



# Holly Park School

## Vexatious Parent Policy

Holly Park enjoys very good relationships with parents. The School welcomes the opportunity to receive positive comments from parents/carers and others when services are appreciated, but is also keen to know when and where there are concerns.

We are committed to dealing with concerns or complaints fairly and professionally and there is a complaints policy in place outlining the agreed routes through which concerns can be raised, recognised and resolved.

The vast majority of complaints and concerns are managed very successfully in an informal but thorough manner. However, a very small minority of parents/carers raise concerns or complaints that are vexatious or unreasonably persistent or conduct themselves in such a way that it is extremely difficult for the school to operate effectively or to maintain a safe and secure environment for staff, learners, visitors and parents/carers alike.

Complainants may make what we consider unreasonable demands on the school for example through:

- the amount of information they seek;
- the nature and scale of service they expect ;
- the number of approaches they make.

Examples of vexatious parents may include:

- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff -for example excessive telephoning or sending emails, writing lengthy complex letters or emails regularly or expecting immediate responses;
- Being abusive, intimidating, passive aggressive or threatening to staff, either by telephone, in writing (including emails and social media) or in meetings;
- Arriving at School without an appointment and demanding to see staff (including the demand to see particular members of staff);
- Refusing to leave the School premises when requested;
- Expecting or demanding return telephone calls or responses within an unreasonable timeframe;
- Refusing to accept the requirements or process outlined in the Complaints Policy;
- Refusing to accept the outcome of the Complaints Policy

### **1. Introduction**

The Headteacher and SMT deal with specific concerns or complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school. The majority of concerns or complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant.

However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school and directly or indirectly on the overall wellbeing of the staff in the school.

In these exceptional circumstances, the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

### **2. Aims of the policy**

The aims of this policy are to:

- Uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint;
- Support the well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents;
- Deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff (in whatever format) in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

### **3. Parents expectations of the school**

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

- Respond within a reasonable time;
- Respond with courtesy and respect;
- Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means
- Ensure that the Complaints policy and this policy are available on the school's website.

### **4. The schools' expectations of parents/carers/members of the public**

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

- Treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;
- Respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;
- Avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
- Avoid any aggression, verbal abuse or other intimidating behaviour;
- Avoid being threatening or passive aggressive in tone either verbally or in writing;
- Ensure that written communications state the facts surrounding the concern without using threatening or unpleasant language;
- Recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;
- Use the appropriate channels to make contact with the school;
- Avoid contacting the Headteacher constantly for small matters that can be dealt with by other members of staff;
- Avoid being derogatory about the school or members of staff on social media;
- Avoid using social media to rally other parents to their cause;
- Recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time;

### **5. Who is a persistent complainant?**

For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who constantly complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable.

Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- Prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern/s or complaint/s;
- Constant and prolific correspondence or excessive e-mails or telephone contact about various issues
- Uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- An insistence upon pursuing concerns or complaints in an unreasonable manner;

- An insistence on only dealing with the Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions above, in such a way that they:

- Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or;
- Cause on-going distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or;
- Have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or;
- Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

## **6. The schools' actions in cases of persistent or vexatious complaints or harassment**

### **In the first instance**

The school will communicate either in writing or verbally (confirmed with a letter) to inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

### **If the behaviour is not modified**

The school will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only;
- In the case of physical, or verbal aggression or other forms of intimidating behaviour, take appropriate advice and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- Consider taking appropriate advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- Limiting the complainant to one type of contact (e.g. telephone, letter, email, etc.)
- Placing limits on the number and duration of contacts with staff per week or month
- Requiring contact to take place with a named member of staff and informing the complainant that if they do not keep to these arrangements, any further correspondence that does not highlight any significantly new matters will not necessarily be acknowledged and responded to, but will be kept on file
- Requiring any face to face contacts to take place in the presence of a witness and in a suitable location and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- In the event of extreme situations or events, the school may take the decision to implement one of the above steps immediately. In this situation, the complainant will be informed in writing.

Ultimately, If a parent is continually and constantly unhappy with the school, they may consider if Holly Park is in fact the best choice of school for them or their children.

The Head and SMT will keep the Chair of Governors informed at all times.

If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances, advice may be sought from HR/Legal Services.

## Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

It is the responsibility of the Governing Body to monitor the effective deployment of this policy. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.



This policy will be reviewed on a biannual basis.

### Document Control

#### Revision History

| Version | Revision Date | Revised By | Revision                            |
|---------|---------------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1.0     | Autumn 2021   | Full Govs  | Written by Ann Pelham               |
| 1.1     | Spring 2022   | Full Govs  | Reviewed and ratified by full govts |
| 1.2     | Spring 2024   | Full Govs  | Reviewed and ratified by full govts |

#### Signed by

|                    | Name          | Signature  | Date       |
|--------------------|---------------|--|------------|
| Headteacher        | Ann Pelham    |  | March 2024 |
| Chair of Governors | Clare Hegarty |  | March 2024 |

#### Distribution

| Shared with   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff via school server</li><li>• Parents via Website</li><li>• Governors via full governing body</li></ul> |

| Date for next review |
|----------------------|
| Spring 2026          |