



# Unacceptable Actions by Complainants Policy

The wellbeing of our school community is at the heart of all that we do and is linked to our Core Values of Community, Belief and Respect. These values help us to better understand and improve the wellbeing of our school community with this policy, and all others, being consistent in promoting those values.

**Approved by:** [Name] **Date:** [Date]

**Last reviewed on:** [Date]

**Next review due** [Date]  
**by:**

## **1. Introduction**

This policy sets out St Ethelwold's approach to the relatively few complainants whose actions or behaviour is considered unacceptable. The term complainant includes anyone acting on behalf of a complainant or who contacts the School in connection with a complaint.

## **2. Aims**

- 2.1 To make it clear to all complainants, both at initial contact and throughout their dealings with the School, what the School can or cannot do in relation to their complaint. In doing so, the aim is to be open and not raise hopes or expectations that cannot be met.
- 2.2 To deal fairly, honestly, consistently and appropriately with all complainants, including those whose actions are considered unacceptable. The School believes that all complainants have the right to be heard, understood and respected. It is also considered that School employees have the same rights.
- 2.3 To provide a service that is accessible to all complainants. However, where it is considered that complainants actions are unacceptable, the right to restrict or change access to the School service is retained.
- 2.4 To ensure that other complainants and School employees do not suffer any disadvantage from complainants who act in an unacceptable manner.

## **3. Defining unacceptable actions by complainants**

- 3.1 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint being made. The school does not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a claimant is forceful or determined. In fact, it is accepted that being persistent can be a positive advantage when pursuing a complaint. However, the actions of complainants who are angry, demanding or unnecessarily persistent may result in unreasonable demands on the office or unacceptable behaviour towards School employees. It is these actions that are considered unacceptable and ones that this policy aims to manage. The School has grouped these actions under three broad headings:

### **Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

- (i) Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause an employee to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
- (ii) Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. It is also considered that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behaviour.
- (iii) We expect our employees to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards employees is unacceptable. School employees understand the difference between aggression and anger. The anger felt by many complainants involves the subject matter of their complaint. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression directed towards School employees.

### **Unreasonable Demands**

- (i) Complainants may make what are considered to be unreasonable demands on the School through the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect or the number of approaches they make. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the complainant.
- (ii) Examples of actions grouped under this heading include demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale, insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular office, continual phone calls or correspondence, repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint or raising unrelated concerns.
- (iii) These demands are considered unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the School, such as diverting an excessive amount of employee time that results in the disadvantage of other complainants or functions.

### **Unreasonable Persistence**

- (i) It is recognised that some complainants will not or cannot accept that the School is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Complainants may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their complaint or contact the office persistently about the same issue.
- (ii) Examples of actions grouped under this heading include persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint, persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the School can or cannot do and continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information. The way in which these complainants approach the School may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.
- (iii) The actions of persistent complainants are considered to be unacceptable when they take up what the School regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

## **4. Managing unacceptable actions by complainants**

4.1 There are relatively few complainants whose actions are considered by the School to be unacceptable. How these actions are managed depends on their nature and extent. If it adversely affects the School's ability to do its work and provide a service to others, complainant contact with the School may need to be restricted in order to manage the unacceptable action. The aim will be to do this in a way, wherever possible, that allows a complaint to progress to completion through the complaints process. Contact in person, by telephone, fax, letter or electronically or by any combination of these may be restricted. Effort will be made to try to maintain at least one form of contact.

4.2 The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse or harassment towards employees is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the

complainant. Incidents may be reported to the police. This will always be the case if physical violence is used or threatened.

- 4.3 The school will not deal with correspondence (letter, fax or electronic) that is abusive to employees or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens the complainant will be told that their language is considered offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. They will be asked to stop using such language and the School will state that there will be no response to their correspondence if they do not stop. The school may require future contact to be through a third party.
- 4.4 School employees will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The employee taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that the behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.
- 4.5 Where a complainant repeatedly phones, visits the office, sends irrelevant documents or raises the same issues, the School may decide to:
- Only take telephone calls from the complainant at set times on set days or put an arrangement in place for only one officer to deal with calls or correspondence from the complainant in the future;
  - Require the complainant to make an appointment to see a named officer before visiting the office or that the complainant contacts the office in writing only;
  - Return the documents to the complainant that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed;
  - Take other action that we consider appropriate. The School will, however, always tell the complainant what action is being taken and why.
- 4.6 Where the complainant continues to correspond on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, then the complainant will be told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and asked to limit or focus their requests accordingly.
- 4.7 Complainant action may be considered unreasonably persistent if all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted and the complainant continues to dispute the School's decision relating to their complaint. The complainant will be told that no future phone calls will be accepted or interviews granted concerning this complaint. Any future contact by the complainant on this issue must be in writing. Future correspondence is read and filed, but only acknowledged or responded to if the complainant provides significant new information relating to the complaint.

## **5 Deciding to restrict complainant contact**

- 5.1 Employees who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a complainant have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in accordance with this policy.
- 5.2 With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact with the School are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by a more senior member of staff. Wherever possible, we give a complainant the opportunity to modify their

behaviour or action before a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements and, if relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

## **6. Appealing a decision to restrict contact**

6.1 A complainant can appeal a decision to restrict contact. A senior officer who was not involved in the original decision considers the appeal. They advise the complainant in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action has been agreed.

## **7. Recording and reviewing a decision to restrict contact**

7.1 The School records all incidents of unacceptable actions by complainants. Where it is decided to restrict complainant contact, an entry noting this made in the relevant file and on appropriate computer records.

7.2 A decision to restrict complainant contact may be reconsidered if the complainant demonstrates a more acceptable approach.

Version	From	To
1	Autumn 2021	April 2024
2	April 2024	