

Future Academies Watford

Dealing with Abusive Parents Policy



SECTION 1 – Dealing with Abusive Parents

1. Statement of Principles

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance ‘Advice on Academy security: Access to, and barring individuals from academy premises’ December 2012 as well as NAHT guidance on dealing with abusive parents.

At Future Academies Watford, we value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the academy. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that students benefit when the relationship between home and academy is a positive one. We also strive to make our academy a place where as adults we model for students the behaviour we teach and expect. We place a high importance on good manners, positive communication and mutual respect.

Almost all parents, guardians and visitors to Future Academies Watford are keen to work with us and are supportive of the academy. However, on very rare occasions the behaviour of a small number of parents falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the academy 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 leader who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

The overriding principle is, however, that all members of the academy community have the right to work or be in academy without fear of aggression or abuse from parents. The board of governors has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

The progress and well-being of the parent’s child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent will have the opportunity to put their views forward at every stage. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from the academy, robust review processes involving the Trust, Chair of Governors and then the governing body are in place to ensure fairness.

2. Definition of Unacceptable Behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent 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 so as to be intimidating
- physical intimidation, eg by standing very close to him/her or the use of aggressive hand gestures
- use of foul, abusive language or swearing
- any kind of physical abuse
- allegations which turn out to be vexatious or malicious.

3. The Academy's Approach to Dealing with Incidents

If a parent/guardian/visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the academy community, the Principal 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.

4. Risk Assessment

The Principal 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 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's/guardian's/visitor'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 academy's action? (low, medium, high).

5. 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 Principal's PA. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults may be made available to the parent if they request it.

6. The Academy's Response

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

6.1 Clarify to the parent what is considered acceptable behaviour by the academy

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

6.2 Invite the parent 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 academy staff will always be accompanied by at least one member of the Senior Team at any such meeting. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements, and care taken to ensure exits cannot be blocked by a parent who could potentially become aggressive.

The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted, and a follow-up letter or email sent to confirm the Academy's expectations and any agreed actions.

6.3. Impose conditions on the parent's contact with the academy and its staff

Although fulfilling a public function, the academy is a private place. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents of enrolled students have an 'implied licence' to come onto academy premises at certain stated times. It is for the academy to define and set out the extent of such access. Parents exceeding this would be trespassing.

Depending of the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the academy may consider imposing conditions on the parent's contact with the academy. These conditions may include (but are not exclusively):

- being accompanied to any meeting with a member of academy staff by a member of SLT
- restricting contact by telephone to named members of the senior leadership team
- restricting written communications to named members of the senior leadership team
- restricting attendance at the academy events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the academy
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Principal.

In this case the parent will be informed by letter from the Principal the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent 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 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 will be invited to make written representation to the governors. This and the evidence from the Principal 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 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'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 academy in other respects.

6.4. 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 academy may consider banning the individual from academy premises. This will include banning a parent from accessing academy staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Principal that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent 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 in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of senior staff.

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 will be invited to make written representation to the governors; this and the evidence from the Principal 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's access to the academy. 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'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's co-operation with the academy in other respects.

6.5. Removal from the Academy

Parents who have been banned from the academy premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed a section 547 offence. They will be considered as trespassers. In these circumstances the offender may be removed from the academy. This may be carried out by a police officer or person authorised by the governing body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent.

6.6. Complaints Policy

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

SECTION 2 – Dealing with Unreasonable Complaints

Future Academies Watford 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 the academy. 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.

Future Academies Watford defines unreasonable complainants as *'those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people's complaints'*.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- 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 complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they 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 academy's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:-

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with the academy while a 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 Principal will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Future Academies Watford causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan.

This will usually be reviewed after 6 months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Future Academies Watford.

Appendices

1. Warning

Model letter 1: This is an initial letter from the Principal to ensure the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the academy. This letter contains a warning about further action if there are other incidents. The letter invites a written response and suggests a meeting.

2. Imposing conditions on the parent's attendance at academy events

Model letter 2: This is a letter from the Principal informing parents of the academy's decision to impose conditions on the parent's attendance at academy events, pending review by the Chair of Governors.

Model letter 3: Letter from the Chair of Governors informing parent of her decision to confirm or remove the conditions.

3. Imposing a ban

Model letter 4: Letter from Principal Informing parents of the academy's intention to impose a ban on their attendance at academy premises, pending review by the Chair of Governors.

Model letter 5: Letter from the Chair of Governors informing parent of her decision to confirm or remove ban.

4. Reviewing the decision to impose conditions or impose a ban

Model Letter 6: Letter from clerk to governors requesting statement from parents to governing body for review of decision.

Model letter 7: Letter from clerk to the governors to confirm the outcome of further reviews of decisions where the imposition of conditions/ban has been extended or removed.

Model Letter 1 Warning (sent by Principal)

Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report about your conduct at the academy on (enter date and time or details). This appears to fall far short of that we would expect of a parent of a student at Future Academies Watford.

(Add factual summary of the incident and of its effect on staff, pupils, and other parents.)

I must inform you that the governing body will not tolerate aggression towards members of the academy community and will act to protect its staff and students from any form of abuse or intimidation. I should warn you that any future conduct of this nature could result in the academy imposing conditions restricting your access to the academy or banning you from contacting or attending the academy altogether.

I wish to give you an opportunity to give me in writing any comments or observations of your own in relation to the report which I have received about your conduct. Please do so within 10 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may include any assurances you are prepared to give about your future good conduct. There is then an option for us to meet to discuss the situation and how it can be avoided in the future.

Details of our policy on dealing with abusive parents can be found on our website.

Yours sincerely

Principal

cc: Chair of Governors

cc: Trust CEO

Model Letter 2: Imposing conditions on the parent's attendance at academy events, pending review (sent by Principal)

Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report from the (name of staff) about your conduct on at
.....

(add summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

(You will recollect that I have already written to you about a previous incident on (date) warning you of the consequence of any further insulting or aggressive behaviour on your part)

I must inform you that the governors, in line with our policy, will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the academy premises and will act to defend academy staff and pupils.

I am, therefore, writing to inform you that I am imposing conditions on the contact you may have with academy. These are as follows: (delete as appropriate)

- You must be accompanied to any meeting with a member of academy staff
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff. You may contact either myself or Mrs Sudbery.
- You may not attend any events for parents except those where you will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the academy.
- Other as are reasonable and proportionate

The restrictions above are provisional until they have been reviewed by the Chair of Governors. Please consider them to be in force until you receive her confirmation.

The Chair of Governors, Nick Minkoff, will need to decide whether it is appropriate to confirm or overturn this decision. You may, if you wish, send him in writing, any comments or observations of your own within 10 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct. The Chair of Governors will then write to you with the outcome of his decision.

If on receipt of your comments, the Chair of Governors considers that my decision should be confirmed, you will be supplied with details of how the conditions will be reviewed by the governing body.

Yours sincerely

Principal

cc: Chair of Governors
cc: Trust CEO

Model Letter 3: Letter to confirm or overturn Principal's decision to impose conditions (sent by chair of governors)

Recorded delivery

Dear

Ms Warwick wrote to you on (date) to detail concerns about an incident when your behaviour towards (name) fell short of what we would expect as an academy. You will be aware that she has written to you previously about your behaviour towards staff.

I have not received a written response from you/I have received a letter from you dated, the contents of which I have considered carefully.

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Principal's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose conditions on your contact with academy should be confirmed. The conditions are as follows:

- (Copy conditions from Principal's letter)

This decision will be reviewed by the governing body in approximately six months' time. The Clerk to the Governors will write to you in advance of the meeting to ask you to provide a written statement for their consideration. When deciding whether it will be necessary to extend the application of conditions to attend academy premises, consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you; and any evidence of your co-operation with the academy in other respects.

OR

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Principal's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose conditions on you should be overturned. You may hence attend academy events as normal. However, should there be a repeat of inappropriate behaviour towards staff all of the above sanctions may be applied.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors

cc: Principal
cc: Trust CEO

Model Letter 4: Imposition of a ban on contacting or attending the academy, pending review (sent by Principal)

Recorded delivery

Dear

I have received a report from the (name of staff) about your conduct on

..... at

(add summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

You will recollect that I have already written to you about a previous incident on (date) warning you of the consequence of any further insulting or aggressive behaviour on your part.

I must inform you that the governors, in line with our policy, will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the academy premises and will act to defend academy staff and pupils.

I am therefore writing to inform you that I am recommending imposing a ban on you attending or contacting the academy. This means you may not attend academy for any reason whatsoever. You must not make contact with any member of staff by telephone or email. You do, however, have the right to attend one meeting per year to discuss your child's progress. This meeting will be with me. I will contact you to arrange this at the time of the next Academic Review Day.

The restrictions above are provisional until they have been reviewed by the Chair of Governors. Please consider them to be in force until you receive her confirmation.

The Chair of Governors, Nick Minkoff, will need to decide whether it is appropriate to confirm or overturn this decision. Please send him, in writing, any comments or observations of your own within 10 working days of the date of this letter. These comments may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct.

If, on receipt of your comments, the Chair of Governors considers that my decision should be confirmed, you will be supplied with details of how this ban will be reviewed by the governing body.

Yours sincerely

Principal

cc: Chair of Governors
cc: Trust CEO

Model Letter 5: Letter to confirm or overturn Principal's decision to impose a ban (sent by chair of governors)

Recorded delivery

Dear

Mrs Warwick wrote to you on (date) to detail concerns about an incident when your behaviour towards (name) fell far short of what we would expect as an academy. You will be aware that she has written to you previously about your behaviour towards staff.

I have not received a written response from you/I have received a letter from you dated, the contents of which I have considered carefully.

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Principal's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose a ban on you should be confirmed. This means you may not attend the academy for any reason whatsoever. You must not make contact with any member of staff by telephone or email. You do, however, have the right to attend one meeting per year to discuss your child's progress. This meeting will be with a member of the senior team.

This decision will be reviewed in six months' time by the governing body. The Clerk to the Governors will write to you in advance of the meeting of the governing body to ask you to provide a written statement for their consideration. When deciding whether it will be necessary to extend the application of conditions to attend academy premises, consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you and any evidence of your co-operation with the academy in other respects.

OR

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Principal's report and your letter, I have determined that the decision to impose a ban should be overturned. You may hence attend academy events as normal. However, should there be a repeat of inappropriate behaviour towards staff all of the above sanctions may be applied.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors

cc: Principal
cc: Trust CEO

Model Letter 6: Letter from clerk to the governors requesting parents' statement for review by GB (sent by clerk to governors)

Recorded delivery

Dear

Mrs Warwick wrote to you on (date) to detail concerns about your behaviour towards academy staff/students which fell short of what we would expect as an academy. As a result of this incident, conditions were imposed on you/a ban was imposed.

This decision will be reviewed by the governing body at their next meeting on (date).

I am writing to ask whether you would like to make a written statement to governors for their consideration in making the decision whether to remove the restriction or extend it.

If you should wish to make a written statement, please can you email it to me at (address) by (date – parents should be given 10 days to respond).

Yours sincerely

Clerk to Governors

cc: Principal
cc: Trust CEO

Model Letter 7: Letter detailing outcome of governing body's review (sent by Clerk to governors)

Dear

I wrote to you on (date) to request a statement to enable governors to review the academy's decision to impose conditions/ban you from attending academy premises.

I have not received a written response from you/I have received a letter from you dated, the contents of which were considered carefully by the governors at their meeting on (date).

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Principal's report (and your letter), governors have determined that the decision to impose conditions/ban you from attending or contacting the academy attend should be confirmed. The conditions of your attendance on site are as follows:

- You must be accompanied to any meeting with a member of academy staff
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff. You may contact either Mrs Warwick or Mrs Sudbery.
- You may not attend any events for parents except those where you will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the academy.
- Any other condition imposed.

OR

- You must not attend any event in the academy except for an annual meeting about your child's progress. This meeting will be conducted by Mrs Warwick.
- You may not contact by telephone or in writing any member of staff.

This decision will be reviewed again in six months' time. When deciding whether it will be necessary to extend the application of conditions to attend academy premises, consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you; and any evidence of your co-operation with the academy in other respects.

OR

In the circumstances, and after further consideration of the Principal's report and your letter, governors have determined that you should once again be allowed to attend parents' events as usual. All conditions have been removed. However, should there be a repeat of inappropriate behaviour towards staff this decision may be revoked.

Yours sincerely

Clerk to Governors

cc: Principal
cc: Trust CEO

Future Academies | Dealing with Abusive Parents Policy

Document control table			
Document title:		Dealing with Abusive Parents Policy	
Author (name & job title):		Principal	
Version number:			
Date created:			
Date approved:			
Approved by:			
Review information:			
Last internal review:		September 2021	
Last review by Governors/Directors:			
Document History			
Version	Date	Author	Note of revisions