



Education
Mutual

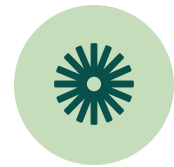


Protecting staff when complaints escalate: leadership, Wellbeing and support

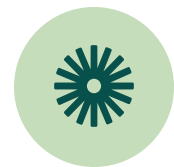
Presented by Lewis Newbury (Education Mutual)
& Cathy Brown (The Mead Educational Trust)



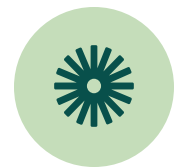
The current landscape of staff absence



A continuous rise in absenteeism



Budget certainty & added value



Local authority schemes

The Department for Education's 'School Workforce in England' report reads that:

65%

of teachers took at least 1 sick day in the 2023/2024 Academic Year

8.3 days

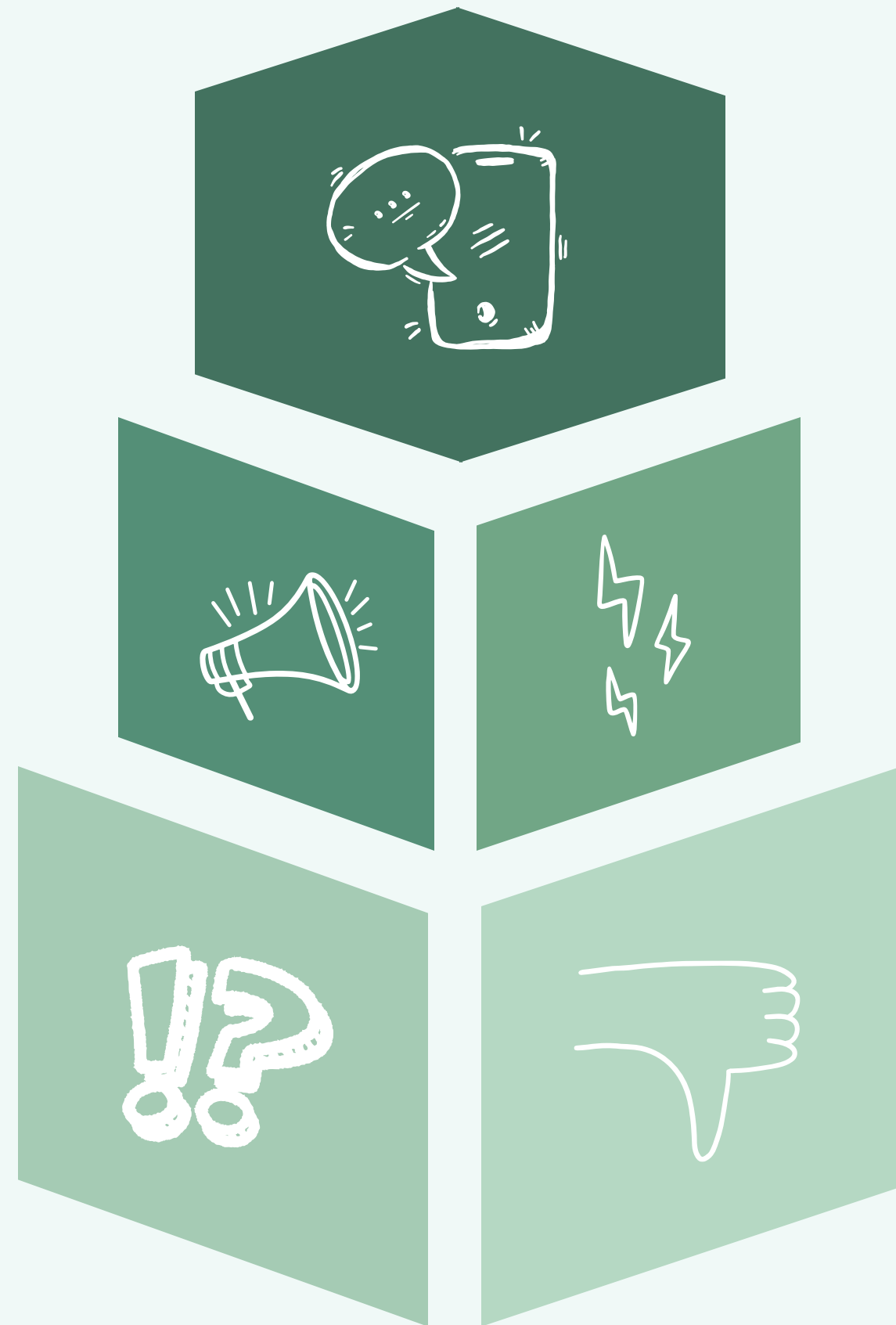
off per absent teacher (averaging)

Published 5th June 2025

*Data taken from Department for Education's School Workforce in England Report, 2024

The new reality

for schools



01

Online defamation and abuse targeting schools is rising

02

Social media platforms baseless accusations

03

Staff are left vulnerable, unsupported and stressed

04

83% of leaders report a rise in complaints (TES)

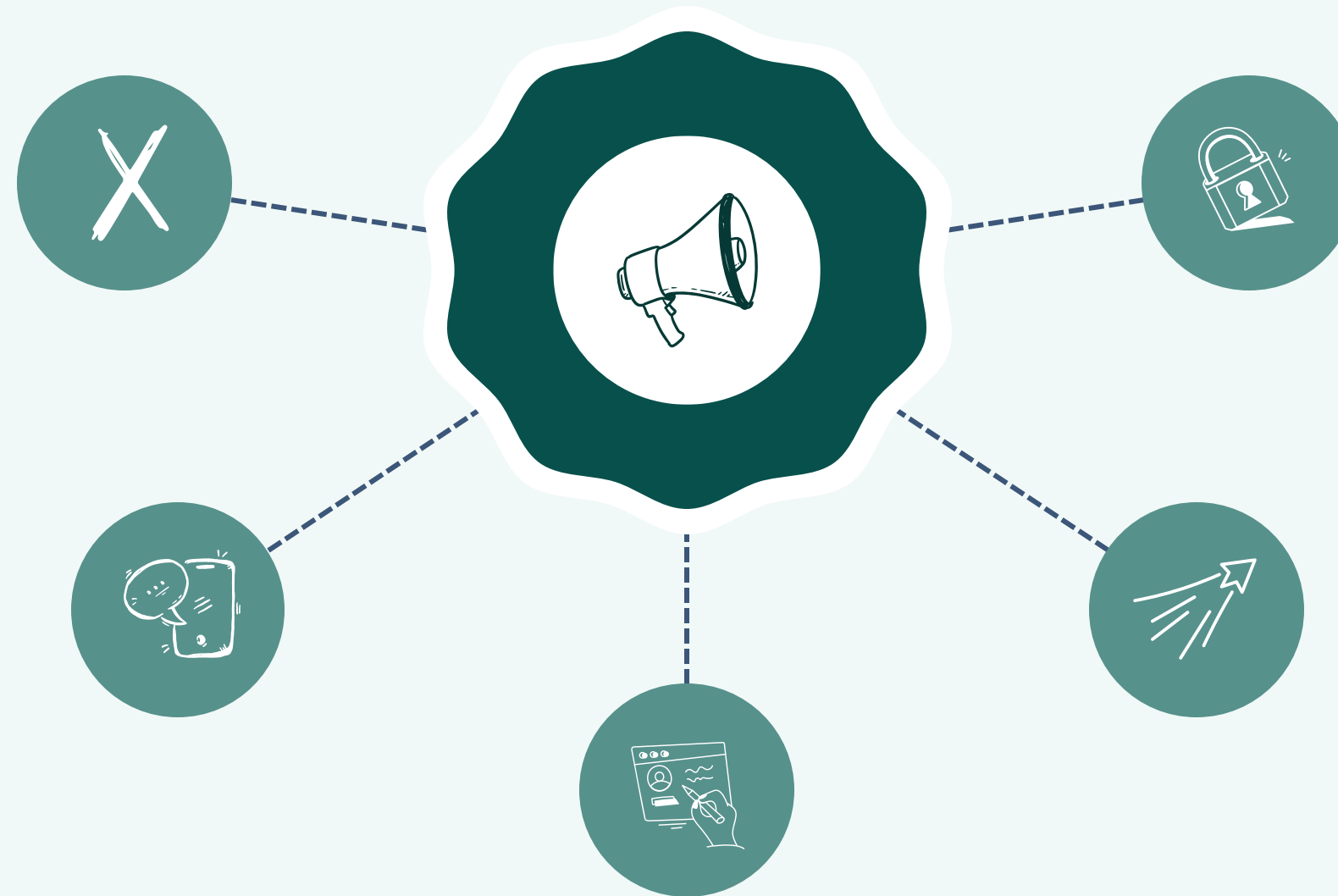
05

Emotional and reputational damage is real

What is defamation?

False, damaging
statements harming
reputation

Can occur on social
media, email, chat
apps, school gate
gossip, forums etc



Many don't realise the
legal consequence

Often spread
quickly and widely

Schools need a clear
approach to handle it



Staff reputation legal protection



Supports staff wellbeing and confidence



Legal support for defamation & slander cases



Quick response to emerging reputational threats



Empowers schools to challenge damaging behaviour



Helps reduce long-term emotional & operational impact



The story behind this

Staff reputation legal protection service



Education Mutual will cover member schools' legal fees should they want to challenge a troll for [libelling staff online](#).



Introduced after Bridget Phillipson said she was “concerned” about the rise in [parental] complaints and staff time they take up.

“We’ve seen a gradual escalation in people thinking they’ve got a right to say whatever they like about a member of staff who’s just doing their job.”

– Nick Hurn, Chairman of Education Mutual and Former CEO of Bishop Wilkinson Multi Academy Trust
via Schools Week 07.02.2025 article [Cease and desist: Trust supports staff to sue online trolls](#)

SCAN ME



[Scan this QR Code](#)
to read the full
Schools Week
article



The Mead Educational Trust

Parent group complaint



What happened



- 25 Aug - parent complaint letter and petition sent to CEO
- 29 Aug - Follow up from parents with some additional concerns
- 6 Sept - Trust response addressing all their points
- 22 Sept – story in Leicester Mercury
- 22 Sept - reply from parents to CEO letter – very detailed and added in some new points
- 24 Sept – held parent forum at school
- Oct – investigation by TMET COO
- 13 Nov – COO sent investigation outcome to parents

Media coverage

News

By **HANNAH RICHARDSON**
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A MUM has claimed a sex education class at her child's Leicester primary school taught pupils "how to make babies".

The allegation is one of a number of complaints made by parents about teaching and management at Thurnby Mead Primary Academy, in Dudley Avenue, Thurncourt.

The complaints, set out in a letter sent to the Mead Education Trust, which runs the school, include allegations that in a sexual education class, eight-year-olds came away "knowing how to have sex".

The organiser of the letter, Bilquis Valli, told the Mercury that about 50 parents had signed the document.

The school has about 250 pupils.

A spokeswoman for the trust said Mead was in contact with the families about their concerns.

The trust has admitted that the details in the sex education class had not been "age-appropriate".

She added the trust believed it was important to have "open and positive relationships with all parents".

The letter stated that parents had "grave concerns" about alleged "mismanagement of Thurnby Mead Primary Academy - a school that we have seen deteriorate year on year since 2021".

'My innocent little boy came out of school knowing how to have sex - that isn't right'

INAPPROPRIATE SEX EDUCATION CLASS PROMPTS COMPLAINTS

It added: "This includes, but is not limited to, academic worries, staff and parent morale, conduct and behaviour towards both children and parents."

Mrs Valli has two children at the school, a daughter, who has just started Year 6, and a son going into Year 4, typically for pupils aged eight and nine.

She claimed that a Year 4 teacher was asked to give a class presentation about sexual activity, which led to the pupils "exiting the lesson knowing how to have sexual intercourse".

Mrs Valli said: "My son is now going into Year 4 and, in my head, I'm thinking 'how could my eight-year-old, my innocent little boy, how

could he know how to have sexual intercourse?"

"The children were exposed to numerous photos and walked away literally knowing how to have sexual intercourse."

"They knew their body parts, like what terms to use. They knew how to make babies."

In a response to the parents, also seen by the Mercury, the trust labelled the class an "error" made by a teacher who was "very early in their career".

It added that the senior leadership team took responsibility for not making sure age-appropriate materials were being used in the class, apologised and referred the incident to the trust's safeguarding lead.



PROTEST: Some parents have signed a letter bemoaning various aspects of teaching and policies at the city's Thurnby Mead Primary School

Ms Valli also claimed the school had an assembly in the run-up to the football World Cup, held in November and December 2022, on the political stance of host nation Qatar on human rights, which she again alleges was inappropriate.

Mrs Valli said: "Why is my nine-year-old (at the time) knowing about

politics? Why does she need to know about all this?"

The trust's response to this stated that Leicester City Council, as the local education authority, had requested all schools put on an assembly on the theme of tolerance "to help ease racial tension at the time".

It added: "The materials were not created by staff members at Thurnby Mead."

FURTHER COMPLAINTS

Mrs Valli further claimed that Arabic music was banned from the playground, but "explicit" songs in English were not regulated.

The trust said this was because its schools have a policy of "any inappropriate music (being) removed immediately" and that "songs in languages other than English cannot always be understood by staff on duty, and therefore it isn't always possible for them to check that the content is appropriate."

Playground music has been temporarily suspended at the school while "a diverse and appropriate playlist is devised," the trust added.

In a further complaint, the mum went on to claim that Year 5 and 6 children - aged nine to 11 - have

scheduled weeks where they have to do "play-leading", meaning they have to supervise the younger years' play during their lunch break.

Mrs Valli said she did not believe children such as her daughter should have to "sacrifice" their lunch breaks to do the task which should be carried out by staff.

She added that her daughter strongly disliked being put in the role.

Mrs Valli said: "Whenever she been allocated play leading, she'll come home and she'll be in tears and she'll say to me, 'Mommy, I really don't want to do it, but I'm scared because they're going to give me a red card (for bad behaviour).'"

"She has a brother who is eight and I don't even get her to look after him."

"There should be staff allocated to these play-leading exercises."

The trust said it had spoken to

pupils about their feelings towards play-leading and had made changes in line with the youngsters' feedback.

It claimed pupils had since said "they are pleased with the changes", but added that it would be checking in with them again on this matter later in the autumn terms.

The mum said her children used to love school, but claimed they were now telling her they hate it and "don't want to go".

Mrs Valli said she just wants the best for her children and for them to have a good future, adding: "Their future starts at primary school."

She also claimed the school had a high turnover of staff, which had led to confusion among parents and pupils.

The letter from parents stated that they had tried to raise concerns with the school, but had been left feeling "unheard" and "ignored".

The trust told parents it gave staff the chance to give feedback on their employment when they left the school, and investigated any concerns raised.

It added that employees' reasons for leaving were confidential and could not be shared by the school.

The trust said: "We recognise that staff departures can be unsettling for the whole community but try to minimise the impact as far as possible."

A spokeswoman for Mead Education Trust said: "Thurnby Mead is at the heart of its community and it's important to us that we have open and positive relationships with all our parents and community members."

"We are in contact with the parents about their concerns and are providing opportunities for all parents and carers to communicate openly with the school."

Impact on staff and pupils

- On Principal
- On other staff
- On pupils
- Longer term

What worked/lessons learned

- Thorough, forensic, fair, independent investigation (but start earlier)
- Investigator talked to lots of people, including appellant and non-appellant parents
- Trust support – practical and moral
- Parent forums – to an extent
- In future, not treat a group complaint through the formal complaint procedure

Case study

Staff reputation legal protection service

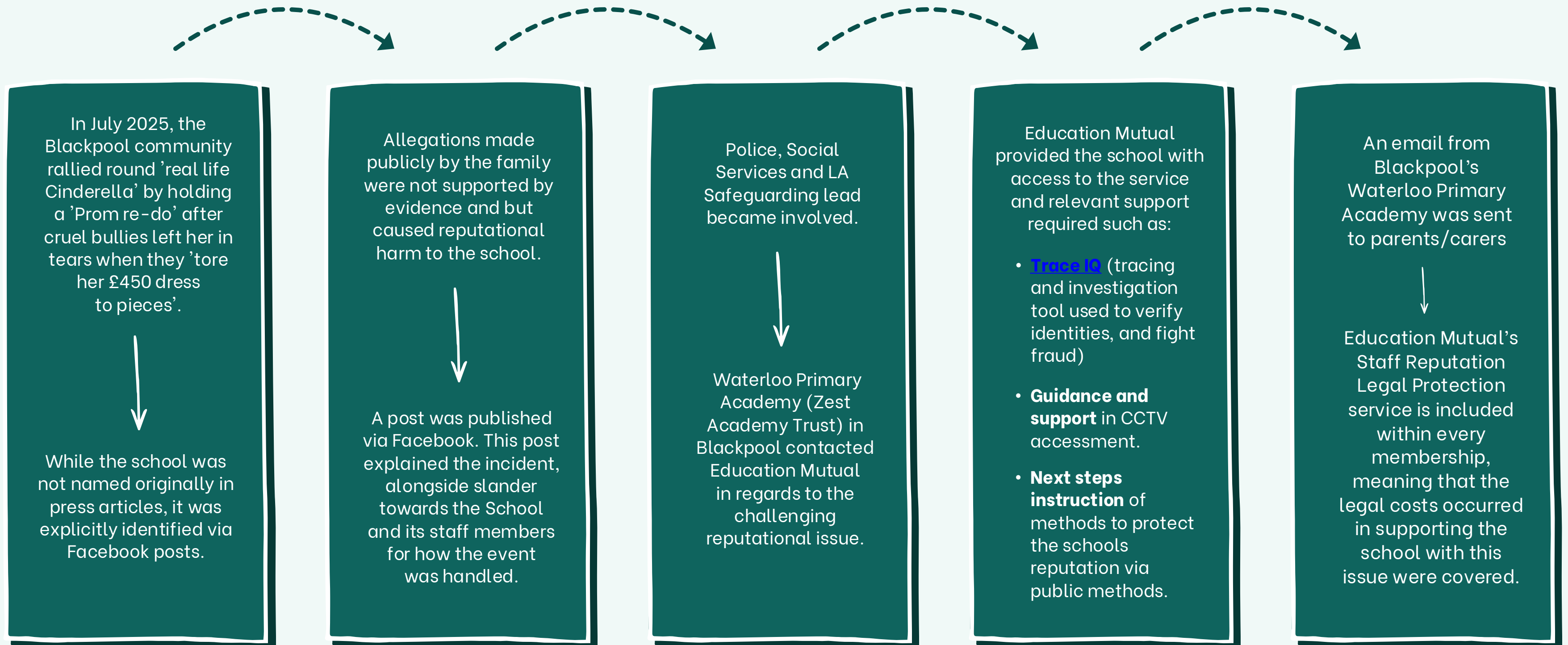
A parent's false accusation

“Real-life Cinderella’ leaves prom in tears after bully tears dress” [Daily Mail, 2025]



Case study 2025

Staff reputation legal protection service



**Timeline of event is provided via related news articles via [Express](#) and [Blackpool Gazette](#) between July 2025 and September 2025*

“Earlier this year, we encountered a challenging reputational issue just before the summer break. Initially, we were uncertain whether our policy would provide the necessary cover. After reaching out to Education Mutual, they stepped in and provided exceptional support. Their professionalism, responsiveness, and expertise were outstanding. They guided us through the process with clarity and confidence, ensuring the matter was resolved efficiently and effectively.

While it is never a situation you hope to face, having access to this level of service as part of our policy proved invaluable. We are extremely grateful for their assistance and for being such a valuable addition to an already comprehensive policy.” *2025

Zest Academy Trust ★★★★★

What can schools do?

01

Create clear
online conduct
& complaints
policies

02

Train staff on
defamation and
response
protocols

03

Support
affected staff
early – not just
reactively

04

Access legal
support when
needed



Why this matters

Staff reputation legal protection service



Holding perpetrators accountable
deters repeat behaviour



Reinforces trust and professionalism
in school communities



Shifts the power dynamic back
in favour of staff



**“Educators should not
endure these attacks
without recourse.”**

*– Nick Hurn, Chairman of Education
Mutual and Former CEO of Bishop
Wilkinson Multi Academy Trust*



Let me know
if you need
ANYTHING!

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