



Managing serial and unreasonable complaints policy

Priestley Smith Specialist VI School

September 2026

Policy review date: September 2027

Policy status: Non Statutory

Responsible member of SLT: Joanna Garvey Headteacher

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c38b69ce5274a70ca3c3ced/Model_policy_for_managing_serial_and_unreasonable_complaints.odt

This policy can also be adapted to manage unreasonable or persistent contact not directly associated with, or resulting from, formal complaints.

Priestley Smith School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

Restrictions will be based on evidenced behaviour and its impact, not simply on a person making a complaint, disagreeing with the school, asking complex questions or exercising a right to challenge a decision. Decisions will take account of individual circumstances, proportionality and any reasonable adjustments required.

Priestley Smith School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the school, such as, if the complainant:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance.
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process.
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure.
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice.
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on.
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales.
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced.
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds.
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed).
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education.
- seeks an unrealistic outcome.
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.
- uses threats to intimidate.
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence.
- knowingly provides falsified information.
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached. Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

The examples above are indicators rather than automatic grounds for restricting contact. The school will assess each case individually and keep a record of the behaviour and its impact.

Managing frequent correspondence

Where the school receives frequent correspondence about day-to-day operational matters, the school will consider each concern on its merits and make proportionate enquiries where appropriate.

Where repeated contact requires staff to repeatedly investigate events, provide detailed explanations or respond to differing accounts of the same incident, the school may manage communication in order to ensure that staff time is used effectively and that the education, welfare and safeguarding of all pupils is not adversely affected.

The school may therefore:

Routine arrangements for managing correspondence are distinct from a formal decision to classify behaviour as unreasonable or impose a restrictive communication plan. Where arrangements materially restrict access, the warning and review safeguards below will apply.

- appoint a single point of contact;
- require communication to be in writing;
- combine several concerns into one response rather than responding separately to each item of correspondence;
- respond within published school timescales rather than immediately;
- decline to enter into prolonged correspondence once reasonable enquiries have been completed and the school's position has been communicated, unless significant new evidence becomes available.

Where accounts of an incident differ and no further independent evidence is available, the school will record the outcome of its enquiries and will not normally engage in repeated correspondence seeking to revisit the same matter.

The school will continue to respond immediately to safeguarding concerns, child protection matters or urgent medical issues where appropriate.

New substantive complaints will be considered on their merits under the published complaints procedure, even where a communication plan is in place. The school will provide a clear route for urgent safeguarding, child protection and medical concerns to be raised and escalated promptly, regardless of any communication restrictions.

The school will not label a person as serial solely because they have complained repeatedly. Each genuinely new complaint will be assessed on its own merits in accordance with the school's published complaints procedure.

If the behaviour continues, the headteacher will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants whose frequency or manner of contact places a disproportionate demand on school resources or has a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing or the effective operation of the school, the Headteacher may implement a communication plan. This may specify:

Any written warning will identify the behaviour of concern, explain its impact, describe the change requested and state the potential consequences if it continues. Wherever possible, the headteacher or Chair of Governors will first discuss the concern informally and consider whether support or reasonable adjustments would resolve the difficulty.

- a single point of contact;
- acceptable methods of communication;
- reasonable response times;
- how frequently the school will respond; and
- that multiple concerns raised within a defined period may be addressed in a single response

Every formal communication plan will be reviewed no later than six months after implementation and at least every six months while it remains in force. Restrictions will be amended or lifted when no longer necessary or proportionate. The complainant will be informed in writing of the review outcome.

A formal communication plan will be confirmed in writing. It will explain the reasons and evidence for the restrictions, their start date, the named point of contact, arrangements for new complaints and urgent matters, how an earlier review may be requested and the scheduled review date.

Any contact restrictions will be proportionate, recorded with reasons and communicated in writing. A complainant may make representations to the Chair of Governors about a restriction imposed by the headteacher (or to an impartial governor if the Chair made the decision).

Protecting staff from unreasonable demands

The school has a duty of care not only to complainants but also to its employees. Where repeated or excessive correspondence results in staff experiencing undue stress, disruption or an unreasonable diversion of time from their duties, the school will take proportionate steps to manage communication whilst ensuring that legitimate concerns continue to be considered fairly.

The school will consider its duties under the Equality Act 2010, including reasonable adjustments and accessible alternatives to any specified communication method where appropriate. Legitimate concerns will continue to be considered fairly, and complainants will ordinarily retain access to the stages of the school's published complaints procedure.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from Priestley Smith School.

If the school considers barring an individual from its premises, it will normally give them an opportunity to make representations before a decision is made, unless immediate action is needed for safety. The school will explain the reasons, duration and review arrangements in writing.

Records and oversight

The school will securely record material correspondence, enquiries, informal discussions, warnings, decisions, reasons for restrictions, reasonable adjustments and review outcomes. The governing body will receive appropriate oversight information in accordance with the school's governance arrangements and confidentiality obligations.

Implementation note: Before approval, confirm alignment with the school's published complaints procedure, safeguarding procedures, governing-body arrangements and stated response times.