



Managing Aggressive Behaviour from Parents and Visitors to our School

Date agreed: 29 June 2023 **Review Date:** June 2028

Purpose

All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe place in which to work and learn. Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence against school staff, or other members of the school community is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any incident will be treated seriously and a disruptive visitor may be banned from entering the school or even prosecuted.

Abuse, threatening / aggressive behaviour or violence are not considered to be an acceptable part of any job, nor is it part of the duties of any employee at this school to accept such behaviour. Throughout this document where the term 'visitor' is used, it covers any abusive parent or visitor to the school and is not confined to adults.

All parents, visitors and staff need to consider how acts of this nature affect the trust that we all need, as a school, to work together to meet the needs of each child.

The Governing Body of Stepney Park Primary School is committed to reducing the risks of its school staff from acts of violence and aggression by:

- Demonstrating to staff that the potential for violence at work is recognised
- Issuing clear procedures/guidelines, which include preventative and protective measures
- Providing adequate training to staff who may be subject to violence or abuse to develop their ability to anticipate violent incidents and deal with them
- Clarifying violent incident reporting and monitoring procedures
- Encouraging proper reporting of incidents and near misses and ensuring that school staff do not avoid reporting violent incidents in the belief that an assault may suggest a failure on the part of the member of staff concerned
- Supporting staff who have been subject to violent, threatening or abusive behaviour and offering counselling where appropriate
- Allocating adequate resources to support this Policy
- Reviewing this Policy statement and procedures and guidelines regularly.

Types of violence / aggressive behaviour

In identifying types of violence, the body recognises that staff can be intimidated or threatened by a variety of circumstances. The list of examples below is not exhaustive, and it should be remembered that aggression and violence is not simply physical assault.

- Kicking
- Biting
- Punching
- Poking or pushing
- Spitting
- Scratching
- Head butting
- Tripping
- Actions that restrict movement
- Unwanted physical contact which results in no injury
- Use of weapons
- Use of missiles
- Swearing
- Other verbal or written abuse which causes personal offence or distress
- Sexual, racial or other harassment
- Bullying
- Intimidation
- Damage to personal property
- Abusive or aggressive telephone calls, letters, faxes, emails, website entries
- Other aggressive behaviour
- Shouting
- Posturing

- Gestures
- Insults
- Innuendo
- Unreasonable demands or blackmail
- Deliberate silence
- Recording conversations without permission from all involved.

One act may be considered serious enough to warrant consideration as an act of violence or aggression; however, staff members will need to consider the seriousness of each incident and the emotional state of the parents in relation to the needs of their child.

Procedures for Staff in dealing with Incidents involving Violent, Threatening or Abusive Visitors

Avoiding an Incident

Parents, or members of the public, may arrive in a tense, agitated state and how they are initially dealt with might well make the difference between a minor exchange of words and a violent confrontation.

Members of staff are entitled to support from their milestone lead or line manager in handling a potentially difficult parent interview, so, if staff have any concerns they should discuss it with them.

Sensitivity towards parental difficulties is an asset. Many adults are still influenced by their own schooling and other childhood experiences, as well as their consequent expectations for their own children. Over anxious, or even ambitious, parents can feel very vulnerable.

Preparation for potentially difficult meetings is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews/meetings prove constructive rather than confrontational:

Always try to:

Prepare in advance by:

- Ensuring there is enough space in the room. People can need greater personal space than normal when upset or angry and the proximity of others can be more threatening
- Considering having a colleague present, or pre-arranging with a colleague to check that all is well, if you have reason to believe that the visitor has a previous history of aggression or violence, or appears to be aggressive or violent.
- Gathering information that might help prepare you for the meeting, by reassuring either you or the family member
- Consider the room layout and whether it is necessary to position your chair close to the door, or leave the door open, should the visitor become aggressive and you need to leave the room.
- Positioning seating at equal height so that the parent does not feel patronised, and, if possible, at a 45 degree angle as this is less threatening. Avoid barriers if it is safe to do so.
- Remove an angry or upset person from an audience, or, if easier, remove the audience and don't leave them waiting unnecessarily. The fewer people that are involved in an incident, the easier it is for an aggressor to back down without losing face.
- Keep the discussion as calm and friendly as possible, paraphrasing what has been said and using sympathy and empathy where appropriate.
- Summarise what has been said and follow through. This will help to build trust and respect.

Minimise a parent/visitor's frustration by:

- Being yourself. Do not hide behind authority, status or a job title. By using your name instead of a description of your status, you are presenting yourself as another human being. Later on, it may be important to explain what authority or status you have in order to reassure the visitor that you are in a position to act on their behalf.
- Keeping the visitor talking and explaining the problem, their perception of what has happened, why they feel aggrieved. Use verbal and non-verbal prompts (saying 'mmm' or 'yes' or nodding)

to keep them talking. Use open questions to encourage them to talk and explain. Use positive body language, smile.

- Listening and allowing the visitor to express any complaint, without preventing them from finishing what they have to say. Listen empathetically without pre-judging or patronising. Listen also for the feelings, concerns and possible intentions behind their words
- Responding promptly, paying attention and showing that you do care about their problem.
- Being polite, pleasant and reassuring and do not show anger. Resist arguing. It is very tempting to respond and become engaged in an argument, especially if you are the focus of aggression or accused in some way, but it is far more likely to result in conflict or confrontation than contribute to defusing the situation.
- Paying attention to your body language so it is as non-threatening as possible.
- Avoid aggressive or defensive stances, such as arms folded, hands on hips or waving fingers or arms. Try to relax your facial muscles and convey openness and empathy with the speaker. Make eye contact, but avoid constant eye contact that may be threatening or trigger aggression because it is perceived as staring
- Trying to explain clearly in jargon free language precisely what your difficulty is in giving the aggressive person what they want. Repeat it until you are sure you are understood because upset people do not always hear the first time.
- Not making any promises which you know you cannot keep as this may make things worse for you or your colleagues at a later date.
- Make sure that you are aware of the school's emergency action plan/'lockdown' procedures and when these should be implemented.

Handling an Incident – General Principles

If someone becomes abusive or threatening, consider whether or not you can cope with the situation. You should not feel you have to cope with it alone: you should seek help from other people, or leave altogether. If a situation appears to be getting out of control, make an excuse and leave and immediately report the incident to the headteacher/person in charge.

First keep calm, relax, allow yourself time to think and decide the best course of action. Ask yourself if what has occurred so far in the exchange means that someone else, specially briefed by you, would be better placed to handle the situation. Colleagues may have particular skills or experience that you do not have. The situation may be such that it requires specialist help, such as the police to eject a person; if so, you should get help quickly, before the situation deteriorates.

Warning Signs

Someone who is potentially, or about to become, violent can give out signs and signals that constitute a recognisable warning:

- Agitation
- Tapping the table
- Loud speech/shouting
- Muscle tension in face, hands, limbs; fidgeting, hand-wringing; clenching fists
- Drawing breath in sharply
- Colour of face: pale is dangerous – the body is ready for action; a red face is likely to indicate a bark worse than the bite, but this could change
- Finger- wagging or jabbing
- Inability to be still, even pacing about
- Swearing
- Staring eyes
- Sweating
- Oversensitivity to ideas, suggestions
- Rapid mood swings.

It should always be remembered that:

- The physical safety of employees is more important than the security of buildings or property.

- When violence is threatened it is important that reasonable effort is made to control the situation.
- If a situation is out of control it is better to retreat and get away if possible.
- In controlling an incident, involvement of members of the public should be avoided
- If an implement has been involved in an attack, this should be retained, provided this can be done without any risk.
- Physical intervention or restraint should always be regarded as an absolute last resort.

Over the Telephone

If a parent, carer or member of the public begins to exhibit aggressive or abusive behaviour, e.g. use of foul language or verbal threats towards any member of staff during a telephone call, the member of staff should:

- Calmly state that the language used is unacceptable and that they will end the call if it continues.
- Try to establish the name and contact details of the complainant (and the nature of the complaint if possible) and state that a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will return their call as soon as possible.
- End the call. Make notes of what was said immediately on termination of the call and then report the incident to a member of the SLT. A member of the SLT will contact the complainant to establish the nature of the complaint and try to resolve the issue.

Written Abuse

- If a member of staff receives written correspondence, e.g. letter, e-mail or text of a threatening or abusive nature from a parent, carer or member of the public, this must be reported immediately to a member of the SLT and a copy retained as evidence. The receiving member of staff will not reply to the correspondence without first agreeing the response with the SLT member or, in preference, the SLT member will respond on their behalf.
- Whilst the school will make every effort to resolve any issue raised by the complainant, consideration may also be given to involving the police, especially where threats of violence have been made.
- Every effort must be made to minimise the likelihood of written abuse through not communicating using personal email or social media direct mail. Only use the secure school email for communicating with parents and other staff (on school related matters). Please refer to the schools relevant policies for further guidance.

Action to be taken following an incident

- Seek medical attention, if required.
- Ensure the safety / wellbeing of the pupils
- Report verbally to the headteacher/SLT as soon as possible. Other staff / pupils may be at risk from the same person.
- Complete an Incident Report Form and pass to the headteacher/SLT for investigation, having sought Union advice, if appropriate (Appendix 1).
- Take time with the headteacher/SLT to discuss the incident and your feelings.
- Ask for assistance if you need it.
- Consider Police involvement, if they are not already involved.
- Seek advice on your entitlement to claim financial compensation, if appropriate.

Where there has been any kind of affray, where an assault* has resulted in actual injury, or where an employee has been seriously threatened, the police should be called, unless this is considered inappropriate. This decision, although personal, should be discussed with the Headteacher. Any incidents of a less serious or ambiguous nature should still be discussed with the police.

**An assault occurs when a person suffers, or is put in immediate fear of, personal injury by the deliberate or reckless act of another. Assault is a criminal offence which may result in prosecution at court.*

Employees have joint responsibility with their employer to review any incidents and identify the need for appropriate training and counselling, and specific strategies to reduce the level of risk.

Actions for the Headteacher / SLT following an incident

- Provide access to a private area for as long as necessary where the member of staff can sit with a friend or colleague.
- Provide assistance, if necessary, for the member of staff to go home/visit their GP/attend hospital etc. A medical assessment of any injury should be made as soon as practicable and, in case of visible injuries, it is helpful to obtain photographs.
- Make time for the employee to talk to you.
- Explain the employee's right to involve the police if they so wish, and assist them with this if needed.
- Provide the opportunity for the member of staff to consult his/her trade union representative before submitting their completed Incident Report Form (Appendix 1).
- Referral to a counsellor for support can be arranged through occupational health
- For non-urgent, preventative advice and support the non-emergency number for The Metropolitan Police is 020 7230 1212 / 020 8217 3825. Whenever there is an emergency and urgent support is required, the emergency 999 number should be used.
- Maintain regular contact with the person if they are off work because of the incident.
- Review risk assessments and procedures following an incident and amend if necessary without delay.
- Ensure other relevant staff are informed of the incident and of any changes to working practices.
- All evidence obtained should be retained to support any action taken.

Headteacher

The Headteacher has a responsibility for staff management and is committed to the objective of reducing violence and risks of violence to employees and ensuring that all staff receive appropriate training.

It is important to ensure that new members of staff are aware of this policy and procedures and that they have access to appropriate training.

Staff should be aware that they can expect support from their line-manager in managing parent interviews well.

A formal notice may be displayed at the entrance(s) to the school informing visitors of the school's expectations about behaviour and/or that they may face prosecution for violent, threatening and abusive behaviour (Appendix 2)

Furthermore, parents and carers may be advised of the school's policy on dealing with threatening and aggressive behaviour through the school's website. The summary of the Stepney Park Primary School's Policy on managing aggressive behaviour from parents and visitors to our school (see appendix 3) includes the following:

- Statement of principles
- Examples of unacceptable behaviour
- Procedures to be followed and actions taken

Role of Local Authority

Advice and support is available from the LA through the Legal Team.

Reporting incidents

A great deal of crime and other incidents often go unreported, sometimes because they are considered too trivial to report or, there is a view that no action will be taken when incidents do occur. Consequently, failure to report incidents and near misses gives a false picture of the real situation. As the employer, the Governing Body has a duty to ensure a safe and secure workplace, but cannot help if it is unaware of problems.

The Headteacher and staff must ensure that all incidents are properly reported and acted upon so that recurrence can be prevented. It is important to record the circumstances that led to violence as this may help identify what events may have triggered the incident and what systems or procedures may need revision.

Procedures for reporting incidents:

- A thorough investigation into the incident will be carried out by the Headteacher, a member of the SLT or an external investigator. The Headteacher should inform the Chair of Governors in confidence of each incident.
- As soon as practicable after the incident, a written statement/Incident report Form (Appendix 1) should be prepared by the member of staff concerned which includes the circumstances leading up to the incident. It needs to contain sufficient detail to help identify appropriate preventive measures, and to help assess whether those measures were successful. Suggested details include information on:
 - Where the incident occurred, including:
 - Physical environment;
 - the time of day;
 - Activity at the time of the incident
 - Details of the perpetrator
 - The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator
 - An account of what happened
 - The outcome
 - If preventive measures have been introduced, did they help?
- Where required the LA should also be informed.
- The school will retain proper evidence so that it can be used to support any action taken.
- Recording details of incidents in writing will also help in reviewing the school's policy and should inform future risk assessments.

Follow up

The Headteacher will need to make a judgement as to whether the visitor is likely to become involved in such an incident again, or whether there were unique circumstances in this specific case. If it is likely that the behaviour will be repeated a warning letter should be sent, explaining that the behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated on the school premises. Depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful to discuss the warning letter with the LA Legal Team.

For future visits to the school, advance notice of an intention to visit could be required and an independent witness could be present.

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury should be advised to make a formal complaint to the police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate.

In certain circumstances, the Headteacher/Governing Body/LA have the power to ban anyone from coming onto school premises for a specified period of time. This decision will be communicated to the person concerned. When the period elapses, the Headteacher/Governing Body/LA will review whether the visitor's ban from the school premises should continue or whether it should be lifted.

The visitor could be declared unwelcome and they can be ordered off the premises as they then become a trespasser under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. *This power is usually delegated by the LA (community, voluntary controlled and community special schools) to the Headteacher.*

Banning a parent/visitor from the school

Based on relevant DFE guidance, Stepney Park Primary School reserves the right to impose a temporary or permanent ban from the school premises on any parent/carers or member of the public who has demonstrated aggressive or abusive behaviour towards any member of staff, student, visitor or volunteer at the school.

This decision shall be made by the Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of Governors and the length of any ban shall be proportionate to the nature and circumstances of the incident. In the case of a parent/carer, prior to a ban being imposed (**except in urgent situations**), the Headteacher/Chair of Governors shall write to the individual indicating that a ban from the premises is being considered, stating the reasons for this and the date by which any written representations by the individual should be received by the school before the decision is made.

In urgent situations, the Headteacher may impose an immediate temporary ban in writing and provide the parent/carer the opportunity to make written representations prior to formalising any extension to the ban.

Where the decision to impose a ban is made, notification of the ban shall be in writing and shall clearly state:

- The reason for the ban being imposed
- The date of commencement of the ban
- A date by which any written representations by the individual should be received by the school
- A date for review of the ban and how this will be arranged (including any reparation that may be required by the School, e.g. a written apology)
- Provision to be made (if a parent or carer) for access to their child during the school day, e.g. should an emergency occur
- Process to be followed should the parent/carer wish to contact the school or need to attend meetings at the School
- What action will be taken to remove the individual from the premises should the ban be breached

The banned individual will be invited to make written representations and to attend a review meeting (accompanied by a friend or relative if required) with the Headteacher and/or a panel of Governors/police representative (this may take place away from the school site if appropriate). The Panel will review the ban and consider whether to lift it, make it permanent or continue it for a specified period. The Headteacher may remove the ban at any time prior to the review date if appropriate resolution has been achieved.

Any ban imposed will not prevent or affect the outcome of the school's investigation into any complaints raised by the individual concerned. These will be handled as per the school's Complaints Policy/Procedure.

Review and Monitoring

This policy will be reviewed by the Governing Body annually.

All incidences of aggressive or abusive behaviour directed towards staff, students, visitors or volunteers by a Parent/Carer or member of the Public will be recorded and reported to the Governing Body to inform review of this policy.

Appendix 1

Incident report form

Relevant incidents include trespass, nuisance or disturbance on school premises, verbal abuse, sexual or racial abuse, threats, aggression, physical violence and intentional damage to property.

Where possible, the form should be completed before any discussion between witnesses is possible, as this might lead to allegations of collusion.

This form should be completed as fully as possible please, using a continuation sheet, if necessary. For any incident involving or witnessed by a pupil or parent/carer/visitor, a member of staff should complete the form on their behalf.

The completed form should be passed to the head teacher, for appropriate action and recording.

Date of incident	
Time of incident	
Name of person reporting incident	
Date incident reported	
Member of staff recording incident	
Date incident recorded	
Name(s) of person(s) causing incident (where name(s) is/are unknown, provide other details of which may allow their identification)	
Status(es) (parents/carers/visitors/trespassers)	
Full description of incident (e.g. names of persons involved; location; nature of any injuries; attendance of emergency services)	
Names of any witnesses	
Status(es) (staff /parents/carers/visitors/trespassers)	
Initial action/outcome (e.g. informal conciliation; police intervention; warning or banning letter issued)	
Summary of subsequent actions taken by the school, including risk assessments	
Linked incidents (if any)	

NOTICE TO ALL PARENTS, CARERS AND VISITORS OF STEPNEY PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL



Inappropriate language, threats or acts of aggression towards staff will not be tolerated on these premises.

Anyone behaving in such a way will be asked to leave; they may receive a ban from the premises and their behaviour may be reported to the police.

Appendix 3. (For school website)

Summary of Stepney Park Primary School's Policy on managing aggressive behaviour from parents and visitors to our school

Statement of principles

The Governing Body of Stepney Park Primary School encourages close links with parents and the community. It believes that pupils benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one.

The vast majority of parents, carers and others visiting our school are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on the rare occasions when a negative attitude towards the school is expressed, this can result in aggression, verbal and or physical abuse towards members of school staff or the wider school community.

The Governing Body expects and requires its members of staff to behave professionally in these difficult situations and attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. However, all members of staff have the right to work without fear of violence and abuse, and the right, in an extreme case, of appropriate self-defence.

All parents, visitors and staff need to consider how acts of this nature affect the trust that we all need, as a school, to work together to meet the needs of each child.

We expect parents and other visitors to behave in a reasonable way towards members of school staff. This policy outlines the steps that will be taken where behaviour is unacceptable.

Examples of behaviour that are considered serious and unacceptable and will not be tolerated:

- shouting at members of the school staff, either in person or over the telephone;
- physically intimidating a member of staff, e.g. standing very close to her/him;
- the use of aggressive hand gestures;
- threatening behaviour;
- shaking or holding a fist towards another person;
- swearing;
- pushing;
- hitting, e.g. slapping, punching and kicking;
- spitting;
- breaching the school's security procedures;
- recording conversations without the consent of all persons present;
- threatening or aggressive emails or letters.

This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour.

Unacceptable behaviour may result in the local authority and the police being informed of the incident.

Procedures to be followed and actions to be taken

If a parent/carers behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the headteacher or appropriate senior staff will seek to resolve the situation through discussion and mediation. If necessary, the school's complaints procedures should be followed. Where all procedures have been exhausted, and aggression or intimidation continue, or where there is an extreme act of violence, a parent or carer may be banned by the headteacher from the school premises for a period of time, subject to review.

In imposing a ban the following steps will be taken:

1. The parent/carers will be informed, in writing, that she/he is banned from the premises, subject to review, and what will happen if the ban is breached, e.g. that police involvement or an injunction application may follow

2. Where an assault has led to a ban, a statement indicating that the matter has been reported to the LA and the police will be included
3. The Chair of Governors/LA will be informed of the ban
4. Where appropriate, arrangements for pupils being delivered to, and collected from the school gate will be clarified.

Conclusion

The LA itself may take action where behaviour is unacceptable or there are serious breaches of our home-school code of conduct or health and safety legislation. In implementing this policy, the school will, as appropriate, seek advice from the LA's education, health and safety and legal departments, to ensure fairness and consistency.

This policy will be reviewed annually