



Policy for Dealing with Persistent/Vexatious Complaints and Harassment

Category: Non-Statutory	Approved by: Full Governing Body
Approved: December 2024	Next Approval due: December 2026
Initial Review by: Chair of Governors	Formal Review by: Teaching & Learning Committee
Linked Policies: Complaints Policy	

When monitoring and reviewing we ensure compliance with the school's Equality Policy.

Our Christian vision:

Built on the rock of Christian faith, we work as a community to create an environment which enables all to flourish. Jesus welcomed all and we embrace diversity, celebrating our different gifts and successes. Like St Peter, we are motivated by our values, learn from our mistakes and strive for the best outcome for all.

Woolhampton CE Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We acknowledge the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 that clearly states that: The Headteacher, SLT and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of Woolhampton CE Primary School and directly or indirectly the overall well-being of the children or staff in the school. In these circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

1. AIMS OF POLICY

- Ensure that all parties are treated in accordance with our school's Christian vision.
- Uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication from the school to persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint,
- Support the well-being of students, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents/ carers,
- Deal fairly, honestly and appropriately with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school,
- Ensure that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS

In implementing this policy the School will seek to ensure that its actions are in accordance with its obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Convention Rights embodied within it in order to protect the Human Rights of both persistent complainants and all other stakeholders.

3. PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- Provide access to the school's Complaints Policy and other associated documentation.
- Respond within a reasonable time.
- Respect privacy.
- Be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint.
- Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints policy, other policies and practice.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress towards a resolution of the concern/complaint raised.

4. THE SCHOOL'S EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS/CARERS/MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The school can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise concerns/complaints with the school to:

- Treat all school staff with courtesy and respect.
- Respect the needs and well-being of all pupils and staff in the school.
- Avoid any use of abusive, aggressive, threatening, coercive or intimidating behaviour whether verbal, written or online.
- Avoid broadcasting the concern/complaint via social media.
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond.

5. THE SCHOOL'S DEFINITION of PERSISTENT/VEXATIOUS and HARASSMENT

The school defines vexatious/persistent complaints, and harassment, as situations where a parent, carer, or member of the public raises concerns—either formally or informally—or frequently raises issues that they believe fall within the remit of the school, but whose behaviour is deemed unreasonable. This process is distinct from the standard complaints procedure outlined in the school's Complaints Policy and applies specifically to instances where behaviour disrupts or negatively impacts the effective operation of the school and well-being of the children and staff.

Unreasonable behaviour may include, but is not limited to, the following characteristics:

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, coercive, prolific, repetitious.
- Refusing to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Persistently making the same complaint with minor differences but never accepting the outcome of any investigation into their complaint.
- Seeking unrealistic outcomes relative to the issue being raised, and stating that their intention is to persist until that outcome is achieved.
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence. Challenging a historical decision/action which cannot be changed.
- Unwilling to accept documented evidence of action.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations, which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted procedure or with good practice.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous council staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses or demanding response by a specific date which is deemed to be unreasonable.
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of the other persons involved.
- Making statements the complainant knows are not true or persuading others to do so.
- Denying or changing statements made at an earlier stage.
- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered.
- Using Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably.
- Actions that are contrary to the expectations stated in Section 4 of this policy.

A complaint may also be considered persistent if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- Maliciously and/or aggressively.
- Appears to be targeting, over a period of time, one or more members of school staff and/or causes ongoing distress to a member of school staff.
- Using threats, intimidation or violence.
- Using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language.
- Knowing it to be false.
- Using falsified information.
- Publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites, public forums and newspapers.

6. THE SCHOOL'S ACTIONS in CASES of PERSISTENT/VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS and HARASSMENT

Where behaviour is identified as becoming persistent, the Headteacher will inform the Chair of Governors. The Headteacher will communicate either in writing or verbally to inform the complainant that their behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing.

If the behaviour continues, the Head teacher or Chair of Governors will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is Persistent and asking them to desist.

If the school considers the behaviour of the complainant is not modified, the Headteacher will agree an appropriate response with the Chair of Governors, or if not available, the Vice Chair of Governors. This may include the following actions, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy.
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties.
- Specify the methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan.
- In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of coercive and intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban. The police will be informed in the case of any serious incident of aggression or violence.
- Consider taking appropriate advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation.
- Consider taking advice from the HR / Legal Services about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant.
- Keep the Chair of Governors informed.

Reviewing decisions and withdrawing 'Persistent or Vexatious' status

Once a complainant has been determined, as persistent or vexatious, such status needs to be regularly reviewed, and, where appropriate, withdrawn at a later date. Such action may be appropriate where a complainant subsequently demonstrates a more reasonable approach or submits a further complaint for which the normal complaints procedures would appear appropriate.

A panel of three governors will review their decisions to categorise a complainant as persistent or vexatious every six months.

The panel, on review, may either withdraw the categorisation of a person as persistent or vexatious or amend the strategy being applied to that person.

If the panel considers it appropriate to withdraw the status of persistent or vexatious complainant, normal contact with the complainant and application of the school's complaints procedure will be resumed. The complainant will be given notice of this decision forthwith.

Copies of all decisions relating to the categorisation of a person as a habitual or vexatious complainant will be sent to the Clerk who will hold and maintain a central register of such decisions.

Responsibility for the Policy and Procedure

Role of the Board of Governors

The Board of Governors has:

- delegated powers and responsibilities to the Headteacher to ensure all school personnel and stakeholders are aware of and comply with this policy;
- responsibility for ensuring that the school complies with all equalities legislation;
- make effective use of relevant research and information to improve this policy;
- responsibility for ensuring this policy and all policies are maintained and updated regularly;
- responsibility for ensuring all policies are made available to parents;
- responsibility for the effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this policy

Role of the Headteacher

The Headteacher will:

- ensure all school personnel and parents are aware of and comply with this policy;
- work closely with Governors;
- provide leadership and vision in respect of equality;
- make effective use of relevant research and information to improve this policy;
- organise training for the appropriate school personnel;
- monitor the effectiveness of this policy;
- report to the Board of Governors on the success and development of this policy.

Role of School Personnel

School personnel will:

- comply with all aspects of this policy;
- report any concerns they have on any aspect of the school community.

Raising Awareness of this Policy

We will raise awareness of this policy via:

- the School's website
- induction of staff
- meetings with school personnel.

7. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

Signed: (Headteacher)

Signed: (Chair of Governors)