

SCAWSBY SALTERSGATE INFANT SCHOOL



Protocols for Handling Unreasonably Persistent, Harassing, Vexatious, Threatening and Abusive Complaints Policy

Document Control

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V1	New	Full gov body	01/09/2026	01/09/2029

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Statement of intent

The Headteacher and Governing Body are committed to the improvement of our School. The school recognises that a complainant may be distressed, frustrated or persistent when raising a genuine concern. A complaint will not be regarded as unreasonable simply because it is persistent, because the complainant disagrees with the school's response, or because the complainant seeks to escalate the matter in accordance with the school's published complaints procedure. There is a procedure for parents/carers to use if they wish to make a formal complaint, as detailed in our Complaints Procedure. Sometimes, however, parents or carers pursuing complaints or other issues treat staff and others in a way that is unacceptable and/or behave in an unacceptable manner. Whilst we recognise that some complaints may relate to serious and distressing incidents, we will not accept unreasonable, persistent harassing, vexatious, threatening, or inappropriate behaviour. The aim of this policy is to clarify the process for dealing with unreasonable complainants or parents who do not act appropriately.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to relevant legislation and guidance, including section 29 of the Education Act 2002, the Equality Act 2010, the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

This policy has also had regard to the Department for Education's Best Practice Guidance for School Complaints Procedures 2020, updated 15 January 2021, and the DfE Model Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

2. Definitions

What do we mean by unreasonable behaviour'?

The school may consider behaviour to be unreasonable where a complainant's actions, correspondence or contact are disproportionate, repetitive, abusive, threatening or otherwise unreasonable in the circumstances. The focus will be on the behaviour and the way in which the complaint is pursued, rather than on the individual or on the fact that they have made a complaint. This will include parents and carers who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner and those who do not act in an appropriate manner towards staff at the school. Unreasonable behaviour can include (but is not limited to) one or a combination of the following:

Actions which are out of proportion to the nature of the complaint:

- Persistent or repetitive contact about the same issue, particularly where the school's published complaints procedure has been completed and the complainant continues to raise substantially the same points without providing significant new information.
- Personally harassing,
- Unjustifiably repetitive
- Obsessive, harassing, or prolific
- Prolific and/or persistent correspondence or excessive email or telephone contact about a concern or complaint
- Repetitious complaints where the complainant has no view about what would satisfy him/her and/or no intention to resolve the complaint
- Acting in a way not in line with the school's aim of reaching a resolution and working with the school
- Pursuing unjustified or unmeritorious complaints and/or unrealistic outcomes to unjustified complaints

An insistence on:

- Pursuing justifiable complaints in an unreasonable manner e.g. using abusive or threatening language;
- Using social media or other public forums in a manner that amounts to harassment, threats, abusive behaviour, or the inappropriate disclosure of confidential or personal information.; or unreasonably refusing reasonable opportunities to discuss or progress the complaint, having regard to any communication, accessibility or other relevant needs.
- Insisting on a complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the school's complaints procedure
- Adopting a 'scatter gun' approach; Pursuing multiple substantially identical complaints simultaneously through different school routes or organisations, where this unnecessarily duplicates the investigation and prevents the school from dealing with the matter effectively. This will not include a complainant exercising a legitimate right to contact their MP, the Department for Education, Ofsted, the Local Authority or another appropriate statutory body.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with issues, and seeking to have them replaced
- Repeatedly making the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Denying or changing statements they made at an earlier stage
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations which the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage
- Raising many detailed but unimportant questions, and insisting they are all answered

- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails or letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses
- Submitting documents or information which the school has reasonable grounds to believe have been deliberately altered, fabricated or materially misrepresented.
- Refusing to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of help
- Refusing to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- An insistence on damaging relationships between the school and the child of the parent involved, by making derogatory comments about the school and its staff to the pupil, thus affecting the child's enjoyment of school and confidence in school staff
- Continuing to pursue substantially the same complaint after the school's published complaints procedure has been fully completed, where the complainant has been given a clear explanation of the school's position and any available escalation or external review options.

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 which has the effect of causing significant or disproportionate distress, disruption or harassment.

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
- 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;
- Actions are pursued aggressively or in any manner not appropriate to an effective resolution.

3. Expectations of school and complainant:

Anyone who raises informal or formal issues and complaints with the School can expect the School to:

- Follow the school's complaints procedure
- Respond within the timescales set out in the school's Complaints Procedure, or explain where this is not possible and provide a revised timescale.
- Be available for consultation within reasonable timescales, having regard to the needs of pupils, staff availability and the nature and complexity of the complaint.
- Respond with courtesy and respect
- Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with guidance from the Local Authority
- Keep those involved informed of progress towards a resolution.

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
- Never to use violence (including threats of violence) towards people or property
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in school 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.
- Speak politely and respectfully using appropriate language and avoid any aggression or verbal abuse, including name-calling
- Raise concerns through appropriate channels and, where possible, avoid raising complaints in circumstances where confidentiality, pupil welfare or the effective investigation of the complaint could be compromised.
- To be prepared to work towards a resolution and in partnership with the school.

4. Behaviour

The school will consider whether the behaviour is genuinely unreasonable or disproportionate and will distinguish between the substance of a complaint and the manner in which it is pursued.

The fact that a complainant remains dissatisfied with the school's response, asks detailed questions, disagrees with the school's findings or wishes to pursue an available stage of the complaints procedure will not, by itself, constitute unreasonable behaviour.

Any restrictions placed on communication or access will be proportionate to the circumstances and will take account of equality, accessibility, safeguarding and communication needs.

5. School's responses to unreasonably persistent complaints, vexatious complainants, unreasonable complaints or harassment

The decision to apply this policy will normally be made by the Headteacher. Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher, or where it would be inappropriate for the Headteacher to make the decision, the Chair of Governors or another appropriate governor nominated by the governing body will make the decision.

Any decision to restrict communication or access will be confirmed in writing, setting out the reason for the decision, the restrictions being applied, the duration or review arrangements, and how legitimate future complaints or urgent matters should be communicated.

- 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 third person present. Where appropriate, meetings may also be held by telephone or online, or communication may be provided in writing. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken
- Require future communication to be made through a specified communication channel, such as the school office email address, postal correspondence or another appropriate method agreed by the school, having regard to any reasonable accessibility or communication needs. The school will respond only to written communication sent via email to the school office (admin@saltersgate-inf.doncaster.sch.uk), in a timely manner. This will be determined by the school only

The complainant may be asked to direct future correspondence to the school office or another nominated contact. Staff may be asked not to respond individually where correspondence should appropriately be managed through the nominated contact.

- Where a complaint has been fully considered under the school's Complaints Procedure, the school may advise the complainant that the matter has been concluded and that further correspondence repeating substantially the same points may not receive a further substantive response. This will not prevent the school from considering a legitimate new complaint or new information where appropriate.
- Place restrictions on the individual's access to school and/or school staff
- Where necessary and proportionate, restrict an individual's access to the school site or require contact with the school to take place through a specified member of staff or communication channel. Any such restriction will be communicated in writing and will have regard to safeguarding, equality and accessibility requirements.
- Restrict the frequency, format or method of future communication where repeated or excessive contact is causing significant disruption, while continuing to consider legitimate new complaints and communications relating to safeguarding, pupil welfare or other matters requiring a response.
- Seek advice or assistance from the Local Authority where appropriate.
- Wherever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss concerns with the complainant before applying the provisions of this policy. Where the unreasonable behaviour of a complainant escalates quickly, the 'unreasonable' marking may need to be applied straightaway if matters have escalated beyond the point where informal discussion is likely to affect positive change on the part of the complainant.

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

6. Physical or verbal aggression

The school will not tolerate violence, threats of violence, serious verbal abuse or personal harassment directed towards pupils, staff, governors, volunteers or visitors. If staff are subject to this type of aggression the school may:

- Prohibit the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect
- Inform the individual that communication with them will cease other than in an emergency

- Seek advice from the Local Authority, police or other appropriate agencies where the circumstances warrant such action.
- Report serious incidents to the police where appropriate and seek appropriate legal or Local Authority advice.
- Where an incident involves serious violence, threats, criminal behaviour or an immediate risk to safety, the school may contact the police or other emergency services as appropriate. This may include barring an individual from Saltersgate infant school.

7.Time Frame and Review

If a complainant's harassing/persistent behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above.

Where a complainant's behaviour has changed and the underlying complaint remains within the timescale set out in the school's Complaints Procedure, the school may resume consideration of the complaint where appropriate. The school will review as appropriate, and at a minimum of once a year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.

Legitimate new complaints, if not pursued in a harassing or unreasonable way, will still be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the vexatious or persistent complaints policy. The school may restrict the method, frequency or format of communication where necessary and proportionate, but legitimate new complaints and matters requiring a response will continue to be considered.

8.Monitoring and Review

This policy is reviewed every three years by the Headteacher. Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all relevant stakeholders.