



respect resilience responsibility

UNREASONABLY PERSISTENT AND VEXATIOUS PARENT BEHAVIOUR POLICY

Date: May 2026

Review Date: May 2027

Purpose

Woodlands Community College is committed to providing high quality parent and student services. The school deals with a large number of telephone calls, letters, emails, web based and face to face enquiries from parents. Most of these are dealt with first time and where parents are dissatisfied, they can refer their issue to one of the school's complaints procedures. From time to time, parents can become upset, angry or frustrated over difficult situations and the school prides itself on the way staff resolve these situations.

Occasionally, staff have to deal with unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious parents. Parental feedback is a valuable tool which is welcomed by the school to help improve the support we provide to parents and students. Raising legitimate queries or criticisms of the school should not in itself lead to someone being regarded as unreasonably persistent or vexatious. Similarly, the fact that a parent is unhappy with a school decision or the outcome of a complaint investigation and seeks to challenge it should not necessarily cause them to be labelled unreasonably persistent.

Scope

The following definition of unreasonably persistent customers:

Those complainants who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with an organisation, hinder the organisation's consideration of their or other people's complaints.

Based on this definition, the school has adopted the following description of an unreasonably persistent or vexatious parent:

Those parents who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder the school's ability to deal with genuine parent enquiries or complaints, the consequence of which is to divert resources from providing much needed support

Persistent and vexatious parents can take up a lot of staff time and make unreasonable demands on staff, which take them away from their normal duties. In addition, the parent's communication can be sarcastic, rude or contain derogatory remarks which can sometimes appear threatening to staff. These sorts of problems happen rarely. This policy exists to ensure that all parties understand how the school will deal with contact of this nature. Dealing positively with these issues will help free up staff time to conduct their normal business and deal with genuine parental enquiries, requests and complaints.

This policy outlines examples of behaviour that are considered persistent and/or vexatious, along with examples of restrictions that can be considered to enable the school to manage this type of behaviour. Formal restrictions can only be imposed by the Chair of Governors.

Where a parent's behaviour is so extreme that it threatens the immediate health, safety and welfare of school employees, or others working on the school's behalf, the school will consider other options, for example reporting the matter to the police or taking legal action. In such cases, the school may not give the parent prior warning of that action.

Examples of unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious behaviour

This is not an exhaustive list but illustrates some of the main incidents that arise:

- Adopting a 'scattergun' approach, e.g. pursuing an enquiry with several members of staff in the school or with other organisations at the same time

- Making unnecessarily excessive demands on the time and resources of the school's staff, for example, telephoning or sending emails daily and/ or several times a day to the school's staff, writing lengthy complex letters frequently e.g. every few days
- Making frequent remarks to the school's staff that could be considered sarcastic, rude, derogatory, discriminatory or threatening.
- Submitting repeat complaints, essentially about the same issue, after the school's complaint procedure has been completed.
- Insisting that an issue is dealt with in a way that is not consistent with the school's policy
- Changing the fundamental basis of a complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage
- Raising numerous detailed but unimportant questions and insisting that they are answered
- Submitting falsified documents
- Refusing to accept the school's decision after all appeal options (see Complaints Policy) have been exhausted
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are outside the school's responsibility and control
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the remit of the school's statutory duty, policy or procedures
- Making what appear to be groundless complaints about the school's staff and seeking to have them replaced.
- Electronically recording meetings and conversations without prior knowledge and consent of the other parties involved.

Dealing with unreasonably persistent and/or vexatious parents

It is important to distinguish between people who make regular contact because they have genuine ongoing or multiple problems and those that are unreasonably persistent or vexatious.

Where it is identified that a parent has become or is becoming unreasonable with their contact with the school, the Head Teacher will attempt to deal with the matter by communication with the parent. This communication may take any format, but must be confirmed in writing. The communication will explain the concerns of the school regarding the parent's behaviour and suggest a way forward to manage the issue. This may include a single point of contact (SPOC), agreement for weekly/fortnightly specified contact or any communication style deemed appropriate and proportionate in the circumstances of each individual case. The behaviour of the parent should then be monitored for a set period. Log sheets (or electronic alternative) should be kept for this period. If the Head Teacher believes that, despite attempts at resolution, the parent continues in their behaviour and therefore is unreasonably persistent or vexatious the matter should be referred to the Chair of Governors

The Head Teacher should include details of the behaviour, attempts at resolution and evidence of the behaviour (including any log sheets kept).

The Chair of Governors will consider the referral, in consultation with Legal Services, if necessary, based on the available evidence. The Chair of Governors will instigate any further enquiries deemed necessary.

Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate. The options most likely to be considered are:

- Contact with the school only be accepted in a particular form (i.e. letter only);
- Contact will only take place with a named member of staff (or deputy in their absence);
- Restricting telephone calls to specified days and times;

- Notifying the parent that only significant and serious queries will be addressed by the school;
- Notifying the parent that only new issues will be dealt with and any issues (that have been previously dealt with) will not be acknowledged or actioned;
- Banning the parent from the school site;
- Extreme cases may lead to the blocking of telephone calls and electronic contact with the school.

The Chair of Governors will write to the parent to explain what action is being taken and why. The letter will also advise on the duration of the action and give details of how to appeal against the decision. The parent will need to write to the Clerk to Governors within **10 working days** of receipt of the outcome letter from the Chair of Governors, to request an appeal panel hearing.

Review

Any restrictions imposed will be reviewed on a yearly basis by the Chair of Governors and the Head Teacher.

Where necessary the review period will be adjusted given the personal circumstances of the parent, the circumstances giving rise to the behaviour or the level of risk identified to the student by the restrictions applied.

The aim of the review(s) is to remove any restrictions as soon as possible, where it can be shown that the behaviour giving rise to the school's action has subsided and there is no likely hood of a reoccurrence.

If further unreasonably persistent or vexatious behaviour has been exhibited during the review period, the Chair of Governors and Head Teacher may choose to extend the restrictions (or impose new restrictions) for a further period. Should this occur, the school will be informed of the reasons for the extension and be invited to comment on the proposal to extend the restrictions. This may involve a period of consultation between the Chair of Governors and Head Teacher and the parent to alter restrictions, to make it easier for the parent to comply.

Should the Chair of Governors and Head Teacher decide that the original restrictions (or new restrictions) be imposed, then the parent will be informed, in writing, what action is being taken and why. The letter will also advise on the duration of the action and give details of how to appeal against the decision.

Where it is believed that communication with a parent by the Chair of Governors, who is no longer deemed persistent or vexatious after a review, could incite the behaviour to recommence then the parent will not be communicated with. The decision will be taken by the Chair of Governors in consultation with the Head Teacher and Legal Services (if necessary) and the reasons for it will be recorded.

Information Retention

Any documents used in the decision making process of this policy regarding an unreasonably persistent or vexatious customer will be retained by the Clerk to the Governors for the duration of any restrictions, plus one year.

The file will then be stored and subsequently destroyed in line with the Southampton City Council's Retention Policy.

Appeal

Appeals are determined by the Governing Body's Appeal Panel, who will confirm, amend or remove the decision to restrict access. In all cases the school will write to the parent to tell them of the results of the review and say what changes (if any) have been made to the decision to restrict access.

Appeal Panel Hearing

1. A request for an Appeal Panel Hearing should be made in writing to the Clerk to Governors within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome letter from the Chair of Governors.
2. Upon receipt of a written request by the appellant for an Appeal Panel Hearing, the procedure outlined below will be followed.
3. The Clerk to Governors will write to the appellant to acknowledge receipt of the request within 5 working days. The letter will inform the appellant that the appeal will be heard by the Appeal Panel within 20 working days of receiving the request. The letter will also confirm that the appellant has the right to submit any further documents relevant to the appeal and ask for any such documents to be sent to the Clerk to Governors, within 5 working days.
4. The Clerk to Governors will make arrangements to convene the Appeal Panel, which will consist of three Governors, who will have had no involvement in the subject matter of the original complaint, no involvement in dealing with the complaint in the previous stages and no detailed knowledge of the complaint.
5. The Clerk to Governors will ensure that the Appeal Panel hears the appeal within 20 working days of receiving the request. All relevant correspondence and documentation regarding the appeal will be provided to the appellant and the Appeal Panel at least 2 working days prior to the Appeal Panel Hearing.
6. The school will be represented at the Appeal Panel Hearing by the person who dealt with the complaint in the previous stage. This will usually be the Chair of Governors, unless the Complaint is about the Chair of Governors, in which case the school will be presented at the Appeal Hearing by the Head Teacher.
7. The Clerk to Governors will write to the appellant, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors (as appropriate), any relevant witnesses and the Appeal Panel informing them of the date, time and venue of the Appeal Panel Hearing, at least 5 working days in advance. The letter to the appellant will confirm that they may bring witnesses to the Appeal Panel Hearing and that they also have the right to be accompanied by a friend or relative for support and an interpreter or signer if necessary. The letter will also explain how the Appeal Panel Hearing will be conducted.

8. The procedure which will be followed at the Appeal Panel Hearing is as follows:
- The appellant will outline their appeal.
 - The Chair of Governors or Head Teacher will ask the appellant questions, if necessary.
 - The Appeal Panel will ask the appellant questions, if necessary.
 - The appellant's witness will make a verbal statement.
 - The Chair of Governors or Head Teacher will ask the witness questions, if necessary.
 - The Appeal Panel will ask the witness questions, if necessary.
 - If the appellant has more than one witness, the next witness will follow.
 - The Chair of Governors or Head Teacher will outline the school's stance to the appeal and how the complaint was dealt with in the previous stages.
 - The appellant will ask the Chair of the Local Governing Body or Head Teacher questions, if necessary.
 - The Appeal Panel will ask the Chair of Governors or Head Teacher questions, if necessary.
 - The school's witness will make a verbal statement.
 - The appellant will ask the witness questions, if necessary.
 - The Appeal Panel will ask the witness questions, if necessary.
 - If the school has more than one witness, the next witness will follow.
 - The appellant will summarise his/her appeal.
 - The Chair of Governors or Head Teacher will summarise the schools' stance.
 - The Appeal Panel Hearing will close to enable the Appeal Panel to meet in private to make their findings of fact and recommendations, if any.
9. The appellant's and the school's witnesses will only attend the Appeal Panel Hearing for that part of it where they give their verbal statements and answer questions. They will be asked to remain outside at all other times. Where a witness has previously given a written account which is largely undisputed, the Chair of the Appeal Panel may decide in advance that they do not need to attend the Appeal Panel Hearing to give a verbal statement.
10. The Clerk to the Appeal Panel (who will usually be the Clerk to Governors, but does not have to be) will record minutes of the Appeal Panel Hearing, however the proceedings will be kept as informal as possible with the main aim being to achieve reconciliation between the appellant and the school.
11. After the Appeal Panel Hearing has closed, the Appeal Panel will meet in private to discuss the appeal. In some cases, it may be possible for this meeting to take place immediately after the Appeal Panel Hearing while the parties wait outside and for a verbal decision to be provided immediately. In most cases, the parties will be informed that the Appeal Panel's decision will be confirmed in writing within 15 working days and be invited to leave.
12. The Appeal Panel will make findings of fact, namely they will decide on a balance of probabilities (i.e. more likely than not) what facts they accept and which they reject. The Appeals Panel will make a written record of their findings of fact. The Appeals Panel will then decide what recommendations to make, if any. These may include recommendations aimed at achieving reconciliation between the appellant and the school, or recommendations for the school to follow aimed at improving the school's procedures or preventing a recurrence of the events

which led to the appeal. The Appeals Panel will make a written record of their recommendations and if no recommendations are made, they will record this fact.

13. The Clerk to the Appeal Panel will write to the appellant, the Head Teacher (in all cases, whether or not the Head Teacher represented the school), the Chair of Governors (if they represented the school) and where relevant, any person complained about, confirming their findings of fact and recommendations within 15 working days of the Appeal Panel Hearing.
14. The Clerk to the Appeal Panel will ensure that a record of the Appeal Panel's findings of fact and recommendations is kept on the school's premises and is available for inspection by the Governing Body and the Head Teacher.