



## Thameside Primary School: Managing Conflict on the School Site

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<b>Policy reviewed by:</b>	Sophie Greenaway
<b>Key Changes:</b>	This is a new policy.



## **Introduction**

Schools are vibrant places where different people come together to grow, learn, and explore. However, with such diversity, conflict often emerges and undermines the peaceful atmosphere schools strive to maintain. These conflicts take various forms due to several factors, such as misunderstandings, social rifts, competition, and differing perspectives.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, there is room for proactive actions and successful conflict-resolution tactics. Schools can foster peaceful cooperation and an atmosphere where conflicts are resolved and become valuable learning opportunities.

## **Equal Opportunities Statement**

This policy applies to all and does not unlawfully discriminate because of the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.

## **Purpose**

All members of the school community have a right to expect that their school is a safe place in which to work and learn. Abuse, threatening behaviour or violence resulting from conflict between or towards any member of the school community (staff, parents/carers, pupil relative, visitors, volunteers, governors, external professionals etc) is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Any incident will be treated seriously.

The aim of this policy is to reduce the risk of conflict escalating in the school environment to the benefit of all members of the school community.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Staff, Visitor, Parent & Volunteer Codes of Conduct (which covers instances of Parent-Parent conflict).

## **Types of conflict & solutions**

### **Staff-student conflicts**

Conflicts between teachers and students are among the most frequent disputes in educational settings. They may emerge due to various reasons, but the more frequent ones include the following:

**Communication problems:** Poor communication or disagreements between pupils and staff may lead to conflicts. The issue may worsen due to unclear directions, language limitations, and varying communication styles.



**Classroom management:** Poor classroom management strategies, such as a lack of clear instruction, inconsistent rules, and favoritism, may promote a hostile climate and lead to disputes between pupils and staff.

**Personality mismatch:** Conflicts can happen due to personality clashes or when staff and pupils have opposing values. Differences in viewpoints, attitudes, or cultural origins can exacerbate misunderstandings and conflict.

**High expectations:** Disappointment and conflict can result from unrealistic expectations on the part of the pupil or the member of staff. Conflicts may occur when the pupils feel pressured or fail to meet the staff member's demands. It can also result from opposing objectives between the pupil and the staff, for instance, when the pupil's educational goals fail to align with the teachers'.

### **School approach to these conflicts:**

**Effective communication:** The school should encourage respectful and open communication between both parties. Create avenues for pupils to voice their complaints or request clarification. Additionally, staff members are encouraged to be personable and open to hearing pupils' voices. Pupils are encouraged to use class worry boxes or speak to a trusted adult to raise conflict issues, both arising at home and at school. Sometimes, pupils prefer to speak to a friend or a parent/carer who voice their opinions for them.

**Specified objectives:** The school should establish clear and achievable expectations for learners and staff. It is important to clarify classroom expectations, task instructions, and assessment standards. This openness helps lessen misunderstandings and prevents confrontations brought about by unfulfilled expectations.

**Positive learning atmosphere:** We encourage an inclusive learning environment where everybody feels valued, respected, and safe. Learners are encouraged to work together, cooperate, and appreciate one another. The school employs therapeutic thinking to its Behaviour Policy which promotes continuity and equality.

**Conflict resolution:** Staff are supported to deploy effective conflict resolution strategies. The use of techniques such as compassion, active listening, and problem-solving techniques through mediation is encouraged.

**Personal growth:** Staff have CPD opportunities to develop their communication techniques, cultural awareness, and classroom management abilities. Developing and maintaining positive relationships between staff and pupils is integral to the school.

To resolve disputes between pupils and staff, both sides must cooperate to create an environment that is encouraging and supportive of learning.

### **Pupil-pupil conflicts**

Conflicts between pupils are a frequent in many school settings.



Finding solutions to pupil-pupil conflicts is crucial for preserving a positive and effective learning environment. These conflicts emerge as a result of various factors. Here are some of the most common causes:

- Variations in backgrounds, beliefs, or values
- Competition for scarce resources, including attention, power, or results
- Communication problems
- Unresolved issues
- Envy or jealousy
- Harassment and bullying
- Peer influence or pressure
- Social or cultural stereotypes

#### **School solutions to these conflicts:**

Please visit the policies listed below which document how we support pupils at Thameside with conflict situations:

- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Anti-Racism Policy
- Relationships & Behaviour Policy
- Child on child abuse & Managing allegations

Also see our Thameside Behaviour Curriculum which explains how we teach pro-social behaviours at our school.

#### **Parent-staff conflicts**

Parent-staff disputes involve tensions and disagreements regarding a pupil's education or wellbeing. Misconceptions, behaviour consequences, academic issues, communication problems, and inconsistencies in expectations may bring on these disagreements.

These conflicts can be some of the most challenging to overcome regarding school disputes. Naturally, parents want the best for their children, so when they feel that those expectations aren't being met, they may become upset.

#### **School approach to these conflicts:**



**Enhance communication:** The key to resolving parent-staff disputes is usually about improving communication between the two parties. To better grasp expectations on both sides, parents ought to:

- Ensure and enhance effective communication with school staff, and ask questions if something needs to be clarified
- Attend parent-teacher meetings frequently and keep informed of developments
- Parents and staff may engage in more regular meetings if necessary

Meanwhile, staff should be receptive to suggestions from parents to foster a child-centred approach that prioritises pupils' needs. They can accomplish this in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Inquiries or worries from parents should be addressed swiftly and politely.
- To avoid misunderstandings later on, ensure that expectations are established explicitly from the start.
- Request advice on teaching methods or behaviour support that have previously been successful with pupils (parents frequently provide insightful suggestions and invited external professionals into meetings is also beneficial).

Together, parents and staff should establish a climate of mutual respect that allows better dispute resolutions before they arise i.e. enhancing parent-staff communication gives pupils a better chance of succeeding.

### **Staff-staff conflicts**

For the purpose of this section, 'staff' will be defined as anyone who is employed by the school, volunteering for the school or visiting the school in either a professional or personal capacity.

Staff-staff conflicts may swiftly disrupt development and morale in any educational institution.

Here are some of the causes of staff-staff conflicts:

**Varying perspectives and opinions:** Conflicts can arise when staff members disagree on the school's rules, processes, or decision-making procedures.

**Conflicting objectives:** When people have divergent goals and objectives, deciding how to allocate resources or manage projects may take work.

**Communication breakdowns:** Unclear instructions, misinterpretation, and communication issues may lead to disagreements among staff.

**Fight for power:** Conflicts may arise once staff members compete for attention, position, and control.



**Personality clashes:** Mismatched working strategies and divergent personalities might also lead to stress and disputes among staff.

### **School approach to these conflicts:**

- Thameside seeks to establish an environment where everyone can express their thoughts without fear of criticism or contempt.
- Members of staff are encouraged to collaborate to generate ideas and develop strategies to improve the school.
- The school aims to create transparent and consistent policies; ensuring that everyone knows the intended procedure for conflict resolution.
- Whole school community involvement in reviewing and writing the school development plan.
- The use of facilitation or other conflict-resolution techniques. If a disagreement gets too heated to manage internally, the school will include a third-party facilitator or mediator who can offer unbiased guidance on moving ahead.

Implementing these actions supports Thameside to foster a more productive environment where everyone has a fair chance to be heard, resulting in better outcomes for all parties concerned.

### **Cultural and diversity conflicts**

Pupils and staff from different cultural backgrounds can feel isolated or underrepresented. When people feel their diversity is not recognised or acknowledged, they may feel unsafe and uneasy.

Conflict can also develop if there is no respect and understanding for various beliefs, cultures, backgrounds, languages, and abilities.

Staff at Thameside undertake training in Diversity and Racial Literacy to support the promotion of sensitivity and inclusion. The school also has a robust Anti-Racism Policy which is reviewed frequently.

### **School approach to these conflicts:**

**Promote dialogue:** The school offers in-person and online platforms so that all pupils, families and staff are comfortable enough to voice their opinions without fear of rejection. It is important to our school that everyone has an opportunity to speak and be heard.

**Enhance understanding:** The school uses its curriculum through creative art, films, books, and other activities to help build understanding between cultures. Thameside also invites visitors from various cultural backgrounds to the classroom.

**Respect opinions:** The school respects other people's views, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds or differences in beliefs. This behaviour is both modelled and taught to



Thameside pupils through our school values, PSCH and Behaviour Curriculums. Doing this promotes an atmosphere where everyone feels appreciated and cherished regardless of origin or values. Our core school value is belonging.

Thameside recognises that every conflict situation differs. When handling complex conflicts or circumstances that call for a higher degree of intervention, it is essential that the senior leadership team involve relevant parties, such as human resources specialists or local authority officials.

### Physical conflicts and violence

Understanding the possibility of physical fights and violence in schools is crucial. Physical disputes can occur in various ways, including violent threats, vandalism, bullying, and physical altercations between students. Concerned parties may experience significant disruption and grief due to these confrontations.

#### **Types of violence include:**

- Kicking
- Biting
- Punching
- Poking or pushing
- Spitting
- Scratching
- Head butting
- Tripping
- Actions that restrict movement
- Unwanted physical contact which results in no injury
- Use of weapons
- Use of missiles
- Swearing
- Other verbal or written abuse which causes personal offence or distress
- Sexual, racial or other harassment
- Bullying
- Intimidation
- Damage to personal property
- Abusive telephone calls, letters, faxes, emails, website entries
- Other aggressive behaviour
- Shouting
- Posturing
- Gestures
- Insults





- Innuendo
- Unreasonable demands or blackmail
- Deliberate silence

### **School approach to these conflicts:**

#### At Thameside, we recognise that:

- Parents, or members of the public, 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. At Thameside we will greet all visitors to the school in line with our Staff Code of Conduct. Likewise, we expect all visitors and volunteers to follow their code of conduct.
- Members of staff are entitled to support from their team leader in handling a potentially difficult meeting. Sensitivity towards parental difficulties is an asset. Many adults are still influenced by their own schooling and other childhood experiences, as well as their consequent expectations for their own children. Over anxious, or even ambitious, parents can feel very vulnerable.
- Preparation is an essential ingredient in ensuring that interviews/meetings prove constructive rather than confrontational.
- Staff should not to engage in work related conversations with parents/carers etc outside of the school boundary. Staff that do risk breaching confidentiality guidelines and may also be putting themselves at unnecessary risk of abuse.

#### At Thameside, we always try to prepare in advance by:

- Ensuring there is enough space in the room for meetings, 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
- Having an alarm readily available (a member of staff nearby/door open/mobile phone nearby which is switched on)
- Considering having a colleague 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.
- Gathering information that might help
- Ensuring the layout of the room is not intimidating for visitors and allows for a quick escape; if possible, position chair/desk with the door behind
- Positioning seating at equal height so that the visitor 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
- Remove an angry or upset person from an audience, or, if easier, remove the audience and don't 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.



- Keep the discussion as calm and friendly as possible, paraphrasing what has been said and using compassion and empathy where appropriate.
- Summarise what has been said (both in the meeting verbally and afterwards in writing) and follow through. This will help to build trust and respect.

At Thameside, staff will act to minimise a parent, visitor or other staff member'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. Use positive body language, smile.
- 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. Don't 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
- 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.
- Make sure that you are aware of the school's emergency action plan/'lockdown' procedures and when these should be implemented.

### **Handling an Abusive or Violent Incident – General Principles**

If someone becomes abusive or threatening, staff should consider whether or not they can cope with the situation. Staff should not feel they have to cope with it alone: they should



seek help from other people, or leave altogether. If a situation appears to be getting out of control, staff should make an excuse and leave and immediately report the incident to the headteacher or another member of the senior leadership team.

It is important that staff:

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

Staff should:

- First keep calm, relax, allow themselves time to think and decide the best course of action.
- Ask themselves if what has occurred so far in the exchange means that someone else, specially briefed, 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, staff 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.

### Over the Telephone

If a parent, carer, visitor or member of the public begins to exhibit aggressive or abusive behaviour, e.g. use of foul language or verbal threats) towards any member of staff during a telephone call, the member of staff should:

- Calmly state that the language used is unacceptable and that they will end the call if it



continues.

- Try to establish the name and contact details of the complainant (and the nature of the complaint if possible) and state that a member of the Leadership Team will return their call as soon as possible.
- End the call. Make notes of what was said immediately on termination of the call and then report the incident to a member of the Leadership Team.

A member of the Leadership Team will contact the complainant to establish the nature of the complaint and try to resolve the issue.

### Written Abuse

If a member of staff receives written correspondence, e.g. letter, e-mail, or text of a threatening or abusive nature from a parent, carer, other staff member or member of the public, this shall be reported immediately to a member of the Leadership Team and a copy retained as evidence. This also includes being the subject of threatening or abusive messages on social media e.g. in a Facebook or WhatsApp group.

The receiving member of staff will not reply to the correspondence without first agreeing the response with the Leadership Team member or, in preference, the SLT member will respond on their behalf.

Whilst the school will make every effort to resolve any issue raised by the complainant, consideration may also be given to involving the police, especially where threats of violence have been made.

Every effort must be made to minimise the likelihood of written abuse through staff not communicating using personal email or social media direct mail. Only use the secure school email for communicating with parents and other members of the school community (on school related matters).

### It should always be remembered that:

- The physical safety of a person 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.

### Action to be taken following a violent incident

- Seek medical attention, if required.
- Report verbally to the headteacher as soon as possible. Other members of the school community may be at risk from the same person.
- Complete a local authority online Accident Form and pass to the headteacher for investigation, having sought Union advice, if appropriate.
- Take time with your headteacher or member of SLT to discuss the incident and your



feelings.

- Ask for assistance if you need it.
- Consider police involvement, if they are not already involved.

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the member of the school community 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.

### Support

Occupational Health advice and telephone-based professional counselling is available through the Local Authority's Employee Assistance Programme.

### Guidance for Headteachers/Team leader

People with responsibility for staff management need to be committed to the objective of reducing violence and risks of violence within the school community and ensuring that all staff receive appropriate training.

It is important to ensure that new members of staff are aware of this policy and procedures as part of their induction to the school and that they have access to appropriate training.

Staff should be aware that they can expect support from their Team leader in managing parent interviews well.

A formal notice should be displayed at the entrance(s) to the school informing visitors of the school's expectations about behaviour and/or that they may face prosecution for violent, threatening and abusive behaviour. At Thameside, this is our Visitor Code of Conduct.

### Role of Local Authority

Advice and support is available from the Local Authority through the Legal Team.

### Role of Thames Valley Police

If Headteachers have 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 will provide advice and support, including being present on the premises when a visit is made, if it is agreed this would be helpful.



## Action following an incident

Where there has been any kind of affray, where an assault\* has resulted in actual injury, or where a member of the school community 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.

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. Assault is a criminal offence which may result in prosecution at court.

## Action to be taken by the Headteacher or SLT following a violent incident

- Provide access to a private area for as long as necessary where the member of the school community can sit with a friend or colleague.
- Provide assistance, if necessary, for the member of the school community 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 them to talk.
- Explain the right to involve the police if they so wish.
- Contact the Police as above under 'Role of Thames Valley Police'.
- If it is a member of staff, provide the opportunity for them to consult his/her trade union representative before submitting their completed online Accident Form for the LA.
- Report the incident.
- Carry out a thorough investigation into the incident.
- Obtain written statements from witnesses as soon as possible after the incident (the sooner the better).
- All evidence obtained should be retained to support any action taken.
- Maintain regular contact with the person if they are an employee and off work because of the incident.
- If a member of staff, make them aware of the availability of occupational health advice and telephone-based professional counselling through the Employee Assistance Programme (0800 243 458).
- Review risk assessments and procedures following an incident and amend if necessary without delay.
- Ensure other relevant members of the school community are informed of the incident and of any changes to working practices.

## Reporting Procedures

A great deal of crime and other incidents often go unreported, sometimes because they are



considered too trivial to report or, there is a view that no action will be taken when incidents do occur. Consequently, failure to report incidents and near misses gives a false picture of the real situation. As the employer, the Governing Body has a duty to ensure a safe and secure workplace, but cannot help if it is unaware of problems.

The Headteacher and staff must ensure that all incidents are properly reported and acted upon so that recurrence can be prevented. It is important to record the circumstances that led to violence as this may help identify what events may have triggered the incident and what systems or procedures may need revision.

As soon as practicable after the incident, a written statement should be prepared by the member of the school community concerned which includes the circumstances leading up to the incident. It needs to contain sufficient detail to help identify appropriate preventive measures, and to help assess whether those measures were successful. Suggested details include information on:

- 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?

The Headteacher should inform the Chair of Governors in confidence of each incident. Where required the LA should also be informed.

The school will need to retain proper evidence so that it can be used to support any action taken. Recording details of incidents will also help in reviewing the school's policy and should inform future risk assessments.

### 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. Depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful to discuss the warning letter with the LA Legal Team.

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

In all cases of assault causing actual injury the member of the school community sustaining the injury should be advised to make a formal complaint to the police against the assailant, unless this is considered inappropriate.

The Headteacher/Governing Body/LA have the power to ban anyone from coming onto





school premises for a specified period of time. This decision will be communicated to the person concerned. When the period elapses, the Headteacher/Governing Body/LA will review whether the visitor's ban from the school premises should continue or whether it should be lifted.

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. *This power is usually delegated by the Local Authority (community, voluntary controlled and community special schools) to the Headteacher and caretaker.*

### Banning a parent/visitor from the school

The school reserves the right to impose a temporary or permanent ban from the school premises on any parent/carer/visitor/volunteer or member of the public who has demonstrated aggressive or abusive behaviour towards any member of staff, student, visitor or volunteer at the school.

This decision shall be made by the Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of Governors and the length of any ban shall be proportionate to the nature and circumstances of the incident.

In the case of a parent/carer, prior to a ban being imposed (except in urgent situations), the Headteacher/Chair of Governors shall write to the individual indicating that a ban from the premises is being considered, stating the reasons for this and the date by which any written representations by the individual should be received by the school before the decision is made. In urgent situations, the Headteacher may impose an immediate temporary ban in writing and provide the parent/carer the opportunity to make written representations prior to formalising any extension to the ban.

Where the decision to impose a ban is made, notification of the ban shall be in writing and shall clearly state:

- The reason for the ban being imposed
- The date of commencement of the ban
- A date by which any written representations by the individual should be received by the school
- A date for review of the ban and how this will be arranged (including any reparation that may be required by the school, e.g. a written apology)
- What action will be taken to remove the individual from the premises should the ban be breached

Provision to be made (if a parent or carer) for access to their child during the school day, e.g. should an emergency occur and the process to be followed should the parent/carer wish to contact the school or need to attend meetings at the school

The banned individual will be invited to make written representations and to attend a review meeting (accompanied by a friend or relative if required) with the Headteacher and/or a panel of Governors/police representative (this may take place away from the school site if





appropriate). The Panel will review the ban and consider whether to lift it, make it permanent or continue it for a specified period.

The Headteacher may remove the ban at any time prior to the review date if appropriate resolution has been achieved.

Any ban imposed will not prevent or affect the outcome of the school's investigation into any complaints raised by the individual concerned. These will be handled as per the school's Complaints Policy/Procedure.

**September 2024**