



Persistent or Unreasonable Complaints and Unacceptable Communications Policy

Approved by Governing Body December 2021

Review due: December 2023

1. **Policy Principles**

- 1.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the school's Complaints Procedure and Behaviour Policy.
- 1.3 Preston Grange Primary School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality and timely service to those who raise concerns. We are committed to building and promoting mutual respect between our parent/carer community, the wider community and our school. We will not normally limit the contact that anyone has with our school. 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. This policy sets out the expectations of the school, parents/carers and members of the community when making or handling complaints as well as general communication.

2. **Parent's and Carer's Expectations of the School**

- 2.1 Preston Grange Primary School is committed to dealing with queries and requests. When raising informal or formal issues or complaints with school staff you can expect them to:
- Communicate the correct channels that are available to raise informal and formal concerns (such as directing general enquiries to the school office).
 - Follow the Complaints Procedure and keep the complainant informed of the progress made in respect of their concern, query, or complaint
 - Respond to queries and requests within a reasonable timeframe
 - Be available to discuss concerns within a reasonable timeframe, keeping in mind that the needs of pupils will always be prioritised
 - Speak to everyone with courtesy and respect

3. **The School's Expectations of Parents and Carers**

3.1 **Contact**

In the first instance we expect all contact with Preston Grange Primary School to be made through the school office, either by email, letter, or by telephone. Your correspondence will then be dealt with by the relevant person.

- 3.2 Preston Grange Primary School expects the following behaviour from parents/carers and member of the community in all communication with members of school staff:
- Communicate with, and behave towards, staff with courtesy and respect
 - Ensure that all written communication (emails, letters) is written respectfully, addressing the member of staff appropriately and in a suitable tone
 - Avoid aggressive or threatening language in any communication with the school
 - Avoid the use of, or threat of violence of any kind
 - Recognise the time constraints on school staff and allow reasonable timeframes for responses to general queries and requests
 - Follow the school's Complaint Procedure

- Avoid publishing unacceptable informationⁱ on social media or any other public forum

4. **What is a Persistent or Unreasonable Complaint**

- 4.1 Preston Grange Primary School defines a persistent or unreasonable complaint as a complaint made to the school in any format which displays unreasonable behaviour.

Some of the features that we identify as unreasonable behaviour are:

- 4.1.1 Refusal to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- 4.1.2 Refusal to co-operate with the complaint investigation process.
- 4.1.3 Refusal to accept the scope of the Complaint Procedure and/or when matters are outside the remit of the school
- 4.1.4 Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the Complaints Procedure or with good practice.
- 4.1.5 Introduces trivial or irrelevant information, as deemed by the Governing Body, which they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
- 4.1.6 Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- 4.1.7 Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- 4.1.8 Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- 4.1.9 Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses).
- 4.1.10 Refusal to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- 4.1.11 Makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with or seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- 4.1.12 Uses threats to intimidate staff members in any forum.
- 4.1.13 Uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.
- 4.1.14 Knowingly provides falsified information.
- 4.1.15 Publishes unacceptable informationⁱⁱ on social media or other public forums, including school-focused group chats (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger).
- 4.1.16 Contributes to 'mobbing' (bullying of an individual by a group, including virtual mobbing).

- 4.1.17 Any other behaviour which causes ongoing distress to individual members of school staff and/or has a significant impact on the school community. This could include

situations where cumulative criticisms and demands have an impact upon staff wellbeing and health.

5. **Managing Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints and Unacceptable Communication**

- 5.1 If the school's ability to respond to the complaint is impacted by any of the behaviours set out in **Section 4**, the school may need to take action to control and manage the situation safely and effectively. Behaviours which fall short of the expectations outlined in **Section 3** may also be subject to these steps.

The school may take any of the following actions as deemed necessary by the Headteacher:

- 5.2 The individual will be informed that their behaviour is unreasonable and is therefore being managed under this policyⁱⁱⁱ. If it is the first instance the complainant will be asked to modify their behaviour to prevent further action being taken in accordance with this policy. Complainants may be asked to resubmit their complaints within five school days removing any inappropriate language or threats so that the matter can be considered.
- 5.3 The individual may be informed that any discussions held with members of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that minutes of the meeting will be taken and retained by the school.
- 5.4 Where physical or verbal aggression or any form of intimidation is exhibited, the school will consider banning the individual from the school site. A temporary ban may be put in place at the discretion of the Headteacher in line with the DFE's Guidance 'Controlling access to school premises' document which covers the barring of individuals from school premises. Any decision to bar a person from the school site should be reviewed by either the Chair of Governors or a Committee of Governors. The person should be given the opportunity to make formal representations to the reviewer. If the decision to bar is upheld, the person should be notified in writing explaining how long the bar will last for and when the decision will next be reviewed.
- 5.5 Seek support and advice from the police regarding any behaviour which could be deemed to be criminal.
- 5.6 Take legal advice with regards to pursuing legal action for harassment, defamation, libel, or any other civil claim (either as a school or individual staff member).
- 5.7 Implement a communication strategy for the individual's communication with the school. Such a strategy could involve the individual having no direct communication with the Headteacher and instead liaising through an identified third party (such as a member of staff, a Governor or Committee of Governors) who would be responsible for determining the reasonableness of the complaint or communication before passing it on to the appropriate staff member. Any communication strategy will be reviewed after six months.

5.8

Any threat of violence or actual violence towards the school premises /property, members of staff or any individual on school premises or in any setting, whether this is physical or verbal, will result in the ending of all direct communication with the individual. The individual will be asked to communicate with the school through a third party, such as Citizen's Advice. The matter will be reported to the police immediately.

6. **Note: Exemptions under this Policy**

- 6.1 Regardless of any communication strategy, the school will provide parents and carers with the information they are entitled to under The Education (Pupil Information) (England) Regulations 2005 within the statutory time frame.
- 6.2 Requests and communication regarding Freedom of Information and Data Protection will be dealt with under the relevant legislation.
- 6.3 Where a complainant has been asked to re-submit their complaint within five school days removing any inappropriate content, the date the complaint was received for the purposes of the Complaints Procedure will remain the original date that the complaint was made. If a complainant does not re-submit their complaint within the timeframe, the school will still consider the complaint but may take further steps as outlined in this policy if the complaint and/or communication escalates.

^{i i} Examples of **unacceptable information** may include but are not limited to:

- Any personal comments about individual staff members, whether their name is used or not
- Any false statements about the school or staff members
- Comments which are derogatory or bring the school or any staff member into disrepute

ⁱⁱ As above.

Appendix A

Date _____

Dear _____

Preston Grange Primary School is committed to building and promoting mutual respect between our parent/carer community and our school.

Your **letter / email / telephone call / complaint / discussion with staff member** on **[date]** was not in keeping with the values and expectations that we hold as a school. **[Provide details]**

We kindly ask that you ensure all further communication follows the expectations set out in our Behaviour Policy and Unacceptable Communications Policy. **[Add specific detail of your request for future communication]**.

Yours sincerely,

EXAMPLE 1:

20th January 2021

Dear Mrs A,

Preston Grange Primary School is committed to building and promoting mutual respect between our parent/carer community and our school.

Your email dated 18th January 2021 addressed to Mrs B was not in keeping with the values and expectations that we hold as a school. In your email you used capital letters and exclamation marks which we deem to be offensive. In addition your demand for a response by the end of the school day was unreasonable.

We kindly ask that you ensure all further communication follows the expectations set out in our Behaviour Policy and Unacceptable Communications Policy. Emails to members of staff should be professional and courteous. Staff will always aim to respond to emails as soon as possible but cannot respond to routine emails within deadlines set by parents/carers.

Yours sincerely,

EXAMPLE 2:

25th January 2021

Dear Mrs A,

Preston Grange Primary School is committed to building and promoting mutual respect between our parent/carer community and our school.

Your complaint dated 20th January 2021 addressed to Mrs B was not in keeping with the values and expectations that we hold as a school. In your complaint you threatened to email Mrs B every day until she reaches a favourable outcome for you. We have also been informed that you have made personal and derogatory comments about Mrs B on social media.

We ask that you ensure all further communication follows the expectations set out in our Behaviour Policy and Unacceptable Communications Policy.

We are committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and in line with our Complaints Procedure. Under Section 5.2 of our Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints and Unacceptable Communications Policy we ask that you help us to resolve your concerns by doing the following:

- 1) Resubmit your complaint without the threat to email Mrs B every day within 5 schools days*
- 2) Immediately remove your personal and derogatory comments about Mrs B made on social media*

If you choose not to comply with these steps, we may take further actions as set out in our Persistent and Unreasonable Complaints and Unacceptable Communications Policy.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,