

BISHOP'S HATFIELD GIRLS' SCHOOL

DEALING WITH ABUSIVE PARENTS & VISITORS

Date of last review:	Spring Term 2024
Date of next review:	Autumn Term 2025
School-based policy	

Statement of principles

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance 'Advice on school security: Access to, and barring individuals from school premises' December 2012 as well as professional guidance on dealing with abusive parents/carers or visitors.

At Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School, we value the positive relationships forged with parents/carers and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents/carers 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 Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School 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/carers or visitors falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression, intimidation, threatening behaviour 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. This may also take place away from the school site and this policy also covers behaviour towards members of the school community that takes place off site and/or outside of school hours.

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. We also recognise that, when subjected to abusive or intimidating behaviour, it can be very challenging for staff to know how to respond. For example, it is not always easy for someone being subjected to intimidating behaviour to name it as such to the person involved.

The overriding principle is that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of violence, threats, intimidation and abuse from parents/carers or visitors. The board of governors has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

The progress and well-being of the parent/carer's child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent/carer will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent/carer will have the opportunity to put their views forward. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from school, robust review processes involving the Chair of Governors and then the governing body are in place to ensure fairness.

Definition of unacceptable behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive, intimidating, threatening or insulting behaviour or language from a parent/carer presents a risk to staff or students. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff or student feel threatened or intimidated. 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 (verbal or physical) - this includes threatening to report staff or the school to external agencies such as Ofsted, the Department for Education etc. or threatening legal redress
- tone or raising of voice or demeanour so as to be intimidating

- refusing to listen, continually talking over staff such as to make them feel unable to express themselves
- calling into question the professionalism of staff without foundation
- physical intimidation, eg by standing very close to a member of staff or the use of aggressive hand gestures
- continual harassment in any way which diverts management from teaching and learning - e.g. persistently emailing or contacting a member of staff to demand action over an issue that has already been dealt with
- use of foul or abusive language
- questioning or undermining the professionalism of staff in a public arena including off site (eg at a school function such as a Parents' Evening or sports fixture) - this includes public criticism of their teaching
- any kind of physical abuse.

The School's approach to dealing with incidents

If a parent/carer/visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the Headteacher or appropriate senior 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 help 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 or intimidation 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 parent/carer's behaviour?
- Is there any evidence of provocation?
- How high is the assessed risk that this will be repeated or there will be retaliation at the school's action? (low, medium, high).

The primary consideration should always be whether the member of staff feels intimidated, threatened or abused. Any behaviour that leads to a member of staff feeling this way should be challenged. This is important in order to protect other staff from being subjected to similar behaviour in the future.

Recording of Incidents

Staff/students subject to abuse will make written statements about incident(s) which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters. It is not expected that witnesses should be interviewed nor that they should provide statements. In particular, where witnesses may be other parents/carers, visitors or pupils it may put them in an awkward position to have to make statements regarding an incident and they themselves may feel threatened or intimidated. However, where possible or practicable, witnesses will be asked to provide information and statements if necessary. The file of evidence will be kept by the Headteacher. In general, due to the sensitive nature of these incidents, any

statements will remain confidential. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, in exceptional circumstances statements made by adults may be made available to the parent/carer if they request it.

The School's response

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/carer what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school

In some instances it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent/carer 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 further action if there are further incidents. The parent/carer will be invited to write to the Headteacher with his/her version of events within 10 working days. If no written response is received within 10 working days then the school will deem that the subject of letter is willing to accept or abide by the letter's contents. If a written statement is provided, the Headteacher may proceed to point 2, or the matter may be closed. There is no automatic right for parents/carers or visitors to demand a meeting to discuss the case. Meetings are held at the discretion of the Headteacher and should take account of the likelihood of the subject repeating their abusive or threatening behaviour at this meeting. Where necessary, the Headteacher may discuss the case with the Chair of Governors to decide what further action is required, if any. Written responses received will be logged and kept on file.

2. Invite the parent/carer to an informal meeting to discuss events

This could be helpful to discuss and defuse the situation, but as stated above this is at the discretion of the Headteacher, in consultation with the Chair of Governors where necessary.

The safety and well-being of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. It is strongly recommended that members of school staff should 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/carer 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/carer'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/carers 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. These are typically parent consultation evenings held once per year or other ad hoc information evenings. Parents/carers exceeding this would be trespassing and should only enter the school site by invitation. The school reserves the right to restrict access to any evening held at the school where attendance may pose a threat to other pupils or staff.

Depending on the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on the parent/carer'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 SLT
- restricting contact with individual members of staff
- restricting contact by telephone to named members of the senior leadership team (SLT)
- restricting written communications to named members of the SLT
- restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent/carer be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Headteacher.

In this case the parent/carer will be informed by letter from the Headteacher the details of the conditions being imposed. The parent/carer 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/carer in writing within 10 working days of the date of the parent/carer's letter. Representation must be made in writing. If a parent/carer or visitor is unable to provide a written response then they should contact the school to explain why. If no representations are made within the 10 day timescale then it will be assumed that the parent/carer agrees to comply with the conditions being imposed.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, the parent/carer has the right to make written representation to the school requesting lifting of the conditions after six months. This will be considered by the school which may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent/carer within 10 days of receipt of the written representation. Parents/carers may appeal to the Chair of Governors in writing if they are dissatisfied with the decision. If no such representation is made then the conditions will be assumed to remain in place until such time as the school chooses to remove or amend them.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, the school will give consideration to the extent of the parent/carer or visitor's compliance with the conditions, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent/carer or visitor'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 or threatening behaviour/intimidation then the school may consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent/carer from accessing 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/carer 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/carer in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the Chair's decision is to confirm the ban, parents/carers in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of senior staff. This meeting will not discuss the reasons for the ban but will purely focus on the child's progress.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, the parent/carer has the right to make written representation to the school requesting lifting of the conditions after six months. This will be

considered by the school which may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent/carer within 10 days of receipt of the written representation. Parents/carers may appeal to the Chair of Governors in writing if they are dissatisfied with the decision. If no such representation is made then the ban will be assumed to remain in place until such time as the school chooses to remove or amend it.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, the school will give consideration to the extent of the parent/carer's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent/carer's co-operation with the school in other respects.

5. Removal from school

Parents/carers 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 offender may be removed from school. This may be carried out by a police officer or person authorised by the Senior Leadership Team of the school. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent/carer.

Appendices

Warning

Model letter 1: This is an initial letter from the Headteacher to ensure the parent/carer is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This letter contains a warning about further action if there are other incidents. The letter invites a written response and suggests a meeting.

Imposing conditions on the parent/carer's attendance at school events

Model letter 2: This is a letter from the Headteacher informing parents/carers of the school's decision to impose conditions on the parent/carer's attendance at school events.

Model letter 3: Letter from the Chair of Governors informing the parent/carer of any decision to confirm or remove the conditions .

Imposing a ban

Model letter 4: Letter from the Headteacher informing parents/carers of the school's intention to impose a ban on their attendance at school premises, pending review by the Chair of Governors.

Model letter 5: Letter from the Chair of Governors informing parent/carer of any decision to confirm or remove ban.

Model Letter 1 Warning (sent by Headteacher)

Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report about your conduct at the school on (enter date and time or details). This appears to fall far short of that we would expect of a parent/carer of a student at Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School.

(Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, and other parents.)

I must inform you that the governing body will not tolerate threatening behaviour or aggression towards members of the school community and will act to protect its staff and students from any form of abuse or intimidation. I should warn you that any future conduct of this nature could result in the school imposing conditions restricting your access to the school or banning you from contacting or attending the school altogether.

I wish to give you an opportunity to give me in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report which I have received about your conduct. You should do so within 10 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may include any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct.

Details of our policy on dealing with abusive parents/carers can be found on our website.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

cc: Chair of Governors

Model Letter 2 Imposing conditions on the parent/carer's attendance at school events, pending review (sent by Headteacher)

Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report from (name of staff) about your conduct on at
.....

(add summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

(You will recollect that I have already written to you about a previous incident on (date) warning you of the consequence of any further insulting or aggressive behaviour on your part).

I must inform you that the governors, in line with our policy, will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the school premises and will act to defend school staff and pupils.

I am therefore writing to inform you that I am imposing conditions on the contact you may have with school. These are as follows: (delete as appropriate)

- You must be accompanied to any meeting with a member of school staff
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing (*named member of staff*).
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff. You may contact either myself or one of my deputies.
- You may not attend any events for parents/carers except those where you will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school.
- Other as reasonable and proportionate

You have 10 school working days to make representation to the Chair of Governors in writing in respect of these conditions. This may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct. The Chair of Governors will need to decide whether it is appropriate to confirm or overturn these conditions and will then write to you with a decision. If no written representation is received within the 10 day period it will be assumed that you agree to comply with these conditions.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, you have the right to make written representation to the school requesting lifting of the conditions after six months. This will be considered by the school which may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to you within 10 school days of receipt of the written representation. You may appeal to the Chair of Governors if you are dissatisfied with the decision.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

cc: Chair of Governors

Letter 3 Letter to confirm or overturn Headteacher's decision to impose conditions (sent by chair of governors)

Recorded delivery

Dear

The Headteacher wrote to you on (date) to detail concerns about an incident when your behaviour towards (name) fell short of what we would expect as a school. You will be aware that the Headteacher has written to you previously about your behaviour towards staff.

I have received a letter from you dated, the contents of which I have considered carefully.

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Headteacher's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose conditions on your contact with school should be confirmed. The conditions are as follows:

- (Copy conditions from HT's letter)

You have the right to make written representation to the school requesting lifting of the conditions after six months. This will be considered by the school which may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. Consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you; and any evidence of your co-operation with the school in other respects.

OR

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Headteacher's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose conditions on you should be lifted. You may hence attend school events as normal. However, should there be a repeat of inappropriate behaviour towards staff all of the above sanctions may be applied.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors

cc: Headteacher

Model Letter 4 Imposition of a ban on contacting or attending the school, pending review (sent by Headteacher)

Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report from (name of staff) about your conduct on at
.....

(add summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

(You will recollect that I have already written to you about a previous incident on (date) warning you of the consequence of any further insulting or aggressive behaviour on your part.)

I must inform you that the governors, in line with our policy, will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the school premises and will act to defend school staff and pupils.

I am therefore writing to inform you that I am imposing a ban on you attending or contacting the school. This means you may not attend school for any reason whatsoever. You must not make contact with any member of staff by telephone or e-mail. You do, however, have the right to attend one meeting per year to discuss your child's progress and this will be arranged for a mutually convenient time. You should make a request for such a meeting in writing.

You have 10 working days to make representation to the Chair of Governors in writing in respect of this ban. This may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct. The Chair of Governors will need to decide whether it is appropriate to confirm or overturn this ban and will then write to you with a decision. If you do not make a representation within 10 working days it will be assumed that you agree to comply with the ban.

If the decision is to confirm the ban, you have the right to make written representation to the school requesting lifting of the ban after six months. This will be considered by the school which may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to you within 10 days of receipt of the written representation. You may appeal to the Chair of Governors if you are dissatisfied with the decision.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

cc: Chair of Governors

Model Letter 5 Letter to confirm or overturn Headteacher's decision to impose a ban (sent by chair of governors)

Recorded delivery

Dear

The Headteacher wrote to you on (date) to detail concerns about an incident when your behaviour towards (name) fell far short of what we would expect as a school. You will be aware that she has written to you previously about your behaviour towards staff.

I have received a letter from you dated, the contents of which I have considered carefully.

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Headteacher's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose a ban on you should be confirmed. This means you may not attend school for any reason whatsoever. You must not make contact with any member of staff by telephone or e-mail. You do, however, have the right to attend one meeting per year to discuss your child's progress to be arranged for a mutually convenient time. You should make a request for such a meeting in writing.

You have the right to make written representation to the school requesting lifting of the ban after six months. This will be considered by the school which may decide to maintain, extend or remove the ban. Consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you; and any evidence of your co-operation with the school in other respects.

OR

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Headteacher's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose a ban should be lifted. You may hence attend school events as normal. However, should there be a repeat of inappropriate behaviour towards staff all of the above sanctions may be applied.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors

cc: Headteacher