

COMMUNICATIONS AND MEETINGS POLICY

Reviewed: June 2022, no change

Status: Non -Statutory

Introduction

We believe that clear, open communication between the school and parents/carers has a positive impact on pupils' learning because it:

- Gives parents/carers the information they need to support their child's
- Helps the school improve, through feedback and consultation with parents/carers
- Builds trust between home and school, which helps the school better support each child's educational and pastoral needs

The aim of this policy is to promote clear and open communication by:

- Explaining how the school communicates with parents/carers
- Setting clear standards for responding to communication from parents/carers
- Helping parents/carers reach the member of school staff who is best placed to address their specific query or concern so they can get a response as quickly as possible

In the following sections, we will use 'parents' to refer to both parents and carers

Dignity at Work

- Parents Pupils and Staff have a right to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace.
- Conduct at all times should encapsulate the core values of Respect, Care, Integrity and Trust

Roles and responsibilities

Headteacher

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring that communications with parents are effective, timely and appropriate
- Regularly reviewing this policy

Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- Responding to communication from parents in line with this policy
- Working with other members of staff to make sure parents get timely information (if they cannot address a query or send the information themselves)

To protect work-Life balance, Staff will not respond to communications outside of school hours 19.00hrs to 07.00hrs or their working hours (if they work part-time), or during school holidays.

Contacting the School

Please note that during local and national crisis communications with the school will be subject to amendment. During a pandemic the school will observe Public Health guidance. Online and virtual platforms will be utilized and person to person presence limited. Zoom or similar software will be used to ensure accessibility.

Telephone

Please use the main reception number to leave a message for a teacher to contact you:

- Reception staff will relay messages to teachers as soon as possible.
- If a call is urgent, please inform the receptionist who will attempt to find a senior member of staff to speak to you.
- We will try to respond to you within three working days, if not the same day.
- Please note lessons will never be interrupted for teachers to take calls.

Email

Please also note that we do not expect staff to be constantly available via email, or to have extensive contact with parents via this medium. We operate an email curfew to protect staff work – life balance, and do not expect staff to respond either frequently or in detail to an email from a parent. Staff have been advised not to respond to emails, but to call you to discuss your queries or concerns, or to arrange a time to meet with you. Staff have been asked to advise their line manager if they receive frequent or lengthy email communications from a parent, who will reinforce our policy. We thank you in advance for your support and cooperation in this respect.

Please use staff email addresses if you need to contact staff directly:

- Teachers are not in a position to check emails consistently throughout the day and the school does not expect work email to be checked during a teacher's personal time.
- We aim to respond to you as soon as possible and within three working days. Part-time staff may take longer to reply.

Meetings

The day-to-day care, welfare and safety of your child is managed by the person who is placed closest to them.

- In the first instance, please approach the following members of staff who are responsible for your child in the following order:
 - 1) Form Tutor or Classroom Teacher (if query is relevant to a specific subject)
 - 2) Head of Year or Curriculum Leader (if query is relevant to a specific subject)
 - 3) Assistant Headteacher – Attached to your child's year group
 - 4) Deputy Headteacher – According to your child's House (Mandela, Brunel, Da Vinci)
 - 5) Headteacher/ Associate Head teacher
- Meetings should always be pre-arranged with members of staff.
- If you urgently need to see someone, for instance if there is a serious family emergency or a child protection issue, please phone ahead and the reception staff will do their best to find a senior member of staff to see you.
- For non-urgent meetings we will aim to meet with you within five working days. The school will determine the level of urgency at its discretion, to enable it to manage multiple demands.

Meeting conduct expectations

We expect meetings to be conducted in cordial terms, even if you are unhappy with the school. We will listen to your concerns and try to resolve them. You will be expected to use a cordial and low tone, and not raise your voice towards the staff. You are not permitted to record the meeting, and if you do so covertly the Governing Body will not allow you to use any such recordings as evidence in a complaint. If the staff cannot immediately resolve your concern they will give you a timeframe for when they will feed back to you. A set of brief notes will be kept of the meeting (a PMR – parent meeting record) .

Ground rules that support a conducive and productive environment which are based on:

- letting everyone participate,
- listening with an open mind,
- thinking before speaking,
- attacking the problem and not the person

Contacting You

Our preferred method of contacting you is via parent mail/ text message, for generic events (trips, school closures, special reminders, detention notification) and operate 'Truancy Call' if your child is not present in class when the register is taken, when an automatic telephone response will be sent to you. Staff will contact you by phone in preference to email, in order to discuss progress and behaviour or arrange a meeting.

School Website & Social Media

Harlington School observes the DfE guidance as detailed in 'What maintained schools must publish on their websites' [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online>]

We use our School website, www.harlingtongschool.co.uk to inform parents of school dates, calendar events, policies and procedures and subject information and generic educational information. All parents who are signed up to Parentmail will receive the weekly newsletter, Harlington HEADlights. The PE department sometimes uses a Twitter account to notify of fixtures and match scores, and to promote student achievements: "@Harlington_PE". This account is private and only students who compete for the school have access to the information published.

No Response

If you have not received a response from the school within three working days please contact the school by emailing enquiries@harlingtongschool.org and we will chase up your enquiry. Communication with parents and carers is important to us, and we will continue to monitor this policy and our approach to improve the process further.

Communications between staff and students: Please refer to the following policy:

Extract from Covid Addendum to Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy:

Protocols for Emailing Students

Under normal circumstances we do not permit staff to directly email our students. This is to safeguard both staff and students. ***At the current time (July 2021 and going forward) staff are asked to use Office 365 for communicating with their teaching groups. Email groups are set up according to staff timetables so that***

the whole group will receive the same email when sent their “zoom” invite and lesson materials/ instructions. Staff will only be available from 8am – 4pm on weekdays to send or reply to student queries about work shared.

Communication with students during school closure can also be via Frog as staff can contact students using the messaging tool. Messaging (including adding attachments) can be used to communicate with individual students as well as groups of students. Staff can also use the tool “File Drop” in which students can hand work in to staff.

Reminders for staff

- A data subject can request any and all information written about them, including emails, and the employer can make a search of staff school emails at any time, without notice or permission.
- An email is a legal contractually binding way to make a commitment. Staff should ensure they **do not** make commitments, either on their own behalf or on behalf of the school.
- All email language and content should follow professional etiquette standards at all times. This includes following the expectations for “Email protocols for staff” as outlined in the “The Harlington Toolkit 2019 – 20”.
- Staff must follow all safeguarding and professional standards at all times in the actions and content within the emails.
- Staff can use the communication tools in Frog or any school sanctioned communication process, but must not engage in phone calls, social media platforms, etc directly with students.

If staff are concerned about any aspect of correspondence with any student then Mr Clayton (Assistant DSL) or Mrs Maidment (DSL) should be contacted immediately.

If a student fails to follow the agreed protocols staff **MUST** stop all email correspondence and inform Mr Clayton/ Mrs Maidment that you have done so.

Further information regarding these protocols can be directed to iwells@harlingtonschool.org or to gclayton@harlingtonschool.org

Staff Video Conferencing with Students.

Harlington School will use Zoom Education for video conferencing. Staff should refer to the guides issued by Mr Wells (GDPR Safeguarding lead) in October 2020 for further information and advice on setting up and delivering lessons via Zoom.

Protocols for video conferencing

Setting up

- No 1:1s video sessions, groups only
- Only use the school allocated platform
- Check that the link you are using in your chosen browser is running in an incognito tab (or equivalent) to make sure it isn't public for the whole world!
- Set up your own two-factor authentication. Generate a random meeting ID when scheduling your event and require a password to join. Send the invitation out with the ID and password.

- Never start without another member of staff in the 'room' and without other colleagues/the school being aware of the session.
- Make sure only the invited/pre-approved participants are included in video conferencing session.
- The live class should be recorded and backed up elsewhere (for your own protection in case of accusations), so that if any issues were to arise, the video can be reviewed.
- Don't record these sessions using your own tools, and expect pupils to respect one another's privacy by not running their own recording software, but do be aware that pupils might still take screenshots, run audio recorders or run their own screen-recorders during these sessions, even if instructed not to.
- Never insist that your pupils use video. Allow them to use just audio and to disable their Mic.
- Limit screen sharing. Make sure your pupils don't take control of the screen and prevent them from sharing random content by limiting screen sharing, so only you as the teacher (host) can present to the class.
- Disable private messaging. Prevent distractions among your class by stopping private messaging between pupils, so they can't talk to one another without your knowledge.
- Aim to work from a quiet space where family members or others with whom you live are unlikely to walk by or interrupt. If you need to switch off the camera or mute the microphone, do!
- Keep a log of everything - what, when, with whom and anything that went wrong

The session

- Make sure everyone is aware that a recording is being made and to whom it will be available.
- Remind participants about the safeguarding policy and reporting process. Remind the participants about expectations and behaviours required during the video conferencing session and beyond.
- Language must be professional and appropriate, including any family members in the background
- Staff and children must wear suitable clothing, as should anyone else in the household.
- Any computers used should be in appropriate areas, for example, not in bedrooms. Pupils should locate in shared parts of the house.
- It's best to use a plain background, or the virtual or blurred background tools available in some video conference applications.
- Remember that "Hosts" can turn someone's video off. This will allow you to block unwanted, distracting, or inappropriate gestures on video.
- Remember that "Hosts" can turn someone's video off and audio off (Disable mic). You can remove a participant. Use these tools if a participant misbehaves and remove them if required.
- Live classes should be kept to a reasonable length of time (20 -30 minutes) at the times specified in the information sent to parents i.e. 9.30am / 11.30 am/ 1.30pm, or the streaming may prevent the family 'getting on' with their day
- **Staff will not:**
 - Give your personal number out.
 - Make contact through other platforms such as social media.
 - Agree to meet students to re-teach content, chat or support.
- Become too familiar with the students. Remember you are staff and they are children which mean boundaries exist and should not be crossed.

- Remember GDPR at all times. Do not share information or data about students, their marks, targets, achievement etc. during a video conference session. Do not reference anything that might be personal data such as health issues.
- Data Controllers need to reassure themselves that any teaching/learning software and/or platforms are suitable and raise no privacy issues; or use cases against the providers terms and conditions (for example, no business use of consumer products)

Consent from parents and students about taking part in a video conferencing session will be sought and the sessions will be recorded. This will be stored. The consent will include an expectation of behaviours and agreements about misuse of the content of the session. (For example, if a student records it or takes a screen shot the session and share on social media).

Please refer to the Covid Addendum to the BfL Framework for guidance on expectations and sanctions.

Appendix 1:

ABUSIVE PARENTS POLICY

New Policy: July 2021

Status: Non-Statutory

Dealing with Abusive Parents

Statement of principles

This policy has been written taking into account the DfE Guidance 'Advice on school security: Access to, and barring individuals from school premises' December 2012, DfE Guidance 'Controlling Access to school premises' November 2018 as well as NAHT guidance on dealing with abusive parents.

At Harlington School, we value the positive relationships forged with parents and visitors to the school. We encourage close links with parents and the community and believe that students benefit when the relationship between home and school is a positive one. We also strive to make our school a place where as adults we model for students the behaviour we teach and expect. In general, we place a high importance on good manners, positive communication and mutual respect.

Almost all parents, carers and visitors to Harlington School are keen to work with us and are supportive of the school. However, on very rare occasions the behaviour of a small number of parents falls short of what we expect. This sometimes manifests itself in aggression or abuse towards members of the school community. This can be in written communication (including social media), on the telephone or in face-to-face incidents.

In these situations we expect members of staff to behave professionally, attempting to defuse the situation where possible and seeking the involvement as appropriate of other colleagues. Staff who face these situations have licence to end any conversation (face to face or on the telephone). They should then refer the incident to a senior manager who will take appropriate action or invoke the provisions of this policy.

The overriding principle is, however, that all members of the school community have the right to work or be in school without fear of aggression or abuse from parents. The board of governors has a requirement to protect staff and students from such aggression.

The progress and well-being of the parent's child(ren) will be fully considered. Actions taken against the parent will be reasonable and proportionate. The parent will have the opportunity to put their views forward at every stage. In the case of the imposition of conditions or a ban from school, robust review processes involving the Chair of Governors and then the governing body are in place to ensure fairness.

Definition of unacceptable behaviour

We consider that aggressive, abusive or insulting behaviour or language from a parent presents a risk to staff or students. Unacceptable behaviour is such that makes a member of staff or student feel threatened. This can be through face-to-face contact, on the telephone or in written communication (including social media). The following is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour:

- any kind of insult as an attempt to demean, embarrass or undermine
- any kind of threat

- raising of voice so as to be intimidating
- physical intimidation, eg by standing very close to him/her or the use of aggressive hand gestures
- use of foul or abusive language
- any kind of physical abuse
- allegations which turn out to be vexatious or malicious.

The school's approach to dealing with incidents

If a parent/carer/visitor behaves in an unacceptable way towards a member of the school community, the head teacher or appropriate senior staff will assess the level of risk before deciding on a future course of action. The course of action will be reasonable and commensurate with the assessed level of risk.

Risk Assessment

The Head teacher will carry out a risk assessment in order to help make a decision about the level of response. In all cases the response will be reasonable and proportionate. The Head teacher will consider the following questions:

- What form did the abuse take?
- What evidence is there?
- What do witnesses say happened?
- Are there previous incidents to take into consideration?
- Do members of staff/students feel intimidated by the parent's behaviour?
- Is there any evidence of provocation?
- How high is the assessed risk that this will be repeated or there will be retaliation at the school's action? (low, medium, high).

Recording of Incidents

Staff/students subject to abuse and witnesses will make written statements about incident(s) which will be kept in a file with subsequent letters. This file will be kept by the Business Manager. Depending on an assessment of the risk of retaliation to witnesses or individuals, statements made by adults these may be made available to the parent if they request it.

The School's response

Following the completion of the risk assessment, the Head teacher will decide the level of action to be taken. Actions will include the following:

- 1. Clarify to the parent what is considered acceptable behaviour by the school*

In some instances it may be appropriate simply to ensure the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This could be explained by letter from the Head teacher. This letter may contain a warning about further action if there are further incidents. The parent will be invited to write to the Head teacher with his/her version of events within 10 working days. Depending on the parent's response a meeting may then be held to discuss the situation and how this can be avoided in future.

- 2. Invite the parent to an informal meeting to discuss events*

This could be helpful to discuss and diffuse the situation.

The safety and well-being of those attending such a meeting must be carefully considered. Members of school staff will always be accompanied by at least one other colleague at any such meeting. Consideration should be given to the seating arrangements, and care taken to ensure exits cannot be blocked by a parent who could potentially become aggressive. Where possible the meeting should be held in a room which has the facility for CCTV recording to be made; all attended should be made aware that the CCTV is in operation.

The main points of discussion and any agreed actions should be noted, and a follow-up letter or e-mail sent to confirm the school's expectations and any agreed actions.

3. Impose conditions on the parent's contact with the school and its staff

Although fulfilling a public function, schools are private places. The public has no automatic right of entry. Parents of enrolled students have an 'implied licence' to come onto school premises at certain stated times. It is for schools to define and set out the extent of such access. Parents exceeding this would be trespassing.

Depending of the type, level or frequency of the unacceptable behaviour, the school may consider imposing conditions on the parent's contact with the school. These conditions may include (but are not exclusively):

- being accompanied to any meeting with a member of school staff by a member of SLT
- restricting contact by telephone to named members of the senior leadership team
- restricting written communications to named members of the senior leadership team
- restricting attendance at school events to those where the parent will be accompanied by a member of the senior leadership of the school
- any other restriction as deemed reasonable and proportionate by the Head teacher.

In this case the parent will be informed by letter from the Head teacher the details of the conditions that are being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations in writing about the conditions to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the conditions. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the date of the parent's letter.

If the decision is to confirm the conditions imposed, this decision will be reviewed by the governing body after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the governors. This and the evidence from the Head teacher will be considered at a meeting of the full governing body. Governors may decide to maintain, extend or remove the conditions. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

When deciding whether it will be necessary to maintain, extend or remove the conditions, governors will give consideration to the extent of the parent's compliance with the conditions, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

4. Imposing a ban

Where other procedures have been exhausted and aggression or intimidation continues OR where there is an extreme act of violence then the school may consider banning the individual from school premises. This will include banning a parent from accessing school staff by written communication or telephone.

In these circumstances, the individual would be advised in writing by the Head teacher that a provisional ban is being imposed. The parent would then be given 10 working days from the date of that letter to make representations about the ban in writing to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors would then decide whether to confirm or remove the ban. This would be communicated to the parent in writing within 10 working days of the receipt of their letter.

If the Chair's decision is to confirm the ban, parents in these circumstances will be offered an annual meeting about their child's progress, usually with a member of senior staff.

A decision to impose a ban will be reviewed by the governing body after approximately six months (and every six months after that, if appropriate). The parent will be invited to make written representation to the governors; this and the evidence from the Head teacher will be considered at a meeting of the full governing body. Governors may decide to remove the ban, extend the ban or impose conditions on parent's access to the school. The decision of the review will be communicated to the parent by the clerk to the governors within 10 days of the date of the meeting.

In deciding whether to remove or extend the ban or impose conditions, governors will consider the extent of the parent's compliance with the ban, any appropriate expressions of regret and assurance of future good conduct received from him/her and any evidence of the parent's co-operation with the school in other respects.

5. Removal from school

Parents who have been banned from the school premises and continue to cause a nuisance will be deemed to have committed a section 547 offence. They will be considered as trespassers. In these circumstances the offender may be removed from school. This may be carried out by a police officer or person authorised by the governing body. Legal proceedings may be brought against the parent.

6. Complaints policy

Any parental complaint that arises from incidents of abusive behaviour will be dealt with under the complaints policy.

Appendix 2- Letters*Warning*

Model letter 1: This is an initial letter from the Head teacher to ensure the parent is clear about behaviour standards expected by the school. This letter contains a warning about further action if there are other incidents. The letter invites a written response and suggests a meeting.

Imposing conditions on the parent's attendance at school events

Model letter 2: This is a letter from the Head teacher informing parents of the school's decision to impose conditions on the parent's attendance at school events, pending review by the Chair of Governors

Model letter 3: Letter from the Chair of Governors informing parent of her decision to confirm or remove the conditions

Imposing a ban

Model letter 4: Letter from Head teacher Informing parents of the school's intention to impose a ban on their attendance at school premises, pending review by the Chair of Governors

Model letter 5: Letter from the Chair of Governors informing parent of her decision to confirm or remove ban

Reviewing the decision to impose conditions or impose a ban

Model Letter 6: Letter from clerk to governors requesting statement from parents to governing body for review of decision.

Model letter 7: Letter from clerk to the governors to confirm the outcome of further reviews of decisions where the imposition of conditions/ban has been extended or removed.

Please see the full policy for letter templates