

Keeping schools safe from abuse, threats and violence

September 2019

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Introduction

This document is being reissued in September 2019 to take account of new guidance from the Department of Education (“Controlling access to school premises”, November 2018). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/controlling-access-to-school-premises>

This guidance aims to assist Headteachers and governing bodies in cases where visitors are being threatening, abusive or aggressive towards other members of the school community. Such behaviour clearly cannot be tolerated. Staff and pupils have a right to expect their school to be a safe place in which to work and learn. This document includes advice on a range of possible measures that can be taken to ensure appropriate protection for schools.

This guidance incorporates the definition in the Education Act 1996 of the word “parent” and includes an individual who has care of the child whether or not s/he is the natural parent or has parental responsibility for the child. This includes step parents. Where an individual does not fall within this broad definition, the principles of this guidance should still be applied (but the wording of the model letters should be amended accordingly).

Headteachers are encouraged to make all staff aware of this guidance and also to consider the guidance in relation to their school’s emergency plan.

In cases where abusive comments or threats are made on social media regarding members of the school community, please refer to the Surrey County Council guidance document “Dealing with adverse comments and complaints against schools on social media” (Autumn term 2017).

Further advice and support

Schools which buy back the Area Schools Support Service can contact their Area Schools Officer:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| • North-east (Elmbridge, Epsom and Ewell, Spelthorne) | 01372 833412 |
| • North-west (Runnymede, Surrey Heath, Woking) | 01483 518106 |
| • South-east (Mole Valley, Reigate and Banstead, Tandridge) | 01737 737960 |
| • South-west (Guildford, Waverley) | 01483 517835 |

Schools which buy back support from Legal Services can contact:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| • Rachel Hickman, Senior Lawyer | 0208 541 9128 |
|---------------------------------|---------------|

Who can go onto school premises?

Schools are private property and people do not have an automatic right to enter. Parents have an “implied licence” to come on to school premises at certain times, for instance:

- For appointments
- To attend a school event
- To drop off or pick up younger children
- Supporting school activities

Schools should set out their rules for this, and tell parents what they are. (See Appendix A). Anyone who breaks those rules would be trespassing.

What behaviour might cause concern?

Behaviour which causes a pupil or member of staff to feel threatened may include:

- Aggression, abuse (including swearing) or use of insults
- Prejudice based language/behaviour
- Behaviour or language which presents a risk to staff or pupils

Immediate actions

- For serious incidents take immediate actions to ensure the safety of the school community. This may include calling police and/or ambulance, and removing pupils and staff from the vicinity of the incident.
- For less serious incidents (for example, a parent who is being inappropriately demanding) a member of the Senior Leadership Team should invite the visitor to a meeting in a private area in order to address the issue which has led to the concern, and remind the parent about acceptable conduct. It may be appropriate to warn the parent that a repeat of such behaviour may lead to a bar from the school premises for a period of time.
- Provide support to those affected by the incident. In such circumstances the support and reassurance of senior leaders will be invaluable, as will the care and understanding of colleagues. If the school has chosen to buy in to an Employee Assistance Service, staff can obtain confidential specialist support by calling the helpline. The staff associations/trade unions are also likely to be a source of assistance.
- As soon as possible after any incident, obtain witness statements, which should be signed and dated. However, if the police are investigating, then consult with them before taking any internal action (including obtaining witness statements).
- Cases of actual assault should be recorded in line with the organisation’s Health & Safety recording procedure. In the case of maintained schools, incidents should be reported to the Local Authority by completing an online health and safety event report.
- Any injuries should be photographed (if the victim consents) for the purpose of evidencing the assault. The victim should be clear about the purpose of the photographs, and who these can be shared with.

Decision making

(In cases where the concerning behaviour has been directed at the Headteacher, then it may be appropriate for the Chair of Governors to carry out the following actions).

Assessing evidence

The Headteacher should carry out an assessment of the circumstances, evidence (including witness statements) and risk factors in order to identify the most appropriate course of action. Points to consider include:

- Has the parent been verbally abusive/aggressive/threatening/intimidating?
- Has the parent been physically aggressive/threatening/intimidating?
- What evidence is there? What do witnesses say happened? Are they consistent?
- Does the parent have a known previous history of aggression/violence? If so, what is the nature and frequency of this?
- Do members of the school staff/community feel intimidated by the parent's behaviour?
- Have pupils witnessed aggressive/threatening/intimidating behaviour from the parent?
- Have pupils been approached inappropriately by the parent?
- Was the parent provoked in any way prior to their behaviour and/or does the parent claim to have been provoked?
- Are there any other mitigating factors?
- Is there a risk (low, medium or high) that the behaviour may be repeated?

In some cases, it may be appropriate to carry out a formal written risk assessment. Please contact your Area Schools Officer for advice.

Possible actions

After evaluating all available information, there are several actions the Headteacher may wish to take. These can include:

- Clarify appropriate standards of behaviour

In some instances it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This could be explained via a telephone or face-to-face discussion, or by letter. However any verbal explanation should be followed by a written confirmation of the discussion and the standards of behaviour outlined.

- Invite the parent to a meeting to discuss events

This could be helpful where a planned and structured meeting has either not been held before or has previously been productive. A full restorative meeting may be considered, but if it is not safe to bring all the parties together at a meeting, a restorative process can still take place through the exchange of information. The safety and well-being of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. It is strongly recommended that members of school staff should be accompanied by at least one other colleague at any such meeting. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements, and care taken to ensure exits cannot be blocked by a parent who could potentially become aggressive. You may wish to invite your Area Schools Officer to attend/facilitate the meeting.

The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted, and a follow-up letter sent to confirm the school's expectations and any agreed actions. Some parents may

covertly record meetings and then seek to use the information obtained to support their case, and therefore schools should state explicitly that information obtained without permission will not be admissible in any proceedings.

- Put in place strategies/ arrangements to avoid future situations of potential conflict
(see Appendix C, model letter 1)

It is sometimes possible to identify situations of potential conflict and to plan for these in a way that minimises potential risks.

For example, where a parent persistently engages in inappropriate discussion with staff at the classroom door at the beginning or end of the school day, the parent could be informed that any discussions with school staff must be held by prior appointment, or that they are only able to have discussions with a designated member of staff (which is usually a member of the senior leadership team). Alternatively, it may be appropriate to require the parent to drop off and pick up their child from a designated area (e.g. the school office).

In more serious cases a further option may be to advise the parent that in future their concerns should be dealt with by written communication only. Any such arrangements should be confirmed in writing to the parent.

In order for these strategies to be effective, all staff must be aware of them, and should act consistently to ensure that they are rigorously applied.

- Issue a formal warning
(see Appendix C, model letter 2)

Where it is a significant but first offence, the Headteacher should warn parents that a bar from the school site would be considered if the behaviour is repeated.

- Withdraw permission for the parent to enter the school site
(see Appendix C, model letters 3 and 4)

Schools can bar someone from the premises if they feel that their aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language is a risk to staff or pupils. It is enough for a member of staff or pupil to feel threatened.

The school should tell an individual that they have been barred, or that they intend to bar them, in writing. Letters should usually be signed by the Headteacher, though in some cases (e.g. where the Headteacher was the victim, or personally involved in the incident), the Chair of Governors, Academy Trust, proprietor or Local Authority may wish to write instead. The individual must be allowed to present their side. A school can either:

- Bar them temporarily (we recommend that this is for a period of up to five school working days) to give the individual the opportunity to formally present their side. After representations from the parent have been considered the school can continue the bar or lift it.
OR
- Tell the parent that they intend to bar them and invite them to present their side by a set deadline (we recommend that this is five school working days). After the parent's side has been heard, the school can decide whether to continue with barring them.

In most cases, for a first offence, a bar of up to four weeks is appropriate and sufficient. In more serious cases a longer barring period of up to six months may be considered but regular reviews (not more than half termly) should take place.

Appendix A

Rules for accessing the school premises and poster for reception area

The Department for Education advises that schools should set out their rules for access to the school premises, and explain that anyone who breaks those rules would be trespassing (“Controlling access to school premises”, November 2018).

Schools may wish to adopt the following wording and share it with parents/carers/visitors via the Home School Agreement, school website, newsletters etc:

We recognise and value our partnerships with parents/carers and members of the community, and we welcome visitors to our school for

- **Appointments**
- **Attending a school event**
- **To drop off or pick up younger children.**
- **Supporting school activities**

We will act to ensure that our school remains a safe place for pupils, staff and all other members of our community. If a parent/carer/visitor has concerns we will always listen to them and seek to address them.

However, abusive, threatening or violent behaviour will not be tolerated. If such behaviour occurs the school may consider barring the person involved, in line with Department for Education guidance on Controlling Access to School Premises, November 2018. Any person who does not comply with these requirements would be trespassing and legal action may be taken.

No meeting at the school may be electronically recorded without the express permission of all parties. Information obtained without such permission will not be admissible in any proceedings.

Poster for reception area

Schools may wish to display the poster overleaf prominently in their reception area.



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.

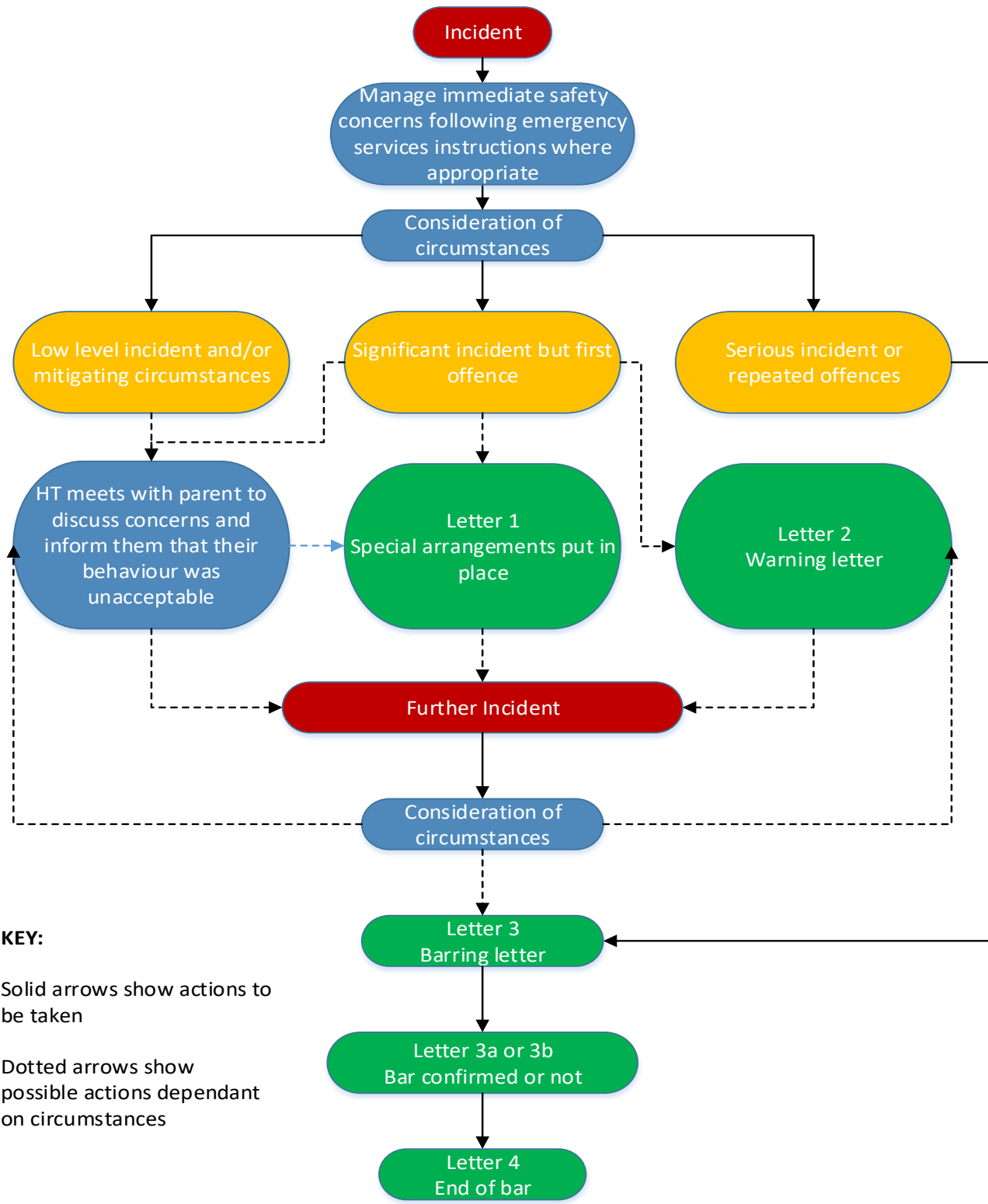
Please be aware, however, that abusive, threatening or violent behaviour will not be tolerated. Visitors behaving in this way may be subject to a bar from the school site.

No meeting at the school may be electronically recorded without the express permission of all parties. Information obtained without such permission will not be admissible in any proceedings.



Appendix B

Managing unacceptable behaviour by visitors on the school site



KEY:

Solid arrows show actions to be taken

Dotted arrows show possible actions dependant on circumstances

Appendix C

Model letters

Letter 1 Introduction of special arrangements

Dear

I understand that you have expressed concern about **(summarise issue)** and I am keen to work in partnership with you to resolve this. Therefore I would like to offer to meet with you **(details)**...

However, I have to advise you that your behaviour on the school site on **(date)** was unacceptable.

(Summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

In order to avoid this situation arising again, I am putting the following measure(s) in place:

- **You should not approach (named member of staff) directly but should instead....**
- **Pick up and drop off your child from a designated area as follows....**

This measure(s) will be in place initially for **(up to four weeks)**, and will then be reviewed.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix C

Letter 2 Warning

Dear

I understand that you have expressed concern about **(summarise issue)** and I am keen to work in partnership with you to resolve this. Therefore I would like to offer to meet with you **(details)...**

However, I have to advise you that your behaviour on the school site on **(date)** was unacceptable.

(Summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils)

For the future I must inform you that a repetition of such behaviour on the school site towards any member of the school community may be followed by arrangements to limit your access to certain staff/ areas of the school, or withdrawal of permission for you to enter the school premises.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix C

Letter 3 Barring letter

Dear

I am writing to advise you formally that your behaviour on the school site on **(date)** was unacceptable.

(Summary of incident and its effect on staff and pupils).

I am therefore instructing you that:

EITHER

3a) You are barred immediately from the school site. If you do not comply with this instruction I shall arrange for you to be removed from the premises. 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 £500.

The bar will be in place temporarily in the first instance, to enable me to review all relevant evidence. If you wish to provide me with any information (e.g. to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, and/or to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct) please do so by (date – 5 school working days from date of letter).

Immediately following my review of all relevant information I will write to inform you whether the bar has been confirmed and the length of time it will be in place, or whether I have decided to lift the bar.

For the duration of the bar you must continue to bring your child(ren) to school and collect them at the end of the school day, but you must not go beyond the school gate. (For infant children – arrangements have been made for your child(ren) to be collected and returned to you at the school gate by a member of the school staff). Special arrangements can be made for you to meet with a member of staff, if necessary, but this may only be with my written permission.

OR

3b) I am considering whether it is appropriate to bar you from the school site. In order for me to reach that decision I need to review all relevant evidence. If you wish to provide me with any information (e.g. to challenge or explain the facts of the incident, and/or to express regret and give assurances about your future good conduct) please do so by (date – 5 school working days from date of letter).

Immediately following my review of all relevant information I will write to inform you whether I have decided that a bar is appropriate and the length of time it will be in place, or whether I have decided not to implement a bar.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix C

Letter 3a Outcome of the review of evidence – confirming bar (or not)

Dear

On **(date)** I wrote to inform you that I had taken the decision to bar you from the school site whilst I considered all relevant information relating to the incident which occurred on **(date)**.

You were given the opportunity to provide me with your written comments by **(date)**. ***I have not received a written response from you OR I have received a letter from you (date), the contents of which I have carefully considered.***

EITHER

Having considered all relevant information, I have determined that the decision to bar you from the school premises should be confirmed. I am therefore instructing that you are barred for a period of (length of bar). Therefore, the first date that you are able to return to the school site is (date).

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.

Should significant new information become available, or there is a significant change in circumstances, you may request a review of the bar.

Even though I have taken this decision, myself and the staff at School remain committed to the education of your child(ren), who must continue to attend school as normal (insert for primary age children) under the arrangements set out in my previous letter.

If you wish to pursue the matter further you have a right to complain to the Chair of Governors, who will consider the circumstances of the decision to withdraw permission for you to come on to the school site. You can make your complaint by writing to Mr/Mrs X, Chair of Governors (insert email address).

OR

Having considered all relevant information, I have determined that a bar is not appropriate on this occasion, however I would remind you that we expect all members of the school community to treat one another in a respectful manner.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix C

Letter 3b Outcome of the review of evidence – imposing bar (or not)

Dear

On **(date)** I wrote to inform you that I was considering barring you from the school site following the incident which occurred on **(date)**.

You were given the opportunity to provide me with your written comments by (date). ***I have not received a written response from you OR I have received a letter from you (date), the contents of which I have carefully considered.***

EITHER

Having considered all relevant information, I have determined that it is appropriate to implement a bar for a period of (length of bar). Therefore, the bar will start from (date) and the first date that you are able to return to the school site is (date).

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.

Should significant new information become available, or there is a significant change in circumstances, you may request a review of the bar.

Even though I have taken this decision, myself and the staff at School remain committed to the education of your child(ren). For the duration of the bar you must continue to bring your child(ren) to school and collect them at the end of the school day, but you must not go beyond the school gate. (For infant children – arrangements have been made for your child(ren) to be collected and returned to you at the school gate by a member of the school staff). Special arrangements can be made for you to meet with a member of staff, if necessary, but this may only be with my written permission.

If you wish to pursue the matter further you have a right to complain to the Chair of Governors, who will consider the circumstances of the decision to withdraw permission for you to come on to the school site. You can make your complaint by writing to Mr/Mrs X, Chair of Governors (insert email address).

OR

Having considered all relevant information, I have determined that a bar is not appropriate on this occasion, however I would remind you that we expect all members of the school community to treat one another in a respectful manner.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix C

Letter 4 Restore permission at end of bar period

Dear

Further to my letter **(dated)** I am writing to confirm that as of **(date)** you will be allowed to access the school site in the normal manner.

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

Headteacher

Appendix D

Dealing with abusive telephone calls

Sometimes staff may have to deal with challenging, abusive, aggressive or threatening telephone calls. It is unacceptable for any member of staff to be subjected to such abuse but staff may not know how to handle such a telephone call. This guidance has been produced to assist staff if they are faced with such a situation.

To reduce the likelihood of callers becoming abusive staff should conduct themselves in a courteous and professional manner and make every attempt to meet the needs of the caller. Staff should also have the confidence that it is acceptable to end an abusive telephone call.

Always

- remain calm and polite
- actively listen – repeat information back to the caller to test understanding of the issue and gain their agreement
- inform the caller they are trying to help them
- be positive and say what you can do
- be clear and avoid using jargon
- if necessary, apologise for an error and take action to put it right
- if you have to go and get some information, let the caller know why you are putting them on hold and do not leave them on hold for a long time
- make notes of the conversation
- follow the procedure below if appropriate
- refer to the caller to the Headteacher or other member of SLT.

Never

- respond in the same manner as an abusive caller
- take it personally
- allow yourself to be bullied
- slam the phone down.

Script for abusive telephone calls

When the caller starts to raise their voice/be abusive:

Mr/Mrs/Ms...please don't raise your voice/swear at me, I am not raising my voice/being rude to you. If you continue to raise your voice/be rude to me then I will be forced to terminate the call.

When the caller continues to raise their voice/be abusive:

Mr/Mrs/Ms.... I understand you are upset/frustrated however I am not prepared to continue to be shouted/sworn at so you can either call back when you have calmed down or if you prefer you can put your views in writing.

If, despite the two warnings above, the caller continues to raise their voice/be abusive:

Mr/Mrs/Ms.... I advised you earlier during this call about raising your voice/swearing and you have continued to do this, so I am afraid I am going to have to terminate this call. **Hang up.**

Further actions:

Make a written note (signed and dated) of the telephone call and report the incident to your line manager.