Communicating with School

Policy and Expectations

St Mark's CofE Primary School

1. Aims

1.1. This policy aims to set out the methods of communication available to parents for contacting the school, and our expectations of parents when visiting our school or communicating with staff at our school.

1.2. We believe it is important to create a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for students, parents and staff in our school. We encourage clear, open communication with parents as we believe it has a positive impact on students' learning. Strong communication provides parents with the information they need to support their child's education and helps to build a partnership between home and school. Communication initiated by parents can be entirely positive and practical, for example to seek information, ask a question, clear up a misunderstanding or to draw attention to a matter. Sometimes there is a need to resolve an issue or misunderstanding.

1.3. We use the term 'parents' in this policy to refer to:

- Anyone with parental responsibility for a student
- Anyone caring for a child (such as grandparents or child-minders)

1.4. The term 'staff' as referred to in this policy includes:

- Anyone employed by the school
- Anyone training in a professional capacity at the school
- Governors (when acting in this capacity)
- Volunteers at the school (when acting in this capacity)
- Anyone employed through an external agency, who are acting in a professional capacity on the school site

1.5. The term 'working days' refers to days during which the school is open to students. Please see section 3 below for further detail.

1.6. We acknowledge that sometimes there can be situations that can be emotional and challenging for parents and staff to work through. Nonetheless, we expect all our community to show mutual respect. We have clear expectations and guidelines on behaviour for all members of our community. This includes staff (through the staff code of conduct) and students (through our Relationships and Behaviour policy). We also expect parents to engage constructively with school staff and to work together with them in the best interests of our students.

1.7. We will only communicate with parents in respect of their own child at the school. Requests to raise a concern on behalf of another parent will be declined, as will requests for information on another child. Should any correspondence be received from legal advisers, then this will be shared with the school's legal advisers.

1.8. If parents are considering making a formal complaint, please refer to the complaints policy, which can be found on the school website. Stage 1 of our complaints policy suggests that other forms of communication can often help in resolving issues. We therefore encourage parents to contact us informally to raise their concern, in the first instance.

2. Methods of communication with the school

Communication with school can take the form of phone calls, face-to-face meetings, online meetings or email contact. In all cases of communications with the school, where the parent is not raising a formal complaint, the following guidance will apply:

2.1. Face-to-face meetings (including online meetings)

2.1.1. Face-to-face conversations are generally the best way of communicating with the school. Meetings with specific staff will generally need to be pre- arranged due to teaching or other commitments of the relevant staff.

2.1.2. Parents should either telephone reception or email adminoffice@st-markscofe.hants.sch.uk to request an appointment with a relevant member of staff. The year group email (yearX@stmarksce.org.uk) may also be used. The school will aim to arrange that meeting within 3 working days, where possible.

2.1.3. Outside of teaching hours, all staff have additional duties which they perform either before school, during break/lunch or after school, so availability of staff outside of teaching hours should not be assumed.

2.1.4. Should a meeting be requested, the head teacher may be involved in the decision about which staff member(s) will attend.

2.1.5. In certain situations, notes may be taken, which may be shared with those present. This is not the default situation, however.

2.1.6. Requests for meetings to be audio-recorded or video-recorded by parents will be declined.

2.2. Email and online contact forms

2.2.1. Parents are encouraged to contact the office via email about any non-urgent issues.

2.2.2. Initially contact should be made through the office or year group emails. They may however redirect emails to other teams in the school, such as the SENCO team or pastoral team, or a member of the leadership team.

2.2.3. The school discourages staff individual email addresses being shared and used. Year group emails are preferable, although certain teams such as SENCO, pastoral team and leadership team may use their individual emails to communicate with parents.

2.2.4. The school will aim to respond within 3 working days, but often this may be sooner. If a response is unable to be provided within this timeline, which can be to ensure a full and considered response, then a revised timeline will be provided and communicated. We ask that parents await a response from the school and that further emails are not sent pending that response, unless the new deadline has passed.

2.2.5. Emails that are in breach of our expectations, in terms of either tone or content (see section 4 below), will be reported to a member of the senior leadership team. The sender may be asked to re-send a message using more respectful language.

2.3. Phone calls

2.3.1. If a query or concern is time sensitive or urgent, the parent should call the office (01256 346 111). The office team will make a note of the key information and arrange for it to be passed on to the most appropriate person, as necessary, at the earliest opportunity. In most circumstances, teaching and leadership staff are unlikely to be available to receive calls due to teaching and other commitments. If the matter is deemed urgent, we will aim to make sure that someone makes contact within one working day, where possible.

2.3.2. If the query or concern is not time sensitive or urgent, then parents may still prefer to call the school office to request a phone call from the relevant member of staff. The relevant staff member will aim to contact them within 3

working days, where possible, but often this may be sooner. If this is not possible (due to teaching or other commitments), someone will respond to schedule a phone call at a convenient time.

2.4. Social Media

2.4.1. The school will not respond to concerns raised via social media.

2.4.2. Where the social media site is run by the school, comments will be removed if they do not meet the acceptable use criteria of the social media site.

2.4.3. Should the school be made aware of any physical threats or abusive behaviour towards staff members on social media, then the school will consider reporting this to the police and seek the removal of this content from the site.

3. School working hours and working days

3.1. Staff will aim to respond to communication during core school hours (08:30–15:30 Monday-Friday), or their working hours (if they work part-time).

3.2. Parents should not expect staff to respond to their communication outside of core school hours (08:30–15:30 Monday-Friday), or during school holidays.

3.3. Staff may choose to work around other responsibilities and commitments and respond outside of these hours, but they are not expected to do so.

4. Types of unacceptable behaviour and communication

4.1. There are some types of behaviour and communication that the school considers unacceptable. These are as follows:

4.1.1. Any physical aggression, e.g. slapping, hitting, punching or kicking;

4.1.2. Physically intimidating a member of staff, or students, e.g. standing very close to them;

4.1.3. The use of aggressive hand gestures, including finger pointing towards a member of staff or student;

4.1.4. Spitting at a member of staff or student;

4.1.5. Shaking or holding a fist towards a member of staff or student;

4.1.6. Shouting at members of staff or students (either in person on school grounds, over the telephone or in an online meeting);

4.1.7. Swearing, or using offensive language, including derogatory language about a protected group or characteristic, as defined by the Equality Act 2010;

4.1.8. Threatening or offensive comments about a member of staff or student of the school (this can include verbally, via texts, emails, social media, etc.);

4.1.9. Sending abusive messages to a member of staff, including via text, email or social media;

4.1.10. Sending a large volume of emails regarding the same matter over a short period of time;

4.1.11. Continuing to raise the same issue, despite it having been already addressed by the school;

4.1.12. Posting defamatory, offensive or derogatory comments about the school, or its staff, on social media platforms;

4.1.13. Disrupting, or threatening to disrupt, school operations (including events on the school grounds and sports team matches);

4.1.14. Breaching or not conforming to the school's security procedures;

4.1.15. Covertly recording phone calls or meetings with members of staff;

4.1.16. Any other behaviour that is disrespectful, threatening or offensive.

4.2. This list is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour, which has no place in our school community.

5. Actions that may be taken by the school as a result of unacceptable behaviour and communication

5.1. In the first instance, if the unacceptable behaviour has occurred on site, the school will ask the parent to cease and/or leave the site. If the behaviour is of a serious nature, then the police will be contacted.

5.2. Thereafter, the school (Headteacher/Member of School Leadership team) will gather information on allegations of unacceptable behaviour. This may include talking to the parties concerned, or others, as witnesses to the behaviour.

5.3. If unacceptable behaviour is considered to have occurred, the following actions may be taken by the school, dependent on the severity/gravity of the behaviour:

5.3.1. The parent will be told verbally that his / her behaviour is considered to be unacceptable and, if it is not modified, the school will take further action;

5.3.2. The parent will be told in writing that his / her behaviour is considered to be unacceptable and, if it is not modified, the school will take further action;

5.3.3. The parent will be advised that all future meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and will be minuted;

5.3.4. Putting in place a contact plan to deal with any communication between the individual and school. For example, except in emergencies, communication to the school having to be in writing only to a named individual, with the school determining timescales for school responses;

5.3.5. Sending a warning letter or an immediate ban from the school site;

5.3.6. Contacting the police where behaviour is criminal in nature;

5.3.7. Seeking advice from the local authority's legal team regarding further action.

5.4. The school will always seek to respond to an incident in a proportionate way. The final decision for how to respond to the unacceptable behaviour and communication rests with the Headteacher and, where necessary, the Governing Body.

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