



# Communication Standards Policy

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# Introduction

Sherwell Valley Primary believes that members of our school community have the right to express their views and ask questions about our School, indeed parent's/carer's comments and suggestions are imperative in helping us to shape and improve.

This policy sets out our approach to the minority of parents/carers whose communication we consider unreasonable or unacceptable, and the action we will take in order to manage the situation.

This document should be read in conjunction with the School's Violent and Threatening Behaviour at Work policy (VATB) which can be found on the school website.

The principles set out in this policy only apply to our dealings with people when they have contact with the School.

## Our Commitment to Our Pupils

We seek to:

- Put the pupils at the heart of all we do
- Ensure fair and open access for all, including visitors and members of the wider school community or members of the community who have difficulty in dealing with us as an education provider.
- Ensure other pupils and our employees do not suffer any disadvantage from parents/carers who act in an unacceptable manner

## Our Aims

The behaviour we aim to manage using this policy results from the actions of parents/carers whose anger, numbers of requests, persistence, or the frivolous nature of issues raised, result in unreasonable demands on the School and/or unacceptable behaviour towards staff.

We recognise that in times of trouble or distress people may act out of character, and we will not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a parent/carer is forceful or determined. We also understand, and will take into account, that the state of a person's mental health can affect their behaviour.

# Unreasonable or Unacceptable Communication

## Abusive or offensive language

We do not accept that employees should be subjected to blasphemy or offensive language even when part of a speech that comes to the fore when the parent/carer is under stress, as this may offend the employee. What is deemed to be offensive will necessarily differ, but can include cultural, racial or religious references. Every employee has the right not to suffer language they would consider as offensive.

## Unmanageable demands

Although not always intentionally, parents/carers may make what we consider unmanageable demands due to 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 parent/carer.

Examples of this include demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale; insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular employee; excessive telephone calls, emails, or letters; sending duplicate requests to more than one employee; or, requiring responses to correspondence where the content is malicious.

We will consider this contact to be unacceptable and/or unreasonable if it starts to impact substantially upon workload, for example by taking up, in comparison to the issues raised, an excessive amount of employees' time to the disadvantage of other parents/carers or pupils..

### **Unreasonable persistence**

We recognise that some parents/carers will not or cannot accept that we are unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Parents/carers may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their concerns or they may contact us persistently about the same issue.

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 we can or cannot do; and, continuing to contact the School without presenting any new information. It is not necessarily the manner in which these parents/carers communicate with the School that is unreasonable but their perseverance in contacting us after our decision has already been explained .

We consider that persistence becomes unreasonable when it takes up what we regard as a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

## **Managing Communication**

How we decide to manage the communication referred to in this policy depends on the nature and the impact it has on individual employees or the School as a whole, however, we may need to manage the unacceptable action by restricting the parents/carer's contact with us. Restrictions that may be considered are; informing a parents/carer that they can only contact us; in person, by telephone, letter or electronically; limiting the frequency responses to correspondence will be sent; and, or appointing a named officer to be the parent/carer's single point of contact. We will always try to maintain at least one form of contact. In extreme circumstances we may refuse to have any personal contact with a parent/carer. In these cases the School will only respond to communication through a third party.

### **Abusive or offensive language**

The threat or use of verbal abuse or harassment towards employees is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the parents/carer. Incidents may be reported to the Police. This will always be the case if physical violence is threatened.

### **Violent and threatening behaviour**

Where the parent/carer displays violent or threatening behaviour which is considered to require the involvement of the Police or where the parents/carer may need to be asked not to enter School building, this needs to be dealt with under the VATB Policy.

### **Correspondence**

We will not deal with correspondence (letter, fax or electronic) that is abusive to employees or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence. When this happens we will tell the parents/carer that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. We will ask them to stop using such language and state that if they do not stop, further correspondence will not be responded to. We reserve the right to require future contact to be through a third party.

### **Telephone calls**

Our employees will end telephone calls if they feel the caller is being aggressive, abusive or offensive. The employee taking the call has the right to make this decision. In most cases the caller will be advised that the behaviour is unacceptable and that the call will be ended if the behaviour does not stop but on the rare occasion when the employee is unable to continue with the call they have the right to disconnect the call without warning .

### **Face to face**

Our employees will ask a parent/carer to leave School property if they feel the parent/carer is being aggressive, abusive or offensive. The employee dealing with the parent/carer has the right to make this decision. In most cases the advice to the parents/carer will be that their behaviour is unacceptable and that they will be asked to leave if the behaviour does not stop.

When dealing with an incident of abusive or offensive language you should also refer to the VATB Policy.

### **Unreasonable demands**

Where a parents/carer repeatedly telephones; visits School offices; sends irrelevant documents; or, continually raises the same issues, we may decide to adopt one or more of the following restrictions:

- Only take telephone calls from the parent/carer at set times on set days or by arrangement.
- Arrange for one named employee to deal with all future calls or correspondence from the parent/carer.
- Limit communication to writing only.
- Only respond to communication on a monthly basis.
- Inform the parent/carer that their correspondence will be read, to ensure no new issues have been made, acknowledged and filed.
- Require the parent/carer to make an appointment to see a named employee before visiting the office.
- Return documents received to the parent/carer or, in extreme cases, advise the parent/carer that further irrelevant documents will be destroyed.
- Take other action that we consider appropriate.

### **Unreasonable persistence**

Where a parent/carer continues to correspond on a wide range of issues, and this action is considered excessive, we may decide to adopt one of more of the following restrictions:

- Inform the parent/carer that we will limit the number of issues we will consider in a given period.
- Ask the parent/carer to limit or focus their requests accordingly.
- Arrange for one named employee to deal with future calls or correspondence from the parent/carer.

A parent/carer's action may be considered unreasonably persistent if, after all internal review mechanisms have been exhausted, they continue to dispute the School's decision relating to the issues raised. In these circumstances, the parent/carer will be told that they will be required to make any future contact on the issue in writing. Any correspondence will be read and filed but only acknowledged or responded to if new information relating to the issue is provided.

## **Restricting Contact**

With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict contact will only be taken after careful consideration by the Head or Chair of Governors consultation with the Local Authority.

Before restricting a parent/carer's contact you must complete the **Restricting Contact Authorisation Form - Appendix A**.

To ensure equality for all our parent/carers an impact assessment, to consider potential problems a restriction may pose on the parent/carer, must be carried out before a restriction is determined. Please complete the **Impact Assessment Form - Appendix B**.

When a decision has been made and approved parents/carers will be told in writing:

- Why a decision has been made to restrict future contact.
- The restricted contact arrangements.
- If relevant, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place.

Please note: Employees who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a parent/carer have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with the School's Violence and Threatening Behaviour at Work policy.

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

A parent/carer can appeal a decision to restrict contact. The appeal will be considered by a member of the Governing Body not involved in the original decision. They will advise the parent/carer in writing whether the restricted contact arrangements still apply or a different course of action has been agreed.

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

Where it is decided to restrict contact, an entry noting this will be made in relevant files held by the School. The name and contact details of the parent/carer and the restriction applied will also be added to the Restricted Contact Central Register.. The name will only be held on the Register for the period the restriction applies.

The Restricted Contact Central Register will be reviewed annually. If the parent/carer demonstrates a more acceptable approach restrictions to contact may be revoked.

### **Policy Availability and Review**

Copies of this policy are available on request. The School may make a charge in accordance with the School's fees and charges policy.

- **The term 'employee(s)' means employees, volunteers or contractors for the purposes of this policy.**

# Appendix A

## COMMUNICATION STANDARDS Restricting Contact Authorisation Form

This form must be completed and authorised before any restrictions to a parents/carer's contact are made.

REQUESTING OFFICER'S DETAILS			
Name (Print)	Name of officer requesting restrictions	Position	
Signature		Date	

parents/carer'S DETAILS			
Name of parents/carer		Section	Service area complaint relates to
parents/carer's contact details		Reference No.	Service area reference number relating to the case

DETAILS OF RESTRICTION
<b>Describe the reason why you have restricted the parents/carer's contact</b>
<p>Please state whether you consider the parents/carers communication to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● abusive or offensive language</li> <li>● unreasonable persistence</li> <li>● unreasonable demands</li> </ul> <p>Give detail of the circumstances which have brought you to this decision, eg.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● length of time you/ colleagues have been in contact with the individual</li> <li>● amount of correspondence exchanged</li> <li>● repeated nature of requests for responses</li> <li>● describe the steps that have already been taken</li> </ul>
<b>Does the parents/carer contact other service areas?</b>

If you are aware that the parents/carer communicates with other service areas please list these areas.

**State what restriction you consider should be applied**

If you feel a single point of contact officer (SPOC) should be appointed please state the name and ext. number of the officer who will be undertaking this role.

**Have you considered the impact and potential problems this restriction may pose on the parents/carer?**

Please complete Restricting Contact Risk Assessment Form – appendix B

**How long do you consider these restrictions should be applied?**

This should not exceed three years. All restrictions will be reviewed annually by the Information Compliance Team.

**Authorising Officer's Record of Decision**

The authorising officer should state whether or not they approve the proposed restrictions. Authorising officers are Executive Heads; Directors; or the Chief Executive

**AUTHORISING OFFICER'S DETAILS**

<b>Name (Print)</b>		<b>Position</b>	
<b>Signature</b>		<b>Date</b>	

**CHECKLIST OF ACTIONS**

**Indicate whether or not you have taken the actions detailed below**

You have read the Communication Standards Policy? YES/NO

You have considered whether any incident relating to the parents/carers communication should be reported under the Violent, Aggressive and Threatening Behaviour Policy? YES/NO

You have notified the parents/carer of the restriction? YES/NO

You have notified all officers who may be contacted by this individual of the restriction? YES/NO

## Appendix B

### COMMUNICATION STANDARDS Impact Assessment Form

This form must be completed before any restrictions to a parents/carer's contact are made.

REQUESTING OFFICER'S DETAILS			
<b>Name (Print)</b>	Name of officer requesting restrictions	<b>Position</b>	
<b>Signature</b>		<b>Date</b>	

parents/carer'S DETAILS			
<b>Name of parents/carer</b>		<b>Reference No.</b>	Service area reference number relating to the case

ASSESSMENT	
Have you been made aware that the parents/carer has a disability Look through all records held on the parents/carer	<b>YES/NO</b>
<b>If you have answered 'yes', please answer the questions below. If you have answered 'no', the Impact Assessment is complete.</b>	
Please specify the parents/carers disability:	
Could this disability affect the way the parents/carer communicates with the School?	<b>YES/NO</b>
If yes, please state why:	
Have you made suitable allowances for the behaviour before considering restricting the parents/carer's contact?	<b>YES/NO</b>
Have you taken into consideration the parents/carer's disability when considering the restriction/s you are proposing? e.g. In most cases it would not be appropriate to restrict a parents/carers contact to written correspondence only, if the parents/carer has learning difficulties.	<b>YES/NO</b>

This form should be kept on the parents/carers file along side the **Restricted Contact Authorisation Form**.

