



Guidance for dealing with disruptive or aggressive behaviour by parents and carers whilst on school premises

Review Period	Two Yearly
Person Responsible for Policy	Chief Executive
Governing Committee	Trust Board
Date of Trustees Approval	March 2022
Date for Review	March 2024

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Introduction

This policy aims to provide guidance to school personnel and governing bodies in respect of problems experienced by schools relating to disruptive or aggressive behaviour by parents and carers whilst on school premises, via telephone or on social media. Such issues are increasingly challenging schools, requiring a disproportionate amount of time being spent by teaching personnel in an effort to resolve and negatively impacting upon the available time spent with pupils.

In recognition of the difficulties experienced, and in an effort to respectfully inform parents and carers of the challenges faced, a letter has been drafted to parents and carers for use by schools reiterating the rights of pupils to learn and school personnel to work in a safe and protective environment and discouraging the posting of comments relating to school or individual personnel on social media. The letter has been drafted with the support of Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council and is contained at **Annex A**.

In respect of disruptive or aggressive behaviour whilst on school premises, the Department for Education advises that schools should have a written policy detailing the conduct expected of parents, carers or visitors to the school and the procedure to adopt should a school wish to restrict access to school premises. A poster to display within school premises (**Annex B**) are within this handbook and clearly specify the conduct expected together with template letters (**Annex C**). In addition, this handbook contains advice on how to deal with aggressive, abusive or threatening telephone calls and includes forms to assist in recording of such calls or other incidents. When dealing with parents, it is important to record all incidents in the event the matter escalates. **Annex D** of this handbook provides a recording form in such regard.

With regard to the use of social media for parents and carers views, unhelpful comments relating to school and their individual teaching personnel are increasingly being posted on social media platforms. Such comments may constitute harassment or defamation and may require legal advice to be sought in respect of further legal action. It is advisable that schools have a social media policy (either separate or part of their Code of Conduct) which can be relied upon when dealing with such unhelpful postings. Pages 8-10 of this handbook provide guidance on this.

This handbook is for use by all schools. Should further advice be required, subject to internal resources and any potential conflict of interest, the City Solicitors Office may be able to provide legal advice on these matters. The hourly rate is currently £75 per hour and if external legal advice is required (e.g. from a barrister) this will be billed for separately.

Dealing with aggressive, abusive or threatening behaviour on school premises by parents and carers

There can be occasions where parents and carers behave in a manner which is wholly unacceptable and display behaviour which is aggressive or threatening. On such occasions the Head Teacher (or designated member of staff) should fully risk assess the situation before deciding on the appropriate course of action. Relevant factors to be considered include;

- Whether the parent or carer has been verbally or physically aggressive, threatening or have they intimidated any other person on the premises?
- Evidence of the incident. Are there any witnesses and if so what do they say happened?
- Does the parent or carer have any previous known history of aggression or violence and/or have they persistently been abusive to school staff, pupils or visitors?
- Is there a risk (low/medium/high) that such behaviour may be repeated?
- Does the conduct have the ability or potential to cause harm or distress to pupils, school staff or other parents?

Once such factors have been considered, there are a number of options that the Head Teacher may wish to take. This includes;

- Inviting the parent or carer to a meeting to discuss the incident;
- Confirming in writing to the parent or carer the considered acceptable behaviour by the school and the consequences of repeat behaviour (warning letter);
- Withdrawing permission for the parent or carer to enter the school site and/or buildings;
- Informing the police

Inviting the parent or carer to a meeting to discuss the incident

In some circumstances it may be appropriate to invite the parent or carer to a meeting to discuss the incident. However, the safety of participants in the meeting should be fully considered and it is recommended that members of school staff should be accompanied by at least one other colleague at any such meeting. Seating arrangements, room access and exits together with the points to be discussed should be fully considered ahead of the meeting. Any agreed actions within the meeting should be noted and it is advised that a follow up letter should be sent after the meeting stating the school's expectations and any agreed actions **confirming in writing to the parent or carer the considered acceptable behaviour by the school and the consequences of repeat behaviour (warning letter)**

On occasions it may be appropriate to simply write to the parent or carer setting out the expectations of the school in respect of behaviour and what advising of the consequences of repeat behaviour (usually the withdrawal of permission to enter the school site). This could be explained in a meeting too, however any verbal explanation should always be followed up in writing. Please see template warning letter at Annex C.

Withdrawing permission for the parent or carer to enter the school site and/or buildings

In more serious circumstances involving actual or threatened aggression or violence, or persistent abuse and/or intimidation, consideration should be given as to whether it is safe for the parent to continue to come onto the school site or enter school buildings. School premises are not open venues for access by any member of the public. Visitors must have an explicit or implied licence to enter the school site/building and anyone who enters without the school's permission is a trespasser. Accordingly, if appropriate, it is possible to withdraw permission for the parent or carer to enter the school premises however any decision to do so must be fair, necessary, and for an appropriate length of time having considered all the circumstances following a fair and proper procedure.

The decision to withdraw permission (i.e. ban the parent from school premises) can be challenged by means of judicial review and therefore it is imperative that the ban is necessary and the length of ban is appropriate. It may be considered that a warning could suffice as opposed to a ban (see above) and any decision to ban a parent should be made after a fair and proper procedure has been followed by a committee of governors taking into account all the circumstances. Any decision to ban should be confirmed in writing to the parent or carer stating the reasons why it is necessary to withdraw permission allowing entry to school premises and an opportunity to make representations should also be provided.

The period of any ban must be reasonable and appropriate having regard to the individual circumstances. A consistent approach as to the duration of the ban should be maintained and a review undertaken before confirmation is provided that the ban has been lifted.

If a parent or carer has been banned from entering school premises, then it may be appropriate to make alternative arrangements in respect of their attendance at school activities i.e. plays/assemblies/parents evening and subject to the age of the pupil then it may be necessary to make alternative arrangements in respect of dropping off and picking up the pupil from school. A clear direction should also be provided to the parent or carer as to how they should communicate any practical issues they may have for discussion with the class teacher.

Informing the police

In an emergency or serious situation the police should be informed immediately. If the parent or carer has previously been banned from the school premises yet have still entered the site, then the police should be notified as the police have the power to remove such person from the school premises.

In respect of situations where there is no immediate threat to staff, pupils or other members of the school community or property, Head Teachers may wish to inform their local community police officer of the situation.

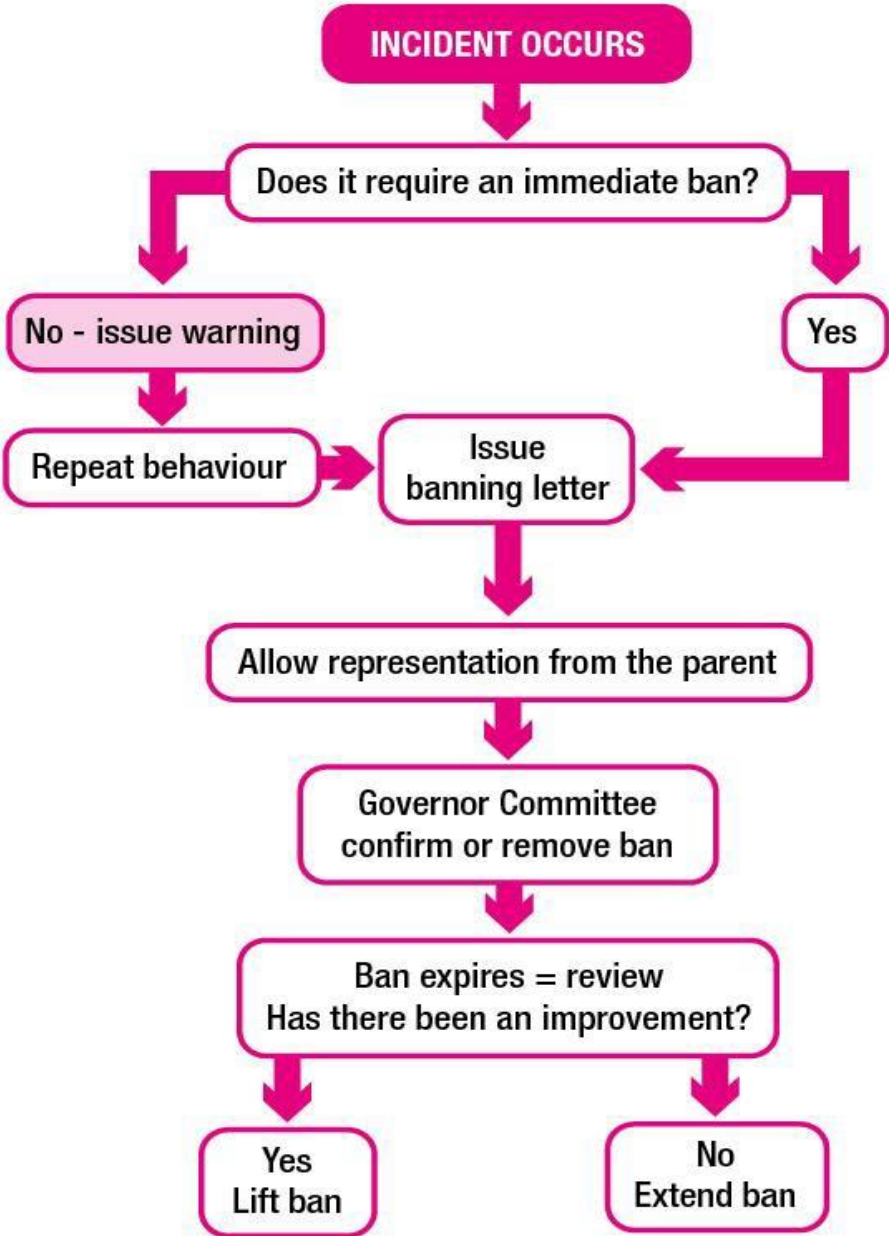
Where appropriate, the police may consider warning the parent or carer of formal action which can include legal proceedings.

As referenced earlier, please see the following documents to assist with this issue;

- Notice to display in school – Annex B
- Template letters – Annex C

The flowchart below summarises the procedure of withdrawing permission for a parent or carer to enter school premises.

Process of implementing a ban



Dealing with aggressive, abusive or threatening telephone calls by parents/carers

On occasions school personnel may have to deal with aggressive, abusive or threatening telephone calls by parents and carers. During such calls school personnel should remain calm and polite and actively listen to the caller. It may be necessary to apologise to the caller for any error that has occurred or to refer the caller to the Head Teacher (or designated member of staff). It is important that school personnel never respond in the same manner as the abusive caller and the suggested scripts below can be utilised to try and diffuse the situation or end the call. Whilst every attempt should be made to meet the needs of the caller, school personnel should be aware that it is acceptable to end an abusive phone call.

Suggested script for aggressive, abusive or threatening telephone calls;

If the caller begins to raise their voice/swear/become abusive:-

“Please don’t raise your voice/swear at me. I am not raising my voice or being rude to you and should you continue then I will have no alternative but to end this call.”

If the caller continues to raise their voice/swear/be abusive:-

“Whilst I appreciate you are upset/frustrated, I am not prepared to continue to be spoken to by you in this manner. Please either call back once you have calmed down or alternatively please inform the school of your views in writing”

If despite the above the caller continues to raise their voice/swear/be abusive:-

“I asked you to refrain from raising your voice/swearing/being abusive earlier in the call and you have failed to do so. Accordingly, I am going to have to end this call”. End call

Following receipt of such a call it is advised that the recipient makes a written note of the telephone call or alternatively complete the appropriate parts of the incident recording form at annex D. The incident should also be reported to the appropriate line manager.

Dealing with parents and carers comments via social media relating to school and individual teaching personnel

The use of social media by parents, carers or pupils to complain or inappropriately comment about a school or a teacher is on the increase. Some comments posted may amount to cyber bullying and consist of threats, harassment and defamation which can lead to low staff morale, loss of staff, a reduction in the recruitment to the teaching profession or damage to the individual's or school's reputation.

Whilst it is appreciated that schools will never be in a position to actively "police" all social media platforms for comments about school or their staff, should a post be brought to a member of school personnel's attention and it is inaccurate or abusive, action needs to be taken to protect the individual employee and school's reputation; to avoid the subject matter escalating; and, to discourage future posts of the same nature.

In respect of closed groups i.e. on Facebook or WhatsApp created by parents or carers to discuss school matters, it is important that schools inform the school community that such groups are not commissioned or authorised by the school. A reminder confirming that school has an "open door" policy and of the appropriate channels to be used if parents or carer have any concerns or issues should be provided together with the fact that school are unable to act on matters which are not within their knowledge.

School should keep all staff safe from abuse, threats and violence and this includes cyberbullying. Once aware of the post, consideration must be given by the school as to the contents of the comments and whether they are serious enough to constitute a criminal offence, harassment and/or defamation.

It is a criminal offence to "send by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character" (The Communications Act 2003). If guilty then this offence is punishable by imprisonment (up to 6 months) and a fine (up to £5,000).

Pursuant to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 “a person must not pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment of another or others and which he knows or ought to know amounts to harassment of that or those others”. Therefore communications sent via social media which target an individual may amount to harassment. If proven, an injunction to refrain from such conduct may be granted and compensation ordered.

The Defamation Act 2013 defines a defamatory statement is one that “tends to lower the claimant in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally”. The statement must have caused (or be likely to cause) serious harm to the claimant’s reputation and if proven, compensation can be ordered.

Therefore, a number of options are available if the content of the postings are sufficiently serious. However, in view of the likelihood of further distress/anxiety arising upon pursuing such course of action (together with costs involved), it is advised that all possible preventive steps are taken to discourage the use of social media as a platform for parents and carers to inappropriately comment or raise their concerns in respect of school.

It is advisable that schools have a Home Learning Agreement in place. This should be reviewed regularly, and signposted to parents at least once every academic year.

The Home Learning Agreement should clearly set out the school’s expectations of parents and carers which could include;

- Parents and carers are expected to refrain from discussing the business of school or children attending school in any public forum, including social media sites.
- The use of social media websites to fuel campaigns and complaints against schools is unacceptable and not in the best interests of the children or the wholeschool community.
- If a pupil, parent or carer is found to have posted defamatory comments on social networking sites, the school will report them to the website host and the school expects the person who posted the comments to remove the comments immediately

Schools can also set guidelines concerning parental online behaviour in their Home Learning Agreement. This can be utilised to inform parents and carers of their responsibilities when using social networks and can include;

- Parents and carers are not expected to post pictures of pupils other than their own children on social networking sites;
- Parents and carers should make complaints through official school channels as opposed to posting them on social networking sites; and
- Parents and carers should not post malicious or fictitious comments on social networking sites about any member of the school community.

Having an established Home Learning Agreement will greatly assist in responding appropriately to such postings (if and when necessary) and will also provide support to school personnel when dealing with such circumstances.

When such postings occur, an appropriate response is required. When dealing with online abuse or inaccurate comments, it is recommended that school personnel;

- Never retaliate or personally engage with the incident;
- Immediately inform the appropriate personnel, i.e. Head teacher and the Police in the event that the law has been broken;
- Ensure that records of the comments/abuse are kept via screen shots, log the time, date and website address for future reference.
- Attempt to get the comments removed by contacting the host (the social networking site) to request the content is removed and stating why/how the comments contravene the host site's term and conditions.

Depending on the circumstances, it may be appropriate to meet the parents or carers who have been involved in posting the inaccurate/abusive comments. This should be via a meeting with the Head Teacher who should address the matter of social networking and explain how such behaviour detrimentally impacts on the school and thus on their children's education.

It is advisable that printouts of the comments are available in the meeting and that the parents or carers are made aware that comments posted online, even when made 'privately', can on occasions be misinterpreted and shared without their knowledge or consent.

If necessary, the Head Teacher should inform the parents or carers that they may have to take further action which could include civil proceedings under the Defamation Act 2013 or alternatively criminal proceedings in some circumstances.

The Head Teacher should refer to the content of the school's Home Learning Agreement and Complaints Policy directing the parent or carer's compliance with same and confirming that any complaints should be channelled through the school's Complaints Policy.

This handbook is for use by all schools. Should further advice be required, subject to internal resources and any potential conflict of interest, the City Solicitors Office may be able to provide legal advice on these matters. The hourly rate is currently £75 per hour and if external legal advice is required (e.g. from a barrister) this will be billed for separately.

Annex

- **Annex A** - Draft letter to parents and carers from school in respect of disruptive parents and social media issues 15
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- **Annex C;** 18
 - Template Letter - Letter 1 - Warning letter to parent (sent by Headteacher).
 - Template letter - Letter 2 - Withdraw permission pending review(sent by Headteacher)
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 - Template letter - Letter 4 - Restore permission after review byChair of Governors (sent by Chair of Governors)
 - Template letter - Letter 5 - Continue ban after second review (sent by Chair of Governors)
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Annex A - Draft letter to parents and carers from school in respect of disruptive parents and social media issues

School
logo and
details



Liverpool
City Council

Dear Parents / Carer

At **(Insert School Name)** we are fortunate that the majority of parents and carers appreciate that educating our pupils involves partnership between all of the school community. A good working partnership is important to equip pupils with the necessary skills for adulthood and we welcome and encourage parents and carers to fully participate in the life of our school.

Unfortunately, the behaviour of a minority of parents and carers can impact negatively upon the good working partnership. We believe that all school staff, parents, carers and pupils are entitled to a safe and protective environment in which to learn and work. The purpose of this letter is to provide a reminder of the conduct expected from all visitors to our school.

Disruptive behaviour

For many of us this may come as a surprise, however a third of school teachers nationally have suffered abusive behaviour from parents and carers in the past. We firmly believe that all members of the school community have the absolute right to work and be in school without fear of aggression or abusive behaviour from parents and carers. Such behaviour can be through face to face contact, in written communications, on the telephone or by the use of social media and can present a risk to staff and pupils. To support a safe school environment, we cannot tolerate parents, carers or visitors who exhibit any of the following behaviour:

- Use of loud and/or offensive language or display temper
- Threaten to carry out actual bodily harm to any other person on school premises
- Damage/destroy school property
- Intimidate any other person on school premises
- Make vexatious or malicious allegations against a member of the school community, either in writing or via direct contact verbally
- Insult any member of the school community in an attempt to demean or undermine

The above list is not exhaustive and any individual exhibiting disruptive or unreasonable behaviour will be considered in accordance with the school's Code of Conduct (which can be accessed via [hyperlink](#)). The school may ultimately decide to impose restrictions on an individual when entering the school premises including a ban from school entirely, which may also extend to non-admittance to school events such as pupil plays/assemblies and communications restricted to writing or via a third party.

The use of social media for parents' views


Whilst we appreciate the right to freedom of speech and recognise the benefits of using social media, unfortunately on occasions we experience situations where members of the school community use social media to exhibit inappropriate behaviour.

It is further appreciated that social media users may be of the opinion that their postings are 'private'. However, once a comment is posted other social media users can forward/share such views. If postings are considered to be threatening or discriminatory, the school may have to refer the matter to the Police and report it to the social media provider. Given the above we ask you never to refer to individual pupils or any member of school staff on social media and we respectfully refer all members of the school community to our Social Media Policy which can be accessed via [\(insert hyperlink\)](#).

It is recognised that parents and carers may not always agree with a particular course of action taken by the school or may have concerns in respect of the school community. We welcome constructive feedback and encourage concerns to be discussed with the relevant person in the school in the first instance. Any complaints which cannot be resolved in this manner should be channelled via our school's complaint policy which can be accessed via [\(insert hyperlink\)](#).

In connection with a city-wide drive to tackle disruptive behaviour and social media issues, this letter is provided to our school community with support from the Chair of Governors, Merseyside Police and Liverpool City Council. We encourage parents and carers to promote positive role models in both the real and digital world. We seek to provide a safe and protective environment in which they can learn and school personnel can work.

Kind Regards,

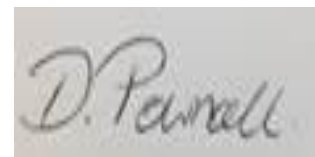


Tony Reeves
Chief Executive
Services Liverpool



Steve Reddy
Director of Children and Young People's
Liverpool

Diane Pownall
Supt Liverpool Community
Policing LP Command



Annex B - Notice to display in school

**School
logo and
details**



**Liverpool
City Council**

We welcome visitors to our school.

We will act to ensure it remains a safe place for pupils, staff and all other members of our community.

If you have concerns, we will always listen to them and seek to address them.

Please be aware however, that school personnel have the right to work without fear. Abusive, threatening or violent behaviour will not be tolerated in this school.

Visitors behaving in this way are likely to be removed from the premises and prosecuted.

Annex C
Letter I - Warning letter to parent (sent by Headteacher)

Dear,

This letter is to inform you that the governing body of the school considers your actions whilst on school grounds [DETAIL BEHAVIOUR], to be wholly unacceptable.

We would ask you to bear in mind the fact that such behaviour on a school site can be confusing, intimidating, disruptive and distressing to pupils, staff and parents/carers.

Please note that the school expects certain standards of behaviour of all people in their dealings with the school.

These include:

- behaving reasonably;
- treating others with courtesy and respect;
- avoiding intimidation, physical and verbal aggression at all times.

School has various steps open to it if we believe that these standards are breached. These include:

- making special arrangements for meetings and communication with the school;
- considering a ban from the school premises;
- considering legal action.

I would ask that you cease acting in the manner detailed above, and advise that any further acts of inappropriate behaviour may result in action being taken by School.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Annex C

Letter 2 - Withdraw permission pending review (sent by Headteacher) LETTER TO PARENT

Dear (name)

I write further to my letter of DATE in which I outlined the standards of behaviour expected of all people in their dealings with the school along with steps that the school may exercise should these standards be breached. Despite this, I am now writing to you following your conduct on (enter dates(s) and time(s)) OR;

I write to you following your conduct on (enter date(s) and time(s))

(Add summary of the incident and the effect on staff, pupils or other parents)

I must inform you that the governors will not tolerate conduct of this nature on the school's premises and will act to defend its staff and pupils. I am therefore instructing that, for a temporary period (insert from and to dates, usually 2-3 weeks in total, not usually longer than half a term) you are not to reappear on the premises of the school. If you do not comply with this instruction I shall arrange for you to be removed from the premises of the school. If you cause a nuisance or disturbance on the premises, you may be prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996; if convicted under this section, you are liable to a fine of up to £500.

For the duration of this decision you may bring your child(ren) to school and collect them/him/her at the end of the school day, but you must not go beyond the school gate. [Detail drop off/collection .e.g. to be collected and returned at the school gate by a member of school staff].

The withdrawal of permission for you to enter the school premises takes effect straightaway. However the Chair of Governors will determine if it is appropriate to confirm this decision. Before they do so, you have an opportunity to provide, in writing, any comments or observations of your own in relation to the above incident(s). These comments may be to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, or express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct. You are asked to send any written comments you wish to make by (date 10 working days from date of letter) for the attention of the Chair of Governors.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

LETTER TO PARENT

Annex C

Letter 3 - Withdrawal of permission confirmed (sent by Chair of Governors)

Dear

On.....the Headteacher wrote to inform you that he/she had withdrawn permission for you to come onto the premises ofschool. To enable me to determine whether to confirm this decision, you were given the opportunity to give your written comments on the incident(s) concerned by

I have not received a written response from you/I have received a letter from you dated , the contents of which I have carefully considered.

In the circumstances and after further consideration, I have determined that the decision to withdraw permission for you to come onto school premises should be confirmed. Accordingly, you are instructed that, until further notice, you are not to come onto the premises of the school without the prior knowledge and approval of the head teacher until [DATE].

Should you not comply with this instruction I shall arrange for you to be removed from the premises of the school. If you cause a nuisance or disturbance on the premises, you may be prosecuted under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996 and if convicted you may be liable to a fine of up to £500.

Even though we have taken this decision, the Headteacher and staff atschool remain committed to the education of your child(ren), who must continue to attend school as normal under the arrangements set out in the head teachers previous letter.

This decision will be reviewed again before the expiry of the withdrawal of your permission to come onto the school premises. When deciding whether it will be necessary to extend the withdrawal of permission to come onto the school premises, consideration will be given to the extent of your compliance with the decision, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from you; and any evidence of your co-operation with the school in other respects.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors

Annex C
Letter 4 - Restore permission after review by Chair of Governors(sent by Chair of Governors)

Dear

On.....I wrote to inform you that on the advice of the Headteacher I had temporarily withdrawn permission for you to come onto the premises of School. To enable me to determine whether to confirm this decision, I gave you the opportunity to give your written comments on the incident concerned by

I have not received a written response from you/I have received a letter from you dated , the contents of which I have carefully considered.

In the circumstances, and after consulting further with the head teacher, I have decided that it is not necessary to confirm the decision and I am therefore restoring to you permission to come onto the school premises, with immediate effect.

(Optional) I must warn you, however, that if it should become necessary in the future I shall not hesitate to withdraw permission for you to come onto the school premises once again.

Yours sincerely Chair of

Governors

Annex C
Letter 5 - Continue ban after second review(sent by
Chair of Governors)

Dear

I wrote to you on.....confirming that permission for you to come onto the premises of..... School had been withdrawn until [DATE]. I also advised you I would take steps to review this decision before its expiry.

I have now completed the review. However, after consultation with the head teacher,I have determined that it is not yet appropriate for me to restore your permission to come onto the school premises. **(Add brief summary of reasons).**

I therefore advise that the instruction that you are not to come onto the premises of School, without the prior knowledge and approval of the head teacher remains in place for a further period until [DATE]. If you do not comply with this instruction I shall arrange for you to be removed from the premises and you may be prosecuted under section 547 of the Education Act 1996 and if convicted you maybe liable to a fine of up to £500.

I shall undertake a further review of this decision before the revised expiry date of the withdrawal of your permission to come onto the school premises.

In the meantime you can write to me with a statement of your views, which I will consider.

Yours sincerely Chair of

Governors

Appendix C

Letter 6 - Restore permission after later review (sent by Chair of Governors)

Dear

I wrote to you on.....confirming that permission for you to come onto the premises ofschool had been withdrawn until [DATE]. I also advised you I would take steps to review this decision before its expiry.

I have now completed the review. After consultation with the head teacher I have decided that it is appropriate to restore permission for you to come onto the schoolpremises with effect from [DATE OF BAN END].

I trust that you will now work together with the school and there will be no further difficulties of the kind which made it necessary to restrict your access to the schoolpremises.

(Optional) I must warn you, however, that if it should become necessary in the future I shall not hesitate to withdraw permission for you to come onto the school premises once again.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors

Appendix D -Recording forms – telephone/other incidents

INCIDENT RECORDING FORM	
Date and Time of incident	
Details of person(s) verbally abused/assaulted	
Name	
Position	
Contact details	
Details of perpetrator	
Name	
Relationship to school (parent/carer to pupil(s) year(s))	
Contact details	
Description of the incident (including relevant events leading up to the incident including details of those present)	
Where did the incident(s) take place?	

Details of witnesses (full name, contact details and relationship to school)	
Name and contact details of police officer(s) involved Incident number/crime reference number	
Has the perpetrator been involved previously with similar incidents? If so, provide details	
Outcome of this incident (Was the incident resolved, if so how?)	
Any other relevant information	

Form completed by?	
Date form completed	