



# Hedingham School & Sixth Form

## Managing Serial and Unreasonable Complaints Policy 2025

*New Policy – Mr P Finch, Headteacher*

Approved by the Curriculum and Personnel Committee on:	26 February 2025
It was ratified by the Full Governing Body on:	
Next review due by:	

## **1. Introduction:**

1.1 Hedingham School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have 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.

1.2 Hedingham School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school. Examples include:

- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff whilst a complaint is being looked into, by for example excessive telephoning or sending emails to numerous staff, writing lengthy complex letters every few days and expecting immediate responses
- Being abusive to staff
- Refusing to accept the decision – repeatedly arguing the point and complaining about the decision.
- Introduces trivial or irrelevant information which 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)
- Refuses 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
- Seeks an unrealistic outcome
- 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
- 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

## **2. Defining Unacceptable Actions by Complainants**

2.1 People may act out of character in times of trouble or distress. There may have been upsetting or distressing circumstances leading up to a complaint coming to the school. The school does not view behaviour as unacceptable just because a complainant is forceful or determined. However, the actions of complainants who are angry, demanding or unreasonably persistent may result in unacceptable demands or behaviour towards school employees. It is these actions that the school considers unacceptable and aims to manage under this policy.

The school has grouped these actions under three broad headings:

### **2.1.1. Aggressive or Abusive Behaviour**

- (a) We expect our staff to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Quite often complainants are angered by decisions made by the school. However, it is not acceptable when anger escalates into aggression directed towards school staff.
- (b) Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
- (c) Examples of behaviours grouped under this heading include: Threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks and rudeness. We also consider that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can be abusive behaviour.

- (d) Where physical violence has been used or threatened towards staff or their families or associates at any time, this will, in itself, cause personal contact to be discontinued. Thereafter, only one form of contact may be used such as correspondence in writing. All such incidents should be documented and reported and notified, as appropriate, to the police.

### **2.1.2 Unreasonable Demands**

- (a) 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
- (b) What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances surrounding the behaviour and the seriousness of the issues raised by the complainant. b. Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:
- demanding responses within an unreasonable time-scale;
  - continually making phone calls or sending letters or emails;
  - repeatedly changing the substance of the complaint;
  - raising unrelated concerns
- (c) We consider these demands as unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the school, such as taking up an excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other complainants or functions.

### **2.1.3 Unreasonably Persistent**

- (a) We recognise that some complainants will not or cannot accept that the school is unable to assist them further or provide a level of service other than that provided already. Complainants may persist in disagreeing with the action or decision taken in relation to their complaint or contact the office persistently about the same issue.
- (b) Examples of actions grouped under this heading include:
- persistent refusal to accept a decision made in relation to a complaint;
  - persistent refusal to accept explanations relating to what the school can or cannot do;
  - continuing to pursue a complaint without presenting any new information
- (c) The way in which these complainants approach our office may be entirely reasonable, but it is their persistent behaviour in continuing to do so that is not.
- (d) We consider the actions of persistent complainants to be unacceptable when they take up what the school regards as being a disproportionate amount of time and resources.

## **3. Managing Unacceptable Actions by Complainants**

3.1 We do not deal with correspondence (letter or electronic) that is abusive to employees. When this happens

we tell the complainant that we consider their language to be offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful. We ask them to stop using such language and state that we will not respond to their correspondence if they do not stop. We may require future contact to be through a third party.

3.2 The school staff will end telephone calls if the caller is considered aggressive, abusive or offensive. The employee taking the call has the right to make this decision, tell the caller that the behaviour is unacceptable and end the call if the behaviour does not stop.

3.3 Where a complainant continues to correspond on a wide range of issues and, this action is considered excessive, then the complainant is told that only a certain number of issues will be considered in a given period and asked to limit or focus their requests accordingly.

## **4. Deciding to Restrict Complainant Contact**

4.1 When a complainant has been deemed vexatious or unreasonably persistent, the relevant member of staff will decide on what action to take, following advice from the Headteacher. (Staff who wish to invoke the policy

should seek advice from the Headteacher in the first instance). The complainant will be notified in writing outlining:

- the reason/s why the decision to apply the policy was taken;
- what it means for his or her contacts with the school;
- how long any restrictions will last; and
- what the complainant can do to have the decision reviewed

4.2 The school can decline further contact either in person, by telephone, letter or electronically, or any combination of these, provided that one form of contact is maintained. Alternatively, any further contact could be restricted to liaison through a third party.

4.3 Notify complainants in writing that the school has fully responded to the points raised and has tried to resolve the issues but there is nothing more to add and continuing contact on the matter will serve no useful purpose. This notification should state that the correspondence is at an end and that further communications will be acknowledged but not answered.

## **5. Restricting contact**

5.1 For complainants who excessively contact [Hedingham School](#) causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months. The following is a summary of the types of restriction which may be used:

- Placing time limits on telephone conversations and personal contacts
- Restricting the number of telephone calls that will be taken (for example one call on one specified morning/afternoon of any week)
- Limiting the complainant to one medium of contact (telephone, letter, email etc)
- Requiring the complainant to communicate only with a named employee
- Requiring any personal contacts to take place in the presence of a witness
- Closing the investigation into a complaint
- Refusing to register and process further complaints providing the complainant with acknowledgements only of further letters or e-mails received after a particular point
- Banning a complainant from some or all of the school's premises

## **6. Withdrawing restriction**

6.1 Once an individual has been classified as a vexatious or unreasonably persistent complainant, there is a mechanism for withdrawing this status if, for example, a more reasonable approach is subsequently demonstrated by the complainant.

6.2 Staff should have already used careful judgement and discussion with the Headteacher in recommending or confirming vexatious or unreasonably persistent status and similar judgement/discussion will be necessary when recommending that such status should be withdrawn.