

Ashford CE Primary School



Managing Positive Communication with Parents and Visitors Policy

Approved by FGB: 23 September 2019

Signed: _____P Wells_____

Chair of Governors

To be reviewed: on updated advice from DfE or SCC

Managing Positive Communication with Parents and Visitors Policy

Our School Vision

We are a caring Christian community where everyone adopts an “I can” attitude; everyone feels valued, safe and loved by God. We celebrate our God-given individuality, achievements and talents and we aspire, with God’s help, to become the best that we can be. We believe that each one of us has the ability to achieve our highest potential, living and learning in the fullness of God.

I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

Philippians 4v13

Statement of principles

At Ashford CE Primary School, we value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that pupils benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one.

We also strive to make our school a place where all adults model for pupils 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 Ashford CE 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 or visitors falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the school community (staff, volunteers, other parents or pupils). This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents. 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 premises and could lead to prosecution.

In the case of any such incident 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 such incidents have licence to end any conversation whether it be face to face or on the telephone. They should then refer the incident to a member of the Senior Leadership Team (“SLT”) who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

The overriding principle is, however, that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from parents or visitors. The Governing body is required to protect the school community from any aggressive or abusive behaviour.

The progress and well-being of the child(ren) of any parent acting in an unacceptable manner will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent will have the opportunity to put their views forward at every stage. 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.

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 Surrey County Council guidance "Keeping schools safe from abuse, threats and violence".

What standard of behaviour do we expect from everyone?

Our school rules are for the whole school community and embrace our Christian vision and values

1. We respect each other.
2. We always try our hardest.
3. We have high aspirations.

Encouraging engagement and involvement of the whole community in our school is a key aspect of our vision and school development plan. We aim to be a warm and welcoming environment which promotes a positive response from parents and visitors and builds an interest and passion in the education of children.

Avoiding an Incident

Parents, or visitors, may arrive at school 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 a member of the leadership team in handling a potentially difficult parent interview. 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 is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews/meetings prove constructive rather than confrontational.

The school also advises all staff not to engage in work related conversations with parents/carers etc outside of the school boundary. Staff that do risk breaching confidentiality guidelines and may also be putting themselves at unnecessary risk of abuse.

Definition of unacceptable behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent presents a risk to staff or pupils. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff or pupil 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, eg by standing very close to him/her or the use of aggressive hand gestures
- Use of foul or abusive language
- Arguing or fighting with another parent (This behaviour becomes even more serious when witnessed by children)
- Any kind of physical abuse
- Allegations which turn out to be vexatious or malicious
- Writing abusive comments about a member of staff in writing, email or on social media e.g. he/she is an idiot
- Racist or sexist comment
- Breaking the school's security procedures
- Any other behaviour likely to cause anybody witnessing it (including the recipient) alarm, distress or to fear that violence may be used against them or others

As an employer, the Governing Body of Ashford CE 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
- Providing appropriate equipment where applicable
- 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.

Ashford CE Primary School expects its 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 staff have the right to work without fear of violence and 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 Executive Headteacher or appropriate member of the SLT 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 Executive Headteacher or member of the SLT 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 person carrying out the risk assessment 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/pupils feel intimidated by the parent'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).

Recording of Incidents

Members of the school community subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about incident(s) which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters. This file will be kept by the School Business Manager.

The School's response

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Executive Headteacher will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include some, or all, of the following:

1. Clarify to the parent/visitor what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school
2. Invite the parent to an informal meeting to discuss events
3. Impose conditions on the parent's contact with the school and its staff
4. Imposing a ban
5. Contact the Police

The procedures for the school's response are set out in the Surrey County Council guidance "Keeping schools safe from abuse, threats and violence". This includes model letters. Advice were necessary will also be sought from the Area Schools team.

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 of the Education Act 1996 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 Governing Body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent/visitor.

Complaints policy

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

Conclusion

Pupils learn best when there is a positive partnership between home and school. Whilst every effort will be made to work with parents, this will only be possible where parents behave in an acceptable way. Unfortunately, where a parent's behaviour is either unacceptable or serious it may not be possible to continue working with him/her and, as a final resort, legal action may be taken. The school will take action where behaviour is serious and breaches safeguarding or health and safety legislation.

Equal Opportunities Statement: This policy applies to all and does not unlawfully discriminate because of the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.

Clarification

Who is a "Parent"?

Section 576 of the Education Act 1996 defines "parent" as:

- All natural (biological) parents, whether they are married or not;
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has parental responsibility for a child or young person;
- Any person who, although not a natural parent, has care of a child or young person.