



Managing Violent and Abusive Visitors to School Policy

2016-2017

Governor Lead:	Personnel Committee
Nominated Lead Member of Staff:	Lee Bergin (Headmaster)
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Principles:

- Day to day access to a school is within the control of the head teacher.
- Normally parents/carers (and those with parental responsibility) are granted “limited licence” to visit the grounds and buildings of a school. The procedures of such visits to set out: the acceptable purposes for such visits; the areas of the school that may be entered at particular times; the standard of behaviour expected
- Violence, threatening behaviour and abuse against school staff or other members of the school community must not be tolerated

Types of behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will **not** be tolerated are:

- shouting at members of the school staff, either in person or over the telephone;
- physically intimidating a member of staff, eg 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, eg 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.

- The governing body is responsible for protecting the health and safety of staff and pupils
- Where there is a breach of such procedures the school needs to respond in a measured way, depending on the seriousness of any inappropriate conduct e.g.:
 - initiate a meeting/dialogue with the individual;
 - write to the visitor, describing their misconduct, explaining its impact on the school and stating its unacceptability;
 - vary the person’s “licence”, say, through the addition of conditions;
 - warn of the possibility of a “ban” (i.e. the withdrawal of their licence) if the misconduct is repeated;
 - impose a ban with a review after a fixed period;
 - impose a ban without review

Practice:

Prevention is better than cure:

- In the majority of cases, parents/carers become angry when they feel an injustice has occurred against their child. This often happens following an incident and the child is able to speak to their parent, often giving a one-sided and frequently inflamed view of events. It is better therefore for the member of staff directly involved to communicate the facts home *before* the pupil has chance to do this.
- Conduct a risk assessment:
 - Who is at risk (reception, teachers...)
 - What the risks are (Abuse, threatening behaviour, violence) and from whom (parent, other visitor)
 - What appropriate actions would mitigate the risks

- Ask other staff of their awareness of similar risks
 - Have procedures for visits and access to site
 - Protect yourself and have a second member of staff with you if risk is anticipated
 - If there is a risk of confrontation, ensure pupils are not in the vicinity, even children of the angry parent
- Diffusing the anger. It takes a strong will and thick skin but where possible, consider the following:
 - L.E.A.P.
 - Listen. Be active and try to look genuinely interested. Try to not interrupt – most parents want to vent all the way. Tell them you will make notes, to show them you're attentive. Lay down a ground rule: you will listen, but expect to do it in a calm environment otherwise the meeting will end immediately
 - Empathise: Even if the parent is wrong and misguided, their feelings are real. An occasional "I can see you're upset" or "I'm sorry you feel we've made the wrong decision" will help.
 - Ask: "Is there anything else you want me to know?"
 - Problem solve: suggest some resolution or at least a time-scale to seek out a resolution. Give a time frame and promise to report back.
 - If things are a bit tetchy, offer to make a cup of tea, get some water etc...the 3 minute break may serve to calm you and the parent down.

If the parent does not calm down, is shouting/abusive/swearing etc...

If the unacceptable behaviour continues, in the first instance it may be useful to call upon a senior colleague to help mediate. "Before this continues, I'm going to ask a colleague to step in to help resolve the matter, give me a few minutes, please".

If the colleague is unable to diffuse the parent, then the senior member should terminate the meeting and ask the parent to leave. It is enough in law for the member of staff to feel threatened. If the parent refuses to leave, then dial 999.

In this instance, the headmaster may consider barring the parent from the school premises.

The Barring Process

The bar, or threat of bar aims to achieve a number of things:

- It confirms to parent that the school will not tolerate misbehaviour
- It shows the school takes health and safety of its staff, visitors and pupils seriously
- It provides a key element to seek legal remedies such as prosecution and injunctions in extreme circumstances

Some principles:

1. The bar should be finite except in the most extreme circumstances
2. The aim should be to resume 'normal' relations as soon as reasonable
3. Bars should be reviewed (even permanent ones)
4. Parents have a right of annual consultation in relation to the educational progress of their child
5. Section 547 of the Education Act 1996 makes it an offence for a trespasser on school premises to cause or permit a nuisance or disturbance.