

# Parents and Visitors Conduct Policy



Reviewed: July 2025  
To be reviewed July 2026

At Highwoods Primary School, we believe that a strong partnership between home and school is essential for the success and well-being of our pupils. We are incredibly fortunate that the vast majority of our parents and carers consistently demonstrate a kind, warm, and appropriate approach to their interactions with the school. Evidence in the form of positive feedback in our annual surveys, being oversubscribed and having waiting lists in each year group, reflect a continually growing reputation within the community.

Our most recent Ofsted inspection highlighted that

*"The school is a warm, welcoming and inclusive community... The school has fostered positive relationships with parents. Parents are highly appreciative of the school's work. Staff are positive that leaders do all they can to help them balance work, training and family life."* This strong foundation is something we highly value and are committed to protecting for all of our community.

This policy outlines our expectations for parent conduct and communication, ensuring a respectful and productive environment for all members of our school community.

## **1. Our Commitment to Parents and Staff**

Our staff are dedicated professionals who strive to support parents and address concerns. They receive training and guidance to manage challenging situations and are empowered to seek support from colleagues or defer a response to fully address an issue. National legislation and school policies ensure all staff work to a high, professional standard.

Staff have the right to work without fear of violence, harassment, intimidation, or abuse at all times.

## **2. Expected Conduct and Unacceptable Behaviour**

While we appreciate the positive relationships we have with nearly all parents, it is paramount that all interactions, particularly when raising issues or making a complaint, do not negatively impact our staff, children, or the wider school community. Our Complaints Policy clearly details the appropriate channels for raising concerns.

We fully appreciate that having access to staff through email has many benefits and can support effective communication. We do expect emails from parent and carers to be polite and civil at all times.

The school reserves the right to determine if any actions cross the threshold for unacceptable conduct, as outlined within legal definitions of abuse and harassment. The impact of an action on an individual, rather than the intent or not, is the key consideration. It is sufficient for a staff member or member of the school community to feel harassed, threatened, or intimidated for the school to take action.

Examples of behaviour considered serious and unacceptable include, but are not limited to:

- Shouting, swearing, or using aggressive language in person, over the telephone, or in any written communication.
- Refusing to leave the school site or classroom when asked by a member of staff.
- Physically intimidating a member of staff (e.g., invading personal space, aggressive staring, aggressive hand gestures, shaking or holding a fist).
- Threatening behaviour, including pushing, hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, or spitting.
- Using derogatory language about the school, staff, or pupils that is designed to cause harm/distress.
- Making racist, homophobic, sexist, or any other prejudicial comments.
- Breaching school security procedures (e.g., attempting to force entry, climbing fences, pulling on locked doors).
- Communicating excessively and unreasonably with staff, which impacts staff well-being and their ability to perform their duties effectively.
- Communicating on private forums and media that then become public, which comment about staff, pupils or the staff in an inappropriate manner.
- False or malicious allegations regarding incidents, or implied incidents.

These expectations also apply to parents interacting with other parents within the school community, and how parents speak to, and about, other pupils of our school.

### 3. Communication with staff: Valuing time and prioritising teaching and learning

Effective communication is a two-way process, and we strive to be as accessible as possible. However, it is crucial to recognise that staff time is extremely precious, and our primary focus is teaching and learning. This means we cannot provide unlimited time for meetings with parents and correspondence. Too much time spent with a minority of the same parents, especially those who are not seeking to work with the school or who are acting inappropriately, can prevent us from adequately supporting our other families. This is not acceptable.

To ensure efficient communication and allow staff to dedicate their efforts to all pupils, we ask parents to be mindful of the following:

- **Email communication:** Emails are checked between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM. While we often respond on the same day or within 48 hours, **please anticipate a response within five school days** due to the need to manage tasks during the day. Safeguarding issues will be addressed immediately. We do not encourage staff to read, respond or access emails before or after these times, or over weekends or out of term time.

- **Responding to communications:** We expect parents to respond to school emails and phone calls in a timely manner. Failing to do so and then expecting immediate attention from places an undue burden on staff time.
- **Excessive communication:** Occasionally, it can be the sheer volume of correspondence from a parent that is not appropriate. Multiple emails each day, or requesting excessive updates on children and their wellbeing or progress, is not manageable. The school will determine if the communication is unmanageable and will inform the parent that there needs to a reduction in frequency of communication.
- **Attending meetings and engaging with support:** When meetings are scheduled or support services are offered, we expect parents to attend or engage as agreed. Repeatedly failing to attend meetings and then requesting more meetings, or failing to engage with referred support services and then asking for further help, deliberately wastes valuable staff time that could be spent supporting other pupils and families. Meetings that are arranged but not attended or services not engaged with are logged by the school which provide a reflection of the time spent supporting families.
- **Appropriate channels:** We provide various channels for communication, including the Headteacher and senior leaders available at the school gate most days, use of year group emails, and the general office email address. Meeting with staff can be arranged through the [office@highwoodsprimary.com](mailto:office@highwoodsprimary.com) or the year group email. Our Complaints Procedure is also readily available on the website. Please utilise these established channels. Class matters should be addressed with the class teacher initially, not senior leaders- senior can be involved if a parent continues to hold concerns after communicating with the teaching.

#### 4. Social Media and online behaviour

Parents are entitled to hold opinions about schools. However, negative comments on social media can cause significant distress to staff and reputational damage to the school, especially when they do not allow the school an opportunity to respond or present a full and accurate picture.

We take a proactive approach by setting clear expectations about social media use and online behaviours, encouraging all parents to contact the school directly with concerns or complaints, which can often be resolved immediately and professionally.

We explicitly ask parents not to post malicious or offensive comments on any form of social media. Action will be taken if comments containing threats, defamation, naming the school, individuals (staff or pupils), or constituting harassment are brought to our attention. Social media is not the forum to have concerns about a school answered- often the school does not have the fair opportunity to respond to these comments and typically information presented is distorted, lacking the necessary accuracy and detail to fairly

represent the situation. Parents will be challenged on these views by the school should they come to light and will be reminded about expectations.

This includes discussions on private platforms like WhatsApp or private Facebook forums where the school or staff are named. Should these private groups become public knowledge and staff are aware, the school will take action, and if needed, restrictions to school site, access to staff can be invoked. Although the school recognises that private forums and groups such as Whatsapp are common and typically are used to support families and communities, should content on these private apps and forums become public, and in any way impact the school or the community, the school will seek to protect the staff, pupils and community.

## 5. Procedures for unacceptable conduct

Should a parent's behaviour be deemed unacceptable, the school will take appropriate steps, which may include:

- **Verbal or written warning:** An initial warning may be issued, outlining the unacceptable behaviour and the expectations for future conduct.
- **Restrictions of access to staff and school site:** This may involve restricting access to year group emails, face-to-face parent meetings (including parent evenings), or, in more serious cases, denying access to the school premises and events.
  - In imposing any restriction, the parent will be informed in writing that an investigation has been opened. In rare but serious incidents, a temporary restriction may be imposed immediately to protect pupils and staff, even before all viewpoints are gathered. The parent will be informed of the denial of access, subject to review, and the consequences of breaching the restriction (e.g., police involvement, injunction).
  - The school will always be fair, balanced, and measured, with the safety, well-being, and education of pupils, and the well-being of staff, at the heart of all decisions.
  - Incidents occurring off school premises, particularly those involving social media or online harassment, will also be considered in line with this policy. The school will act impartially, collecting all views where possible and appropriate, and assess whether restrictions are needed to maintain harmony and safety. Parents may be signposted to the police or legal advice by the school.
  - In the event of an altercation between parents, alternative collection and drop-off points for children may be arranged. This may be to ensure there are no incidents occurring on school site. This is not necessarily recognition of the school siding with any parent, but a preventative measure to manage a volatile situation.
  - Where an act of violence, aggression, or intimidation towards staff or a person in the school community has been proven, a parent may be denied

access to school grounds and events by the Headteacher, for a time-dependent period.

- Any restrictions to school site and staff access will be clarified in writing, detailing the reasons, timeline, and desired behaviour for review. The school's complaints procedure will also be referenced for parents wishing to challenge the decision.
- The school will review the parent's conduct and consider the views of impacted staff before lifting any restrictions, which will be communicated to the parent.
- Trustees will be informed of any restrictions to site or staff for parents.
- If appropriate, and a parent is no longer a member of our parent community due to their child attending another school or moving on, the school might still deem it appropriate to continue a ban or restrictions if said parent accesses school grounds- examples include, but are not limited to, collecting children on behalf of a friend or family member, or joining a school event such as the summer fair. This will be communicate if possible in writing but ultimately the discretion remains with the Headteacher and the adult will be informed to leave sight verbally.
- The Headteacher reserves the right to remove or limit access to school grounds for pupils who are ex-pupils, if it is deemed it will compromise the safety, wellbeing and culture of the school.
- **Involvement of external agencies:** In appropriate circumstances, the Local Authority (LA) and/or the police will be informed. This is in line with our statutory safeguarding responsibilities.
- **Legal proceedings:** Where individuals persist in unacceptable behaviour or ignore restrictions, legal proceedings may be pursued. Options include:
  - Prosecution under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996.
  - Appropriate behaviour contracts (voluntary agreements).
  - Anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.
  - Restraining orders under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997.
  - Prosecution for criminal damage or assault.
  - Legal advice is available through Essex Legal Services, and individual cases will be discussed with the Chair of Governors, Headteacher, and Legal Services. Where appropriate, the school will enrol the help of other legal professionals.

In all cases, the Headteacher will inform Trustees of any decisions taken. If discussed at a Trustee meeting, then minutes of this are recorded but these may be in confidential matters.

## 6. Record keeping

Clear and detailed records of all incidents will be maintained on the school's electronic system (CPOMS), including:

- Time, date, and details of the incident.
- Signed and dated staff witness statements.
- Views of the parent or carer.
- Questions from senior leaders to staff regarding the incident and responses.
- Copies of all relevant correspondence.
- Any physical evidence will be bagged and labelled.

## 7. Dealing with abusive telephone calls

Staff are not expected to tolerate abusive, aggressive, or threatening telephone calls. If a caller becomes abusive, staff are empowered to:

- **Issue a warning:** "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, I will be forced to terminate the call."
- **Second warning:** "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."
- **Terminate the call:** If the abuse continues, "Mr/Mrs/Ms... I advised you earlier 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." The call will then be ended.
- All such incidents will be recorded on CPOMS and reported to the Headteacher or senior leader.

In light of a staff member having to deal with an abusive call, further restrictions may be imposed by the school as a result. This could include removing phone conversations from communication and using email, limiting access to site and the removal of face to face meetings. In these cases, virtual meetings can be used as they can be recorded and copies sent to all parties. Permission from all parties needs to be attained prior to the meeting being recorded.

## 8. Cyberbullying and the law

While there isn't a specific criminal offence called cyberbullying, such activities can fall under various laws, including the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Malicious Communications Act 1988, Section 127 of the Communications Act 2003, the Public Order Act 1986, and the Defamation Acts 1952 and 1996.

As an employer, we have a duty to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of all employees, including addressing incidents related to employment that occur outside of working hours or premises.

Repeated online and social media abuse will not be tolerated and where the staff member feels harassed, the school will fully support them in order to protect them, where appropriate, using legal support and police.

## **Conclusion**

The Trustees of Highwoods Primary School and staff are fully committed to fostering positive relationships with our parents and the wider community. We are incredibly grateful for the support and collaborative spirit demonstrated by the vast majority of our families. This policy serves to reinforce our shared commitment to a safe, respectful, and productive learning environment for all children and to ensure that our dedicated staff can focus on their vital role of teaching and nurturing every pupil. In implementing this policy, the school will, as appropriate, seek advice from the Local Authority's education, health and safety, and legal departments, to ensure fairness and consistency.