

Working Together

Communication Policy for Parents & Carers

Rationale

The South Lincolnshire Academies Trust is fortunate to work with parents/carers that are supportive and polite. Most of our parents/carers recognise that educating children is a process that is strengthened by a positive partnership between parents, staff and the school community. This positive partnership and strong working relationship equips children with the necessary skills for adulthood. For these reasons, we continue to welcome and encourage parents/carers to participate fully in the life of our School.

Parental engagement with their child/children's learning is important in supporting attainment and progress and parents/carers have a legitimate right to understand what their child is learning at school and what progress they are making.

However, it is also important that any contact between parents/carers and the Trust/School must be appropriate, proportionate and respectful, in terms of the professional knowledge, experience and skill of the staff and of the entitlement of staff to an appropriate work/life balance.

Policy purpose

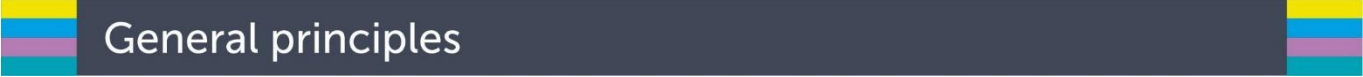
The purpose of this policy is to support clear, respectful and reasonable communication between parents/carers, visitors, staff and the Trust/School. It is intended to help concerns be resolved as early as possible, protect staff wellbeing and ensure pupils continue to be safe, supported and well educated.

The policy sets out:

- The general principles underpinning the conduct of members of the Trust/School community;
- How it is expected that communication between parents/carers and the Trust/School will take place;
- What behaviours towards the Trust/School and members of our school community are deemed unacceptable and open to challenge by the Trust/School;
- The additional steps the Trust/School can take in respect of unacceptable behaviour by a parent/carer/visitor.



Aspire • Challenge • Achieve



General principles

Trust staff will always try to be helpful, professional and prompt in their communication with parents/carers. All communication to the Trust/School should be acknowledged within 48 hours on school working days and, where possible, parents/carers will be given a timeframe for the matter to be dealt with. More complex matters may take longer and, where this is the case, the Trust/School will explain when a fuller response can be expected.

If parents/carers do not receive an acknowledgment within 48 hours, they should contact the Trust/School again to check that the communication has been received.

NB: Please note that the 48 hour acknowledgement period applies to school working days only. It does not apply during evenings, weekends, bank holidays or school holiday periods.

To help the Trust/School respond as quickly and effectively as possible, parents/carers should avoid sending the same concern or complaint to multiple members of staff, Governors or Trustees at the same time. This can delay a response and make it harder to ensure the right person is dealing with the matter.

When raising a concern or informal complaint, parents/carers should include the pupil's name, a short summary of the issue, relevant dates, what has already been done and the outcome they are seeking. This helps the Trust/School understand the concern clearly and respond appropriately.

A concern is usually an expression of worry or doubt where reassurance is being sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about action taken, or a lack of action. Wherever possible, parents/carers are encouraged to raise concerns informally and early, so that matters can be resolved before they become formal complaints.

All communication should respect the caring ethos and values of our Trust and reflect the rationale detailed at the start of this policy.

Please remember:

- To ensure that all communications, be they written or verbal, are calm and polite and that parents/carers remain mindful of the right of the recipient to be treated with respect;
- The School Reception opens at 8am and closes at 4.15pm;
- Please note that mornings and the end of the school day in particular, are very busy;
- All our staff are contracted to different working hours, so this may affect when a response can be sent. Staff are not expected to respond to emails outside their normal working hours, during teaching time, at weekends or during school holidays;
- Members of staff are very busy during the school day, i.e. with pastoral staff having many pre-booked meetings and with teachers who teach for the majority of the day. Therefore, when parents/carers would like to speak with a member of staff, we ask that they make an appointment to do so at a time when staff can give both sufficient time and their full attention;
- It is important to note that it will not be possible to see parents/carers who arrive at school without an appointment, due to the prior commitments of staff;
- If the matter that you need to contact the Trust/School about is still not resolved, parents/carers should follow the procedure in the School's Complaints Policy (available on the website).
- Urgent safeguarding concerns will always be prioritised. If a child is at immediate risk of harm, parents/carers should contact the police or emergency services without delay, as well as notifying the School DSL through the usual safeguarding routes.

The need to maintain positive communication

As stated above, the School enjoys very positive and productive relationships and communications with the majority of our parents/carers.

Please remember:

- Timeframes for a matter to be dealt with appropriately will be decided by the recipient of the communication or by the Trust/School's Complaints Policy. Parents/carers should not demand an immediate response or a response within their own timeframe;
- Lengthy, frequent, demanding, or disrespectful communications to staff will seriously undermine their ability to carry out their core duty of educating the children;
- When communicating with Staff/Governors, language should remain respectful and calm. It is not acceptable to use language that calls into question colleagues' professional ability; represents any form of personal attack or seeks to direct how they carry out their professional role;
- It is entirely inappropriate to use raised voice, invade personal space, and use language that is disrespectful, rude, offensive, aggressive or threatening. Parents and carers will be given a warning about the use of their language, if there is a continuation the member of staff may terminate any communication and refer the matter onto the Senior Leadership Team or Chief Executive Officer;
- It is unacceptable to record conversations/meetings with Staff/Governors without making them aware of the recording and seeking their express permission to capture what could be personal information and breach their human right to privacy, which extends to their workplace;
- Please note that for staff safety, in the majority of meeting rooms we have CCTV recording, but with no audio;
- We politely ask parents/carers not to resort to any form of communication over Trust/School related matters, including of its staff or Governing Body or any other matters that relate directly to the Trust/School, via a medium other than the School's Complaints Policy, including social media platforms. We do however, strongly encourage parents to communicate with us, if there are any issues, so we can resolve any matter/s together.
- The Trust/School may consider communication to be unreasonable if it is excessively frequent, unnecessarily lengthy, abusive, aggressive, repeats matters already answered, or seeks to reopen issues that have been properly considered under the relevant policy. In these circumstances, the Trust/School may put reasonable communication arrangements in place.

Inappropriate use of social media sites

The Trust/School seeks to teach students the importance of appropriate and responsible use of social media and it is therefore vital that everyone in the school community, including parents/carers lead by example.

The Trust considers the use of social media platforms and websites to complain about, or make personal comments about, the School, members of staff or Governors as unacceptable and inappropriate. We strongly encourage parents/carers to raise concerns directly with the School through the appropriate route so they can be dealt with fairly, quickly and appropriately for everyone involved.

In the event that any student or parent/carer of a child/children being educated in any of the Trust schools is found to be posting libellous or defamatory comments on social network sites, they will be reported to the appropriate 'report abuse' section of the network site.

All social network sites have clear rules about the content, which can be posted, on the site and they provide robust mechanisms to report contact or activity which breaches this. The Trust/School expects that the parent/carer or student will remove such comments immediately.

In serious cases the Trust/School will also consider its legal options to deal with any such misuse of social media platforms.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, is the issue of cyber bullying and the use by one child or a parent/carer to publicly humiliate another by inappropriate social network entries. We will deal with any such matter as a serious incident of school bullying. However, please be reassured that thankfully such incidents are extremely rare.

Please note that the inappropriate use of a communications network can give rise to offences under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 or the Communications Act 2003 and if persistent, could be deemed to constitute the offence of harassment.

Attending the school premises

All of the Trust schools are a place of learning, with an important duty to safeguard and protect the health and safety and well-being of the students and staff we serve.

Schools are private premises and not public spaces. Parents/carers have an implied licence to enter school premises for specific reasons, such as attending an appointment, attending a school event or dropping off and collecting children where this is appropriate. The Trust/School can set reasonable rules for access to its premises and may remove or restrict this licence where behaviour or language is aggressive, abusive, insulting or causes staff or pupils to feel threatened.

Please remember:

- Parents/carers should behave appropriately when on the School premises. We politely ask and remind parents/carers to not shout, swear or cause any form of disruption that interferes or threatens to interfere with the core operation of the School.
- Threats of violence, use of violence towards people or property on the School's premises is a criminal offence, and will likely result in the matter being reported to the police;
- Approaching someone else's child in order to discuss or reprimand them because of their actions towards your own child is inappropriate. Such an approach to a child may be seen to be an assault on that child and may have legal consequences;
- We cannot give out any other student's address due to GDPR regulations.

Additional steps by the school

The following is not an exhaustive list:

- A member of staff/Governor will challenge unacceptable behaviour calmly and by asking the person/people concerned to stop; to respect personal space; stop shouting or using inappropriate behaviour or may end a telephone call/meeting or direct the person to leave the premises.
- The Trust/School may communicate with a parent/carer to challenge unacceptable behaviour and set out conditions to establish a way forward. This may include a Communication Strategy, such as one named point of contact, communication by email or letter only, an agreed frequency of contact, a review date and an agreement that only new information will be considered on matters that have already been closed.
- The School will comply with, and fully implement, the Department for Education Controlling Access to School Premises, should it deem it appropriate to do so.

- If the School decides the matter requires a more formal approach we may instruct our legal advisers to communicate with the parent/carer, warning them about their behaviour and/or putting in place Communication Strategy to restrict their means of corresponding with the Trust/School and/or banning them from School premises if felt to be appropriate.
- In serious instances where the peace is breached or the law broken, the School will report the matter to the police.

This policy will be reviewed regularly and may be updated in line with Department for Education guidance, safeguarding expectations, legal requirements and Trust practice.

We trust that parents and carers will assist our School with the implementation of this policy and we thank you for your continuing support of the School.

