Working Effectively with Parents

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

OR

Alternatively

0.03 kg of prevention = 0.54 kg of cure.
Two Sculptors

I dreamed I stood in a studio and watched two sculptors there. The clay they used was a child's mind, and they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher and the tools she used were books, music and art. One was a parent who worked with a guiding hand and a loving heart.

Day after day the teacher toiled with a touch that was deft and sure, Whilst the parent laboured by her side and polished and smoothed it o'er. And when at last their task was done they were proud of what they'd wrought. For the things they had moulded into the child could neither be sold nor bought.

Each agreed they would have failed if they had worked alone;

For behind the teacher stood the school, And behind the parent the home.

Author Unknown
Effective Communication

An Open School
Dealing with differing personalities – the Do’s and the Do Not’s
Parent Protocol Packs
School Websites

Handling Problems:

School’s Complaint’s Procedure
Allegations
What happens when it all goes wrong – a scenario!
Persistent Complaints
Basic Principles
The Good!
Rationally minded parents – form almost all of the parents in our schools.

The Bad!
Parents who are not so rationally inclined - even usually well-mannered parents can come into school like enraged protectors, on the hunt for a pound of flesh.

… and the Ugly!
Parents who are irrational 24/7 - the parents who will not be satisfied in any way, shape, or form, no matter what you do.

Every teacher knows that parent, when barely a week into the school year, you wince at the sound of that parent’s voice or the whisper of that parent’s name. Fortunately, those parents are rare, but what they lack in numbers they make up for in their total lack of reason!
What does ‘an open and welcoming school’ really look like?
Dealing with different types of parents…….

Co-operative parents
Belligerent parents
Indifferent parents
Reluctant parents
Overly interested parents
Effective Communication

Problems arise out of poor communication:

- Be POSITIVE.
- Take a PERSONALIZED approach.
- Be PROACTIVE.
- Work in PARTNERSHIP.
Don't procrastinate.
In most cases a successful resolution is to meet with or call that parent as soon as possible, thus increasing the chances that a small event will not become much bigger.

Genuinely acknowledge a parent's concern.
Parents fear that their concerns will not be acknowledged, let alone handled fairly. Allow parents the opportunity to vent, to express their protest first. Some complaints are obvious and direct. Others mask underlying circumstances or conditions. Try to confirm (and even affirm) their perception of the problem before offering your own explanation of the situation.

Be assertive but not abrasive.
Explain the rationale behind actions. Make a conscious effort to speak without losing your cool. An overtly defensive posture, punctuated by obvious non-verbal signals -- crossed arms, rolling eyes, a furrowed brow, a frown -- just end up pouring fuel on the fire.

Document all efforts.
Make a note of any communications with parents about any kind of complaint. In the vast majority of cases, the notes aren’t needed. However, on rare occasions, the documentation has proven useful in establishing a timeline of events.
DO’s

- Send positive messages to parents.
- Show respect in your body language and words.
- Contact parents at the first sign of problems.
- Develop contacts and identify personnel and other community agencies that can provide support and services to families.
- Identify personnel who can translate if necessary.
- Develop a parent friendly website.

DO NOT’S

- Contact parents only when there is a problem.
- Talk down to parent.
- Contact parents only after a problem has gotten out of hand.
- Contact parents when you do not have a plan of action.
- Send information only in English when parents speak other languages.
- Blame parents.
Parent Protocol Packs

If we are determined to create an inclusive culture of learning where all children will be challenged in their thinking, to achieve to the best of their abilities and strive to become lifelong learners, then all staff, parents and children need to understand their responsibilities and work together towards the same goals.

Rather like the old Home/School Agreements an understanding needs to be reached:

- The school will.....
- Parents and carers will.....
- The pupils will......

This to be signed and dated........and then adhered to.
School Websites

**Design**
What does the layout look like?
How is colour and text used?
How are visuals incorporated?

**Innovation**
Does the website look like a template from Microsoft or is it original, conveying the uniqueness of the organization?

**Content**
Is the content fresh and interesting?
Is it updated frequently?

**Technology**
Do the pages load promptly?
Do the hyperlinks work?

**Interactivity**
Is the information presented in a variety of ways to engage the user, including text, video, photos, and hyperlinks?

**Ease of use**
Is it hard it is to navigate the pages or perform a search function?
Is ‘signposting’ clear?
The school complaints procedure – an overview

- Policy and process
- 2002 Education Act
- No role for LA
- Policy adoption minuted
- Publicised
- Timescales
The school complaints procedure – at school level

◆ Informal stage
◆ Formal stage – informal must proceed
◆ Outcomes- action or no action
◆ Complaint form – the key
◆ Contact with the complainant
◆ Substantiated, malicious, false unsubstantiated
The school complaints procedure - Stage 3

- Role of the clerk
- Chair letter ends first formal stage
- Review is the next stage
- Review form - the key
- Does the request meet criteria for review?
- **Review not an appeal**
What happens if a complaint goes beyond the school?

- The LADO – see allegations later
- The Local MP
- OFSTED
- The Local Authority
- Others

This document contains information on what schools and colleges should do and sets out the legal duties with which schools and colleges must comply in order to keep children safe. It should be read alongside statutory guidance Working together to safeguard children, and departmental advice What to do if you are worried a child is being abused – Advice for practitioners.
An Allegation?

When a person who works or volunteers with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- Possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015
Up to three strands in consideration of an allegation.

- A police investigation of a possible criminal offence
- Enquiries and assessment by children’s social care about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services
- Consideration by the employer of disciplinary action in respect of the individual.
Possible Outcomes

Abuse

- Substantiated
- Unsubstantiated
- Malicious
- False
SCENARIO

Mr Monk
1) The Headteacher knows Mr Monk well, having had many previous conversations with him about minor concerns he has raised.

2) The relationship in the past has been good, but Mr Monk has taken up a lot of the Head’s time in discussing/resolving these issues.

3) In the last two years, Mr Monk has decorated two classrooms, put up a fence and repaired broken windows in school, all for nothing.

4) The parent approaches the Head at 9.05 one morning, asking, as usual, for ‘one moment of her time’.

5) She has arrived late because she locked herself out of her car. She is just going to meet a member of staff over a capability issue. Her heart sinks at Mr Monk’s approach. She sees the member of staff she is about to meet drumming his fingers on a classroom door and looking at his watch.

6) The Head responds that she cannot stop as she has an important meeting and asks him to talk to the school secretary.

7) As she hurries past, he says that he is ‘really worried’ about something. Now near the end of the corridor, the Head calls out that he should see her deputy.
After reflection, Mr Monk writes a letter to the Headteacher expressing his concern: that his son, Norbert, has been subject to ‘bullying’ by this teacher, Mrs Wistler.

The Headteacher passes the letter to the Deputy Head, who asks the class teacher if this is the case. She says it is not.

Mr Monk cannot find the Deputy Head and is then nearly knocked over by his son’s class teacher/tutor as she exits her classroom to shout after a child who has just run out. Confused and upset, Mr Monk leaves.

The Deputy Head writes a note to Mr Monk indicating this response. She gives the letter to Norbert to take home.

Norbert, believing the letter to be an adverse report, makes a paper aeroplane of the envelope and flies it into the river.

Three weeks later, Mr Monk, who has been in Brazil, writes angrily to the Head, asking why his formal complaint has not been dealt with.
14) The Head asks the Deputy Head to write again to Mr Monk repeating the previous response. The Deputy sends the letter through the post.

15) That day, the Head has to admonish a group of pupils including Norbert for hanging out of a first-floor window and dropping oranges onto the heads of small boys playing football below.

16) The following day, the Head is passing a toilet block when she hears a crackling noise. She investigates and finds four boys, including Norbert, in a cubicle trying to set light to a copy of *The Sun*.

17) The boys run for it. In turning quickly, the Head slips on the wet floor and half-falls against Norbert, who is half-way out of the cubicle. No-one is injured.

18) The next day the Headteacher receives a formal complaint from Mr Monk alleging that she has ‘victimised’ Norbert and has assaulted him.

19) The Head, busy and annoyed, writes a brief reply denying victimisation and dismissing the alleged assault as “tripe”. She sends the letter immediately.

20) Mr Monk copies his letter of complaint to the Chair of Governors.

21) The Chair, having briefly asked the Head about the incident in the toilets, sends a note home by post indicating that Norbert was to blame for what happened.

22) The following day, Mr Monk arrives on site with his wife; they accuse the Head of being a child molester. Their behaviour to the Head and classteacher is threatening and upsets both other parents and many children.
23) The next day Mr Monk writes to the Director of Learning with a formal complaint against the Chair of Governors, indicating mis-handling of his complaint against the Head.

24) The Deputy reports at lunchtime that she has seen a poster stuck to a wall near the School suggesting that it is not safe for children.

25) At the end of the afternoon Mr Monk appears outside the school with a reporter and waving a banner reading “THIS SCHOOL IS NOT SAFE FOR YOUR CHILD”. He is distributing leaflets to other parents.

26) Mr Monk takes his assault allegation to the Police, and the rest of his complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, DfES and a solicitor. The solicitor advises him that he may have a strong case against the School and local authority. The Police ask for a strategy meeting……
PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS/HARASSMENT POLICY

- Sets out what parents/carers can expect of schools
- Sets out what schools can expect of parents/carers
- Brings together actions that schools can take in cases of unreasonable/harassing actions by parents/carers
BASIC PRINCIPLES

- Always stick to the identified procedures but offer conciliation
- Obtain early advice/support
- Minor early concessions in a dispute can prevent complications
- Be sensitive to everyone’s positions