



WOODBIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

Abusive Visitors and Parents Policy

Statement of Principles

This policy has been written taking into account DfE guidance: Controlling Access to School Premises (2018) on dealing with abusive visitors and parents.

Woodbridge High School values the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that students 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 Woodbridge 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 and visitors falls short of what we expect and whose behaviour is unacceptable (to tie in with definition below). 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 that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from visitors or parents. The school's management team and governing body has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

Actions taken against visitors and parents will be reasonable and proportionate. They will have the opportunity to put forward their views at every stage. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from school, robust review processes involving the governing body are in place to ensure fairness.

Definition of Unacceptable Behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent or visitor 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, e.g. 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.

Dealing with Incidents

If a parent or visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the head teacher or appropriate senior member of 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 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 visitor or parent's behaviour?
- Is there any evidence of provocation?
- How high is the assessed risk that this will be repeated, or there will be subsequent retaliation following the school's action?

Recording of Incidents

Staff or students subject to abuse, and witnesses of abuse, will provide written statements which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters. This file will be kept by the Headteacher's PA. Further to an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses and/or individuals, statements made by adults may be made available to the parent if they request it. These may have names and/or other personal details redacted, as deemed appropriate.

Procedures

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 or visitor what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school

In some instances it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent or visitor is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This could be explained in a letter from the Headteacher. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are future incidents. The parent or visitor will be invited to write to the Headteacher with his/her version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the response a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.

2. Invite the parent or visitor to an informal meeting to discuss events

It may be helpful to discuss and defuse 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 or visitor 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 establishments. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents of enrolled students 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 the school's leadership team;
- restricting contact by telephone to named members of the school's leadership team;
- restricting written communications to named members of the school's leadership team;
- restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the school's leadership team; and / or
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Headteacher.
- holding meetings remotely rather than in-person

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 Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors 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 Governing Body after a period of six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Governing Body. This and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the full Governing Body.

Governors may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the Clerk to the Governing Body within 10 working days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, Governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent's compliance with the conditions, any appropriate expressions received of regret and assurance of future good conduct 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 act of extreme violence then the school will consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent from contacting school staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Headteacher that a provisional 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 Chair of Governors.

The Chair of Governors 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. If the

Chair's decision is to confirm the ban, parents in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of the school's leadership team.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the Governing Body after a period of six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the Governors; this and the evidence from the Headteacher will be considered at a meeting of the full Governing Body. Governors 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 by the Clerk to the Governing Body within 10 working days of the date of the meeting. In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, Governors 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 them and any evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

5. Removal from school

Parents or visitors who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed a section 547 offence¹. 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 Governing Body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent or visitor.

6. Complaints policy

Any complaint that arises from incidents of abusive behaviour will be dealt with under the complaints policy.

Approval: Approved by the C&S Committee on 8th November 2022

Next Re-Approval: Autumn term 2025

Reviewer: Mr J. Clifton (Deputy Headteacher)

¹ Education Act 1996