



Walkwood

Church of England  Middle School

Protocol for home/school communications

Governing Body Committee responsible:	Full Board		
Approval granted:	25 March 2019	Review date:	Spring Term 2022

“The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just.”

Psalm 37: 30:

“Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.”

Proverbs 13:3

“Church of England Schools have at their heart a belief that all children are loved by God, are individually unique and that the school has a mission to help each pupil to fulfil their potential in all aspects of their personhood: physically, academically, socially, morally and spiritually. Schools have a duty to try to remove any factor that might represent a hindrance to a child’s fulfilment. We want all pupils to want to engage in learning in a safe and welcoming ethos.”

Valuing All God’s Children, Church of England, 2014

“The core purpose of any Church school is to maximise the learning potential of every pupil within the love of God.”

SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) 2012



Aim

The following outlines the school protocol with regard to communication between home and school.

All communication must respect the dignity of the recipient.

Introduction

Telephones and email provide us with a quick and easy means of communication. As a result it is used for such a wide range of communications, it has also become increasingly difficult to distinguish between formal and informal communications.

The ease of communication has many advantages, but these are proving to have ever diminishing returns as the expectation for almost instantaneous reply, in a well-informed, considered and timely manner appears to be on the increase, with complaints following when this has not been possible.

As a school **our first priority is to deliver high quality teaching and learning**. The ability and ease of communication by telephone or email directly with a teacher of a parent's child is a privilege.

On any one day a teacher will have a plethora of demands on their time including up to five lessons teaching and tutor time, possibly lunch duties and activities, and maybe after school practices and clubs. Telephone messages for teachers are passed on quickly by staff in the Reception office. Teachers cannot, and are not expected to, monitor and manage their email inbox during lessons or at other times in the day when they should be planning and preparing for lessons, assessing pupils' work or carrying out school duties.

The school and parents expect teachers to be fully prepared, focused and engaged with pupils and supporting their learning. Whilst administration staff, some support staff and senior leaders may be able to access emails more routinely, their primary function is to support teachers and pupils.

As parents we may feel that it is perfectly reasonable to ask for updates about our child's progress or behaviour. Parents' Evenings and the annual report provide holistic information. Yet, there are times when some pupils need additional support and guidance which will be determined and arranged. However, we believe that parents cannot micro manage their child's education via email or through on-going requests for telephone contact and a response within the same day.

The school works hard to provide parents with timely and informative information concerning their child's progress throughout the year. In addition to this staff may also telephone, write or email a parent to inform them of a serious incident or serious ongoing concerns about a child's behaviour or attitude to learning. They would not be expected to maintain a running dialogue about such matters, unless it has been agreed as part of a Pastoral Support Plan.

We provide parents with an online system – ePraise - that enables them to view their child's attendance at lessons, behaviour and achievements by simply logging in. Parents are encouraged to use this facility.

Wherever the word 'parent' is used in the following sections, this applies equally well to a pupil's carer or carers.

Procedures and timescales

1. By the end of the **day after receiving the communication** - receipt of an email will be acknowledged (during term time but not over a weekend) and a request for a telephone call will be responded to. Messages given to the Reception staff by telephone are passed to staff members by email on the same day. Part-time staff may not work every school day.
2. Within **4 working school days** – the school shall provide a response by telephone or in writing (which may be an email). This may include informing the sender that more time is required to provide a full response. If this is the case staff should indicate a timeframe in which a response should be expected.
3. Staff will not be expected to monitor or respond to emails out of their normal working hours (including weekends and published school holidays, and days when staff are not in school as they work part-time). Whilst parents may compose emails at hours to suit their own needs, we do not expect such messages to be replied to outside of a member of staff's normal working hours. Mobile phones and other electronic devices that enable staff to access their school emails when away from school can make it difficult to 'place into pending' a message from a parent, leading to unnecessary worry and anxiety on the part of the staff. Such devices belonging to staff are encrypted for data protection.
4. Whilst this is rare, if a member of staff receives an email which is of an aggressive tone, sets unreasonable demands or could otherwise be interpreted as harassing, they will refer this to a member of the Senior Leadership Team in the school, who will decide if consideration needs to be given to dealing with further communication.
5. Whilst it is rare, if a member of staff is contacting a parent by telephone and receives protractedly aggressive, abusive or threatening comments, then the staff member will caution the parent/carer that the call will not continue unless moderation of language occurs. If the parent/carer does not do so, the staff member will say that the conversation is terminating and will end the call. The staff member will report this to their line manager, copying in the Senior Leadership Team. The parent will not be entitled to a following call for at least 48 hours.

Guidance to staff

- Reply to the original sender – only 'Reply to all' when this is absolutely necessary which will be rare occasions. Only send or forward to colleagues that have need to read it.
- When addressing the parent or carer, use the correct title and surname, thus keeping matters formal.
- Write an appropriate title in the subject line.
- Staff have the opportunity to check emails at least once a day – before morning registration although it may be possible within the afternoon tutor time, although work with pupils is the priority.



- It is not usually appropriate for emails to be checked or replied to in lessons; they should never be visible to pupils.
- Consider having a conversation or a phone call instead of writing a long email. If the message is urgent, seek out the relevant party in person, or make contact by telephone.
- Use appropriate language in emails. Never send a message you would not want to be shown to others including parents and colleagues. Do not send emails when you are angry or upset; take care with your tone and do not use capitals as they are construed as 'shouting'.
- Emails should be used to instruct or to share information, not to enter into debate.
- Before forwarding an email, check the email trail content is appropriate and relevant.
- Email length should be kept to a minimum.
- Telephone calls and emails should be responded to by the end of the day after the message was received, even if the response is brief and promises a fuller reply at a later date.

Other things to consider

When communicating with the school, parents are asked to bear in mind that a great many staff are putting their heart and soul, and many hours, into trying to help our pupils achieve well. We would never wish to discourage parents from communicating with staff, establishing a relationship and working together. Parental communication is essential: we do not always get it right and we need helpful feedback to help us to continue to improve but we constantly aim to do so.

On occasions staff face criticism over an activity which they may be doing entirely out of goodwill, be it running a trip, or a team, or a concert, or a play, and an ill-crafted email from an upset parent, even when the point is justified, can result in hurt being caused and a reluctance from staff to continue to go the extra mile, that we so much appreciate of them. Likewise, even when a communication is about a core school responsibility, communications need to be respectful. Couching a point as being 'direct', 'blunt' or 'honest' does not make it any less destructive to a relationship that should be based on trust and mutual respect. This applies to all communication and staff need to be just as careful in how we show they value our pupils and parents.

Many of parents will be facing the same challenges in their own workplace from an increasing expectation of 'anytime, anywhere' communications. Some readers may be of the view that this is simply the way the world works now. However, our school has a duty of care to staff, as it does to pupils. This includes a responsibility to ensure that the staff workload is manageable and does not unreasonably intrude in to their private life.

