



# Matthews Hall

*Established 1918*

## **VEXATIOUS BEHAVIOUR POLICY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Head of School, faculty, and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of Matthews Hall ("the School") in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure.

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 of such pursuits can begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the School and directly or indirectly compromise the overall well-being of the children or staff in the School.

In these circumstances, the School may take action in accordance with this policy.

### **1. AIMS OF POLICY**

1.1 The aims of this policy are to:

Uphold 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 well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the School, including governors and parents; deal fairly, firmly, honestly, openly, and transparently with those who make persistent, unreasonable, or vexatious complaints and/or those who badger or harass members of staff in school. In this way, the Head of School and his or her team ultimately preserve and promote the teaching and learning environment.

### **2. PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL**

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

- 1) communicate to parents/guardians in writing about:
  - a) how and when problems can be raised with the School;
  - b) the existence of the School's complaints procedure, and
  - c) the existence of the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints
  
- 2) respond within a reasonable time;

3) be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the School and the nature of the complaint;

4) respond with courtesy and respect;

5) attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the School's complaints procedure, and keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised.

### **3. THE SCHOOL'S EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

3.1 The School can expect parents/guardians who wish to raise problems with the School to:

a) treat all school staff with courtesy, patience, and respect;

b) respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;

c) avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;

d) avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;

e) recognise the time constraints under which all members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;

f) recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time, especially if there are extenuating circumstances;

g) (in the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Procedure.

### **4. WHO IS A PERSISTENT COMPLAINANT?**

4.1 For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/guardian who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the School, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

a) actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;

b) prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;

c) uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably

d) an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;

e) an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;

f) an insistence on only dealing with the Head of School on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the School to deal with such matters;

g) an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant, but cannot be changed.

4.2 For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in (a) to (g) above in such a way that they:

a) appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or

b) cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or

c) have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community

and/or

d) 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, while not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

## **5. THE SCHOOL'S ACTIONS IN CASES OF PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS OR HARASSMENT**

5.1 In the first instance the School will verbally inform the complainant that his / her behaviour is becoming unreasonable / unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

5.2 This will be confirmed in writing.

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

a) inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the School to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy;

b) inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;

c) inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the School should be by letter only;

d) (in the case of physical, or verbal aggression) seek legal counsel and consider warning the complainant about being banned from school property; OR proceed straight to a temporary ban;

e) seek legal counsel under anti-harassment legislation;

f) seek legal counsel and establish a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant

5.4 If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the School may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level.

## 6. REVIEW

6.1 The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once in a school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.