

Chorlton CofE Primary School Primary School Policy for managing
serial and unreasonable complaints

1. Introduction

Chorlton CE Primary School is committed to dealing with all informal concerns and formal complaints fairly, impartially, and in a timely manner. We aim to provide a high-quality service to all those who raise concerns or complaints (hereafter referred to as 'complainants,' encompassing those who informally raise concerns and those who make formal complaints).

While we value open communication and do not normally limit contact, we also have a duty to protect our staff from unacceptable behaviour. This policy outlines the school's approach to managing situations where complainants exhibit behaviour that is deemed unreasonable, abusive, offensive, or threatening, hindering the school's ability to address their concerns effectively. This policy is adapted from the DfE Model Policy.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define what constitutes a serial or unreasonable complaint.
- Outline the steps the school will take to manage such complaints.
- Protect staff from unreasonable, abusive, offensive, or threatening behaviour.
- Ensure that all complaints are dealt with fairly and impartially, within the bounds of reasonable and respectful communication.
- Maintain a safe and productive learning environment for all pupils and staff.
- Comply with relevant legislation and guidance.

3. Definition of Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

Chorlton CE Primary School defines unreasonable behaviour as conduct that hinders our consideration of concerns and complaints due to the frequency,

nature, or intensity of the complainant's contact with the school. This may include, but is not limited to, instances where the complainant:

- Refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds for complaint, or the desired outcomes, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process.
- Refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways that are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information that they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
- Raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- Makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues and seeks to have them replaced.
- Changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed), including referral to the Department for Education.
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- Makes excessive demands on school time through frequent, lengthy, and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email, or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- Uses threats to intimidate.
- Uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language or violence.
- Knowingly provides falsified information.
- Publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint while the complaint is being progressed. Repeated correspondence (either by letter, phone, email, or text) is unhelpful and could delay the outcome.

4. Procedure for Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints

The following procedure will be followed when dealing with serial and unreasonable complaints:

1. **Initial Assessment:** The Headteacher (or designated senior leader) will assess the complainant's behaviour to determine if it falls within the definition of unreasonable behaviour as outlined in this policy.
2. **Informal Discussion:** Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will communicate the concerns with the complainant informally to try and resolve the issues. This may involve:
 - Explaining the school's complaints procedure.
 - Clarifying the scope of the complaint.
 - Setting reasonable expectations for communication and response times.
 - Addressing any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.
3. **Written Warning:** If the unreasonable behaviour persists, the Headteacher (or designated senior leader) will send a formal written warning to the complainant. This warning will:
 - Clearly identify the specific behaviours that are considered unreasonable.
 - Explain the impact of these behaviours on the school's ability to address the complaint.
 - Outline the potential consequences of continuing the unreasonable behaviour, as detailed in section 5.
 - Offer a final opportunity for the complainant to modify their behaviour.
4. **Implementation of Restrictions:** If the complainant continues to exhibit unreasonable behaviour after receiving a written warning, the school may implement one or more of the following restrictions:
 - Limiting contact to a specific person or department within the school.
 - Restricting the mode of communication (e.g., requiring all communication to be in writing).
 - Setting time limits on telephone conversations.
 - Requiring all meetings to be conducted with a witness present.
 - Refusing to register new complaints while the unreasonable behaviour continues.
 - Temporarily suspending communication with the complainant.

5. **Notification of Restrictions:** The complainant will be notified in writing of any restrictions imposed, the reasons for the restrictions, and the duration of the restrictions.
6. **Review of Restrictions:** The Headteacher (or designated senior leader) will review the restrictions periodically to determine if they are still necessary and appropriate.
7. **Escalation:** In cases of serious harassment, threats, or violence, the school will consider involving the police or other relevant authorities.

5. Potential Consequences of Unreasonable Behaviour

The school reserves the right to take the following actions in response to persistent or severe unreasonable behaviour:

- **Limiting Contact:** Restricting the complainant's contact with specific staff members or departments.
- **Restricting Communication Methods:** Requiring all communication to be in writing (e.g., letters or emails).
- **Setting Time Limits:** Imposing time limits on telephone conversations or meetings.
- **Requiring Witnessed Meetings:** Mandating that all meetings be conducted with a witness present.
- **Refusing New Complaints:** Declining to register new complaints while the unreasonable behaviour continues.
- **Suspending Communication:** Temporarily suspending all communication with the complainant.
- **Legal Action:** In cases of serious harassment, threats, or violence, involving the police or pursuing legal action.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Headteacher:** Overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring this policy.
- **Designated Senior Leader:** Responsible for assessing and managing unreasonable complaints, issuing written warnings, and imposing restrictions.
- **Staff:** Responsible for reporting any instances of unreasonable behaviour to the Headteacher or designated senior leader.

- **Governing Body:** Responsible for reviewing and approving this policy and ensuring that it is implemented effectively.

7. Communication

This policy will be made available to all stakeholders, including parents, staff, and governors, through the following channels:

- School website
- School policy file on Google Drive

8. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years by the Headteacher (or designated senior leader) and the Governing Body to ensure that it is effective and compliant with relevant legislation and guidance.

9. Related Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following school policies and procedures:

- Complaints Policy
- Behaviour and Relationships Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Data Protection Policy

10. Framework Note

This policy aligns with the OFSTED inspection framework, particularly in relation to safeguarding, behaviour and attitudes, and leadership and management. By effectively managing unreasonable complaints, the school can ensure a safe and productive learning environment for all pupils and staff, and demonstrate its commitment to providing a high-quality education.