

HOLY FAMILY CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL



Policy on Managing Aggressive Behaviour of Visitors to School

Reviewed: March 2025

To be reviewed: March 2026

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Policy on Managing Aggressive Behaviour of Visitors to School

‘Living, Loving and Learning as followers of Jesus Christ.’

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Purpose

Mindful of our Mission Statement, this policy embodies the school values and philosophy in relation to Aggressive Visitors to our school. It sets out to adhere to the relevant legislation and guidance.

Audience

This document is intended for all visitors to the school community. The policy is available on the school website. Staff and pupils will be made aware of contents of this policy, including when reinforcing the expectations and consequences of unacceptable behaviour in appropriate ways and at appropriate times.

This policy is to be used in conjunction with Parent Code of Conduct.

Rationale

The identity of the school is developed by the Christian example of the staff and the relationships that exist. Everyone involved in the school is part of the school community.

Visitors are central in this community as they are the legitimate and irreplaceable agents in the education of children. Mutual care and respect is fostered at every level. There is honest dialogue in a climate of warmth and trust. Staff are sensitive and patient. School staff have a reputation for approachability. Conflict is resolved through forgiveness, reconciliation and healing as far as possible.

Staff encourage close links with visitors and the community. We believe that pupils benefit from positive relationships.

The vast majority of visitors to our school are keen to work co-operatively 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, verbal and or physical abuse towards school staff.

Aims

The aims of this Policy are:

- to confirm that visitors are valued, listened to and respected as part of a partnership;
- to clarify expectations;
- to delineate the types of behaviour that are not acceptable;
- to outline the procedures to be taken where behaviour is unacceptable;
- to detail strategies for managing an aggressive individual;
- to confirm that the needs of the child are paramount;
- to support staff in managing difficult/dangerous and stressful situations;
- to set out who the school needs to contact and how to report the incident;
- to establish what follow up action is needed

Expectations

The Governing Board:

- expects and requires its staff to behave professionally in these difficult situations and attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement, as appropriate, of other colleagues. However, it is acknowledged that all staff have the right to work without fear of violence and abuse, and the right in an extreme case, of appropriate self defence;
- expects all visitors to behave in a respectful way towards school staff. It is understood that they have a right to express their concerns.

Roles and Responsibilities

Headteacher:

The Headteacher is responsible under the Management of Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Regulations 1999. They must ensure that occupational risk assessments identify if staff are at risk from violence at work. If violence is identified as an occupational hazard, then actions need to be taken to protect employees by minimising the risk. Records of the risk assessments will be kept within the schools electronic CPOMS system and shared with all employees. The measures need to be monitored to make sure that they are effective.

Employees:

Employees have a responsibility for their own health and safety and that of other staff. As such they should understand the school Policy and procedures are designed to protect both themselves and their colleagues from incidences of violence.

Definition of Abuse, threatening and violent behaviour

The Health and Safety Executive's definition of work-related violence is: 'Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'.

The most common example of unreasonable behaviour is abusive and aggressive language for which the most widely used remedy, where informal action is not considered to be appropriate or has proved to be ineffective, is the withdrawal of permission to be on school premises.

Where a person recklessly or intentionally applies unlawful force on another, or puts another in fear of an immediate attack, it is an offence in law which constitutes an assault. The Police would normally be contacted immediately in such cases.

There are three categories of assault, based on the severity of the injury to the victim:

- a) Common Assault - involving the threat of immediate violence or causing minor injury (such as a graze, reddening of skin or minor bruise).
- b) Actual Bodily Harm - causing an injury which interferes with the health or comfort of the victim (such as multiple bruising, broken tooth or temporary sensory loss).
- c) Grievous Bodily Harm - causing serious injury (such as a broken bone or an injury requiring lengthy treatment).

There is also a racially aggravated form of assault where there is a racial element to the offence, which carries higher maximum penalties. It is important to note that no physical attack or injury needs to have occurred for a common assault to have taken place. It is sufficient for a person to have been threatened with immediate violence and put in fear of a physical attack for an offence to have been committed. Individual circumstances will influence the decision as to whether a particular incident should be reported to the Police. The Police would expect to be involved where there is a clear injury (whether physical or emotional) and acknowledge that other factors may need to be taken into account such as the previous behaviour of the offender and the likelihood of a repetition if action is not taken to prevent it.

Types of Behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will not be tolerated

This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour:

- Shouting at school staff, either in person or on the telephone;
- Abusive texts, emails, letters;
- Physically intimidating a member of staff, e.g., standing very close to her/him;
- The use of aggressive hand gestures;
- Threatening/insulting school staff;
- Shaking or holding a fist towards another person;
- Swearing;
- Pushing/shoving;
- Hitting, e.g., slapping, punching and kicking;
- Spitting;
- Racist, homophobic or sexist comments;
- Breaking the school's security procedures;
- Damaging personal property;
- Head wobbling

Harassment

Situations can arise where staff find themselves subjected to a pattern or persistent and unreasonable behaviour from individual visitors which is not abusive or overtly aggressive but which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive. In these circumstances, staff may be faced with a barrage of constant demands or criticisms (on an almost daily basis) which, whilst not particularly taxing or serious, when viewed in isolation, can have the cumulative effect over time of undermining the confidence, wellbeing and health of the staff member.

In extreme cases, the behaviour of the visitor may constitute an offence under the Protection of Harassment Act 1997. If so, the Police have powers to take action against the offender.

If the actions of a visitor appear to be heading in this direction, the Headteacher has the options of writing and/or talking to the visitor explaining the gravity of the situation, banning the visitor from the school premises and/or advising the visitor to make a formal complaint which would provide for an independent investigation by the Governing Board.

Procedure

The School's Measures to Avoid, Prevent and Minimise Incidents

The Headteacher has the prime responsibility in the school to ensure that staff are protected. This responsibility is delegated to the Deputy Headteacher who shares responsibility for the safety of staff on a day to day basis.

Staff are advised, in the event of an incident to:

- Speak calmly and without raising the voice.
- Be assertive but not aggressive.
- Be polite but firm.
- Seek assistance.
- Think about an escape route, should the need arise.
- Walk away.
- Advise the caller that the member of staff is going to end the phone call.

When a visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school staff, the Headteacher, or appropriate member of the senior staff, seeks to resolve the situation through discussion and mediation. If necessary, the school's Complaints Procedure should be followed.

The Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher will request that the person causing offence leave the premises. Should the person not leave the premises, then a member of school staff will call the Police.

Where all procedures have been exhausted, and aggression or intimidation continues, or where there is an act of violence, a visitor may be banned by the Headteacher from the school premises for a period of time, subject to review.

Prior to being banned the following steps are taken:

- The violent/aggressive incident is reported electronically on the school's CPOMS system. Advice will be sought, as appropriate, from Sefton's legal team to ensure fairness and consistency;
- The visitor is informed, in writing, that they are banned from the premises, subject to review, and what will happen if the ban is breached, e.g., that an injunction application may follow;
- Where an incident has led to a ban, a statement indicating that the matter has been reported to the Police will be included;
- The Chair of Governors will be informed of the ban;
- Where appropriate, arrangements for children being delivered to, and collected from the school gate will be clarified.

The review process is as follows:

A panel of governors will meet and discuss the ban. Potential existing risks will be discussed with consideration given to the likelihood of the incident re-occurring. Any incidences that have taken place following the ban being issued will be mean an automatic extension of the ban.

Conclusion

Children learn best when there is a positive partnership between home and school. Whilst every effort is made to work with visitors, this is only possible where visitors behave in a respectful manner.

Unfortunately, where a visitor's behaviour is either unacceptable or serious it will not be possible to continue working with him/her and, as a final resort, legal action may be taken.

The school will take action where behaviour is unacceptable or serious and breaches our Parent Code of conduct or health and safety legislation.

The Governing body will not tolerate threatening or abusive conduct of any nature on school premises and will act to protect staff, pupils and other visitors to the school premise. If a parent or visitor is banned and they subsequently fails to comply with the ban they could be removed from the school premises and prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996, if convicted under this section a fine could be imposed of up to £500.

APPENDIX I

Strategies for Managing an Aggressive Visitor

- Remember you may be dealing with an unhappy adult whose mood may be chemically enhanced.
- If you are aware that a visitor is unhappy inform the Headteacher or another senior person. Make an appointment to speak with the individual, it can provide time for the anger/frustration to be reduced.
- If confronted with an angry adult remain calm, your priority is to defuse the situation. Avoid looking aggressive. Don't put your hands on your hips, don't wag any fingers, and don't become officious. Speak slowly so that you are not drawn into a heated argument.
- Ask another adult or a child to go for the Headteacher or another senior member of staff and request them to come – NOW!
- Once the initial intrusion is contained, the official form is completed (Appendix I) and forwarded to Sefton Health and Safety.
- If there is physical violence and the person refuses to leave, then the Police are informed. The priority is to prevent subsequent incidents.
- Headteacher to write to the individual explaining the consequences of his/her behaviour, for example, ban from school.

Negotiating Strategies

When confronted with an angry or distressed visitor staying calm and in control is easier said than done. The following strategies can help:

- Be aware of your own body language. Adopt an open and non-threatening posture and speak softly even if the visitor is shouting;
- Offer to speak to the visitor in a private setting;
- Use 'I' statements rather than 'you'. For example, 'I feel that (child's name) has not given you the whole picture, rather than 'Your son/daughter has not told you the truth';
- Try to gain clarity about the visitor's situation or concern. This will help both of you to keep focused and to establish the facts. Recognise the difficulty;
- Summarise regularly what the visitor is saying during the incident. This does not mean agreeing or disagreeing;
- Let the visitor talk without interruption; curtailing the flow only fuels the anger. Allow silences;
- Acknowledge the feelings expressed, 'I can see that you are unhappy about...';
- Concentrating on their feelings and the details they provide demonstrates good listening skills and visitors will be more likely to feel their concerns have been heard accurately;
- Avoid hurrying the visitor. If you do not have time, offer a choice, 'You can arrange an appointment to discuss this later today, or I will find someone else who can speak to you as soon as possible';
- Avoid giving advice at an early stage; this way visitors can make their own decisions and will be less likely to blame you if the option they chose does not work out;
- Be clear about the boundaries of your role but ensure that you take responsibility appropriately.
- State clearly what you can do for the visitor. Be positive about the management of the difficulty.

APPENDIX II

Calming Techniques

How do we communicate CALM?

The first person who needs to calm down or stay calm is the adult in school.

Calming Techniques

C Communication: stance, posture, gesture, facial expression, intonation, scripts

A Awareness and Communication: reading behaviour, anticipating what might happen next, knowledge of handling plans

L Listening: give time and space, allow pauses for take-up time

M Making Safe: removing anything that can be used as a weapon

Space and Stance

Understanding the importance of body space:

When arms outstretched -

- Between nose and elbow is the **intimate body space** and is the inner circle of danger - if you are in this area, you are probably too close
- Between elbow and fingertips is **personal space**
- Outside the fingers is **social space**
- Distances may vary with individual factors including: cultural, gender, background, emotional state, medication/drugs, size, relationship with the person.

Defusing Body Language Responses

A non-threatening stance is characterised by:

- Social distance
- Sideways stance, step back
- Intermittent eye contact
- Relaxed body position
- Open palms

Paraverbal Communication

- Only 10-15% of our messages are perceived by the words used
- The inflection in your voice determines how a message is perceived by nuances in tone, manner, volume and cadence
- What you say is not as important as how you say it. Intonation is the quality of the 'noise' people make when they are speaking
- Volume matching is a skill.

APPENDIX III

Managing an Aggressive Visitor

Food for Thought

- If parents/carers and visitors are valued, and believe that they will be taken seriously, they usually follow procedures.
- Share information, sensitively, to ensure that all staff are aware of any potential risk with an adult.
- Often a child can become acutely embarrassed by a difficult relative and can play the main role in repairing any fracture. Whatever the dispute, the child's needs are of utmost importance.
- If there is a subsequent court case, you must not allow it to inhibit your normal professional reactions. If contact has to be made with the visitor as part of day to day activity, then ensure it is made by a senior member of staff. In the end though, if a visitor has proved unwilling to work with the school in the best interests of the pupil, the child may have to move to another school.
- There is no safe way to deal with visitors under the influence of alcohol or drugs. It is nearly impossible to reason with them and their reactions will be unpredictable. One possible response is to say that it is not possible to talk at the moment; ask the visitor to telephone for an appointment; then politely and firmly ask him or her to leave the premises. Request the support of another member of staff.
- EVERY SITUATION IS UNIQUE.

APPENDIX IV

The Law

Nationally, a small minority of visitors demonstrate serious disaffection and anti-social behaviour involving verbal abuse or even physical attacks on staff, other visitors or children.

The law is not suspended in a school context. Assault (an intentional or reckless act that causes someone to be put in fear of immediate physical harm whether or not there is physical contact) and battery (an intentional or reckless application of force) can both lead to a fine or several months' imprisonment. Assault resulting in actually bodily harm can lead to up to several years' imprisonment.

There may also be action for damages, which may include loss of actual and potential future earnings.

A parent/carer is a visitor on school property and may be asked to leave. Failure to do so constitutes trespass. The Headteacher has the right to ban a parent/carer from a school site but should initially do so on a temporary basis through a letter; then permanently if necessary.

The DfE's 'A Legal Toolkit for Schools' provides information about dealing with aggressive behaviour towards staff: www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/behaviour/beh