



Durham School

Parental Communication Policy

1. Policy aims

1.1 Effective relationships between the School, its pupils, the parents, alumni, and the staff are critical to the School's success; these relationships are founded on clear, accurate, and timely communication. This policy seeks to ensure that all external communication is clear, consistent, positive, and aligned to other policies. The policy will ensure that staff understand the importance of external communication and the public perception of the School. The policy is essential to underpin the achievement of the School's strategic objectives.

1.2 This policy adheres to the philosophy underlying the Equalities Act 2010. The School commits to observing its principles and does not discriminate on any grounds.

2. Policy statements

2.1 This policy relates to external communication regardless of the media and the audience. It covers verbal, written, electronic, pictorial and video communications

2.2 Communications can and will take a variety of forms: verbal, through face-to-face meetings or by telephone; written, through letters, notes in planners, or InTouch; occasionally, a communication may be received second hand or through an intermediary. Nevertheless, in the School's communication, the aim is to provide clear information that is consistent with the School's values and which represents the School to the highest standard.

2.3 Timely communication is essential to maintaining the positive relationships the School has with parents; parents understand that telephone calls during the day may not always be practical; nevertheless, alternatives do exist, and it is crucial that staff respond in an appropriately punctual way.

2.4 As a School, we have a duty to ensure that not only is the information we provide clear and accurate, but that all our communications with external parties reflect the high educational standards we aim to deliver as well as the values we hold. In light of this, checks and filters are put in place to ensure that all communication is consistent in terms of register, tone, as well as grammatical accuracy.

2.5 The School commits in this policy to observing the principles of the Equality Act 2010 and does not discriminate on any grounds.

3. Response Times

3.1 As far as is reasonably possible, the School aims to acknowledge and respond to all communication in a timely fashion; where it is not practical, however, to provide a full response, a holding reply will be sent within 24 hours.

3.2 A full and detailed reply, either by e-mail, letter, or in person may take longer, but parents will be informed that their request is being handled.

3.3 Unless communication is urgent, and a response is needed to safeguard the welfare of a child, there is no expectation for staff to respond to communications between 18.30 and 07.30. Any communication received by staff within this period may be dealt with during the next working day or at the earliest convenience, but within three working days.

3.4 There is no expectation for staff to respond to communication received at a weekend which may be answered in the following working week.

3.5 Any communication received outside term time does not fall within the above response times; however, staff are encouraged to monitor e-mails and respond to any non-urgent messages; the latter may be given a holding reply and answered fully in term.

3.6 Where communication relates to a complaint, separate response times apply as dictated by the Complaints' Policy.

4. Methods of Communication

All communication with parents is formal; as such, an appropriately formal means of communication must be used: staff may choose from a personal meeting, telephone conversation, prep diary, e-mail, or letter.

4.1 Personal Meetings

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way of communicating over potentially complicated topics; as far as is reasonably possible, meetings will be organised in consultation and at mutually convenient times. In advance of any meeting, it may be helpful for the School to be aware of any specific requests for information or questions, and parents are politely asked to communicate these in advance. Meetings may be arranged via the relevant Housemaster/-mistress, the pupil's tutor, or other relevant member of staff.

4.2 Telephone calls

Telephone calls remain preferable to e-mail for anything other than the communication of factual information; where any communication looks to open discussion, the preferred method is either a telephone conversation or personal meeting. Meetings will be arranged at the earliest, mutually convenient opportunity.

4.3 Prep Diary

The prep diary should only be used for communicating brief points of information. Similarly, MyLearning may also be used to communicate details of prep when such information is clear and readily understandable.

4.4 E-mail

Electronic communication has quickly become the normal way of communicating with staff, parents and, increasingly, with pupils outside normal School hours. Nevertheless, the School acknowledges that pupils, parents, and staff are entitled to reasonable breaks from their working hours and places no expectation on staff to send or respond to messages between 18.30 and 07.30 or over a weekend unless messages are of a genuinely urgent nature.

4.5 Letters

The School continues to use letters for formal communication, but these are increasingly sent out via InTouch. As such, parents are asked to keep the School up-to-date with changes to postal and e-mail addresses as well as telephone numbers.

4.6 Social Networking

Social media is an ideal way to share generic School or Departmental news, but is not used to communicate with parents and pupils.

5. Severe Weather and Emergency Closure

In the event of severe weather, the School may need to be closed at short notice; the procedure for this is set out in the Adverse Weather Policy; pupils, parents, and staff will be notified of any such changes via the School website and InTouch communications.

6. Responsibilities

The Head is responsible for monitoring this policy and will provide reports and recommendations to the SMT and Governors as appropriate.

7. Links to other policies and documents

This policy has no specific links to other policies or documents.

8. Oversight

Oversight of the Parental Communications Policy is undertaken by the Audit Committee. The policy will be reviewed by the Head annually.

**Policy last reviewed by
Dr M P Alderson, Deputy Head [Staff]
05 June 2018**