

Managing inappropriate parent behaviour during online learning

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Please note: the information contained in this legal update is correct as of the original date of publication.

The transfer of pupil education from the classroom to remote learning has created challenges for pupils, parents and school staff. The Department for Education's more [prescriptive expectations](#) on what remote learning should be provided has placed greater pressure on schools to make more provision available and ensure work is being done at home. This, in turn, places greater pressure on parents to support home learning whilst also trying to balance their own work and other commitments. Add general lockdown fatigue to this mix and it is not surprising that tensions between home and school arise.

Teachers providing online learning via platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Google Classroom are, for the first time, delivering teaching to pupils and their parents. Whilst most parents participate in these sessions constructively, in the ways envisaged by the school's remote learning agreement with parents, a small minority have acted in a way which undermines the teaching or the teacher.

When this happens, what steps can a school take?

The first thing to consider is whether there are pastoral issues which need to be resolved. The parent concerned may be under a great deal of personal stress and be responding to this in an inappropriate way. Initially reaching out to these parents in the spirit of support may reveal underlying issues which the school can work with the parent to resolve. Taking this approach, rather than an immediately combative or legal one, may help to avoid the escalation of the matter via a parent complaint to the school or Ofsted, and may ultimately result in a more productive and collaborative relationship between home and school. This does not mean that the behaviour should be ignored; it should certainly be pointed out to the parent that such behaviour is not acceptable and should under no account be repeated. Ideally, the initial discussion would be by telephone with a careful telephone note made of what was said. If felt necessary, this could be followed up with a letter.

If, despite fair warning, the parent persists in their behaviour during online teaching then the school's options include:

- restricting or removing the pupil's access to live online lessons – the school would need to carefully evidence what additional steps it was taking to ensure the pupil was not being put at a disadvantage because of their parent's behaviour;
- designating the pupil as "otherwise vulnerable" and offering them on-site provision.

Teachers and other staff are also under a great deal of professional and personal pressure. They have the right to feel supported by senior leaders as they strive to meet the challenges of this new way of teaching. Staff should be empowered to take steps during their online teaching to protect themselves and other pupils in the online class from any inappropriate behaviour. Senior leaders should make clear that staff have the right to use the technology to 'mute' any parent who is acting inappropriately, and ensure staff are clear on how and to who they should escalate any concerns. Staff subject to any abuse may themselves need pastoral support and should be informed about what steps the school has taken to address any issues, so they are reassured that their concerns have been taken seriously.

If you would like support with any of these issues, then please contact [Victoria Hatton](mailto:victoria.hatton@brownejacobson.com) or a member of the education team on [0370 270 6000](tel:+44(0)3300452808).

Contact

Victoria Hatton
Partner

victoria.hatton@brownejacobson.com

+44 (0)330 045 2808

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