

Managing Violent and Abusive Visitors in Schools policy

Introduction

As a general rule, schools are orderly, safe places, where relationships between staff and visitors, especially parents/carers, demonstrate mutual respect and recognition of shared responsibility for pupils' welfare and educational progress. Parental involvement is an important factor in educational success and in dealing with emerging problems at an early stage. However, on occasion, the behaviour of a few parents/ carers can cause severe disruption or worse, resulting in abusive or aggressive behaviour towards staff, pupils, or other members of the school community. This policy aims to provide a clear framework to prevent such situations happening and to spot the signs of how to deal with such incidents before they escalate to a problematic level.

This document is mainly about dealing with violence, threatening behaviour or abuse by parents of a pupil in a school, including those cases where the parent has been asked not to come onto the premises.

Violence, threatening behaviour and abuse against school staff

Violence, threatening behaviour and abuse against school staff or other members of the school community will not be tolerated. All members of the school community have a right to expect that school is a safe place in which to work and learn. There is no place for violence, threatening behaviour or abuse in schools. Types of behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will not be tolerated include: shouting at members of the school staff, either in person or over the telephone (in the case of this occurring during a telephone call staff should inform the caller that this is unacceptable and that should it continue that they will end the call); physically intimidating a member of staff, e.g. standing very close to her/him; the use of aggressive hand gestures; threatening behaviour; shaking or holding a fist towards another person; swearing; pushing; hitting, e.g. slapping, punching and kicking; spitting; breaching the school's security procedures. This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour. Where such behaviour does occur, staff must know that their school, Station and MOD Schools will play a proactive role in taking all possible action to deal with it, in response to the wishes of the staff. In certain circumstances, this will mean the school taking the lead in initiating action on the staff members' behalf with the school's support, and in other circumstances we expect Station or MOD Schools to support the school in action that the school itself will initiate, which may include involvement of the chain of command or Cyprus Joint Police Unit (CJPU). At all times the common purpose remains clear: to achieve zero tolerance of violence, threatening behaviour or abuse in schools, and to ensure all members of the school community, and all visitors to the school, can be confident that they are operating within a safe environment.

Schools should in the first instance ask MOD Schools for advice on the appropriateness of the remedies available and MOD Schools should, where they have the power to do so, take the lead in initiating action with the Executive Principal. In circumstances where power does not lie with the MOD Schools (e.g. under the criminal law) we would expect MOD Schools to support and advise school and they should remove as much of the burden from them as possible.

School policy for dealing with incidents

1. When a member of staff is arranging a meeting with parents they should always consider the likely tone of the meeting and try to arrange a location that will safeguard themselves as far as possible. The member of staff should also be very careful that they use language that is honest, professional but sensitive as appropriate for the agenda of the meeting.
2. Should a member of school staff be involved with a meeting with a parent who is becoming aggressive then they should remind the parent of the importance that they remain calm and remind the parent that they all have the common interest of providing the best possible provision for their child.
3. Should this not be successful then the member of staff should inform the parent that should they not be able to continue the meeting in a calm manner then the member of staff will be forced to postpone the meeting until a time that the meeting can be conducted in a purposeful and reasonable manner. If it is deemed appropriate then the parent/carer should be guided to a different room away from other people. Should these strategies not improve the situation then the parent should be invited to leave and informed that another date will be offered to continue the meeting.
4. Should a situation be deemed to be an emergency then the member of staff should contact a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who should go to support the member of staff without delay. The member of SLT should offer the parent an alternative location where they should be informed of the requirement to conduct themselves in a manner that does not threaten members of the school staff.
5. Should SLT not be available or their presence not improve the situation then it may be necessary to involve other agencies. This should not be done without giving the parent a reasonable opportunity to address their behaviour. Again, if this is not followed by an improvement in the situation then the Cyprus Joint Police Unit should be called to escort the parent from the site and take relevant subsequent action. Unless it is considered likely to cause a deterioration in the situation the parents should be warned that this action is to be taken unless they cease to be threatening to school staff.
6. It is imperative that any such incident is thoroughly recorded in writing. It is suggested that SIMS or our Staff incident forms are used to record the situation. The incident should also be reported to a member of SLT as soon as is possible..

The Banning Process

The Executive Principal will need to assemble the full facts before proceeding, making sure that all those involved in any incidents, or witnesses to those incidents, record the situation as outlined above. The Executive Principal should write to parent/carer to record in detail the incident and why it is unacceptable; explain that the school/governing body will consider banning the parent from the school site, giving the parent a period in which they may respond in writing giving their version and why they should not be banned; tell the parent when a decision will be made. The length of a ban should be finite in length, as only the most serious misconduct would justify an indefinite ban. The parent's chain of command should be made aware of the ban as is appropriate. The duration will be sufficient to convey a clear message about the seriousness of the associated misconduct, but not so long as to be disproportionate. The aim should always be to restore "normal" relations as soon as is reasonably practicable. Even if a ban is permanent, it should be reviewed periodically, taking account of subsequently demonstrated patterns of behaviour.

Sample letters following an incident

Sample 1

Warning letter, from the Executive Principal: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school

Dear I have received a report about your conduct at the school on (enter date and time). (Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, other parents.) I must inform you that the school will not tolerate conduct of this nature on its premises and will act to protect its staff and pupils. Therefore if, in the future, I receive any reports of conduct of this nature I will be forced to consider preventing you from entering the school grounds and buildings. If you do not comply with that instruction I will be able to arrange for you to be removed from the premises and prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. Nevertheless, I wish to give you an opportunity to give me in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report which I have received about your conduct. These comments may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct. To enable me to take a decision on this matter at an early point, you are asked to send me any written comments you wish to make by (state date ten working days from the date of letter).

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Sample 2

Banning Letter, from the school or SGC: to parent/carer with child/ren at the school

Dear I have received a report about your conduct on (enter date and time). (Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, other parents.) I must inform you that the school/ governing body (delete as appropriate) will not tolerate conduct of this nature on its premises and will act to protect its staff and pupils. I am therefore instructing that until (add date) you are not to reappear on the premises of the school. If you do not comply with this instruction I may arrange for you to be removed from the premises and prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. However, I still need to decide whether it is appropriate to confirm this decision. Before I do so, I wish to give you an opportunity to give me in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report which I have received. These comments may include any expressions of regret on your part and any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct. To enable me to take a decision on this matter at an early point, you are asked to send me any written comments you wish to make by (state date ten working days from the date of letter). If on receipt of your comments I consider that my decision should be confirmed, or extended, you will be supplied with details of how to pursue a review of the circumstances of your case. In any event, the decision to prevent you from entering the school premises will be reviewed by (complete as appropriate). That review will take account of any representations that you may have made and of your subsequent conduct.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher/Chair of SGC

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