

## THE PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP POLICY

This Policy is the responsibility of the Headmaster (in conjunction with the Chair of Trustees) and will be reviewed biennially.

### Introduction

At the heart of an Austin Friars education are the strong and supportive relationships between staff and pupils, as well as between staff and parents, carers and guardians (hereafter referred to as 'parents'). For the relationship between the School and parents to be most effective, it is accepted that dialogue is required however, on occasions it will be necessary for parents to place their faith in School staff. Parents are asked to recognise the wealth of teaching experience that exists within the School and be assured that in most circumstances, staff will have encountered most situations, or a something similar, on many occasions.

It is recognised that on occasions, parents may wish to ascertain what has occurred in School or to clarify how they might fulfil their supporting role in enabling the best educational experience for their child. It is not the School's intention to discourage this. In the vast majority of circumstances, such dialogue will occur without incident, and it is accepted that at times parents may wish to question or challenge the School's approach.

The Headmaster and Staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day to day management of the School in accordance with the Complaints Policy. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and / or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainant(s) begin to impact negatively on the day to day running of the School and directly or indirectly the overall wellbeing of the pupils or staff. In these exceptional circumstances, the School may take action in accordance with this policy.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for preventing harassment and for taking action to prevent actions which may have a detrimental effect on staff. An employee can make a complaint against the School where they are harassed by someone who does not work for the School, such as a parent. Reasonable and proportionate action should be taken by the School to address the issue.

This policy adheres to the philosophy underlying the Equalities Act 2010. The School commits to observing its principles and does not discriminate on any grounds.

### Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Articulate the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the School and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint;
- Support the wellbeing of pupils, staff and everyone who has legitimate interest in the work of the School, including Trustees and parents;
- Deal fairly, honestly, openly and transparently with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

## Expectations

Parents / carers / members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the School can expect the School to:

- Make available to complainants in writing:
  - How and when problems can be raised in the School;
  - The existence of the School's complaints policy, and
  - The existence of the School-Parents' Relationship Policy;
- Respond within a reasonable time;
- Be available for consultation with reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of other pupils within the School and the nature of the complaint;
- Respond with courtesy and respect;
- Attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the School's complaints policies, other policies and practice and advice from appropriate advisers, keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised.

The School expects parents / carers / member of the public who wish to raise problems with the School to:

- Treat all School staff and others associated with the School, with courtesy and respect;
- Respect the needs and wellbeing of pupils and staff in the Schools;
- Avoid the use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
- Avoid aggression or verbal abuse;
- Recognise the time constraints under which member of staff in the School work and allow the School a reasonable time period to respond;
- Recognise that resolving a specific problem and drafting an appropriate response can sometimes take a considerable amount of time;
- Follow the School Complaints policy in the case of a complaint.

For the purposes of this policy a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant believes to be within the remit of the School, and whose behaviour is unreasonable.

Unreasonable behaviour may be characterised by:

- Actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitive;
- Prolific correspondence or excessive email or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- An insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial/unsubstantiated complaints and / or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- An insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- An insistence on revisiting issues that had previously been considered 'closed' or that occurred over six weeks prior (or in a previous half term, whichever is the longer)
- An insistence on only dealing with the Headmaster (or other Senior member of staff) on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the School to deal with such matters;
- An insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainants but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the School because it is unlawful;
- Utilising approaches other than the recognised complaints policy to complain about the School or any individual connected with the Schools, including but not limited to

passing information relating to the School to the press or other media, particularly where such actions are interpreted by the School as a breach of confidentiality.

## **Harassment**

For the purposes of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as above in such a way that they:

- Appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of School staff and / or
- Cause ongoing distress to individual members of School staff and / or
- Have a significant adverse effect on the whole / parts of the School community and / or
- Are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, wellbeing and health.

Harassment is not necessarily face to face. It may occur through written communications, social media posts, visual images, email and phone.

## **Procedure**

In the first instance the School will inform the complainant that his / her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable / unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy. This will be confirmed in writing/via email.

The Board of Trustees or the Headmaster may consider barring the parent/carer from the School premises following an incident of misconduct. The Headmaster may impose an immediate ban on a parent / carer without recourse to the Board of Trustees. Where this is the case, the action will be followed up as set out below.

If the behaviour of the individual is not modified the School may take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- Inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered to be unreasonable / unacceptable and, therefore, falls under the terms of this policy;
- Inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meeting may be taken in the interest of all parties;
- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the School should be by letter only;
- Consider banning the complainant from the School site, or proceed straight to a temporary ban, this action may in particular be appropriate in cases of physical or verbal aggression;
- Consider taking advice from appropriate external parties / advisers about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from this complainant;
- In extreme circumstances the School may
  - use external agencies to assist in enforcing a decision and, or,

- decide to terminate the contract between the parent and the School, requiring them to find alternative provision for their child.

The School will review as appropriate, any sanctions applied to parents in the context of this policy. Such sanctions will be reviewed on a termly basis as a minimum.

**Links to other policies and documents**

This policy is linked to the following:

- Complaints Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- The School's Terms & Conditions

(All of the above are available on the School website.)

\*\*\*\*\*

Reviewed and endorsed by Full Trustees Meeting on: 17<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Next Review by Trustees: Lent Term 2025