



Derwent and Southill Federation

*We are a Values-led Federation
We respect ourselves; We respect others; We respect the environment.*



Management of Unreasonable Complainants Policy 26 27

The federation and the governors are committed to the improvement of the school and welcome any concerns raised by parents. However, in a minority of cases people pursue their complaints in a way that is unreasonable. They may behave unacceptably, or be unreasonably persistent in their contact with the schools and submission of information. This can impede the investigation of their complaint (or complaints by others) and can have significant impact on both the wellbeing and also effective function of the staff in school. These actions can occur either while their complaint is being investigated, or once the school has concluded the complaint investigation.

This policy aims to develop a proportionate approach when responding to unreasonable complainant behaviour and is based on the Local Government Ombudsman's guidance for good practice in dealing with these complaints.

Definition

This policy covers 'unreasonable complainant behaviour', which may include one or two isolated incidents, as well as 'unreasonably persistent behaviour', which is usually an accumulation of incidents or behaviour over a longer period.

Unreasonable and unreasonably persistent complainants are those complainants who, because of the nature or frequency of their contacts with the school, hinder the school's consideration of their, or other people's complaints.

This policy differentiates between 'persistent' complainants and 'unreasonably persistent' complainants in recognition that parents may be 'persistent' because they feel the school has not dealt with their complaint properly and are not prepared to leave the matter there. Almost all complainants see themselves as pursuing justified complaints. However, some complainants may have justified complaints but may pursue them in inappropriate ways. Others may pursue complaints which appear to have no substance or which have already been investigated and determined. Their contacts with the school may be amicable but still place very heavy demands on staff time, or they may be very emotionally charged and distressing for all involved. Situations can escalate, and in a minority of cases complainants become abusive, offensive, threatening or otherwise behave unacceptably.

Examples of unreasonable actions and behaviours

These are some of the actions and behaviours which may be considered to be unreasonable actions and behaviours.

- Refusing to specify the grounds of a complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- Refusing to cooperate with the complaints investigation process.
- Refusing to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure.

- Insisting on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice.
- Making unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeking to have them replaced.
- Changing the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- Denying or changing statements he or she made at an earlier stage.
- Introducing trivial or irrelevant new information at a later stage.
- Raising numerous, detailed but unimportant questions; insisting they are all answered.
- Covertly recording meetings and conversations.
- Submitting falsified documents from themselves or others.
- Adopting a 'scattergun' approach: pursuing parallel complaints on the same issue with a variety of organisations.
- Making excessive demands on the time and resources of staff with lengthy phone calls, emails to numerous staff, or detailed letters every few days, and expecting immediate responses.
- Submitting repeat complaints with minor additions/variations that the complainant insists make these 'new' complaints.
- Refusing to accept the decision; repeatedly arguing points with no new evidence.

Harassment

We regard harassment as the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress rather than seek a resolution.

Behaviour will fall within the scope of this policy if:

- It appears to be deliberately targeted over a significant period of time at one or more members of school staff or others.
- The way in which a complaint or other issues is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes ongoing distress to school staff or others
- It has a significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.
- Actions are pursued aggressively or in any manner not appropriate to an effective resolution

Response to Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the school's complaints procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty and reach a resolution.

Decisions regarding whether the complainant is unreasonably persistent or whether there has been unreasonable complainant behaviour will be taken jointly by the Head teacher (HT) and the Chair of Governors in accordance with the policy. In this situation complainants will be notified in writing by the HT

In cases of unreasonable complainant behaviour, the school may take any or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- Inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach
- Inform the complainant in writing that the school considers their behaviour to fall under the terms of this policy.
- Require all future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a third person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken

- Inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication.
- Inform the complainant in writing that their behaviour is now considered to fall under the terms of this policy and that any complaint will not be investigated further until it is pursued in a manner the school's leadership (either Derwent or Southill) considers to be reasonable.
- Place restrictions on the individual's access to school and/or school staff.
- Cease all correspondence and communication with the complainant other than that necessary for the health and safety of any child/adult in school.
- Involve officers of the local authority

Time frame and review

If a complainant's unreasonable behaviour is modified and the complaint still lies within the time limit specified within the school's complaints policy, the school will use its discretion and may resume the investigation of the complaint.

Legitimate new complaints, if not pursued in a persistent or unreasonable way, will still be considered, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy. The federation nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals subject to the policy.

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

If a complainant's unreasonable behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school (either Derwent or Southill) may resume the process identified above.

Policy Review

The Governing Body of our federation is responsible for oversight of the Head teacher's annual review of this policy, and for reporting back to the Local Authority.

Date policy agreed: September 2026



Signed Neil Parsons (Chair of Governors)

Date of Review: September 2027