

**John Colet School's Policy covering  
Incidents involving Violent, Threatening or Abusive Visitors**

Date policy was agreed	October 2012
Date Equalities impact assessment completed	February 2012
Date policy was reviewed	January 2015
Date reviewed by Governor Advisor	February 2012
Date reviewed by Parents	February 2012
Date reviewed by the Governors	February 2015
Governors body responsible for the review	Finance and GP Committee
Senior Leadership Team Member accountable for writing and reviewing the policy	Head of Finance and Business

Those involved in formulating and reviewing this policy were a representative of the Governing body, Mrs C McLintock (Headteacher), 23 parents and 12 staff. The BCC model guidance was also considered.

Review 2015 – Mrs Cathryn Roche (Governor) Mrs K Hart (Head of Finance and Business)

### **Monitoring and Reviewing**

This policy will be formally reviewed every 3 years.

Ongoing monitoring of actions and impacts/outcomes will be:

- Feedback within school to the Headteacher
- Feedback via the Headteacher's termly report to Governors
- Health and Safety reports

### **Legislation this policy relates to**

- DfE Legal Toolkit for Schools (0504-2002)
- Health and Safety at Work Act et al 1974
- Education Act 1996

### **Definition**

Throughout this document where the term 'visitor' is used it covers any parent/carer or visitor to the school and is not confined to adults.

### **Aim**

All members of the school community have a right to expect that John Colet is a safe place in which to work and learn. Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence against school staff, or other members of the school community is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any incident will be treated seriously and a disruptive visitor may be banned from entering the school or even prosecuted.

The Governing Body is committed to reducing the risks of its school staff from acts of violence and aggression by:

- Demonstrating to staff that the potential for violence at work is recognised

- Issuing clear procedures/guidelines, which include preventative and protective measures (Appendix 1)
- Providing a poster visible to visitors as they sign in at Reception as to the school's expectations of visitor behaviour
- Providing adequate training to staff who may be subject to violence or abuse to develop their ability to anticipate violent incidents and deal with them
- Providing an appropriate visitors system which authorises and records visits to site
- Clarifying violent incident reporting and monitoring procedures
- Encouraging proper reporting of incidents and near misses and ensuring that school staff do not avoid reporting violent incidents in the belief that an assault may suggest a failure on the part of the member of staff concerned
- Supporting staff who have been subject to violent, threatening or a abusive behaviour and offering counselling where appropriate

### **Types of violence**

In identifying types of violence the Governing Body recognises that staff can be intimidated or threatened by a variety of circumstances, not simply physical assault, which includes:

- Threatening behaviour
- Gesturing
- Any aggressive or inappropriate contact
- Use of weapons
- Use of aggressive animals
- Abusive telephone calls, texts, letters, faxes, emails, website or social network entries
- Swearing, shouting insults etc
- Innuendo
- Deliberate silence
- Intimidating behaviour causing fear or emotional upset
- Any damage to property on the school site

### **Support**

Occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling is available through the school's Employee Assistance Programme (0800 282 193)

Referrals can be made to the School's Counsellor via the Headteacher.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Procedures for Staff in dealing with Incidents involving Violent, Threatening or Abusive Visitors**

These procedures have been drawn up following an assessment of risk to staff and others from abusive and violent visitors. They will be reviewed on a regular basis.

#### **Avoiding an Incident**

Visitors may arrive in a tense, agitated state and how they are initially dealt with might well make the difference between a minor exchange of words and a violent confrontation.

Office staff must ask if they have an appointment. If not, a senior member of staff must be called rather than the member of staff being asked for. As the member of the office staff is creating the visitor badge, they should assess the visitor's state and must feedback to the member of staff prior to them seeing the visitor. Where there is concern about a visitor's state then a member of senior staff should be informed and advice sought.

The Office should keep their door locked if they feel that their personal safety is at risk and inform their Line Manager.

Members of staff are entitled to support from their Line Manager in handling a potentially difficult parent interview, so, if you have any concerns you should discuss them with your Line Manager. Sensitivity towards parental difficulties is an asset. Many adults are still influenced by their own school and other childhood experiences, as well as their consequent expectations for their own children. Over anxious, or even ambitious, parents can feel very vulnerable. Adults with communication difficulties (for example English as an Additional Language) may feel vulnerable and this may influence their behaviour.

Preparation is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews prove constructive rather than confrontational. Interviews should be by appointment only. Any interview which is not by appointment should be in emergencies only and have two members of staff present.

#### **Always try to:**

- Prepare in advance by:
  - Gathering information that might help
  - Using the Meetings Room so not isolated
  - Ensuring meetings take place when other staff are around (ideally 8am-4pm)
  - Ensuring someone else knows about the meeting
  - Ensuring the layout of the room is not intimidating for visitors and allows you to escape quickly; if possible position your chair/desk with the door behind you
  - Positioning seating at equal height so that the parent does not feel patronised, and, if possible, at a 45 degree angle as this is less threatening. Avoid barriers if it is safe to do so
  - Considering items in the room that could be used as potential weapons
  - Ensuring there is enough space in the room, whilst also making it appear intimate and relaxing (this can be achieved through lighting and warm colouring). People can need greater personal space than normal when upset or angry and the proximity of others can be more threatening

- Considering having a colleague or scribe present, or pre-arranging with a colleague to check that all is well, if you have reason to believe that the visitor has a previous history of aggression or violence, or appears to be aggressive or violent. There should always be a colleague present if there is more than one visitor.
- Considering having a translator present
- Remove an angry or upset person from an audience, or, if easier, remove the audience and do not leave them waiting unnecessarily. The fewer people that are involved in an incident, the easier it is for an aggressor to back down without losing face
- If a child is present with the aggressor then ask the child to leave the room and ask office staff to supervise them
- Keep the discussion as calm and friendly as possible, paraphrasing what has been said and using sympathy and empathy where appropriate.
- Speak in a calm and low tone. If voices get raised then saying “I think that we should both agree not to raise our voices” or “If you don’t remain calm and continue to shout at me I can’t clearly hear what you trying to say to me” can sometimes help
- Summarise what has been said and follow through. This will help to build trust and respect
- Minimise a visitor’s frustration by: -
  - Being yourself. Do not hide behind authority, status or a job title. By using your name instead of a description of your status, you are presenting yourself as another human being. Later on, it may be important to explain what authority or status you have in order to reassure the visitor that you are in a position to act on their behalf
  - Keeping the visitor talking and explaining the problem, their perception of what has happened, why they feel aggrieved. Use verbal and non-verbal prompts (saying ‘mmm’ or ‘yes’ or nodding) to keep them talking. Use open questions to encourage them to talk and explain
  - Listening and allowing the visitor to express any complaint, without preventing them from finishing what they have to say. Listen empathetically without pre-judging or patronising. Listen also for the feelings, concerns and possible intentions behind their words
  - Responding promptly, paying attention and showing that you do care about their problem. Do not keep leaving the room as this gives the message that you have other more important matters to deal with
  - Being polite, pleasant and reassuring and do not show anger. Resist arguing. It is very tempting to respond and become engaged in an argument, especially if you are the butt of aggression or accused in some way, but it is far more likely to result in conflict or confrontation than contribute to defusing the situation
  - Paying attention to your body language so it is as non-threatening as possible. Avoid aggressive or defensive stances, such as arms folded, hands on hips or waving fingers or arms. Try to relax your facial muscles and convey openness and empathy with the speaker. Make eye contact, but avoid constant eye contact that may be threatening or trigger aggression because it is perceived as staring
  - Being aware of your voice tone, not speaking too loudly or quickly
  - Trying to explain clearly in jargon free language precisely what your difficulty is in giving the aggressive person what they want. Repeat it until you are sure you are understood because upset people do not always hear the first time
  - Not making any promises which you know you cannot keep as this may make things worse for you or your colleagues at a later date

On occasion an invited visitor may arrive with someone to support them. It should be made clear that this support person can be asked to leave, if they make a nuisance of themselves or they are perceived in any way to be threatening or abusive.

### **Handling an Incident – General Principles**

If someone becomes abusive or threatening, consider whether or not you can cope with the situation. You should not feel you have to cope with it alone: you should seek help from other people, or leave altogether. If a situation appears to be getting out of control, make an excuse and leave and immediately report the incident to the Headteacher/Designated Person.

If an intruder comes into a classroom, the member of staff should attempt to get themselves and any students out of the room straightaway, seek assistance from their nearest colleague and get a message to the School Office who will contact senior staff straightaway.

It is important that you:

- Know whether you are in a position to offer the visitor a realistic and reasonable answer to their expectations
- Know whether you are competent to handle the situation
- Be confident you have back up
- Be assured you can summon help
- Have a plan of how to approach the problem

First keep calm, relax, allow yourself time to think and decide the best course of action. Ask yourself if what has occurred so far in the exchange means that someone else, specially briefed by you, would be better placed to handle the situation.

Colleagues may have particular skills or experience that you do not have. The situation may be such that it requires specialist help, such as the police to eject a person; if so, you should get help quickly, before the situation deteriorates.

### **Warning Signs**

Someone who is potentially, or about to become, violent can give out signs and signals that constitute a recognisable warning:

- Agitation
- Tapping the table
- Loud speech/shouting
- Muscle tension in face, hands, limbs; fidgeting, hand-wringing; clenching fists
- Drawing breath in sharply
- Colour of face: pale is dangerous – the body is ready for action; a red face is likely to indicate a bark worse than the bite, but this could change
- Finger- wagging or jabbing
- Inability to be still, even pacing about
- Swearing
- Staring eyes
- Sweating

- Oversensitivity to ideas, suggestions
- Rapid mood swings

It should always be remembered that:

- The physical safety of staff/students is more important than the security of buildings or property
- When violence is threatened it is important that reasonable effort is made to control the situation
- If a situation is out of control it is better to retreat and get away if possible
- In controlling an incident, involvement of members of the public should be avoided
- If an implement has been involved in an attack, this should be retained, provided this can be done without any risk
- Physical intervention or restraint should always be regarded as an absolute last resort

### **Staff action to be taken following an incident**

- Alert the School Office straightway who will inform senior staff
- Seek medical attention, if required
- Report verbally to the Headteacher as soon as possible. Other staff may be at risk from the same person
- Complete an Incident Report Form and pass to the Headteacher for investigation, having sought Union advice, if appropriate, including:
  - Where the incident occurred, including physical environment; the time of day;
  - Activity at the time of the incident
  - Details of the perpetrator
  - The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator
  - An account of what happened
  - Any other witnesses
  - The outcome
  - If preventive measures had been introduced, did they help?
- Take time with the Headteacher/Line Manager to discuss the incident and your feelings
- Ask for assistance if you need it
- Consider Police involvement, if they are not already involved
- Seek advice on your entitlement to claim financial compensation, if appropriate

In all cases of assault causing actual injury, the employee sustaining the injury is advised to make a formal complaint to the Police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate. This decision, although personal, should be discussed with the Headteacher.

Employees have joint responsibility with their employer to review any incidents and identify the need for appropriate training and counselling, and specific strategies to reduce the level of risk.

### **School (Line Manager/Senior Staff) action to be taken following an incident**

- Provide access to a private area for as long as necessary where the member of staff can sit with a friend or colleague
- Provide assistance, if necessary, for the member of staff to go home/visit their GP/attend hospital etc. A medical assessment of any injury should be made as soon as practicable and, in case of visible injuries, it is helpful to obtain photographs

- Make time for the employee to talk to the person leading on the investigation
- Explain the employee's right to involve the Police if they so wish
- Contact the Police. Obtain an incident reference and record it
- Provide the opportunity for the member of staff to consult his/her trade union representative before submitting their completed Incident Report Form
- Carry out a thorough investigation into the incident. Available photographic evidence of any injuries or damage or relevant CCTV footage can be very helpful. The Headteacher should make sure that any CCTV footage is retained and not accidentally overwritten
- Obtain written statements from witnesses as soon as possible after the incident (the sooner the better) including:
  - Where the incident occurred, including physical environment; the time of day;
  - Activity at the time of the incident
  - Details of the perpetrator
  - The relationship between the victim and the perpetrator
  - An account of what happened
  - The outcome
  - If preventive measures have been introduced, did they help?
- All evidence obtained should be retained to support any action taken
- Maintain regular contact with the person if they are off work because of the incident
- Make the member of staff aware of the availability of occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme (0800 282 193)
- Review risk assessments and procedures following an incident and amend if necessary without delay
- Ensure other relevant staff are informed of the incident and of any changes to working practices

## **Role of Thames Valley Police**

### **Preventative Action**

If the Headteacher has any concerns or fears regarding a potentially violent, threatening or abusive visitor, they should not hesitate to contact the Police in advance for help and advice. Thames Valley Police are keen to support schools in the prevention of such incidents and will not consider any issue too small, if a school has concerns. They can provide advice and support, including being present on the premises when a visit is made, if it is agreed this would be helpful.

Where there has been any kind of affray, where an assault\* has resulted in actual injury, or where an employee has been seriously threatened, the Police should be called.

*\*An assault occurs when a person suffers, or is put in immediate fear of, personal injury by the deliberate or reckless act of another.*

Any incidents of a less serious or ambiguous nature should still be discussed with the Police.

### **Contacting the Police**

For non-urgent, preventative advice and support the non-emergency number for Thames Valley Police is 101. Whenever there is an emergency and urgent support is required, the emergency 999 number should be used.

**Follow up**

The Headteacher will need to make a judgement as to whether the visitor is likely to become involved in such an incident again, or whether there were unique circumstances in this specific case. If it is likely that the behaviour will be repeated a warning letter should be sent, explaining that the behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated on the school premises.

For future visits to the school, advance notice of an intention to visit could be required and an independent witness could be present.

If abusive behaviour is repeated, the visitor should be declared unwelcome and they can be ordered off the premises as they then become a trespasser under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996.