



Dealing with Abusive Parents/Carers Policy

Approved by: Governing Board

Date: 22 March 2023

Last reviewed on: March 2023

Next review due by: March 2025

This Policy should be read in conjunction with: Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy; Complaints Policy

Statement of Principles

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance 'Advice on school security: Access to, and barring individuals from school premises' December 2012.

At Downlands Community School, we value the positive relationships forged with parents/carers and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents/carers 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 Downlands are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on very rare occasions the behaviour of a parent/carer or visitor falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the school community.

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 board of governors has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

The progress and well-being of the parent/carer'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, robust review processes involving the Chair of Governors and then the governing board are in place to ensure fairness.

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 Headteacher or appropriate senior staff member 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 an investigation 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 staff/students feel intimidated by the parents/carers or visitors 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?

Recording of Incidents

Staff/students subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about the incident which will be kept on 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 investigation, the Headteacher will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include the following:

1. Clarify to the parent/carer or visitor 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 a letter from the Headteacher. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are subsequent incidents. The parent/carer will be invited to write to the Headteacher with their response within 10 school days. Depending on the response a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.
2. Invite the parent/carer to an informal meeting to discuss events.
This could be helpful to discuss and defuse 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.
3. Impose conditions on the parent/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. Parent/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. Parent/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 parents/carers or visitors 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.

If any of the conditions are being imposed, the parent/carer would then be given 10 school days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 school days of the date of the parents/carer's letter.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by a panel of 3 governors (to include the Chair of Governors) each term. The parent/carer will be invited to make written representation to the governors. This and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the panel. Governors may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the governors within 10 school days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent/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/carer'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 act of violence then the school may consider banning the parent/carer or visitor. They will be informed by letter from the Headteacher of the details of the ban. This will include banning a parent from accessing school staff by written communication or telephone.

The parent/carer would then be given 10 school days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent/carer in writing within 10 school days of the receipt of their letter.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by a panel of 3 governors (to include the Chair of Governors) each term. The parent will be invited to make written representation to the governors; this and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the panel. Governors may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent/carers access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the governors within 10 school days of the date of the meeting.

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

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 a section 547 offence. 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, the Headteacher or his nominees authorised by the governing board. 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.