



United Learning
The best in everyone™

Dunottar School

Communications Protocol for Parents, Visitors and Staff Policy

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1. Introduction

At Dunottar School we have a strong sense of working together. The staff and students are expected to work within the Warrior Learner ethos, school code of conduct and community rules. This protocol sets down the school's expectations of parents and visitors in sharing our ambition, which is for the students to achieve their own personal best as they move through the school.

All our staff have the right to work in an environment that is free from abuse, harassment and victimisation. This policy outlines United Learning's approach to protecting its staff from unacceptable behaviour (physical and/or psychological) from parents/carers of students and visitors.

Dunottar School is opposed to any abuse, and takes a firm stance against bullying, harassment or victimisation in all its forms.

We recognise that in our community, as in life, there will be times when frustration about what may have been said or done can occur. School staff understand the pressure that students and parents feel at times and are committed to helping resolve difficulties when they arise in a sensitive and helpful manner. Just as we demand the very highest standards of courtesy and professionalism from our staff, we also expect students, parents and visitors to follow the general principles set out in this document with regard to the tone and content of communications, be they in person, on the telephone, or in writing.

In addition, this protocol seeks to put in some protection for school staff from any behaviour from any non-employee which might cause distress.

2. Rationale

Dunottar School has a legal responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect its employees from all forms of abuse and behaviour causing concern whilst carrying out their day-to-day duties.

3. Context

Regrettably, although this is not the norm, Dunottar School has experienced occurrences of verbal and written discourtesy of its employees in a range of contexts.

4. Aims of this protocol

- To improve understanding between parents, visitors and staff by providing parameters and guidelines for all.
- To protect all employees from behaviour which causes distress.
- To outline the procedures for how the school will handle examples of such behaviour.

5. Definition of behaviour which causes distress:

Dunottar School expects all those who engage with our staff to be respectful, reasonable and courteous in all their communications, including the tone, content, volume and/or nature of such communications.

Unacceptable behaviour may take the form of, including but not limited to:

- a) Verbal abuse; verbal abuse may be defined as "the repeated improper and excessive use of language or tone of voice to humiliate someone, or to undermine someone's dignity" including swearing. Verbal abuse which is related to a protected characteristic, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, faith, or age, may constitute hate speech.

- b) Physical abuse (whether actual or threatened);
- c) Bullying type behaviour, including harassment and victimisation;
- d) Aggressive behaviour, including shouting;
- e) Inappropriate language, including swearing;
- f) Undermining professional integrity and/or abilities;
- g) Pressure to alter grades or give awards/responsibilities to students;
- h) Any other unreasonable conduct (whether one off or persistent) which causes distress or harm (physical and/or psychological).

Unacceptable behaviour may take place in various contexts, including but not limited to:

- a) In person (both one-to-one or in public, such as at a sports match or parents evening);
- b) On the telephone;
- c) In writing (including emails, texts and Instant Messaging);
- d) Online (including posting malicious comments on websites and social media sites or messaging apps, other acts of “internet trolling”, and misuse of images/footage).

6. General Principles on the Tone and Content of Communication

All Communications between parents and school and vice versa should be:

- Polite and courteous - in tone and content.
- Illustrative of our common purpose.
- Respectful of professional integrity.
- Assume the best of intentions of the school and its staff - we are all working in the best interests of the students.
- Mindful of the time pressures under which teachers and parents operate.

7. Response Times

When a parent contacts the school on an informal basis, where possible they should expect an acknowledgement from the member of staff within 24 working hours and a fuller response within 48 working hours (consideration may be needed to allow for differing working patterns for staff within these standard response times). If the school member of staff needs longer to address a parent or visitors query, then they will update them as appropriate.

Please see the school complaints policy for complaints.

8. Meetings with Staff

Unless it is an emergency then we ask that parents request an appointment so that the school can give thought and consideration as to how to best support the student and parent/s with resolving the issue. When meetings occur with school staff outside of the usual run of meetings such as parent teacher consultations the following will take place:

- The School will decide on which staff are most suited to resolving the issue and at which level of authority within the school structure.
- Two appropriate staff members will be present. (If applicable)
- Meetings will take place during staff working hours.
- A time frame will be established at the outset of the meeting so that all parties know how long they have together.
- Short notes will be taken to capture the main points of the meeting and not minutes verbatim.

9. Verbal Abuse

In the most extreme of events, which are rare, all incidents of verbal abuse on staff must be reported in writing. The report must be sent to the relevant member of the Senior Management Team at the earliest possible opportunity.

Staff should have every right to:

- terminate the conversation if they deem it to have become abusive.
- record the nature of the conversation and examples of the alleged abuse.

The relevant member of the Senior Management Team will contact the parent and will initiate the Senior Management procedure set out below in section 12.

10. Correspondence

All correspondence that is unacceptable in tone or content must be passed immediately to the relevant member of the Senior Management Team at the earliest possible opportunity, the staff member will acknowledge the correspondence but will not reply in full to the parent.

The relevant member of the Senior Management Team will reply to the parent and will initiate the Senior Management procedure set out below in section 12.

11. Online Abuse

Any member of staff who receives inappropriate and abusive contact online e.g. emails, social media, direct messaging, etc. should raise the matter as soon as possible with the relevant member of the Senior Management Team.

Individuals should not respond to the inappropriate contact and should maintain a record of evidence e.g. frequency and time of contact, screen shots, etc.

12. Vexatious, Malicious or Defamatory Behaviour

The school takes very seriously any action, by a parent and/or visitor, which, after full and fair consideration, is deemed vexatious, malicious, defamatory, or which sets out to undermine the reputation of the individual and/or of the School.

All behaviour deemed vexatious, malicious or defamatory must be reported immediately to the relevant member of the Senior Management Team at the earliest possible opportunity without discussion with the parent or visitor.

The employee or teacher concerned should provide the relevant member of the Senior Management Team with the evidence e.g. screenshots from Social media/networking sites, notes from the relevant conversation or the email concerned etc.

The relevant member of the Senior Management Team will reply to the parent and will initiate the Senior Management Team procedure set out below in section 12.

The school may seek appropriate legal advice if these matters arise.

13. Senior Management Team Procedure

The Senior Management Team Four Step Procedure for following up on alleged abusive behaviour towards staff is as follows:

- Step One - Phone call/Meeting with Relevant member of Senior Management Team.
- Step Two - Phone call/Meeting with Headmaster, followed by a formal warning letter.
- Step Three – Phone call/Meeting with the Chair of Governors.
- Step Four - Required Removal of pupil, under section 6, Exclusion and Required Removal, in the School's terms and conditions.

Serious abusive behaviour, such as physical abuse or making career- threatening malicious and defamatory comments will be dealt with at Stage Two, Three or Four of the procedure, without going through the prior stages and may involve external agencies.

14. Outcomes

The following sanctions may be applied to parents and visitors:

Warning letters to parents or visitors.

- Permission to attend school functions may be withdrawn, including, but not limited to:
 - Performances
 - Sports fixtures
 - Open Days
 - Parent-teacher meetings
- Restrict all communication with the school through a member of the Senior Management Team.
- Permission to be on school premises may be withdrawn.
- Required removal of the student from the school.

Dunottar School sees working collaboratively with parents, visitors and students as key to ensuring a positive experience for everyone in our school community.

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