

HABITUAL (*PERSISTENT*) OR VEXATIOUS (*UNREASONABLE*) COMPLAINTS – School Website Copy

Habitual and/or vexatious complainants can be a problem for staff and governors. The difficulty in handling such complaints can place a strain on time and resources. Whilst the school endeavours to respond with patience and sympathy to the needs of all complainants, there are times when there is nothing further which can reasonably be done to assist or to rectify a real or perceived problem.

Where a complainant tries to raise an issue which has already been dealt with through the school's complaints procedure, and everything that could be reasonably done in response to the complaint has been done, the school will not reinvestigate the complaint except in exceptional circumstances, such as if new evidence has come to light.

Each case will be viewed individually and decided on its merit. However, a complainant (and / or anyone acting on their behalf) may be deemed to be habitual or vexatious if previous or current contact with them shows that they may meet any or all of the following criteria, dependent upon degree.

Where complainants:

- Refuse to co-operate with the school's relevant procedures.
- Change the basis of the complaint as the complaint progresses by raising further concerns or questions.
- Are unwilling to accept the final decision and seek an unrealistic outcome.
- Refuse to accept documented evidence of action taken or denies receiving information in spite of correspondence specifically answering their questions.
- Have meetings or telephone conversations recorded and circulated to others without the prior knowledge and consent of all parties involved.
- While addressing a complaint, have an excessive number of contacts with the school, placing unreasonable demands on staff time. A contact may be in person, or by telephone, letter, or email.
- Seek to pursue a complaint where the concerns identified are not within the remit of the Governing Board to investigate.
- Make unreasonable demands and fail to accept that these may be unreasonable, for example, insisting on responses to complaints of enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or within the complaints procedure or normal recognised practice.
- Harass or are personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with the complaint. Staff recognise, however, that complainants may sometimes act out of character in terms of stress, anxiety or distress and will make reasonable allowances for this. They will document all instances of harassment, abusive or verbally aggressive behaviour.

Dealing with Habitual (*Persistent*) or Vexatious (*Unreasonable*) Complaints

In cases of persistent or unreasonable complaints, or harassment, the Headteacher and Chair of Governors will determine what action to take. It may be decided to deal with complainants in one or more of the following ways:

- Inform the complainant that their behaviour is now considered to be unreasonable or unacceptable and request a changed approach.
- Withdraw contact with the complainant either in person, by telephone, by email, by fax, by letter or any combination of these, provided that at least one form of contact is maintained.
- To restrict contact to liaison through a designated member of staff.
- Notify the complainant in writing that the Governing Board has responded fully to the points raised and has tried to resolve the complaint but there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose.
- Inform the complainant that any form of contact in relation to their complaint, or similar issues to their complaint, will be acknowledged but not answered.
- Withdraw Implied Permission which allows the complainant to enter the school site, without prior written consent either using the school's policy for Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour on School Premises, and / or seeking legal advice to ensure the appropriate procedures are used.

When a complainant has been determined as habitual or vexatious, that status will be regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, withdrawn at a later date. This action may be appropriate when the complainant demonstrates a more reasonable approach or submits a further complaint which will be dealt with as a new complaint.

A panel of 3 governors should review a decision to categorise a complainant as habitual or vexatious every six months and decide if that category can be amended or withdrawn. The complainant will be given notice of this decision immediately.

Copies of all decisions relating to the categorisation of a person as a habitual or vexatious complainant will be sent to the Governance Professional who will hold and maintain a central, secure register of such decisions.