

## Policy for dealing with abusive parents

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### **Rationale**

Veritas MAT value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to our Trust schools. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that pupils 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 our Trust schools 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 board of Trustees has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

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, robust review processes involving the Trust CEO and board of trustees 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. 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, eg 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 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/pupils subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about incident(s) which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults these may be made available to the parent if they request it.

### **The School's response**

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Headteacher 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 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 Headteacher with his/her version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent's response a meeting 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 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 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 pupils 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 of 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 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Trust CEO. The Trust CEO would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 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 Trust CEO typically after approximately one term (and termly thereafter, if appropriate).

The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Trustees. This and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered and the CEO may decide 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 CEO 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 CEO that a ban is being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the CEO.

The CEO would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees after approximately one term (and every term after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make

written representation to the CEO; this and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the full Board of Trustees. Trustees may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent's access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, Trustees 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. 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 or person authorised by the Board of Trustees. 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 the Headteacher 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 meeting.

#### *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, pending review by the CEO.

#### *Imposing a ban*

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

#### *Reviewing the decision to impose conditions or impose a ban*

Model Letter 4: Letter from CEO requesting statement from parents to review the ban.

Model letter 5: Letter from Trustees to confirm the outcome of further reviews of decisions where the imposition of conditions/ban has been extended or removed.

#### *Model Letter 1 Warning (sent by Headteacher)*

Recorded delivery

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 that we would expect of a parent of a student at .....

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

I must inform you that the Board of Trustees 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 in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report which I have received about your conduct. Please do so within 10 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may include any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct. There is then an option for us to meet to discuss the situation and how it can be avoided in the future.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

cc: CEO

cc. Chair of Trustees

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

Recorded delivery

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 Trustees, 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 with a member of school staff
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff. You may contact either myself or (deputy headteacher). .
- You may not attend any events for parents except those where you will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school.
- Other as are reasonable and proportionate

You may, if you wish, send the CEO in writing any comments or observations of your own within 10 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.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

cc: CEO

cc. Chair of Trustees

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

Recorded delivery

Dear

Further to speaking to you on ..... 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 Trustees, 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 to take effect immediately. These are as follows:

- You may not enter the school site at any time during the duration of this ban.
- You may not attend any events for parents during the duration of this ban.

You may, if you wish, send me in writing any comments or observations of your own within 10 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. This ban will be reviewed at the start of term 5 that starts on 20 April 2020.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive Officer

cc: Headteacher

cc: Chair of Trustees

*Model Letter 4: Letter from CEO requesting parents' statement for review by*

Recorded delivery

Dear

I wrote to you on (date) to detail concerns about your behaviour towards school staff/students fell short of what we would expect as a school. As a result of this incident, conditions were imposed on you/a ban was imposed.

This decision will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees at their next meeting on (date).

I am writing to ask whether you would like to make a written statement to Trustees for their consideration in making the decision whether to remove the restriction or extend it.

If you should wish to make a written statement, please submit this by (date – parents should be given 10 days to respond).

Yours sincerely

CEO

cc: Headteacher

cc. Chair of trustees

*Model Letter 5: Letter detailing outcome of Board of Trustees review (sent by Clerk to Trustees)*

Dear

I wrote to you on (date) to request a statement to enable Trustees to review the school's decision to impose conditions/ban you from attending school premises.

I have not received a written response from you/I have received a letter from you dated ....., the contents of which were considered carefully by the Trustees at their meeting on (date).

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Headteacher's report (and your letter), Trustees have determined that the decision to impose conditions/ban you from attending or contacting school attend should be confirmed. The conditions of your attendance on site are as follows:

- You must be accompanied to any meeting with a member of school staff
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff. You may contact either the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- You may not attend any events for parents except those where you will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school.
- Any other condition imposed

OR

- You must not attend any event in school except for an annual meeting about your child's progress. This meeting will be conducted by the headteacher.
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff.

This decision will be reviewed again in six months' time. When deciding whether it will be necessary to extend the application of conditions to attend school premises, consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you; and any evidence of your co-operation with the school in other respects.

OR

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Headteacher's report and your letter, Trustees have determined that you should once again be allowed to attend parents' events as usual. All conditions have been removed. However, should there be a repeat of inappropriate behaviour towards staff this decision may be revoked.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to Trustees

cc: Headteacher

cc. CEO