



**BALLYMENA ACADEMY**

**POLICY STATEMENT**  
**IN RELATION TO**  
**PROMOTION OF EFFECTIVE**  
**WORKING RELATIONSHIPS**  
**WITH**  
**PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

## **Policy on Promotion of Effective Working Relationships with Parents/Guardians**

1. The Board of Governors of Ballymena Academy, in recognising that the education of our children is a partnership between the home and school, will seek to allow parents/guardians a right of access at all reasonable times to the Principal, or a teacher delegated by him.
2. The Principal, as the day-to-day manager of the school, will seek to ensure that all such contacts are conducted in a manner which will promote the educational interests of the pupil and that all exchanges between school and home are informed by a mutual respect for each other's knowledge and concern for the pupil's welfare. It is important that pupils feel secure in the working relationship between home and school.
3. All exchanges between parents/guardians and staff should be conducted in a respectful and tolerant manner and parents/guardians are asked to adhere to this when seeking contact with any member of staff.
4. The Board of Governors endorses the school's arrangements for effective parent/teacher communication, as set out below.

Contact between parents/guardians and the school will take the form of:

- (a) meetings to discuss the pupil's academic progress;
  - (b) casual or informal exchanges of information made for "routine housekeeping purposes", e.g. illness, medical appointments;
  - (c) more sensitive, wider issues involving school policies that are causing concern. In such circumstances an appointment should be made and the issues clarified in advance to enable the member of staff to make appropriate preparation.
5. While it is acknowledged that almost all exchanges are conducted in an appropriate and respectful manner, this policy sets out the approach which will be taken on the rare occasions where the actions or behaviour of an individual are unacceptable. Such occurrences are very rare and we trust are unlikely to occur in the context of this school.
  6. The Board of Governors, Principal and Staff remain committed to working with all parents/guardians to strengthen home/school partnerships.

### **Policy Scope**

7. This policy applies to any parent/guardian who is interacting or communicating with Ballymena Academy.

### **Defining Unacceptable Behaviour**

8. It is accepted that individuals may act out of character in times of difficulty or distress, as they may have encountered upsetting or distressing circumstances prior to contacting the school. The school does not necessarily view behaviour as unacceptable simply because an individual is assertive or emotional. However, angry, demanding, or persistent behaviour, may result in unreasonable demands on the school and an unacceptable impact on staff.

9. Unacceptable behaviour can be grouped under two headings:

- Aggressive or abusive language or behaviour;
- Unreasonable demands.

#### **Aggressive or Abusive Language or Behaviour**

10. Staff can expect to be treated courteously and with respect. Violence or abuse towards staff is unacceptable. Staff understand that people can become angry or frustrated when they feel that matters, about which they feel strongly, are not being dealt with as they expect. Where that anger escalates into aggression towards staff, this is unacceptable. Such aggression may include behaviour or language (whether oral or written) that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.
11. Specific examples of actions or behaviours which fall under this heading include threats, physical violence, personal verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and rudeness, regardless of the method of communication.
12. The School also considers that inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations may be regarded as abusive behaviour. This can include inappropriate use of social or other media.

#### **Unreasonable Demands**

13. Parents/Guardians, or others contacting the school, may make what the school considers to be unreasonable demands due to the amount of information they seek, the nature and scale of service they expect, or the number of contacts made. What amounts to unreasonable demands will always depend on the circumstances and context for the behaviour, as well as the seriousness of the issues raised by the individual.
14. Examples of actions which may be considered an unreasonable demand include:
- demanding responses within an unreasonable timescale;
  - demanding responses from several members of staff on the same subject;
  - insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff who is unavailable or not involved in their case;
  - continual phone calls or letters;
  - repeatedly changing the substance and focus of the issue/complaint, or raising unrelated concerns.
15. Such demands may be considered unacceptable and unreasonable if they start to impact substantially on the work of the school, i.e. taking up excessive amount of staff time to the disadvantage of other pupils.

#### **Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour – Early Intervention**

16. The school seeks to support staff in intervening early in an interaction where an individual is verbally abusive or is behaving unacceptably. This is with a view to addressing the situation at the earliest stage, altering the tone of the communication and, where possible, averting the need for application of the strongest measures set out in this policy.

17. In the case of **telephone calls**, where the caller is rude, offensive, abusive or intimidating, members of staff will inform the caller that their behaviour or language is unacceptable in the hope that it will prompt the individual to moderate their behaviour or agree to be called back at a time when they may be calmer. However, if the caller continues to be offensive or abusive, the call will be terminated. Our staff have the right to make this decision.
18. Such calls should be logged by the individual member of staff, with brief details of the reason the call was terminated and they should also report the call to their line manager to ensure a fair and reasonable process.
19. In more extreme situations, the school will inform the person, in writing, that the school will not permit any personal contact from them. This means that the school will limit contact with them to either written communication or through a third party.
20. Similarly, where **correspondence** is received (either **letter or electronic**) that is abusive to staff or contains allegations that lack substantive evidence, we will inform the sender that we consider their language offensive, unnecessary and unhelpful and ask them to stop using such language. We will ask that the sender edit their correspondence to remove any offensive text and resend it, otherwise it will not be responded to.
21. The same early intervention principles, as described above for telephone calls, should be applied in the case of all such correspondence.

#### **Dealing with More Severe or Immediate Cases of Unacceptable Behaviour**

22. Unfortunately, there may be rare cases where it is immediately apparent that efforts to de-escalate a situation are not feasible. The threat or use of physical violence, verbal abuse, or harassment towards staff is likely to result in further action being taken.
23. In the most severe cases, the individual will be notified, in writing, of the proposed withdrawal of licence to enter school premises.
24. If, during the course of their work, i.e. phone call or interview, a member of staff encounters an individual who is particularly aggressive, they should speak immediately to a member of the Senior Leadership Team, the Principal or Deputy Principal, who will determine what, if any, action is to be taken.

#### **Personal Callers to the School**

25. If, on arrival at the school, a parent/guardian appears to be aggressive or abusive, they should be shown into an 'interview room'. A member of the Senior Management Team should be informed and they should speak to the parent/guardian in order to seek resolution to the issue. The Principal, or a designated deputy, should also be informed of the situation.

#### **Deciding to Restrict Parent/Guardian Contact**

26. Staff of the school, who directly experience aggressive or abusive behaviour, have the authority to deal immediately with that behaviour in a manner they consider appropriate to the situation and in line with this Policy. With the exception of such immediate decisions taken at the time of an incident, decisions to withdraw licence can only be taken after careful consideration of the situation by the Principal, usually in consultation with the Chairman of the Board of Governors. Wherever possible, the school will give a parent/guardian opportunity to modify their behaviour or action before such a decision is taken. Parents/Guardians will be informed, in writing, why a decision has been made to restrict future contact, the restricted contact arrangements, the length of time that these restrictions will be in place (if relevant) and right of appeal (see below). These restrictions may apply to telephone calls and/or visits to the school.

#### **Appealing a Decision to have licence withdrawn**

27. A parent/guardian can appeal a decision to have their licence to enter school premises withdrawn. A sub-committee of the Board of Governors, who were not involved in the original decision, should consider any such appeal. Having considered the appeal, they should advise the parent/guardian, in writing, that either the licence to enter premises remains or that a different course of action has been agreed.

#### **Restriction of licence to enter school premises**

28. When the school is satisfied that the interests of all parties is best served by the maintenance of normal access arrangements, then the licence to enter school premises will be restored.