



## Community Services: Education

Argyll House  
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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**

##### 1.1 Public enquiry into the shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996.

In Lord Cullen's report following the public enquiry into the shootings at Dunblane Primary School, two recommendations, listed below, were made in relation to school security.

- i Recommendation: those staff who have a legal responsibility for the health and safety of teaching staff and pupils at school should prepare a safety strategy 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.

Government response: the government supports the above recommendation, and agrees that the safety strategy and action plan should take account of the situation at each individual school. The booklet *Improving Security in Schools*, published in September 1996 by the Department for Education and Employment and issued to interested parties in Scotland by the Scottish Executive Education and Industry Department, contained detailed advice to education authorities. In particular, it gives advice on carrying out the type of security surveys and risk assessment which the Cullen Report recommends.

Council response: in-service training courses have taken place for head teachers in relation to school security. The advice within those courses, in particular in

devising an action plan, is firmly based on the booklet *Improving Security in Schools*. Each head teacher should prepare and revise an appropriate action plan for his or her school and should consult with the parent council, health and safety representatives and members of staff. It is important that the action plan considers the safety requirements of all legitimate users of the school building.

- ii Recommendation: it is desirable that the guidance provided by the Education Service Advisory Committee in relation to violence to staff in the education sector should be extended to encompass the safety and protection of the school population as a whole.

Government response: the government supports this recommendation. The report prepared by the Education Service Advisory Committee (ESAC), *Violence to Staff in the Education Service*, published in 1990 (second impression 1996), gives general advice to employers in all sectors of education and includes a list of main factors which might be addressed in a plan of action. This report reflects the advice given in the recommendation by Lord Cullen.

Council response: the Council fully accepts all of the advice contained in the report.

## 1.2 Discipline Task Group

A Discipline Task Group was established by the Scottish Executive in January 2001 in the report *Better Behaviour, Better Learning*. The report made a number of recommendations which are currently being implemented by the Scottish Government.

## 1.3 Definition of violence

Circular No 6/03 Reporting incidents of anti-social behaviour and violence, issued by the Scottish Executive Education Department advised of the following definition of violence:

*"Any incident in which any employee of a school is seriously verbally or physically abused, attacked or harassed by a pupil, parent, member of the public or any other person in circumstances arising out of the course of his/her employment. This includes any statement or action that causes the member of staff to fear for their safety, the safety of another, the school or for personal property"*

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.

#### 1.4 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.

## 2 School procedures

- 2.1
  - i The school's action 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 action 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, 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, eg use of personal relationships, diversion of attention, group pressure, rewards and sanctions.
- 2.4
  - i It is recognised that in some extreme situations staff may require to physically restrain pupils who are a danger to themselves or to others.
  - ii If a situation escalates to the point where a pupil cannot be controlled, staff should vacate the room, even if extensive damage to fabric or furnishings may occur. Personal safety of staff and pupils is of paramount importance.

## 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

With the exception of guide dogs, dogs should not be allowed into education premises. Police can be called if a dog owner disregards this ruling. It follows that staff members should not take dogs or other animals to education establishments. The only exception to this would be animals required by the school for curricular purposes.

## 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 full written report should be submitted to the Head of HR within 48 hours of the incident, along with the completion of the Council incident report form which should be passed to the departments indicated on the form. This form is available from the Health and Safety Officer, HR Section, Education Services - see also appendix 1.

- 3.4 Where a member of staff has to go home or be hospitalised, the Head of Improvement and HR 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. Additionally, all incidents causing injury should be reported using the Council's incident report form and accident book.
- 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.
- 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 periodic 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 disciplinary 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

Below are 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 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;
- maintain eye contact.

## 5.3 Physical restraint

- i Physical restraint should, if used, involve minimum reasonable force and should seek to avoid injury to the person. For example, pupils should be held in such a way as to avoid any interference with breathing or primary blood flows.

The action taken should be commensurate with that taken by a caring parent/carer.

- ii Continued calm reassurance should be offered to the person being restrained.

Yours sincerely

Executive Director of Community Services

March 2010

## Appendix 1



Chief Executive Unit	
Operational Services	
Community Services	
Corporate Services	
Development Services	

PER/S/100C

### Internal accident/incident report form

Name of injured person							
Occupation							
Employee		Non-employee		Resident		Pupil	
Place of employment							
Area							
Date of birth				Male		Female	
Home address							
Postcode							
Work telephone				Home telephone			

#### Details of accident/incident

Location		Date/time of incident		Date/time reported	
Reported to		Designation		Telephone number	
Reportable under Riddor		Date F2508 or F2508A sent to HSE (attach copy)			
YES / NO					

Nature of incident	Treatment provided	Type of incident		
Fatality	No treatment	Slip/trip (same level)	Hazardous substance	
Major injury	First aid on site	Slip/trip (at height)	Manual handling	
Over 3 day injury	Doctor/nurse	Violence (physical)	Hit by falling object	
Minor injury	Sent to hospital	Verbal abuse	Hit by moving object	
No injury		Plant/machinery	Electrical	
Dangerous occurrence		Working at height	Other*	
Reportable disease		Road traffic accident		

\* Include in description of incident

Date/time employee stopped work	N/A		am/pm on	
Description of incident (give brief details of the incident including the part and side of body affected)				
State what actions have been taken to prevent a recurrence				

Name/address of witnesses

1	2

Person completing report

Name	Signature	Designation
Address	Date	
Postcode		

To be completed by relevant Personnel Section and then sent to the Council's Health and Safety Manager

Date of return to work	
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**Health and Safety Section use only**

Incident investigated by Health and Safety Manager logie.collins@argyll-bute.gov.uk	
Incident report required	YES / NO
Date incident report completed	YES / NO
Date copied to department	

Responsible person's signature

Designation

Date

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**This form must be completed in accordance with departmental instructions**

Copy 1 - retain on file at the offices of the responsible person

Copy 3 - send to head of service at departmental headquarters

Copy 2 - send to Council's Health and Safety Manager

Copy 4 - send to relevant personnel section for your department

## **Appendix 2**

### **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.