



Community Services: Education

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To: Heads of all Educational Establishments

Dear Colleague

Violence and aggression towards staff: advice on procedures and practice

This circular gives general information and guidance about dealing with violence and aggression towards staff in Argyll and Bute schools.

1 Introduction

Incidents involving intruders in schools in recent years have put staff, pupils and visitors at risk. Tragic events such as those at Dunblane Primary School in March 1996, and the subsequent report of Lord Cullen's Public Inquiry, have emphasised that employers need to consider the protection of the school population as a whole from intruders.

- 1.1. Following this incident all Councils produced policies on school security. The majority of schools and colleges will now have a range of security measures including perimeter fences, controlled entry systems, staff security passes, security lighting and cameras. Those staff who have a legal responsibility for the health and safety of staff and pupils at school should prepare a safety strategy/ policy for the protection of the school population against violence, together with an action plan for implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of safety measures appropriate to the particular school. Throughout the preparation of the school safety policy there should be consultation with the parent council, health and safety representatives, pupils and members of staff. It is important that the policy considers the safety requirements of all legitimate users of the school building.

1.2. Definition of violence

Violence is any incident in where an employee of a school is verbally abused, threatened, or physically assaulted by a member of the public, other employee or other third party in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment. This includes physical attack and threatening behaviour with or without a weapon and intentional damage to personal property.

Any of these may occur either within Council premises, on outside visits or out with working time when it is in connection with work. It should be noted that most people accept that physical force against an individual is an example of violence, though violence can take many other forms, including:

- (a) verbal abuse and threats;
- (b) rude gestures/innuendoes;
- (c) sexual or racial harassment.

Where there is no physical injury, there can still be considerable emotional stress; threats can indicate a risk of actual injury. Malicious damage to an employee's property can also cause distress and fear of physical attack.

1.3. Offensive weapons

It is a criminal offence for any person to have in their possession any article with a blade or point, or any other offensive weapon, on school premises. Where any person on the school premises has an offensive weapon, this should be immediately reported to the police. The only exception to the above advice is where it is known that the possession of such an article is essential.

1.4. Responsibility

All employers have a legal duty under Section 2 (1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the Health, Safety and Welfare of their employees. This duty also extends to protecting employees from violence, in terms of job design, working practices, personal safety equipment, training etc.

Management will take a proactive approach to violence ensuring the Health and Safety of Argyll and Bute Councils employees.

Employees also have a legal duty to look after themselves, and, not to endanger others by their acts or omissions. They also have a duty to report any dangerous situation to their employer. These duties, as with the employer, extend to violence.

Violence can lead to low morale and a poor image for Argyll and Bute

Council. It can also mean extra costs, in terms of absenteeism, higher insurance premiums and compensation payments.

2 School procedures

- 2.1
- i The school's critical activity recovery (CARP) plan should reflect that full consideration has been given to the potential for incidents of violence.
 - ii An effective access control system, as specified in the school's CARP plan, should reduce the possibility of staff and pupils being threatened by an intruder.
 - iii However, most assaults are carried out by individuals who have passed through the access control system. They therefore tend to be:
 - Pupil on pupil;
 - Pupil on staff;
 - Parent/carer or relative of pupil on staff.
 - iv Contingency plans should be considered for these eventualities. Staff should be encouraged to recognise and respond positively to potentially violent situations. They should not have to face such situations alone. Assistance should be summoned as quickly as possible.
 - v In high risk areas appropriate means of raising the alarm such as personal attack alarms, panic buttons, mobile phones, two-way radios etc should be available to staff.
- 2.2 When angry parents or other visitors arrive at an educational establishment, a set of agreed procedures can help defuse a difficult situation.
- 2.3 In the majority of situations it should be possible to prevent violent confrontations by employing non-physical methods, e.g. use of personal relationships, diversion of attention, rewards and de-escalation techniques and strategies
- 2.4
- i It is recognised that in some exceptional circumstances staff may require to use restrictive physical intervention as part of their duty of care of children in order to prevent significant harm to the child/young person or others. Physical restrictive intervention should be the last resort and should only be considered when all other measures to de-escalate the situation have been exhausted. If physical restrictive intervention is required then it should be used with the least amount of force for the shortest necessary time frame to prevent significant harm occurring in accordance with the local authority Managing Distressed Behaviour Guidance.

ii If a situation escalates to the point where a pupil is extremely distressed and dysregulated and there is significant risk of harm, staff will take appropriate action to reduce the risk and achieve a safe outcome, through their dynamic risk assessment and professional judgement. Personal safety of staff and pupils is of paramount importance. Any action should be the minimum required in the circumstances to prevent a child or young person harming themselves or others.

2.5 Staff addresses

Staff should be aware of the potential dangers of purposely or unwillingly giving out their home address or home telephone number.

2.6 Dogs

Please refer to Education Management Circular No 1.27b

2.7 Staff working during holidays

Heads of establishments should ensure that there is an agreed set of procedures for ensuring the health and safety of staff working late or during holidays.

2.8 Cash handling

- i Persons in possession of, transporting or handling large sums of money are potentially at risk of violence or assault. The Council and its contractors have general systems for safeguarding employees and the security of cash.
- ii Staff taking monies to banks or offices should vary time, day and route.
- iii If any member of staff is threatened with violence while carrying Council funds and the situation is one which cannot safely be tackled or assistance immediately obtained, the monies should be handed over. The employee should note details of the assailant(s).

3 Procedures to be followed after an act of violence

3.1 Referral of violent persons to the police

All education employees will receive a positive and supportive response where an assault has taken place against them. This support may include the incident being reported to the police on their behalf.

All members of staff have rights as ordinary citizens to make their own complaint to the police following assault, irrespective of other departmental procedures.

- 3.2 Following a violent episode the immediate concern is the wellbeing of and the provision of any necessary medical treatment to the member of staff and any other person involved.
- 3.3 In all such situations a PER/s/100C incident report form must be completed and should be passed to the school support manager. This form is available on the Council HUB. A brief entry in pastoral notes should be made, if the incident involves a child or young person who is a pupil at a local authority establishment, to refer to the PERs 100 incident report and the form should be scanned in and uploaded to the well-being application on SEEMiS.
- 3.4 Where a member of staff has to go home or be hospitalised, School Services Support Manager should be informed immediately.
- 3.5 A copy of this and supporting correspondence should be retained by the head of establishment. Schools must maintain a register of incidents of anti-social behaviour or violence on their premises.
- 3.6 Thereafter, as soon as possible, the head of establishment should convene a meeting with staff members involved to discuss the incident and any matters arising. The intention is:
 - (a) to create a supportive system for staff;
 - (b) to facilitate learning from the experience;
 - (c) to enhance the development of good practice from a debrief of the incident.
- 3.7 Violence should not be viewed as a negative reflection on the abilities of a member of staff.
- 3.8 The department will submit regular reports based on collated school returns to the local negotiating committee.

4 Complaints

- 4.1 Following violence to staff, it is not uncommon for there to be counter-allegations against members of staff, perhaps by way of justification for aggressive action.
- 4.2 Heads of establishment must insist that any such complaints following a violent episode be made in writing. The member of staff complained against should be informed of the complaint lodged. The normal complaint procedures should follow. Where the head of establishment determines that there is no substance to the complaint, it is imperative that both the complainer and the member of staff should be informed as quickly as possible.

5 Practical advice

5.1 Signs of potentially violent behaviour. Please note this is not an exhaustive list. Please be aware of specific additional support needs of individual children and young people and be aware of any changes in their environment.

Below are some indicative signs and signals to be alert to:

- restless behaviour involving pushing, noisiness and jostling;
- deliberately provocative conduct (name calling etc);
- a noticeable behaviour change from the norm;
- over-sensitive reaction to correction or instruction;
- previous history of violent conduct.

Staff should not overreact, question or attempt to counsel an intoxicated person who is under the influence of alcohol, drugs or solvents. To do so could provoke violence. Calmness and reassurance is required.

All threats should be taken seriously and the individual should withdraw from the situation if she or he feels physically threatened.

5.2 Dealing with distressed behaviour or aggression

Agreed procedures can help diffuse a difficult situation. Examples are:

- avoid confrontation in front of an audience; the fewer people that are involved, the easier it is for the aggressor to back down;
- ask another, preferably senior, member of staff to help talk things through with the aggressor;
- stay calm, speaking slowly so as not to be drawn into a heated argument;
- keep yourself close to an escape route;
- avoid sudden moves;
- try to be aware of the increased perceived level of threat that the young person is experiencing when in a distressed state.

5.3 Restrictive Physical intervention

It is recognised that in some exceptional circumstances staff may require to use restrictive physical intervention as part of their duty of care of children in order to prevent significant harm to the child/young person or others.

Physical intervention should be the last resort and should only be considered when all other measures to de-escalate the situation have been exhausted. If

physical intervention is required then it should be used with the least amount of force for the shortest necessary time frame to prevent significant harm occurring. For example, pupils should be restrained or manoeuvred in such a way as to avoid any interference with breathing or primary blood flows. Continued calm reassurance should be offered to the person being restrained.

5.4 GIRFEC and Managing Distressed Behaviour

Adhering to the principles of GIRFEC is a consistent way for people to work with all children and young people. The approach helps practitioners focus on what makes a positive difference for children and young people – and how they can act to deliver these improvements. Any intervention with a child or young person must follow the practice outlined in the Managing Distressed Behaviour Guidance. Staff members, where appropriate, are offered training in approved methods of physical intervention. Within Argyll and Bute the approved provider of physical intervention is the CALM organisation and our trainers that have been trained and approved by the CALM organisation are the only people that should provide this training in our establishments.

Yours sincerely
Executive Director of Community Services

Appendix 1

The link to the Per/S/100C recording form can be found on this page on the Hub.
[Health and Safety - ACCIN \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/Health-and-Safety-ACCIN)

Aggressive behaviour/violence towards staff

Corporate policy and Community Services health and safety guidance states:

"that the Council/department does not accept that it is part of an employee's duty to be subjected to verbal abuse, threats or physical assault".

The Council use the definition provided by the Health and Safety Executive for aggression:

"an incident of aggression is one which involves a person being abused, threatened, or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work".

Examples of such violence are where:

- (a) force has been applied;
- (b) severe threat or serious abuse (including severe verbal abuse) takes place;
- (c) physical assault (with or without a weapon) takes place;
- (d) racial, religious or sexual harassment has taken place.