

Preserve your school reputation

Implement a systematic management plan to provide control

In an open, competitive market place the development of an appropriate reputation and the preservation of that reputation are important ingredients in the success of any school. With the school community being as large as it is, encompassing students, parents, staff, benefactors and other stakeholders, there are many opportunities for incidents to occur which can impact on the reputation of a school.

Nature of the risk

The preservation of reputation is not entirely due to the perceptions created by events. It is also dependent on the control of those events themselves. There is a broad range of components that contribute towards a school's reputation:

- Safety of students/staff/community
- Welfare of students/staff/community
- Academic achievement
- Personality development – confidence and leadership
- Citizenship skills
- Establishment of an ethical value system
- Career path planning for students
- Mind broadening experiences
- Sporting achievements
- Open and compassionate consideration of parents needs
- Value for fees paid
- Career opportunities for staff
- Professional fulfilment for staff
- Open and positive school culture

Different schools may place more or less emphasis on each of these components but for all schools events or public comments which question standards or management of any of these components will detract from its reputation.

We can help you:

- To enable a school to understand its desired reputation.
- To ensure systematic identification of risks to its reputation.
- To effectively manage circumstances so as to minimise the incidence of events that can harm reputation.
- To enable a school to mitigate the effects of any adverse event.

Infrastructure required

1. **Documentation** - School vision/turnover and major objectives that relate to these; statement of desired reputation; and plan to build and maintain reputation.
2. **Human Resources** - School council; staff; parent representative body; and student body.

Self-Assessment of Exposure of Loss of Reputation

- Does the school community have a clear understanding and commitment to the schools reputation?
- Is there an integrated strategy in place that identifies and addresses the maintenance and development of the schools' reputation?
- Do all students have a clear understanding of the behavior expected of them?
- Is counselling routinely provided for students and staff following a breach of standards?

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Assessment and guidelines for loss of reputation for your school

- Are there documented strategies for staff to use to achieve the objectives of the school?
- Is reputation regularly measured?
- Are students, parents and staff consulted on reputation issues?
- Does the council routinely and periodically review reputation?
- Is there communication with all members of the school community following incidents locally or in the school community at large?
- Are there documented procedures for interacting with the media?

Guidelines on how to manage exposure to loss of reputation

Reputation

- Council to review the objectives and goals of the school programmes and adopt a statement defining the reputation that the school wishes to have.
- The recommendation to the council should be developed by the Head following extensive consultation with the student, staff and parent groups.

Incident Prevention Management

Exposure identification

- Review of past known events with positive and negative impact on reputation.
- Facilitated brainstorming session to identify barriers to achieving the stated reputation. Should involve senior staff and one or more council members and parent representatives.
- Ranking by importance, of the risks or exposures identified.

Strategies

- For each identified exposure, an action plan to reduce the likelihood of occurrence and the severity of the impact should be developed. These action plans should address: what is to be done; by whom; by when; how completion will be demonstrated; and how completion will be reported.

- These strategies would include: documented standards of behaviour; guidelines for supervision levels education of staff, students and parents in the need for good reputation; recognition of achievement of high standards; and monitoring of the successful progress of the strategy action plans.

Mitigation

- School staff must be alerted as soon as possible to a potentially damaging event.
- There must be a documented response plan for such events, which is trialled and tested on a periodic basis.
- All information about the event, which the school releases, should be controlled to represent consistently, the views of the school. Rumour should be managed.
- There should be a documented procedure for counselling and action, administered consistently, fairly and without bias. This procedure needs to be firm but compassionate.
- The school must be quick to communicate on the issue as any delay enables rumours to begin and creates an appearance that the school is “manufacturing” facts.

Media

The council must adopt a policy for dealing with the media and it must address:

- Access by media to school property
- Access by media to school spokespeople and staff
- Protection of students and parents from the media
- Control of student and parent statements
- Prepared school statements or press releases
- Training in media liaison for key people

Further information

For further information on reputation management advice for your school please contact your Willis Towers Watson insurance broker.

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