

## Management of Abuse Against Staff Policy

### Introduction

We welcome visitors to West Nottinghamshire College, and we want to ensure it remains a safe place for staff, students and all members of our community.

The college values the positive relationships with parents, carers, family members and visitors to the college. We encourage close links with parents, carers, family members and visitors and believe that our students benefit when the relationship between home and college is a positive one.

We also strive to make our college a place where we place emphasis on our values of respect, collaboration, ambition, compassion, and integrity. Staff have a right to feel safe at college and should be able to work in an environment where they are not subject to aggressive, abusive or intimidating behaviour.

Almost all parents, carers and family members are keen to work with us and are supportive of the college. However, on very rare occasions, the behaviour of a small number of parents, carers, family members and visitors falls short of what we expect and is unacceptable. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the college community. This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone, or in face-to-face incidents.

In these situations, we expect members of staff to behave professionally, attempting to defuse the situation where possible and seeking the involvement of other colleagues as appropriate. Staff who face these situations have licence to end any conversation immediately (face-to-face or on the telephone). They should then refer the incident to a member of the senior leadership team or straight to the Executive team, who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy. The overriding principle is, however, that all members of the college community have the right to work or be in college without fear of aggression or abuse. The college has a requirement to protect staff from such aggression.

### Escalation of Serious Incidences

In situations involving immediate threats, violent behaviour or other serious incidents that a staff member believes pose a risk to life or safety, the staff member or another member of staff is authorised and expected to contact the appropriate emergency services including the Police without delay. If staff members feel that they are in serious or imminent danger they should, if possible, go to a reception point or nearest staff room and seek assistance. Staff have access to Microsoft teams and should utilise these to contact their duty head or reception. Radios are also available in some areas of the college to contact duty head and reception.

The progress and wellbeing of the student will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent, carer, family member or visitor will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent, family member, 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 college, robust review processes involving a senior postholder are in place to ensure fairness.

## **Definition of unacceptable behaviour**

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent, carer, family member or visitor presents a risk to staff. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff feel 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 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.

## **The college's approach to dealing with incidents**

If a parent, carer, family member or visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the college staff, an appropriate manager (e.g. duty head, head of department or line manager) will assess the level of risk before deciding on a course of action and whether to escalate to a senior postholder. The course of action will be reasonable and commensurate with the assessed level of risk.

## **Risk Assessment**

If escalated to a senior postholder, they will carry out a risk assessment in order to help them in making a decision about the level of response. In all cases the response will be reasonable and proportionate and ensure that the college takes all steps to ensure the staff member is safe. The senior postholder will consider the following questions:

- How does the member of staff feel? What impact the behaviour has had on the member of staff?
- What form did the abuse take?
- What evidence is there?
- What do witnesses say happened?
- Are there previous incidents to take into consideration?
- Is there any evidence of provocation?
- How high is the assessed risk that this will be repeated or there will be retaliation at the college's action? (low, medium, high).

## **Recording of Incidents**

Staff members who have been subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about the incident(s), which will be kept in an electronic file with subsequent letters. This file will be kept by the director of human resources.

## **The college's response**

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the senior postholder will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions could include the following:

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

In some instances, it may be appropriate to simply ensure that they are clear about the behaviour standards expected by the college. This could be explained by letter. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents. The parent, carer, family member or visitor will be asked to confirm in writing their version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the response, a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.

2. Invite to an informal meeting to discuss events

This could be helpful to discuss and diffuse the situation. The safety and wellbeing of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. There will be no requirement for the member of staff who has been subjected to the behaviour to attend the meeting. Members of college 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, family member or visitor who could potentially become aggressive. The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted, and a follow-up letter or email will be sent to confirm the college's expectations and any agreed actions.

3. Impose conditions on the parent, carer, family member or visitors contact with the college and its staff

Although fulfilling a public function, colleges are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. The college has the right to deny entry to any member of the public where they pose a risk to a member of the college community. Depending on the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the college may consider imposing conditions on the contact with the college. These conditions may include (but are not exclusively):

- being accompanied to any meeting with a member of college staff by a member of the senior leadership team
- 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 college events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the college
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the senior leadership team.

In this case, the parent, carer, family member or visitor will be informed by letter of the details of the conditions that are being imposed. They would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the senior postholder responsible for the decision. The senior postholder will then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions, and the final decision will be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the date of receipt of the written representations.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the senior postholder on a termly basis (and each term after that, if appropriate). Any proposed changes to the decision will take into consideration the views of the staff member who was subjected to the behaviour.

4. Imposing a ban

Where other procedures have been exhausted and aggression or intimidation continues or where there is an extreme threat or act of violence, the college may consider banning a parent, carer, family

member of visitor from college premises. This will include banning that individual from accessing college staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the senior postholder that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent, carer, family member 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 senior postholder who was responsible for the decision. The senior postholder would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This final decision would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the decision is to confirm the ban imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the senior postholder on a termly basis (and each term after that, if appropriate). Any proposed decision will take into consideration the views of the staff member who was subjected to the behaviour.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, the senior postholder will give consideration to the views of the staff member who was subjected to the behaviour, extent of the individual's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received, and any evidence of cooperation with the college in other respects.

#### 5. Removal from college

Parents, carers, family members or visitors who have been banned from the college premises and continue to cause a nuisance or threat will be considered as trespassers. In these circumstances, the offender may be removed from college premises by the police. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent, carer, family member or visitor.

#### 6. Support for staff who experience an incident

For serious incidents the college will undertake an 'After Action Review' chaired by the Director of Human Resources and Senior DSL with affected staff present to consider learning points and any measures to put in place to protect staff. The staff member may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative if requested.

Staff will be offered access to the college counselling services and occupational health service and signposted to other external support mechanisms as appropriate

Where staff are asked to remain at home for their own safety this will be clearly communicated to them as a measure to protect their safety and will be on full pay. Follow up calls to keep the staff member updated on the situation and check their wellbeing will be carried out either by their line manager or a member of the college senior leadership team.

### **Right of appeal**

Parents, carers, family members or visitors have a right of appeal against the decision of the senior postholder at any point of this procedure. This should be done in writing and addressed to the head of governance.

### **Equality and diversity monitoring**

In order to monitor the fairness and address any issues relating to this procedure and its implementation in respect of equality and diversity, monitoring, reporting and analysis of aspects of the process will be carried out. This will be completed by Human Resources and will be reported to the Equality and Diversity Steering Group in order to inform the college of performance outlined in the Equality and Diversity Scheme.

## **Definitions**

“**Senior postholders**” are the principal and chief executive; the vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience; the vice principal: curriculum and quality; and the chief financial officer.

The “**Executive team**” comprises the abovementioned individuals *plus* the director: IT, estates and learning resources and the director: human resources and organisational development.

The “**senior leadership team**”, for the purposes of this document, comprises the abovementioned individuals *plus* second- and third-tier managers at assistant principal/assistant director level and head of department/head of service level.