

Vexatious Complaints Policy




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COMMITTEE: C&PR

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Harlow Fields School and College

Vexatious Complaints Policy

Policy for Handling Unreasonably Persistent, Harassing, Vexatious, Unreasonable or Abusive Complaints

Introduction

The Headteacher and Governing Body of Harlow Fields School and College are committed to the continual improvement of our school. We welcome feedback from parents and carers and will always strive to resolve any concerns as quickly as possible. A formal complaints procedure is available on our school website for parents and carers wishing to raise concerns.

However, there are instances where parents or carers may pursue complaints in a manner that is unacceptable or unreasonable.

This policy aims to clarify the process for addressing such behaviours, in line with our motto of "Working together to succeed" and the Nolan Principles of public life, which emphasise integrity, accountability, and respect.

Nolan Principles

The Nolan Principles, which guide the conduct of public officials, are as follows:

1. Selflessness: Acting solely in the public interest.
2. Integrity: Avoiding any situation that may compromise integrity.
3. Objectivity: Making decisions based on merit.
4. Accountability: Being accountable for decisions and actions.
5. Openness: Being open about decisions and actions, providing reasons for them.
6. Honesty: Being truthful in all communications.
7. Leadership: Promoting and supporting these principles through leadership.

Definition of an Unreasonable Complainant

An unreasonable complainant may be defined as anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour while making a complaint. This includes parents and carers who pursue complaints in an inappropriate manner towards staff or other members of the school community.

Examples of Unreasonable Behaviour

Unreasonable behaviour may include, but is not limited to:

- Complaints that are out of proportion to the nature of the issue.
- Persistent complaints even after the complaints procedure has been exhausted.
- Personally harassing staff or other members of the school community.
- Unjustifiably repetitious complaints without a clear resolution goal.
- Obsessive or prolific correspondence regarding a concern or complaint.
- Making false allegations against staff without evidence.
- Acting contrary to the school's aim of reaching a resolution.
- Using abusive or threatening language.
- Refusing to attend appointments to discuss the complaint.

Definition of Harassment

Harassment is considered the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the behaviour is intended to cause personal distress rather than seek resolution. This includes:

- Targeting specific staff members over a significant period.
- Causing ongoing distress through the manner of complaint pursuit.
- Having a significant adverse effect on the school community.

Expectations from the School

Anyone who raises informal or formal issues can expect the school to:

- Follow the school's complaints procedure.
- Respond within a reasonable timeframe (24 hours for acknowledgment).
- Be available for consultations within reasonable limits.
- Respond courteously and respectfully in line with the Nolan Principles.
- Keep involved parties informed of progress towards resolution.

Expectations from Complainants

The school expects anyone raising concerns to:

- Treat all staff with courtesy and respect, reflecting the principles of integrity and respect.
- Respect the needs of pupils and staff.
- Avoid violence or threats towards individuals or property.
- Allow the school reasonable time to respond to complaints.
- Follow the school's complaints procedure.
- Use appropriate language and avoid aggression.
- Raise concerns in appropriate settings, avoiding public confrontations.
- Work towards a resolution in partnership with the school, embodying our motto of "Working together to succeed."

Responses to Unreasonable Complaints

This policy is intended to work alongside the school's complaints procedure. In cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take the following steps:

1. Inform the complainant informally that their behaviour is considered unreasonable and request a change in approach.
2. Notify the complainant in writing that their behaviour falls under this policy.
3. Require future meetings to have a third party present.
4. Limit communication to written correspondence only, except in emergencies.
5. Inform the complainant that further investigation will only occur if pursued reasonably.
6. Restrict access to school premises if necessary.
7. Cease all communication except for health and safety matters.
8. Involve local authority officers if needed.

Aggression and Harassment

The school will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression. In such cases, the school may:

- Prohibit the individual from entering school premises immediately.
- Cease communication except in emergencies.
- Pursue legal action under Anti-Harassment legislation.

Timeframe and Review

If a complainant's behaviour improves but then resumes within a reasonable period, the school may reinstate the process outlined above. The school reserves the right to not respond to communications from individuals subject to this policy. Regular reviews will ensure that legitimate new complaints are still considered.

