POLICY TITLE: Dealing with Vexatious Parents, Carers and Visitors

STATUS: Non-Statutory

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1. Statement of Principles

1.1 This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance 'Controlling Access to School Premises' November 2018.

1.2 At The Latimer Arts College we value the positive relationships forged with parents and carers and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and carers and the community and believe that students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. We also strive to make our school a place where, as adults, we model for students the behaviour we teach and expect. In general, we place a high importance on good manners, positive communication and mutual respect.

1.3 Our overriding principle is that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from parents, carers or visitors. The Governing Body has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

1.4 On the rare occasions the behaviour of a parent, carer or visitor falls short of what we expect, we expect members of staff to behave professionally, attempting to defuse the situation where possible and seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. Staff who face these situations have licence to end any conversation (face to face or on the telephone). They should then refer the incident to a member of the Senior Leadership Team who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

1.5 The progress and well-being of the parent's and carers child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent, carer or visitor will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent, carer or visitor will have the opportunity to put their views forward at every stage. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from the school, robust review processes involving the Chair of Governors and then the Governing Body are in place to ensure fairness.

2 Definition of unacceptable behaviour

2.1 We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent, carer or visitor presents a risk to staff or students. Unacceptable behaviour is such that a member of staff or student feels threatened. This can be through face-to-face contact, on the telephone or in written communication (including social media). The following is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour:

- any kind of insult as an attempt to demean, embarrass or undermine
- any kind of threat
- raising of voice so as to be intimidating
- physical intimidation, e.g. by standing very close to another or the use of aggressive hand gestures
- use of foul or abusive language
- any kind of physical abuse
- allegations which turn out to be vexatious or malicious.

3. The School's approach to dealing with incidents

3.1 If a parent, carer or visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the School community, the Principal or appropriate Senior Leader will assess the level of risk before deciding on a future course of action. The course of action will be reasonable and commensurate with the assessed level of risk.

4. Risk Assessment

4.1 The Principal will carry out a risk assessment in order to help make a decision about the level of response. In all cases the response will be reasonable and proportionate. The Principal will consider the following questions:

- What form did the abuse take?
- What evidence is there?
- What do witnesses say happened?
- Are there previous incidents to take into consideration?
- Do members of staff/students feel intimidated by the parent, carer or visitor's behaviour?
- Is there any evidence of provocation?
- How high is the assessed risk that this will be repeated or there will be retaliation at the school's action? (low, medium, high).

5. Recording of Incidents

5.1 Staff and students subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about incident(s) which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters.

6. The school's response

6.1 Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Principal will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include the following:

1. Clarify to the parent, carer or visitor what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school

In some instances, it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent, carer or visitor is clear about behaviour standards expected by the School. This could be explained by letter from the Principal. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents. The

parent, carer or visitor will be invited to write to the Principal with his/her version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent, carer or visitor's response a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.

2. Invite the parent, carer or visitor to an informal meeting to discuss events

This could be helpful to discuss and diffuse the situation.

The safety and well-being of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. Members of school staff will always 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, carer or visitor who could potentially become aggressive.

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.

3. Impose conditions on the parent, carer or visitor's contact with the school and its staff

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents and carers of enrolled students have an 'implied licence' to come onto School premises at certain stated times, as defined by the School. Parents and carers exceeding this would be trespassing.

Depending of the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on the parent, carer or visitor's contact with the school. These conditions may include (but are not exclusively):

- being accompanied to any meeting with a member of school staff by a Senior Leader
- restricting contact by telephone to named members of the Senior Leadership Team
- restricting written communications to named members of the Senior Leadership Team
- restricting attendance at School events to those where the parent, carer or visitor will be accompanied by a member of the Senior Leadership Team
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Principal.

In this case the parent, carer or visitor will be informed by letter from the Principal the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent, carer or visitor would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent, carer or visitor in writing within 10 working days of the date of the letter.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the Governing Body after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent, carer or visitor will be invited to make written representation to the Governors. This and the evidence from the Principal will be considered by a panel of three governors. The governors panel may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the Clerk to the Governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, Governors will consider the extent of the parent, carer or visitor's compliance with the conditions, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent, carer or visitor's co-operation with the school in other respects.

4. Imposing a ban

Where other procedures have been exhausted and aggression or intimidation continues OR where there is an extreme act of violence then the school may consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent, carer or visitor from accessing school staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Principal that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent, carer or visitor would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the Chair of Governors.

The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent, carer or visitor in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the Chair's decision is to confirm the ban, a parent, carer or visitor in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by a panel of three Governors after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent, carer or visitor will be invited to make written representation to the Governors; this and the evidence from the Principal will be considered at a meeting of the governors' panel. Governors may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent, carer or visitor's access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent, carer or visitor by the Clerk to the Governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, Governors will consider the extent of the parent, carer or visitor's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent, carer or visitor's co-operation with the School in other respects.

5. Removal from School

Parents, carers or visitors who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed a section 547 offence. They will be considered as trespassers. In these circumstances the offender may be removed from School. This may be carried out by a police officer of person authorised by the Governing Body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent, carer or visitor.

7. Complaints Procedure

7.1 Any parental complaint that arises from incidents of abusive behaviour will be dealt with under the School's Complaints Procedure.

8. Monitoring by the Governing Body

8.1 This policy will be reviewed by the Governing Body annually.