

# Policy on the Prevention and Management of Unacceptable Customer Behaviour



Part of the school's commitment to ensure a safe and friendly working environment

## 1. Aim

It is a key priority and responsibility for our school is to ensure a safe, inclusive, and supportive working environment, where everyone can undertake their role, without fear of violence, abuse, harassment, hate or discrimination. This applies to the way we are treated by colleagues and by customers although the approaches taken will be different. For the purposes of this policy, "customer" refers to parents, carers, visitors and all other individuals who interact with the school or its staff.

This policy defines how the school will meet this key priority when working with customers, by covering:

- what is meant by 'unacceptable customer behaviour',
- the importance of keeping staff safe by identifying and mitigating risks, and how this can be done,
- how an incident will be managed and responded to,
- the support available for those that experience unacceptable behaviour, and
- how an incident can be reported, and why reporting is important.

The aim of the Policy is to empower and enable managers/Headteachers and staff to take the most appropriate approach to prevent and respond to incidents of unacceptable customer behaviour.

Please refer to the Dignity & Respect Policy which defines how the priority will be achieved in relation to our interactions with colleagues.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to schools.

Staff who commission/procure services where unacceptable behaviour may be a risk, should refer to the document titled 'Selection and Management of Contractors Arrangements' on the WSSfE Health & Safety page titled 'Contractors and Construction Projects'.

## 3. Who Can Help?

If managers/Headteachers have any questions in relation to the identification, assessment, and prevention of risk, they can contact the Health & Safety Service by emailing [HealthandSafety@westsussex.gov.uk](mailto:HealthandSafety@westsussex.gov.uk), or phoning 01243 752025.

If managers/Headteachers would like any advice and support on how best they can support staff that have experienced unacceptable customer behaviour, they can contact the HR Business Partnering team.

Staff should contact their manager/Headteacher, or if not appropriate another manager within their school in the first instance, if they have any questions, concerns or would like to report an incident.

We recognise the significant impact that unacceptable behaviour can have on the health and wellbeing of staff. The Employee Assistance Programme includes free and confidential advice or counselling. If applicable, Mental Health First Aiders may also be available at the school to provide support to staff and to signpost to other sources of support.

The [Hate Incident Support Service](#) operated by Victim Support Sussex can offer practical, emotional, and advocacy support if you have been targeted due to your race, faith, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity.

## 4. Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

This section contains examples of unacceptable customer behaviour, which are:

- Violence or threats of violence
- Aggression
- Abusive, offensive or threatening language, verbally or in writing.
- Harassment<sup>1</sup>
- Stalking or threats of stalking
- All forms of discrimination<sup>2</sup> including racism, ableism, sexism, ageism, transphobia, homophobia, or faith/religion based. For example:
  - Seeking to have staff replaced or not engaging with individuals due to their characteristics, for unjustifiable reasons<sup>3</sup>
  - Overt actions or subtle microaggressions that may not be intended to cause harm but do so unwittingly.
- Failing to comply with a reasonable request from a member of staff.
- Making unjustified, vexatious complaints about staff.

## 5. Preventing Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

The school will not condone unacceptable customer behaviour and will never expect staff to either.

As described in this Policy, the school will do everything in its power to protect staff and to ensure they do not experience unacceptable customer behaviour, including any forms of abuse or discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> **Harassment** is unwanted conduct related to protected characteristics that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. Protected characteristics are age; race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins); disability; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity/re-assignment; religion & belief; pregnancy and maternity; and marital/civil partnership status.

<sup>2</sup> **Discrimination** is where someone is treated unfairly compared to another person because of their protected characteristic.

<sup>3</sup> A **justifiable** reason could be for example requesting a particular gender for reasons of dignity, or due to a prior trauma.

The school should make its customers aware of the [West Sussex County Council Customer Promise](#).

## **Risk Assessments**

Managers/Headteachers have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their staff by assessing and reducing the risks of unacceptable customer behaviour, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Managers/Headteachers must complete an overarching school or team risk assessment where this risk is identified. This should be done in collaboration with impacted staff that are in roles deemed high risk of unacceptable customer behaviour. High risk roles include those that:

- work directly with members of the public;
- work in an area, or with individual where there have been a past incident(s)
- work alone;
- have an enforcement role; or
- work with money, other valuables or medicines.

The aim of the risk assessment is to identify and suitably mitigate the risk of unacceptable customer behaviour, by implementing precautionary measures. The risk assessment should:

- consider past incidents, to identify patterns or triggers to inform strategies to protect staff.
- be regularly reviewed and re-visited where staff are working with individuals that are known to have behavioural issues, or in response to an incident.

## **6. Incident Management**

All staff that witness or are made aware of unacceptable behaviour have a responsibility to act and provide support.

The School will never accept requests from customers to work with (or not work with) individuals due to their characteristics, for unjustifiable reasons as this would be condoning and colluding with discriminatory behaviour.

The health, safety and wellbeing of staff is of the utmost importance. Where a member of staff perceives that a customer's behaviour threatens their physical or psychological safety or wellbeing, or the safety and wellbeing of other staff/customers, they should remove themselves and others from the situation immediately. This should be done with the confidence that they will have the full support of the school and their manager/Headteacher.

## **7. Responding To Incidents of Unacceptable Behaviour**

Some customers may have a disability or condition that makes it difficult for them to either express themselves or communicate clearly and / or appropriately. In these circumstances, although unacceptable behaviour will not be condoned, how it is addressed and mitigated will be different and an approach must take into consideration their disability/ condition or personal needs.

The following actions may be taken in response to unacceptable behaviour depending on the situation and circumstances.

- Informal feedback, giving the individual the opportunity to reflect upon and change their language, behaviour, or attitude.
- Formal written warning
- Recording future interactions
- Implementation or review of a behaviour contract
- Temporarily or permanently restricting contact or changing/withdrawing a service or elements of a service. The services defined procedure must be followed and agreement obtained from an Officer with delegated authority before taking action.
- Notifying the Police and taking part in any legal action that follows.

Managers/Headteachers should discuss and update the member of staff as soon as possible, with all steps taken to ensure they are supported and that steps are being taken to prevent it from occurring again.

Experiencing unacceptable behaviour impacts everyone differently, but the impact on health and wellbeing can be significant. A manager/Headteacher will ensure impacted staff have access to the emotional and practical support required.

Where the incident of unacceptable behaviour warrants it, the school will support staff so they can, if they wish:

- feel confident to report incidents to the Police;
- fully participate in the Police investigation; and
- attend court, if required.

Staff will be paid if they require time off to meet with the Police and to attend court, or access support services.

The Industrial Injury Policy may apply where staff are physically injured whilst undertaking their work duties.

## **8. Reporting Incidents of Unacceptable Behaviour**

Where an incident occurs, it must be reported to a line manager/Headteacher or if not appropriate another manager within the school.

- Managers/Headteachers must take timely, supportive, decisive, and proportionate action with consideration to the wishes of the individual(s) that experienced the behaviour.

The incident must be reported by the school on the [Health & Safety Portal](#), so that support can be provided, steps taken to prevent reoccurrence, to enable continuous learning and to implement proactive solutions.

- If a member of staff does not want to report an incident on the H&S Portal, the manager/Headteacher may still consider it necessary, for the safety of the individual and others. This should be discussed with the staff member.

Incident data, including numbers and motivational factors will be monitored and will be used to identify and influence future work requirements.

## 9. Document History

Date	Notes	Who
February 2026	Policy launched	HR Policy Team