



SENDScope

Independent School

DEALING WITH ABUSIVE PEOPLE POLICY

POLICY WRITTEN BY:	SENDScope Director Natalie Walsh
DATE POLICY PREPARED:	May 2022
DATE POLICY REVIEWED:	September 2024
DATE FOR NEXT REVIEW:	September 2026

DEALING WITH ABUSIVE PEOPLE POLICY

Statement of principles

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 NAHT guidance on dealing with abusive parents.

At SENDSCOPE, 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 students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. We also strive to make our school a place where, as adults, we model for students 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 SENDSCOPE are keen to work with us and are supportive. However, on very rare occasions the behaviour of a small number, falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the school community. This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents.

In these situations, 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 these situations have licence to end any conversation (face to face or on the telephone). They should then refer the incident to a senior manager 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/carers/visitors. The board of governors has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

The progress and well-being of the parent's/carer's child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent/carer will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent/carer 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.

Definition of unacceptable behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive, or insulting behaviour or language from a parent/carer presents a risk to staff or students. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff or student 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 to be intimidating
- physical intimidation, e.g., by standing very close to him/her or the use of aggressive hand gestures
- use of foul or abusive language
- any kind of physical abuse
- allegations which turn out to be vexatious or malicious.

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 Principal(s) or appropriate senior staff 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 Principal(s) 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 Principal(s) 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/students feel intimidated by the parent/carer'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

Staff/students 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 Directors of SENDSCOPE. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults these may be made available to the parent if they request it.

The School's response

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Principal(s) will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include the following:

1. Clarify to the parent/carer what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school.

In some instances, it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent/carer is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This could be explained by letter from the Principal(s). This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents. The parent/carer will be invited to write to the Principal(s) with his/her version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent's/carer's response, a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.

2. Invite the parent/carer to an informal meeting to discuss events.

This could be helpful to discuss and diffuse the situation. The safety and well-being of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. Members of school staff will always be accompanied by at least one other colleague at any such meeting. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements, and care taken to ensure exits cannot be blocked by a parent/carer who could potentially become aggressive. The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted, and a follow-up letter or e-mail sent to confirm the school's expectations and any agreed actions.

3. Impose conditions on the parent's contact with the school and its staff.

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents/Carers of enrolled students have an 'implied licence' to come onto school premises at certain stated times. It is for schools to define and set out the extent of such access. Parents/Carers exceeding this would be trespassing. Depending on the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on the parent/carer's contact with the school. These conditions may include (but are not exclusively):

- being accompanied to any meeting with a SENDSCOPE Director
- restricting contact by telephone to SENDSCOPE Directors
- restricting written communications to SENDSCOPE Directors
- restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent/carer will be accompanied by a SENDSCOPE Director
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by SENDSCOPE Directors.

In this case the parent/carer will be informed by letter from the Principal(s) the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent/carer would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent/carer in writing within 10 working days of the date of the parent's letter. If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the governing body

after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent/carer will be invited to make written representation to the governors. This and the evidence from the Principal(s) will be considered at a meeting of the full governing body. Governors may decide to maintain, extend, or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent/carer by the clerk to the governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting. When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent/carer's compliance with the conditions, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

4. *Imposing a ban.*

Where other procedures have been exhausted and aggression or intimidation continues OR where there is an extreme act of violence then the school may consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent/carer from accessing school staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Principal (s) that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent/carer would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter. If the Chair's decision is to confirm the ban, parents/carers in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, with a Director of SENDSCOPE. A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the governing body after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent/carer will be invited to make written representation to the governors; this and the evidence from the Principal(s) will be considered at a meeting of the full governing body. Governors may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent/carer's access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting. In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent/carer's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent/carer's co-operation with the school in other respects.

5. *Removal from school.*

Parents/carers who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed a section 547 offence of the Education Act. 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 Principal(s). Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent.

6. *Complaints policy*

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