model Letter 1 Warning (sent by Senior Member of Staff)

Dear

I have received a report about your conduct at the school on (enter date and time or details). This appears to fall far short of what we would expect of a parent of a student at the Weald.

(Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, and other parents.)

I must inform you that the Weald School will not tolerate aggression towards members of the school community and will act to protect its staff and students from any form of abuse or intimidation. I should warn you that any future conduct of this nature could result in the school imposing conditions restricting your access to the school or banning you from contacting or attending the school altogether.

I wish to give you an opportunity to give me any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report, which I have received about your conduct. Please do so either in writing or email me at name@theweald.org.uk to discuss the circumstances within 5 working days of the date of this letter/email. These comments may include any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct.

Details of our policy on dealing with abusive parents can be found on our website.

Yours sincerely

Senior Member of Staff

Model Letter: 2 Imposing conditions on the parent's attendance at school events (sent by Headteacher)

Dear

I have received a report from the (name of staff) about your conduct on
at

(add summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

(You will recollect that **member of staff** has already written to you about a previous incident on (date) warning you of the consequence of any further insulting or aggressive behaviour on your part).

I must inform you that The Weald, in line with our policy, will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the school premises and will act to defend school staff and pupils.

I am therefore writing to inform you that I am imposing conditions on the contact you may have with school. These are as follows: **(delete as appropriate)**

- You must be accompanied to any meeting by a member of school staff
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff. You may contact either myself or one of the deputy headteachers.
- You may not attend any events for parents except those where you will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team of the school.
- Other as are reasonable and proportionate

You may, if you wish, send me in writing any comments or observations of your own within 5 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct. I will then write to you to determine whether I need to review this decision.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Model Letter 3: Imposition of a ban on contacting or attending the school, pending review (sent by Headteacher)

Dear

I have received a report from the (name of staff) about your conduct on
at

(add summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

You will recollect that I have already written to you about a previous incident on (date) warning you of the consequence of any further insulting or aggressive behaviour on your part.

I must inform you that the Weald, in line with our policy, will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the school premises and will act to defend school staff and pupils.

I am therefore writing to inform you that I am imposing a ban on you attending or contacting the school. This means you may not attend school for any reason whatsoever. You must not make contact with any member of staff by telephone or e-mail. You do, however, have the right to attend one meeting per year to discuss your child's progress. This meeting will be with **named member of senior staff**. I will contact you to arrange this at the time of the next parent evening.

You may, if you wish, send me in writing any comments or observations of your own within 5 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct. I will then write to you to determine whether I need to review this decision.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher