



# DISRUPTIVE VISITORS POLICY

Review Date:	Autumn 2020
Reviewed by:	Governing Body
Next review:	Autumn 2021

## 1. Policy Overview

All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe place in which to work and learn. Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence against school staff, or other members of the school community is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any incident will be treated seriously and a disruptive visitor may be banned from entering the school or even prosecuted.

Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence are not considered an acceptable part of any job, nor is it part of the duties of any employee to accept such behaviour.

Throughout this document where the term 'visitor' is used it covers any abusive parent or visitor to the school and is not confined to adults.

The Governing Body of The Downley School is committed to reducing the risks of its school staff from acts of violence and aggression by:

- Demonstrating to staff that the potential for violence at work is recognised
- Issuing clear procedures/guidelines, which include preventative and protective measures
- Providing adequate training to staff who may be subject to violence or abuse to develop their ability to anticipate violent incidents and deal with them
- Providing appropriate equipment where applicable
- Clarifying violent incident reporting and monitoring procedures
- Encouraging proper reporting of incidents and near misses and ensuring that school staff do not avoid reporting violent incidents in the belief that an assault may suggest a failure on the part of the member of staff concerned
- Supporting staff who have been subject to violent, threatening or abusive behaviour and offering counselling where appropriate
- Allocating adequate resources to support this Policy
- Reviewing this Policy statement, procedures, and guidelines regularly.

## 2. Types of Violence

In identifying types of violence, the governing body recognises that staff can be intimidated or threatened by a variety of circumstances, not simply physical assault, which includes:

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- Threatening behaviour
- Gesturing
- Abusive telephone calls, letters, faxes, emails, website entries
- Swearing, shouting insults etc.
- Innuendo
- Deliberate silence
- Intimidating behaviour causing fear or emotional upset.

## 3. Staff Procedure for dealing with Incidents involving Violent, Threatening or Abusive Visitors

3.1. These procedures have been drawn up in discussion with staff following an assessment of risk to staff and others from abusive and violent visitors. They will be reviewed on a regular basis and the procedural details can be found in Appendix A under the following headings:

### 4. Avoiding an Incident

Parents, or members of the public, may arrive in a tense, agitated state and how they are initially dealt with might well make the difference between a minor exchange of words and a violent confrontation.

Members of staff are entitled to support from their manager in handling a potentially difficult parent interview, so, if you have any concerns you should discuss them with your manager. Sensitivity towards parental difficulties is an asset. Many adults are still influenced by their own school and other childhood experiences, as well as their consequent expectations for their own children. Over anxious, or even ambitious, parents can feel very vulnerable.

#### 4.1 Preparation

This is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews prove constructive rather than confrontational. Always try to prepare in advance by:

- Gathering information that might help
- Ensuring the layout of the room is not intimidating for visitors and allows you to escape quickly; if possible position your chair/desk with the door behind you
- Positioning seating at equal height so that the parent does not feel patronised, and, if possible, at a 45-degree angle as this is less threatening. Avoid barriers if it is safe to do so.
- Considering items in the room that could be used as potential weapons
- Ensuring there is enough space in the room, whilst also making it appear intimate and relaxing (this can be achieved through lighting and warm colouring). People can need greater personal space than normal when upset or angry and the proximity of others can be more threatening
- Having an alarm readily available
- Considering having a colleague present or pre-arranging with a colleague to check that all is well, if you have reason to believe that the visitor has a previous history of aggression or violence, or appears to be aggressive or violent.

#### 4.2 Removal

Try to remove an angry or upset person from an audience, or, if easier, remove the audience and do not leave them waiting unnecessarily. The fewer people that are involved in an incident, the easier it is for an aggressor to back down without losing face.

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## 4.3 Be Yourself

Minimise a parent/visitor's frustration by being yourself. Do not hide behind authority, status or a job title. By using your name instead of a description of your status, you are presenting yourself as another human being.

Later on, it may be important to explain what authority or status you have in order to reassure the visitor that you are in a position to act on their behalf.

## 4.4 Interpersonal Skills

- Keep the discussion as calm and friendly as possible, paraphrasing what has been said and using sympathy and empathy where appropriate.
- Summarise what has been said and follow through. This will help to build trust and respect.
- Later on, it may be important to explain what authority or status you have in order to reassure the visitor that you are in a position to act on their behalf.
- Keeping the visitor talking and explaining the problem, their perception of what has happened, why they feel aggrieved. Use verbal and non-verbal prompts (saying 'mmm' or 'yes' or nodding) to keep them talking. Use open questions to encourage them to talk and explain
- Listening and allowing the visitor to express any complaint, without preventing them from finishing what they have to say. Listen empathetically without pre-judging or patronising. Listen also for the feelings, concerns and possible intentions behind their words
- Responding promptly, paying attention and showing that you do care about their problem. Don't keep leaving the room as this gives the message that you have other more important matters to deal with
- Being polite, pleasant and reassuring and do not show anger. Resist arguing. It is very tempting to respond and become engaged in an argument, especially if you are the butt of aggression or accused in some way, but it is far more likely to result in conflict or confrontation than contribute to defusing the situation.
- Paying attention to your body language so it is as non-threatening as possible. Avoid aggressive or defensive stances, such as arms folded, hands on hips or waving fingers or arms. Try to relax your facial muscles and convey openness and empathy with the speaker. Make eye contact, but avoid constant eye contact that may be threatening or trigger aggression because it is perceived as staring
- Trying to explain clearly in jargon free language precisely what your difficulty is in giving the aggressive person what they want. Repeat it until you are sure you are understood because upset people do not always hear the first time
- Not making any promises, which you know you cannot keep as this may make things worse for you or your colleagues later.

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## 4.5 Further Guidance

The Educational Psychology Service has produced helpful guidance for schools on working with parents and it contains a number of useful proformas, including a meeting preparation checklist and forms for recording discussions/meetings with parents.

Make sure that you are aware of the school's emergency action plan/'lockdown' procedures and when these should be implemented.

## 5. Handling an Incident – General Principles

If someone becomes abusive or threatening, consider whether you can cope with the situation. You should not feel you have to cope with it alone: you should seek help from other people, or leave altogether. If a situation appears to be getting out of control, make an excuse and leave and immediately report the incident to the head teacher/designated person.

It is important that you:

- Know whether you are in a position to offer the parent a realistic and reasonable answer to their expectations
- Know whether you are competent to handle the situation
- Be confident you have back up
- Be assured you can summon help
- Have a plan of how to approach the problem.

First keep calm, relax, allow yourself time to think and decide the best course of action. Ask yourself if what has occurred so far in the exchange means that someone else, specially briefed by you, would be better placed to handle the situation.

Colleagues may have particular skills or experience that you do not have. The situation may be such that it requires specialist help, such as the police to eject a person; if so, you should get help quickly, before the situation deteriorates.

### 5.1 Warning Signs

Someone who is potentially, or about to become, violent can give out signs and signals that constitute a recognisable warning: -

- Agitation
- Tapping the table
- Loud speech/shouting
- Muscle tension in face, hands, limbs; fidgeting, hand-wringing; clenching fists
- Drawing breath in sharply
- Colour of face: pale is dangerous – the body is ready for action; a red face is likely to indicate a bark worse than the bite, but this could change
- Finger- wagging or jabbing
- Inability to be still, even pacing about
- Swearing
- Staring eyes
- Sweating
- Oversensitivity to ideas, suggestions
- Rapid mood swings.

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It should always be remembered that:

1. The physical safety of employees is more important than the security of buildings or property
2. When violence is threatened it is important that reasonable effort is made to control the situation
3. If a situation is out of control it is better to retreat and get away if possible
4. In controlling an incident, involvement of members of the public should be avoided
5. If an implement has been involved in an attack, this should be retained, provided this can be done without any risk
6. Physical intervention or restraint should always be regarded as an absolute last resort.

## 6. Action to be taken following an incident

- Seek medical attention, if required
- Report verbally to your head teacher/manager as soon as possible. Other staff may be at risk from the same person
- Complete an Incident Report Form and pass to your head teacher/manager for investigation, having sought Union advice, if appropriate
- Take time with your head teacher/manager to discuss the incident and your feelings
- Ask for assistance if you need it
- Consider Police involvement, if they are not already involved
- Seek advice on your entitlement to claim financial compensation, if appropriate.

In all cases of assault, causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury is advised to make a formal complaint to the Police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate. This decision, although personal, should be discussed with the head teacher/manager.

Employees have joint responsibility with their employer to review any incidents and identify the need for appropriate training and counselling, and specific strategies to reduce the level of risk.

## 7. Support

Occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling is available through the Local Authority's Employee Assistance Programme (0800 243 458).

## 8. Guidance for Head teachers/Managers

People with responsibility for staff management need to be committed to the objective of reducing violence and risks of violence to employees and ensuring that all staff receive appropriate training.

It is important to ensure that new members of staff are aware of this policy and procedures as part of their induction to the school and that they have access to appropriate training.

Staff should be aware that they could expect support from their manager/head teacher in managing parent interviews well.

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A formal notice should be displayed at the entrance(s) to the school informing visitors of the school's expectations about behaviour and/or that they may face prosecution for violent, threatening and abusive behaviour.

## 9. Role of Local Authority

Advice and support is available from the Local Authority through the School Improvement Service and the Legal Team and in LA maintained schools, the Local Authority will take a proactive role in taking all possible action to deal with incidents, in response to the wishes of the school.

## 10. Role of Thames Valley Police

### 10.1 Preventative Action

If head teachers or managers have any concerns or fears regarding a potentially violent, threatening or abusive visitor, they should not hesitate to contact the Police in advance for help and advice. Thames Valley Police are keen to support schools in the prevention of such incidents and will not consider any issue too small, if a school has concerns. They can provide advice and support, including being present on the premises when a visit is made, if it is agreed this would be helpful.

### 10.2 Action following an Incident

Where there has been any kind of affray, where an assault\* has resulted in actual injury, or where an employee has been seriously threatened, the Police should be called.

*\*An assault occurs when a person suffers, or is put in immediate fear of, personal injury by the deliberate or reckless act of another.*

Any incidents of a less serious or ambiguous nature should still be discussed with the Police.

In all cases of assault, causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury is advised to make a formal complaint to the Police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate. This decision, although personal, should be discussed with the head teacher/manager. Assault is a criminal offence, which may result in prosecution at court.

### 10.3 Contacting the Police

For non-urgent, preventative advice and support the non-emergency number for Thames Valley Police is 0845 8 505 505. Whenever there is an emergency and urgent support is required, the emergency 999 number should be used.

### 10.4 Action to be taken following an incident

- Provide access to a private area for as long as necessary where the member of staff can sit with a friend or colleague.
- Provide assistance, if necessary, for the member of staff to go home/visit their GP/attend hospital etc. A medical assessment of any injury should be made, as soon as practicable and, in case of visible injuries, it is helpful to obtain photographs.
- Make time for the employee to talk to you.
- Explain the employee's right to involve the Police if they so wish.
- Contact the Police as above under 'Role of Thames Valley Police.'

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- Provide the opportunity for the member of staff to consult his/her trade union representative before submitting their completed Incident Report Form/Statement (Appendix E).
- Report the incident by calling the Local Authority's Contact Centre having made use of the checklist of information required, included in Appendix F. It is recommended that Foundation and Voluntary Aided schools also do this.
- Carry out a thorough investigation into the incident. Available photographic evidence of any injuries or damage or relevant CCTV footage can be very helpful. Head teachers/managers should make sure that any CCTV footage is retained and not accidentally overwritten.
- Obtain written statements from witnesses as soon as possible after the incident (the sooner the better).
- All evidence obtained should be retained to support any action taken.
- Maintain regular contact with the person if they are off work because of the incident.
- Make the member of staff aware of the availability of occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme (0800 243 458).
- Review risk assessments and procedures following an incident and amend if necessary immediately.
- Ensure other relevant staff are informed of the incident and of any changes to working practices.

## 10.5 Reporting Procedures

A great deal of crime and other incidents often go unreported, sometimes because they are considered too trivial to report or, there is a view that no action will be taken when incidents do occur. Consequently, failure to report incidents and near misses gives a false picture of the real situation. As the employer, the Council/governing body\* has a duty to ensure a safe and secure workplace, but cannot help if it is unaware of problems.

Managers and staff must ensure that all incidents are properly reported and acted upon so that recurrence can be prevented. It is important to record the circumstances that led to violence as this may help identify what events may have triggered the incident and what systems or procedures may need revision.

As soon as practicable after the incident, a written statement/Incident report Form (Appendix E) should be prepared by the member of staff concerned which includes the circumstances leading up to the incident. It needs to contain sufficient detail to help identify appropriate preventive measures, and to help assess whether those measures were successful. Suggested details include information on:

- Where the incident occurred, including physical environment; the time of day;
- Activity at the time of the incident
- Details of the perpetrator
- The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator
- An account of what happened
- the outcome
- If preventive measures have been introduced, did they help?

The Head teacher should inform the Chairman of Governors in confidence of each incident. The Local Authority will be informed via the Contact Centre report, but, in addition, a telephone call to the School Improvement Area Offices will provide an immediate alert.

The school will need to retain proper evidence so that it can be used to support any action taken. Recording details of incidents will also help in reviewing the school's policy and should inform future risk assessments.

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## 11. Follow Up

The Head teacher will need to make a judgement as to whether the visitor is likely to become involved in such an incident again, or whether there were unique circumstances in this specific case. If it is likely that the behaviour will be repeated, a warning letter should be sent, explaining that the behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated on the school premises.

For future visits to the school, advance notice of an intention to visit could be required and an independent witness could be present.

In all cases of assault, causing actual injury the employee sustaining the injury should be advised to make a formal complaint to the Police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate.

The Local Authority has the power to ban anyone from coming onto school premises for a specified period. The Local Authority will liaise with the head teacher, taking into account their views in making such a decision. This decision will be communicated to the person concerned. In liaison with the Head teacher when the period elapses, the Local Authority will review whether the visitor's ban from the school premises should continue or whether it should be lifted.

The Local Authority will take a lead in this role and should be contacted if a disruptive person enters the school and the head teacher considers action is necessary.

For foundation or voluntary aided schools, the Local Authority can take action with the governing body's consent, or the governing body itself can authorise the banning of a parent from school premises or take further action.

If abusive behaviour is repeated, the visitor should be declared unwelcome and they can be ordered off the premises: as they then become a trespasser under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996. This power is usually delegated by the Local Authority (community, voluntary controlled and community special schools) or governing body (foundation or voluntary aided schools), to the Head teacher and caretaker.

In Buckinghamshire Community, Community Special and Voluntary Controlled Schools the view is taken that the governing body and head teacher have control of the occupation of the school premises, so the head teacher is the authorised person for the purposes of Section 547 of the Education Act.

