



Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints



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Aim

Gastrells Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

This policy covers both formal and informal complaints and managing unreasonable or persistent contact not directly associated with, or resulting from, formal complaints.

Gastrells Primary School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as if the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- Refuses to co-operate with the complaint's investigation process
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaint's procedure
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaint's procedure or with good practice
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists that these are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales

- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- Refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed, including referral and advice from the Local Authority and the Department for Education
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- Uses threats to intimidate
- Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- Knowingly provides falsified information
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums

Please note: the above list is not intended to be exhaustive and is for guidance purposes only. It is at the discretion of the school what is deemed to be unreasonable.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Head Teacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking. If the behaviour continues, the Head Teacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable, refer them to this policy and remind them to act in accordance with it and ask them to change it.

For complainants who excessively contact Gastrells Primary School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after 6 months

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Gastrells Primary School.

If the complainant contacts the school again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as 'serial' or 'persistent'. We may stop responding to the complainant when the following conditions are met:

- We have taken every reasonable step to address the complainant's concerns
- The complainant has been given a clear statement of our position and their options
- The complainant contacts the school repeatedly, making substantially the same points each time
- The case to stop responding is stronger if:
 - The complainant's communications are often or always abusive or aggressive
 - The complainant makes insulting personal comments about or threats towards staff
 - We have reason to believe the individual is contacting the school with the intention of causing disruption or inconvenience

Where we decide to stop responding, we will inform the individual that we intend to do so. We will also explain that we will consider any new complaints they make provided the concerns raised are materially different to those raised previously and/or are unconnected to the previous concern.

If we have resolved a complaint under our complaints procedure and receive a duplicate complaint on the same subject from a partner, family member or other individual, we will assess whether there are aspects that we hadn't previously considered, or any new information we need to take into account.

If we are satisfied that there are no new aspects, we will:

- Tell the new complainant that we have already investigated and responded to this issue, and that the local process is complete
- Direct them to the DfE if they are dissatisfied with our original handling of the complaint. If a duplicate complaint is raised, which in the view of the school, warrants further consideration, the complaints procedure will be repeated.

Parents' Expectations of the School

Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- Regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing:
- Publish the school's complaints procedure on our website
- Follow the Policy for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints
- Follow the complaints procedure
- Respond within a reasonable time
- Be available for consultation within reasonable time limits, bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint
- Respond with courtesy and respect
- Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with advice from the Local Authority. Keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised

The School's Expectations of Parents/Carers/Members of the Public

The school can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise problems with the school to:

- Treat all school staff with courtesy and respect
- Respect the needs and wellbeing of pupils and staff in the school
- Avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property
- Avoid any aggression or verbal abuse
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond
- Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time
- In the case of a complaint, follow the school's complaints procedure

Linked Policies

Complaints

Parental Communications Policy