

Brine Multi Academy Trust



Brine Leas School

Dealing with Abusive Parents Policy

PRINCIPLE

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE's guidance 'Advice on School Security: Access to, and barring individuals from school premises' (December 2012), as well as the National Association of Headteacher's guidance on dealing with abusive parents

The Trustees of Brine Multi Academy Trust and the governors of Brine Leas School value the positive relationships that our schools forge with their parents, visitors and wider communities. Close links are encouraged as we believe that our pupils/students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. Trustees and governors also strive to make sure that school is a place where adults act as role models for the behaviour expected of its pupils/students. In general, there is high importance on good manners, positive communication and general respect.

Fortunately, most parents¹ and visitors 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 falls short of what we expect. 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 circumstances, we expect members of staff to remain professional, attempting to defuse the situation where possible, and seek the involvement of another colleague as appropriate. Staff who face these situations have the right to end any conversation. They should then refer the incident to a member of the school's leadership team who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

DEFINITION OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour/language from a parent 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 writing (including social media).

¹ For the purpose of this policy, the term 'parent' refers to anyone with parental responsibility, or who provides day to day care for a child in school.

The following is not an exhaustive list, but illustrates what is deemed to be unacceptable behaviour:

- any kind of insult as an attempt to demean, embarrass or undermine;
- any kind of threat;
- the raising of voice so as to be intimidating;
- physical intimidation, i.e. standing very close 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.

THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

If a parent or visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the headteacher, 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, or appropriate senior member of staff, will carry out a risk assessment in order to help make a decision about the level of response. In all cases, the response will be reasonable and proportionate. The headteacher, or appropriate senior member of staff, carrying out the risk assessment will consider the following questions:

- What form of abuse was reported?
- what evidence is there?
- what do witnesses say happened?
- Are there previous incidents to take into account?
- Do members of staff or pupils/students feel intimidated by the parent's behaviour?
- Is there any evidence of provocation?
- How high is the risk of repetition or there will be retaliation at the school's action? (low, medium, high)

RECORDING OF INCIDENTS

Staff or students/pupils that are subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about the incident(s) which will be kept in a file with all associated letters and paperwork. This file will be kept by the Headteacher (or the Headteacher's PA). Depending on an assessment of risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults may be made available to the parent if they request it.

THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the headteacher, or member of the school's leadership team in their absence, will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include the following:

1. Clarify to the parent what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate simply to ensure that the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school.

This could be explained by letter from the headteacher. This letter may contain a warning about future action if there are further incidents. The parent(s) will be invited to write to the headteacher with their version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent's response, a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in the future.

2. Invite the parent(s) to an informal meeting to discuss events

This could be helpful to discuss and defuse the situation.

The safety and wellbeing of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. Members of the 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 who could potentially become aggressive.

The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted and a follow-up letter or email 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 places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents of enrolled pupils/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 on 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 by a member of the school's leadership team.
- Restricting contact by telephone to named members of the leadership team.
- Restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the leadership team.
- Any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the headteacher.

In this case the parent(s) will be informed, by letter from the headteacher, details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of the letter to make representations, in writing, to the Chair of the Local Governing Board, about the conditions being imposed. The Chair of the Local Governing Board (or Vice-Chair in their absence) will 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 the letter from the parent was received.

If the Chair of Governor's decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this will be reviewed by the Local Governing Board after approximately 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 school, will be considered at a meeting of the Local 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 Governors 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 of regret and assurance or future good conduct received from them, plus 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 extreme act of violence then the school may consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent from access school staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Headteacher that a provision ban is being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations, in writing to the Chair of Governors, about the ban. The Chair of Governors (or Vice Chair in their absence) 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 of Governors (or Vice Chair in their absence) decides to confirm the ban, then the school will offer these parents an annual meeting to discuss their child's progress. This meeting would usually be with a member of the school's leadership team.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the Local Governing Board after approximately 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 school, will be considered at a meeting of the Local 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 Governors within 10 working days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the ban (with or without conditions), governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance or future good conduct received from them, plus any evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

REMOVAL FROM SCHOOL

Parents who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance, will be deemed to have committed a Section 547 offence. They will be considered as trespassers. In these circumstances, the parent may be removed from the school grounds. This may be carried out by a police officer or person authorised by the Local Governing Board. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent in this situation.

COMPLAINTS POLICY

Any parental complaint that arises from incidents of abusive behaviour will be dealt with under the Trust's Complaints Policy.

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