

Glenlola Collegiate School

“EXCELLENCE THROUGH COMMITMENT, CONTRIBUTION and CARING”

Unacceptable Behaviour Policy



1. Introduction

1.1 Glenlola Collegiate School (hereafter referred to as ‘the School’) is committed to providing high quality education to its pupils and believes that constructive and open engagement with parents and carers allows us to do this effectively. However, the School prioritises highly a safe working environment for staff, and aims to ensure working conditions that enable efficient and effective working. Everyone who approaches the School has the right to be heard, understood and respected. The School also considers that its staff have the same rights.

The School aims to engage constructively with parents, carers and other members of the public. However, on occasions individuals may make unreasonable demands that could affect the service we provide to our pupils, or may communicate with the School in a manner which causes offence to staff. The expectation that those who contact the School treat our staff with respect and courtesy is reflected also in our Values and Expected Behaviours document which is available from the School on request. The School reserves the right to manage contacts in an appropriate manner to protect our staff and to maintain the effectiveness of our service (ref: TNC 2011/2 *Policy Statement on Tackling Violence and Abusive Behaviour against Teachers*).

1.2 This policy sets out the approach which will be taken on the rare occasions where the actions or behaviour of an individual are considered unacceptable.

2. Policy Aims

This policy aims to:

2.1 Support constructive engagement with all who contact the School whilst asserting the right, where it considers an individual’s actions or behaviour to be unacceptable, to restrict or change access to members of staff.

2.2 Protect staff, in accordance with the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 and associated legislation; recognising the School’s responsibility as an employer for providing a safe and healthy workplace and, as far as is reasonably practicable, a risk free working environment for all its staff.

2.3 Support staff in intervening early in any interaction where an individual is verbally abusive or is behaving unacceptably. This is with a view to addressing the situation at the earliest stage, altering the tone of the communication and where possible averting the need for full application of the measures contained in this document.

2.4 Ensure that those who contact the School do not, by their behaviour or conduct, disadvantage others or place unreasonable demands on staff.

3. Policy Scope

This policy applies to any individual who is interacting or communicating with the School.

3.1 The policy covers all areas of work undertaken by the School and all of its staff. It also applies to external service providers, for example independent professional advisors, Legal and other professional

service providers. It is not therefore necessarily restricted to matters relating to the investigation of complaints.

4. Defining Unacceptable Behaviour

4.1 It is accepted that individuals may act out of character in times of difficulty or distress, as they may have encountered upsetting or distressing circumstances prior to contacting the School. The School does not necessarily view behaviour as unacceptable simply because an individual is assertive or emotional. However, angry, demanding, or persistent behaviour, may result in unreasonable demands on the School, and may have an unacceptable impact on staff.

4.2 Unacceptable behaviour can be grouped under three headings:

- Aggressive or abusive language or behaviour;
- Unreasonable demands;
- Unreasonable persistence.

4.2.1 Aggressive or Abusive Language or Behaviour

Staff can expect to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Staff understand that people can become angry or frustrated when they feel that matters about which they feel strongly are not being dealt with as they expect. Where that anger escalates into aggression towards staff, this is unacceptable. Such aggression may include behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

Specific examples of actions or behaviours which fall under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and rudeness, regardless of the method of communication.

The School also considers that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations may be regarded as abusive behaviour. This can include inappropriate use of social or other media.

4.2.2 Unreasonable Demands

Complainants or others contacting the School may make what the School considers to be unreasonable demands due to the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the number of contacts made.

What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances and context for the behaviour, as well as the seriousness of the issues raised by the individual.

Examples of actions which may be considered an unreasonable demand include:

- demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale
- demanding responses from several members of staff on the same subject
- insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff who is unavailable or not involved in their case

- continual phone calls or letters
- repeatedly changing the substance and focus of the issue/complaint, or raising unrelated concerns.

Such demands may be considered unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the School, i.e. taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of others.

4.2.3 Unreasonable Persistence

The School recognises that some complainants will not, or cannot, accept that the School is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Complainants may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their complaint or may contact the School persistently about the same issue.

Examples of actions which may be considered unreasonable persistence include:

- vexatious complaints (see further at **Annex1**)
- persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the School can or cannot do

The way in which the School is approached may be entirely reasonable, but it is the persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not. The actions of persistent individuals are considered to be unacceptable when they take up a disproportionate amount of time and resources and thereby disadvantage other service users or place unreasonable demands on School staff.

5. Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour – Early Intervention

5.1 The School aims to address unacceptable behaviour in a way, wherever possible, that allows a complaint or enquiry to progress to completion through the School's normal assessment and investigation processes. The School also seeks to support staff in intervening early in an interaction where an individual is verbally abusive or is behaving unacceptably. This is with a view to addressing the situation at the earliest stage, altering the tone of the communication and where possible averting the need for full application of the measures set out in points 6 -10 of this policy.

5.2 In the case of **telephone calls**, where the caller is rude, offensive, abusive or intimidating, members of staff will inform the caller that their behaviour or language is unacceptable in the hope that it will prompt the individual to moderate this behaviour or agree to be called back at a time when they may be calmer. However, if the caller continues to be offensive or abusive, the call will be terminated. Our staff have the right to make this decision.

5.3 Such calls should be logged by the individual member of staff via the School Office on the Case Handling System with brief details of the reason the call was terminated and should also be reported to their line manager to ensure a fair and reasonable process.

5.4 In more extreme situations, the School will inform the person in writing that it will not permit any personal contact from them. This means that the School will limit contact with them to either written communication or through a third party.

5.5 Similarly, where **correspondence** is received (either **letter or electronic**) that is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence, the School will inform the sender that it considers their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful and will ask them to stop using such language. The School will ask that the sender edit their correspondence to remove any offensive text and resend it, otherwise it will not be responded to.

5.6 The same early intervention principles as described above for telephone calls should be applied in the case of all such correspondence.

6. Dealing with More Severe or Immediate Cases of Unacceptable Behaviour

6.1 Unfortunately, there may be rare cases where it is immediately apparent that efforts to de-escalate a situation are not feasible. The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse, or harassment towards the staff is likely to result in the ending of all direct contact with the complainant. Incidents may be reported to the police, i.e. if physical violence is used or threatened.

6.2 In such cases subsequent contact may be restricted in person, by telephone, letter or electronically or by any combination of these. The School will endeavour to maintain at least one form of contact. In the most severe cases, the individual will be notified in writing that their name is on a 'no personal contact' list. This means that they must restrict contact with the School to either written communication (including email) or through a third party.

6.3 If a complainant repeatedly phones, visits the School, or raises the same issues, a decision may be taken to:

- 6.3.1 only take telephone calls from the complainant at set times on set days, or put an arrangement in place for only one member of staff to deal with the calls or correspondence in the future.
- 6.3.2 require the complainant to either make an appointment to see a named member of staff before visiting the School, or to only contact the School in writing.
- 6.3.3 take other action that is considered appropriate. The complainant will be advised of what action is to be taken and the reasons for doing so.

6.4 If during the course of their work, i.e. phone call or interview, a member of staff encounters an individual who is particularly aggressive, they should speak immediately to the Principal or a Vice Principal. The action taken may include reporting the matter to the police, seeking specific advice in respect of security concerns.

6.5 **Correspondence** – The School will not normally deal with correspondence (letter, or electronic) that is abusive to staff. When such correspondence is received, the complainant will be advised that their language is considered to be offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. They will be asked to refrain from using such language and advised that they will not receive a response to their correspondence until they do.

6.6 Telephone Calls – A member of staff may decide to terminate a telephone call if the caller is considered to be aggressive, abusive or offensive. However, before terminating a telephone call, the caller should normally be informed that their behaviour is unacceptable and that the call will be terminated if the unacceptable behaviour does not stop. If a call is terminated in such circumstances, the member of staff should make a note of the action taken and the reasons for doing so. The matter should also be brought to the attention of their Line Manager and the Principal.

6.7 Personal Callers to the School – Anyone wishing to meet a member of staff should make an appointment to do so. Only in exceptional circumstances might a member of staff, exercising their own discretion, decide to meet where no appointment has been made. If, on arrival at the School, a caller appears to be aggressive or abusive, they should be asked to wait in Reception. The Principal or a Vice Principal should be informed immediately, and any subsequent interview should be conducted by them accompanied by another member of staff. During any such interview, the interview room should be kept under surveillance. Arrangements can be made for an Authorised Officer (under the Public Order (NI) Order 1987) to be available, or for PSNI attendance if necessary.

6.8 Persistent Disputes Regarding a Decision – If the School has responded in detail to an expression of dissatisfaction, and the complainant continues to dispute the decision relating to their complaint, any further correspondence from the complainant will be regarded as ‘unreasonably persistent’. The complainant should be told that no future phone calls will be accepted, or interviews granted concerning this complaint, and that any future contact on the issue must be submitted in writing. Such correspondence will be noted and filed, and only acknowledged or responded to if the complainant provides significant new information relating to the complaint.

6.9 Information from a Third Party Regarding a Complainant – From time to time, the School may be made aware during investigations that a complainant has a history of aggressive behaviour, often towards staff concerned. Where such information is provided, it should be reported to the Principal or a Vice Principal immediately.

7. Deciding to Restrict Complainant Contact

7.1 Staff of the School who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour from a complainant have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this Policy. With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to restrict ongoing contact with the School are only taken after careful consideration of the situation by the Principal. Wherever possible, the School will give a complainant the opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before such a decision is taken. Complainants will be informed, in writing, why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place (if relevant) and right of appeal (see below).

8. Appealing a Decision to Restrict Contact

8.1 A complainant can appeal a decision to restrict contact. A member of the Senior Leadership Team who was not involved in the original decision should consider any such appeal. Having considered the complainant's appeal, they should advise the complainant in writing that either the restricted contact arrangements continue to apply or that a different course of action has been agreed.

9. Failure to Comply with Restrictions

9.1 Failure to comply with restrictions arising from the application of this policy will result in escalation. The manner and degree of this escalation shall be determined on a case-by-case basis.

10. Recording and Reviewing a Decision to Restrict Contact

10.1 The School records all incidents of unacceptable actions by complainants. Where it is decided to restrict complainant contact, an entry noting this should be made. The School will also maintain a central register of all individuals who are subject to contact restrictions.

10.2 A decision to restrict contact may be reconsidered if the complainant demonstrates a more acceptable approach. The Principal will regularly review the status of all complainants with restricted contact arrangements including any time frames in place.

11. Policy Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed by the Principal every three years, or more frequently if required.

Annex 1

Vexatious Complainants

1. A complainant may be defined as ‘habitual’ or ‘vexatious’ where current or previous contact with them demonstrates that they:
 - i. change the substance of a complaint, continually raise new issues, or seek to prolong contact by continually raising further concerns or questions upon receipt of a response whilst the complaint is being addressed. Care must be taken not to discard new issues that are significantly different from the original complaint as these might need to be addressed as separate complaints.
 - ii. are unwilling to accept documented evidence as being factual; deny receipt of an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions; or do not accept that facts can sometimes be difficult to verify when a long period of time has elapsed.
 - iii. do not clearly identify the precise issues that they wish to have investigated, despite reasonable efforts of staff and, where appropriate, third party advisors to help them specify their concerns; and/or where the concerns identified are not within the School’s remit to investigate.
 - iv. focus on a trivial matter to an extent that is out of proportion to its significance, and continue to focus on this point. It is recognised that determining what is a ‘trivial’ matter can be subjective, and careful judgement must be used in applying this criterion.
 - v. have, in the course of their complaint, had an excessive number of contacts with the School placing unreasonable demands on staff. Contact may be in person or by telephone, letter or fax. Discretion must be used in determining the precise number of ‘excessive contacts’ applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each individual case.
 - vi. have harassed, been personally abusive, or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with their complaint. Staff must recognise that complainants may sometimes act out of character at times of stress, anxiety, or distress and should make reasonable allowances for this. All incidents of harassment must be recorded.
 - vii. are known to have recorded meetings or face-to-face / telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
 - viii. display unreasonable demands or expectations, and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable, i.e. insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is either reasonable or normal practice.