Sebert Wood Communication Guide

Effective communication means understanding is developed, trust is built, confidentiality respected, and action coordinated. It is essential to foster good relationships and vital to the wellbeing of the school community. Communication should be clear, concise, accurate, timely, relevant, targeted, honest and reciprocal.

Objectives:
- Ensure effective communication takes place in school and externally - between all staff, parents/carers, pupils and other stakeholders.
- Have open communication on both sides so that everyone is encouraged to communicate politely and professionally.
- Ensure parents/carers are fully aware of the ways they can contact school and ensure the school is in possession of the current contact details for all parents/carers.

Effective communication is a **TWO WAY PROCESS**. There are a wide range of ways used by school to ensure everyone is kept informed:
- Face to face communication.
- Phone calls – internal and external. We will attempt to contact parents/carers by telephone if the matter is urgent or if their child is unwell and if we need to speak directly with the parent/carer or to obtain a quick response. Parents should ensure they provide all contact telephone numbers (e.g. home, mobile, work for both parents/carers) and remember to keep us up to date of any changes.
- Emails.
- Internal memos may be sent regarding specific issues – hard copy/email or both.
- The school website. A range of information and calendar of relevant events on the school website.
- Class base whiteboards for messages in the entrance lobby for each year group.
- Formal scheduled meetings e.g. teaching staff meetings, support staff meetings, parent consultations, information evenings etc.
- Special or ad hoc meetings for pressing issues or concerns.
- Reading record books and pupil planners.
- Written letters.
- In school Walkie-Talkie system.
- Messages and information via staff pigeonholes (*check daily and clear regularly*).
- 'Head bump' emails through the Medical Tracker system.
- Weekly staff briefings, bulletins and notes.
- Weekly parent updates/newsletters.
- Electronic school calendar for all staff to view and contribute to, outlining key dates, activities and events.
- Weekly calendar sheet - this is simply a printout generated from the online calendar. An A3 copy is posted in the staff room on a Friday (individuals may request a copy).
- Staff room whiteboard can be used for additional staff messages not included in the weekly plan, changes to plans, items of short notice, internal job vacancies, or general messages etc.
- Message folder – occasionally messages are sent around in a folder. Staff who need to see the message are highlighted and they are asked to read, confirm they have seen it and pass it on.
- Governors reports, minutes and agendas – via Governorhub online – printed copies available on request.
- School Comms - email messages for parents, governors and staff (Weekly Parent Bulletins, Newsletters, and other messages sent via the Comms system). We request that all parents/carers and staff register on the system. Registration is quick and simple and School Office staff are happy to support parents/carers in this process. We keep paper copies of communication to a minimum. We also use SchoolComms to send out forms that need completion e.g. to obtain consent for school visits.
- Occasional use of hard copies or permission forms to parents via pupil book bags.
- Reminders or letters to individual parents are sent to classes to be given out by the class teachers and to pupils the same day. *Every class must have a system for distributing letters and other materials to go home with the children.*
- School Twitter account *(only used for information and announcements NOT for opinions or comments).*

Sebert Wood Primary School is responsible for:

- Keeping staff, pupils, parents, and stakeholders well informed of school events and activities within appropriate timelines.
- Ensuring staff have the relevant information available to communicate with colleagues effectively.
- Placing key policies, documents and procedures in areas that are accessible and useful to the entire school community (e.g. the School network, website and GovernorHub).
- Ensuring that responses are actioned within a reasonable timeframe.
- Maintaining open channels of two-way communication and listen to feedback from all stakeholders.
- Ensuring information is made available in a timely manner and via appropriate channels.
- Keeping parents/carers informed of concerns about a pupils' wellbeing and/or behaviour.
- Keeping parents/carers informed of the progress of their child at regular intervals. We provide a mid-year summary report and an end of year report to each child's parents. Pupils are given an opportunity to comment in the summer term report. In addition, parents/carers have the opportunity to meet their child's teacher/s for a Parents' Evening consultation in the autumn and spring terms, with an optional meeting on the summer term.
- Encouraging parents/carers to contact the school using the appropriate channels, if any issues arise regarding their child's progress or well-being. We will make reasonable adjustments to our arrangements if this will enable a parent with a disability to participate fully in a meeting at our school, or to receive and understand communication.
- Recognising children's protection is a shared responsibility, and Sebert Wood Primary School should provide a safe and secure environment. *If any member of staff has concerns about a child, these will be passed to the Designated Safeguarding Lead who may share this information with the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).*

Other information

- For general enquiries, parents/carers are required to phone the school office, which is open from Monday to Friday between 8.45 am and 3.45 pm, on the school phone number. Outside of these hours a voicemail message may be left.
- The school has a standard landline phone system, School Comms message/email system and a standard Microsoft email account which it uses to communicate with parents.
- The SENDCO, class teachers and support staff work closely with individual pupils and their parents/carers and external agencies. Meetings are held to discuss best practice and provision for individuals and groups.
- For agreed *formal meetings*, notes will be taken (by mutual agreement), action points progressed and feedback given to those present. (GDPR rules apply). IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR AT THE BEGINNING OF A MEETING IF IT IS CONSIDERED TO BE A 'FORMAL MEETING' AND THAT NOTES ARE BEING TAKEN.
- For *informal meetings* staff may take notes for their own personal reference – these are not required to be published or shared as a matter of course, but may be used as evidence should it become necessary at a later date. (GDPR rules apply). IT SHOULD BE MADE CLEAR AT THE BEGINNING OF A MEETING IF IT IS CONSIDERED TO BE AN 'INFORMAL MEETING'.
- All forms of communication should reflect an understanding, empathy and respect for individual differences, circumstances and needs.
- Formal communication such as letters must be approved by the Office Manager who will consult the Senior Leadership team where necessary. Most day to day standard communications will be delegated to the office admin team. For other day to day communication, staff may check with a member of the senior leadership team if they have any concerns.
- Emails from parents should go via the admin email address and are forwarded to the appropriate person. It is important that this procedure is followed to ensure that the Admin team can acknowledge the emails stating the action of forwarding and track them if required.
- Staff will forward relevant emails from parents to the appropriate member of the senior leadership team if the content is deemed a *formal complaint* and the complaints procedure should then be triggered.
- Staff should respond to emails as soon as reasonably possible via the admin email.
- Emails of an urgent nature (well-being or pastoral nature) should be responded to preferably within 48 working hours but no later than 5 working days.
- Emails which raise a general concern or ones of opinion or passing comment on a matter will be acknowledged by the admin team. Where an email response is appropriate this should generally be within 10 days *(excluding weekends and/or holidays)*.

- **Telephone calls:** Office staff will not interrupt teaching for staff to answer an external telephone call unless it is an emergency.
- **Social Media Sites/Blogs:** Staff must not communicate with parents via social networking sites or accept them as "friends". Staff will not accept pupils or ex-pupils as "friends" and follow the online safety Policy and Procedures.
- **School Website:** The school website provides an opportunity to share information about the school and is an opportunity to promote the school to a wider audience.
- If a matter is related to a pupil/class or the curriculum then the communication should be with the class teacher. If the teacher is not available and the matter is urgent, contact should be made with the Key Stage Leader. If not available and the matter is urgent the Assistant Head or Deputy Head should be contacted.
- Under no circumstances will staff personal details be shared with parents/carers.
- For concerns or complaints please see separate Schools Complaints Procedure document online.
- *For safeguarding matters the school DSL or the safeguarding governor should be contacted.*
- The school office is very busy at certain times of the day (i.e. 9.00 – 9.30 am when absences and lunches are being processed). Staff should try to avoid requests for assistance from the office team at the busiest times, unless it is an emergency.
- Phone calls can be made from base phones – dial 9 for an outside line.
- There is no time or room in the workplace for passing on hearsay, rumour or gossip. Do not engage in it or tolerate it from others. In particular, do not pass on to the actual person who was the subject of the hearsay, rumour or gossip what was being said about them. If you have a grievance or concern about an individual or an issue, you must speak to the Headteacher.
- All staff and stakeholders are encouraged to comment on and contribute ideas as to how communication can be enhanced and improved. Feedback to SLT and Governors is welcomed.

Staff are responsible for:
- Ensuring the principles and procedures of this policy are followed and to communicate regularly with each other so that information is available and understood, within the context of the school working environment.
- Reading and responding to all school communications as appropriate - checking emails regularly but NOT DURING LESSONS.
- Communicating proactively with parents/carers about pupil progress, pastoral and behavioural issues and helping parents/carers to support their child's learning through the appropriate channels, taking into account confidentiality and data protection issues.
- Ensuring that relevant information is passed on to supply teachers, support staff.
- Ensuring all relevant information (both academic and pastoral) is passed onto the next teacher (and to new schools) in the summer term, taking into account issues of confidentiality and data protection.
- Using the most effective methods of communication considering the content, context and audience.
- Being open, honest, ethical, professional, jargon free and easily understood by all.
- Communicating with empathy, understanding and respect for pupils and their parents/carers.
- Ensuring personal mobile phones/tablets are never used for school based matters – unless a serious emergency.
- Responding to a parent/carer as soon as possible, according to the urgency of the matter. For urgent matters this should be within 48 hours where possible *(for emails no later than 5 school days)* but excludes weekends and/or holidays. Parents should not be contacted outside of business hours (8.00 am – 6.00 pm) unless it is a matter of sufficient urgency/emergency, or parents have specifically requested contact and staff are able to do so.
- Staff should forward relevant emails from parents to the Headteacher if the content is deemed a *formal complaint* and the complaints procedure should then be triggered.
- Staff should respond to emails as soon as reasonably possible via the admin email.
- Emails of an urgent nature should be responded to no later than 5 school days. A phone call is often preferable for urgent matters, particularly where it relates to a pastoral or well-being matter.
- Emails which raise a general concern or ones of opinion or passing comment on a matter will be acknowledged by the admin team. Where an email response is appropriate this should generally be within 10 days *(excluding weekends and/or holidays)*.
- Frequently checking the online calendar and/or weekly sheet and clearing pigeonholes regularly.

- Informing the school office of any events that have been arranged, adding events to the calendar in a timely way and electronically 'inviting' appropriate staff.
- Ensuring that all correspondence/letters to parents/carers MUST be sent via admin, so that they can be checked for consistency, format etc.
- Reporting issues regarding Health and safety and repairs via the Site Manager reporting system/log
- Reporting technical issues for ICT/Computing, via the log book or support email contact.
- Checking the staff noticeboard daily and add items as appropriate.

Parents/carers are responsible for:
- Checking and reading the key communications circulated by the school and responding/acting on them when necessary, e.g. by checking SchoolComms, attending meetings etc.
- Visiting the school website for information about the school.
- Informing the school of medical conditions/allergies, along with medical documentation of these conditions.
- Informing the school of all up-to-date contact information (phone numbers, addresses, etc), including that of two or more emergency contacts.
- Contacting the school regarding pupil attendance/absence issues.
- Informing the school of child protection matters, legal issues or relevant duties including the appropriate documentation.
- Making clear the nature of their concern during the initial contact with school.
- Raising any issues or concerns they may have with the class teacher in the first instance. This is considered to be an informal stage. (see also Complaints Procedure).
- Communicating with staff in a polite and respectful manner.
- Emails to the school from parents and vice versa should be made via the admin@ email (NOT SEPARATE TEACHER ADDRESSES) specifying the member of staff the query is addressed to. This enables office staff to monitor communication and ensure messages are received by the correct person.
- Staff will forward relevant emails from parents to the appropriate member of the senior leadership team if the content is deemed a *formal complaint* and the complaints procedure should then be triggered.
- Staff should respond to emails as soon as reasonably possible via the admin email.
- Emails which raise a general concern or ones of opinion or passing comment on a matter will be acknowledged by the admin team. Where an email response is appropriate this will generally be within 10 days *(excluding weekends and/or holidays)*.

Additional notes for parents/carers
- <u>The top priority of any school is to work directly with pupils and support their educational needs within school. Excessive time spent on emails and phone calls can take away valuable time from this work.</u>
- Parents/Carers should only email or phone the school to talk to teachers or support staff for very urgent or emergency matters.
- Unlike office-based businesses, the nature of a school means that events and activities that take place during specified hours e.g. teaching timetables, clubs and lunchtime work directly with pupils, mean it is often not possible to speak to teaching staff during the school day. Parents may be disappointed or frustrated if they feel that a message elicits no immediate reply, when in fact there has been no available opportunity for the member of staff to reach a telephone or return a call or email.
- Our aim is to return a telephone call to a parent/carer during normal business hours, (unless the matter is an emergency or a specific request has been made by a parent/carer) as soon as reasonably possible. *This excludes weekends and/or holidays.*
- Return phone calls may be made by someone other than the person to whom the original call was made, should it be felt that this is appropriate in order to deal with the matter.
- Whilst staff will always seek to establish open and friendly relationships with parents, they will also ensure that the relationships are professional, and parents should always be addressed in an appropriate manner.
- Staff will NOT accept friendship requests from parents on social media.

APPENDIX - Email communication and etiquette
E-mail is a quick, efficient way of communicating. They can be sent at any time and answered at a time to suit. This may mean that people feel under pressure to check and answer as soon as possible and emails take up an increasing amount of time. It is important therefore to consider ways in which emails can be best managed.

- Do not over communicate by email when a face to face meeting and direct discussion is preferable.
- Email should not be used for extensive conversation or indefinite storage of information or documents.
- Email is not 100% secure and is subject to data protection and GDPR rules. Remember that an email can be stored indefinitely and forwarded many times to anyone and everyone!
- For sensitive emails use the secure email service - via the school office.
- Advice from the ICO is that the initials of a person should be used in the subject matter title of emails and in the content where possible. This reduces the likelihood of data breaches.
- With the exception of sensitive matters above, make use of subject headings to make the email content clear.
- Always check the tone of your email as they can be misconstrued. Don't use ambiguous words, and think about how your email 'feels' emotionally for the recipient/s.
- Consider the best time during the working day for you to look at emails. Generally a dedicated time slot is better than frequent checks.
- Workload advice suggests you should never look at an email more than once! Manage them by:
  - Deal with the matter straight away (action/reply)
  - Forwarding (delegating!)
  - Printing to action or discuss later
  - Archive emails (set up electronic folders)
  - Deleting!
- Carefully check the conversation history before forwarding.
- Carefully check the addresses you are sending to. It is easy to auto fill with an unintended recipient!
- <u>Before you hit send, double check and proof read the email!</u>
- Avoid sharing sensitive information and giving opinion via email, if personal.
- Read and respond in a timely manner, but again this should be carefully managed. There is NO expectation that staff read school emails outside of business hours i.e. between 6.00 pm and 8.00 am, but this is only guidance.
- The whole point of emails is that they can be sent at any time, and read at a time to suit - but they don't have to be read at every moment!
- Staff may read emails outside of business hours if they wish, but in the interests of work life balance, be mindful of emails infringing on leisure time away from school.
- Email accounts can be removed from personal devices at weekends and holidays.
- Use the *Out of Office* message when out of the office/school. Make sure the message is clear and unambiguous. Do not imply you *may* answer emails unless this is actually the case.
- When sending emails, consider using the 'delayed send' option. I.e. prepare the email at 5.00 pm on a Friday but delay send it to arrive at 8.00 am on Monday.
- When dealing with emails from parents/carers, these should be managed via the school admin team. Emails from parents/carers should be responded to preferably within 48 hours (unless it is a matter of sufficient urgency i.e. a safeguarding matter) but no later than 5 days as an absolute maximum.
- Admin will reply to the parent/carer acknowledging receipt and that the email will be passed onto the appropriate member of staff for action. A separate email will then be generated and forwarded to the member of staff FYA.
- When staff reply to the parent via admin, a new blank email is generated, to avoid lengthy email threads.
- Make emails clear, concise and short. People are more likely to read shorter emails than long rambling ones.
- For longer subjects consider chunking into series of smaller emails. Stick to one subject per email if possible.
- Be careful not to overuse CC. Think carefully about who the main recipient is and who actually needs to see a carbon copy of the email. CC means that there is no expectation of action. Do not send vital or important information as a CC as it may be overlooked.
- Make it clear in the email the actions and by whom. Use FYI (For your Information) and FYA (For your action).
- It is courteous to send a reply to an action request email, not necessarily to an FYI email.
- Emails should not contain a demand for a response within a single working day.
- Only add a *Read Request* receipt when it is absolutely imperative you know the message has been received.
- *Do not use private email addresses for school related communication.*
- All emails to the school will be treated as confidential, unless there is a specific reason not to do so.
- *Email and internet access is used in line with the Online Safety Policy and Acceptable Use Agreement.*