



‘Parents’ and Carers’ Expected Standards of Behaviour when Communicating with or about the Academy Policy

This policy has been approved by the Board of Trustees with reference to the academy’s Equality Policy. The aims of the Equality Policy are to ensure that Plume Academy meets the needs of all, taking account of gender identity, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation, age, ability, disability and social circumstances. It is important that in this academy, we meet the diverse needs of students to ensure inclusion for all and that all students are prepared for full participation in a multi-ethnic society.

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The Senior Leadership Team and Trustees of Plume Academy actively encourage close links with parents, carers and the local community, and strongly believe that our students greatly benefit when the relationship between home and the academy remains a positive one.

The vast majority of our parents, carers and our many visitors remain keen to work with us in a positively communicative manner and are very supportive of the academy. With an academy the size of ours, there are a huge amount of home/school interactions on a daily basis, so it is of paramount importance that discussions between both sets of stakeholders continue to be conducted in a calm, polite and mutually respectful manner. Again, in the vast majority of cases, this is what happens, but on very rare occasions, unnecessary aggression, rudeness and verbal abuse may be directed towards members of the academy's staff and this will never be acceptable or indeed tolerated.

The Board of Trustees rightfully expect Plume Academy's staff members to behave professionally should such a difficult situation arise and to attempt to defuse the situation where possible, seeking the involvement of other colleagues as and when appropriate. However, all of the academy's members of staff have the right to work without having to tolerate such unacceptable behaviour or abuse.

Abusive, rude and on the rarest of occasions, threatening behaviour against the academy's staff or other members of the academy community, including other parents, carers and students, will again, never be accepted or tolerated. All members of the academy community have a right to expect that their academy is a safe and respectful place in which to work and learn, and that there will never be a place for any form of abuse, rudeness, intimidating, disrespectful or threatening behaviour.

Therefore, we expect parents, carers and all stakeholders associated with Plume Academy, including our many visitors, to behave in a respectful and responsible manner towards members of the academy's staff and the wider academy community at all times. The purpose of this policy is to outline the steps that will be taken should behaviour occur that is not as we expect.

Examples of behaviour that is considered unacceptable by our parents, carers and visitors towards our staff and other members of the academy community include:

- verbal intimidation. For example, shouting and/or swearing, in person or over the telephone;
- constant emails and/or phone calls which amount to harassment and intimidation, despite the academy's best efforts to address the situation or circumstances in question;
- regularly emailing staff and expecting responses at unreasonable times such as late at night, during the weekend or when the academy is not in term time;
- inappropriate electronic activity including publishing abusive or inappropriate content with regards to the academy teachers and/or students on social media websites such as Facebook and Twitter or via email communication;
- any form of unwanted physical contact;
- physical intimidation, for example standing unnecessarily close to a member of staff;
- the use of rude or aggressive hand gestures, including shaking or holding a fist, pointing at a member of staff or using abusive gestures; and
- breaching the academy's security procedures as all visitors must first report to one of the main or student reception areas if they are coming onto site without a prior appointment.

Parental/carer meetings

If a parent or carer attends a meeting on site with a member of the academy's staff, the parent or carer is prohibited from recording the meeting. If the parent or carer continues to attempt to record the meeting, it will be terminated, the parent or carer will be asked to leave the site, is highly likely to be banned from the academy and all future communication will be through written correspondence only until further notice.

Parental/visitor access to the academy premises

In general, parents and carers, plus visitors, are granted what is known as 'limited licence' to visit the grounds and buildings of a school. However, where there are serious concerns regarding the conduct of a parent, carer or visitor, and possible staff/student safety, the respective school's leadership is entitled to:

- initiate a meeting/dialogue with the individual in question;
- write to the visitor, describing their misconduct, explaining its impact on the academy and stating its unacceptability;
- vary the person's 'licence'/access to the academy. For example, through the implementation of conditions;
- warn of the possibility of a 'ban' (i.e. the withdrawal of their licence) if the misconduct is repeated;
- impose a ban with a review after a fixed period; and
- impose a ban without review.

Procedure to be followed

If a parent, carer or visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the Plume Academy community, the Joint Heads of Academy and/or appropriate senior staff will seek to resolve the situation through discussion and mediation. If necessary, the academy's Complaints Policy should be followed by the parent/carer. Where all procedures have been exhausted, and any inappropriate behaviour continues, or where the circumstances otherwise require it, a parent, carer or visitor may be banned from the academy's premises for a period of time, subject to review.

In imposing a ban, the following steps will be taken:

1. The Chair of the Board of Trustees will be informed of the ban.
2. The parent, carer or visitor will be informed, in writing, that s/he is banned from the premises and what will happen if the ban is breached, e.g. Police involvement or an injunction application may be pursued.
3. Where an assault has led to a ban, the perpetrator will be informed that the matter has been reported to the Police.
4. As appropriate, arrangements for meetings at the academy regarding the respective parent's/carer's children, and arrangements for them being delivered to and collected from the academy will also be clarified.

Social Media Sites

1. The appropriate use of social media sites by parents, carers and associated stakeholders

Social media sites have the potential to enhance the learning and achievement of students and enable parents and carers to access information about the academy, as well as provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, the academy recognises that many parents, carers and other family members will have personal social networking accounts which they might use to discuss/share views about academy issues with friends and acquaintances. As a guide, individuals should consider the following prior to posting any information on social media sites about Plume Academy, its staff, its students, or anyone else associated with us:

- is the social media site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give the respective feedback or express the views typed and alluded to?
- would private and confidential discussions with the academy be more appropriate? For example, if there are serious allegations being made and/or concerns being raised, social media should not be used to name individuals and make abusive, derogatory or inflammatory comments about those people. Instead, the academy should be contacted so that the related concerns, issues or matters referred to can be aired, discussed and ultimately, resolved accordingly;
- are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to individuals which would not be justified, particularly if the academy has not yet had a chance to investigate the alleged issues? The academy may not even be aware at the time matters are raised on social media; and
- the reputational impact that the posting of such material may have on the academy and/or individual(s).

2. Inappropriate use of social media sites by parents and carers

Although social media sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns about the academy (and those associated with it), it is rarely appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a private and confidential discussion with the academy or utilising the academy's formal Complaints Policy are much better suited to this.

The academy considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social media sites. This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only:

- making allegations about staff or students of the academy;
- making complaints about the academy or staff/students associated with the academy;
- making defamatory statements about the academy or staff/students associated with the academy;
- posting negative/offensive comments about specific students/staff of the academy;
- posting racist comments; and
- posting comments which threaten violence.

Parents and carers should also ensure that their children are not using social media sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents and carers explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents and carers are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media.

3. Procedure the academy will follow if inappropriate use occurs/continues

The academy will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents and carers in a professional and positive solution-focused manner, and understands that parents and carers may not always realise when they have used social media sites inappropriately. Therefore, as a first step, the academy will usually discuss the matter with the respective parent or carer to try and resolve the matter and to ask that the relevant information be removed from the social media site in question. However, if the parent or carer refuses to do this and continues to use social media sites in a manner the academy considers inappropriate, the academy will consider taking the following action:

- take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this;
- set out the academy's concerns in writing, giving the parent or carer a warning and requesting that the material in question be removed;
- contact the Police where the academy feels it appropriate. For example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed, in cases where the posting has a racial element or if the post is considered to be grossly obscene and/or threatens violence;
- if the inappropriate comments have been made on an academy related/owned forum, the academy may act to block or restrict that individual's access to it;
- contact the host/provider of the respective social media site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information; and
- take other legal action against the individual.

This is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of behaviour that is deemed as both inappropriate as well as unacceptable.

Conclusion

In implementing this policy, the academy will, as appropriate, seek advice from its legal advisors to ensure matters have been handled and managed in a fair, appropriate and lawful manner.