

## **POLICY FOR HANDLING UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT, HARASSING OR ABUSIVE COMPLAINANTS**

### **(part of the Complaints Policy – March 2017)**

The headteacher and governing body are committed to the improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents/carers and will always try to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. There is a procedure for parents to use if they wish to make a formal complaint.

Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept threatening or harassing behaviour. The aim of this leaflet is to provide information about our school policy on unreasonably persistent complainants or harassment of staff.

### **What do we mean by 'an unreasonably persistent complainant'?**

An unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include parents and carers who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner. Unreasonable behaviour may include:

- □ actions which are
  - out of proportion to the nature of the complaint, or
  - persistent – even when the complaints procedure has been exhausted, or
  - personally harassing, or
  - unjustifiably repetitious and/or
- □ an insistence on
  - pursuing unjustified complaints and/or
  - unrealistic outcomes to justified complaints and/or
- □ an insistence on
  - pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner (eg using abusive or threatening language; or
  - making complaints in public; or
  - refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint

### **What is 'harassment'?**

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than seek a resolution. Behaviour will fall within the scope of this policy if:

- □ it appears to be deliberately targeted over a significant period of time at one or more members of school staff or others, without good cause;
- □ the way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes ongoing distress to school staff or others;
- □ it has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community, interfering with the daily business of the education of pupils.

### **What can you expect from the school?**

Anyone who raises informal or formal concerns and complaints with the school can expect us to:

- □ keep in touch regularly in writing over:
  - how and when problems can be raised with the school

- o details of the school's complaints procedure
- o details of the school's Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/Harassment Policy
- respond within a reasonable time
- be available for consultation within a reasonable time limit, bearing in mind the needs of pupils
- respond with courtesy and respect
- attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure and advice from Cumbria County Council or diocesan authority
- keep those involved informed of progress

This leaflet forms part of the school's complaints procedure, available on request from the school office.

### **What the school expects of you**

The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:

- treat all staff with courtesy and respect
- respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school
- avoid the use of violence (including threats of violence) towards people or property
- recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint
- recognise that some problems may not be resolved in a short time
- follow the school's complaints procedure

### **Schools' responses to unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment**

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty. However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy
- require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present: in the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication

The school has a duty of care to staff and pupils and will take emergency measures should these become necessary in extreme cases.

### **Physical or verbal aggression**

The school will not tolerate **any** form of physical or verbal aggression against school staff. If staff are subject to this type of aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect
- request an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)
- prosecute under Anti-Harassment legislation

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy. The school

nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.