

DRUMAHOE PRIMARY SCHOOL



SCHOOL COMMUNICATION POLICY

Drumahoe Primary School



School Communication Policy Statement

Context

This policy will provide guidance for Staff in communicating with parents/guardians, members of the school community and the wider community about school matters.

Rationale

Open and effective communication is vital to the health and well-being of the School community. Effective communication encompasses the exchange of ideas, where people feel they have been heard and their opinions valued, and where information is clear and accurate. All communication needs to be timely, relevant, accurate, well targeted, well delivered, clear and concise, open honest and frank, reciprocal and interactive. This policy's implementation enhances the quality of School community through:

- Providing a framework for effective communication;
- Promoting understanding and co-operative teamwork between the School, parents or guardians and pupils;
- Promoting active participation of the whole School community in effective communication;
- Contributing to the best learning outcomes for pupils;
- Ensuring principles of effective communication are displayed by staff in their work in the School;
- Collective understanding that parents/guardians, pupils and staff have a common goal.

Aims of the Policy:

1. To improve the quality of service given to pupils at Drumahoe P.S. by ensuring that effective communication and consultation takes place between the school, parents, pupils and other stakeholders.
2. To improve the quality of service by ensuring robust processes for consultation between the school, parents and pupils.
3. To be effective, communication must be open on both sides. Staff and parents are encouraged to ensure that all communication remains polite and professional. Where parents/guardians feel that standards of communication fall short of expectation, they are referred to our **Complaints Policy**.

Structures in place to facilitate open communication & consultation with Parents

- Meeting for parents of new P1 intake – mid June/Baseline - September.
- Parent/teacher meetings one-to-one in November- February and June.
- Parents receive academic school report of each pupil at the end of each school year.
- Annual Review Meetings with parents whose children have special needs.
- Consultation throughout the year.
- Written communication – letters, Memos, texts, School App, School Website, Twitter, Facebook.
- Parents Representatives on The Board of Governors are involved in the drafting and review of all school policies. Decisions taken to change current policies and procedures or to introduce new ones will be made known to all parents through the School App, in written format via letters home or through the school Website.
- Regular Parent Memos keep parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and school concerns.
- Homework diary (if applicable) used to relay messages which are signed between parents and teachers. Parents requested to sign diary to certify that homework has been completed.
- Information provided regarding school and community activities on Parents' Notice board.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her education. In all matters pertaining to the well-being and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by the teachers.

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings aims:

- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school;
- To inform teachers on how children are coping outside school;
- To establish an ongoing relationship and communication with parents;
- To help teachers/parents get to know the children better as individuals;
- To help children realise that home and school are working together.

Annual Academic Report

All communication sent from the school will be sent to the child's home address as given on the SIMS Data Form, unless otherwise requested by parents

In the case of separated parents, requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings and the Annual Academic Report will be issued to both addresses only on a request made to the Principal.

Informal Parent/Teacher Meetings

Arranging parent/teacher meetings within the school day while children are in school is difficult. However, parents are welcome to speak to the Principal or teacher(s) at an appointed time through the Front Office.

Meetings with the class teacher at the class door to discuss a child's concern/progress is discouraged on a number of grounds:

- A teacher cannot adequately supervise his/her class while at the same time speaking to a parent;
- It is difficult to be discrete when so many children are standing close by;
- It can be embarrassing for a child when his/her parent is talking to the teacher at a classroom door.

If parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, musical instruments, sports gear etc. this can be done through the Secretary's office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum. Parents are strongly discouraged from taking pupils out of school during term time in order to facilitate family holidays.

1 School Mechanisms for Communication:

- 1:1 Communications can take a variety of forms: verbal (through meetings or by telephone), written (through letters, notes in diaries, Parent App or e-mail). Occasionally a communication may be received second hand or through an intermediary.
- 1:2 Effective telephone communication can sometimes be a problem in a school, where teachers may be teaching full time and running clubs or otherwise working with pupils at lunchtime or after school. 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. Our aim will always be to return a telephone call to a parent within 24 hours. Return calls may be made by someone other than the person to whom the original call was made, should it be felt that this is more appropriate.
- 1:3 The school has been particularly proactive in encouraging use of modern communications methods including the new Parent App. All parents/guardians are asked (SIMS Data Form) to give an email address for another possible method of effective communication. Over the years the majority of parents are satisfied with the two-way communication they have with school.
- 1:4 However, this does not mean that the school always gets things right and this policy aims to clarify the parameters within which we operate to ensure that communication is carried out with all stakeholders and interested parties effectively and clearly.

2 Communication between the school and parents operates in the following ways:

- 2:1 Prospective parents and pupils are invited to an Open Evening in Term 1 preceding the academic year of entry to the school. All prospective parents will receive a School Prospectus;
- 2:2 Parents and the pupils accepted into the school are invited to an Induction Morning in June where the main channels of communication are outlined;
- 2:6 Details about all severe weather/emergency closure events at the school are published via our School App/Website, Facebook pages, and Twitter feed;
- 2:7 Parent Memos are provided which outline the important events at the school;

2:8 Consultation between the school, parents, and pupils operates in the following ways:

- Questionnaires are issued on occasions to parents on a range of issues and through a variety of means (hard copy, through electronic surveys, email etc.);
- Parents and visitors to the school can make suggestions for improving the service and are encouraged to leave these with reception;
- School reports are issued with a reply slip inviting parents to comment on the report they have received;
- The Kids' Forum is consulted on a range of key issues relating to the school. Meetings take place at least every half term, with additional meetings for specific issues;
- Pupils are encouraged to be constructive about how the school can improve provision;
 - Consultation between external agencies takes place with a view to improving the service provided by the school;
- The Special Educational Needs Team works closely with individual pupils, parents/guardians and external experts and meetings are held frequently to discuss best practice and provision for individuals and groups.

3 Communication Systems:

3:1 Parents Communicating with Staff

Parents or Guardians wishing to contact staff about a matter related to school have a number of options: Parents should always in the first instance ring the School Office on 028-71302284.

- If the matter is related to curriculum or class matters, then the request is to the class teacher via the Office. If the teacher is not available and the matter is urgent, contact should be made with the Key Stage Co-Ordinator or the Principal;
- If the matter is related to a welfare issue the Designated Teacher for Child Protection (DTCP - Mrs Hegarty) should be contacted via the Office. If not available and the matter is urgent, the Deputy Designated for Child Protection (DDTPC – Mr McMaster) should be contacted;
- Parents must make clear the nature of the concern during the initial contact with the School Office.

3:2 Procedures for Staff Communicating with Parents or Guardians

As a general rule, parents or guardians should be well informed about the academic progress and pastoral well-being of their child. The school has many formal and informal communication mechanisms in place for this. The following points provide guidance for staff when communicating with parents about academic, pastoral and discipline issues outside the more formal mechanisms, such as parent-teacher evenings. In all dealings with parents and guardians, communication should be professional, open and frank. At the same time, it is essential that staff communicate with empathy, understanding and respect for pupils and their parents or guardians.

The following procedures have been divided between academic and pastoral communications.

3:3 Academic Communication

This section relates to communication with parents or guardians about academic progress of a pupil. Regular communication with parents/guardians will build relationships and generate trust, which will enhance communications when there are more difficult issues to deal with.

- 3:3:1 Minor Academic issues such as a missed homework will appropriately begin with a note in the Homework Diary or in the Progress/Conduct Card (if applicable). Repeated minor issues or failure to submit formal work, such as homework, will result in discussions with the pupil by relevant staff and telephone contact with the parent(s) or guardian(s). If the telephone contact is made by the teacher, it must be discussed with the Head of Key Stage beforehand. Notes must be kept and entered into the pupil's file.
- 3:3:2 When a significant academic change is being contemplated, such as a pupil moving to a different group for literacy/numeracy, contact will be made with the parents or guardians in advance, and an opportunity provided for discussion about such changes.
- 3:3:3 Follow-up phone calls or meetings should be held on a regular basis when a child is at risk academically.

3:4 Communication about Pastoral and/or Discipline Issues:

This section relates to communication by staff with parents or guardians about pastoral issues and ongoing or serious discipline issues of a pupil. Early and regular communication with parents/guardians will build relationships and generate trust, which will enhance communications when there are more difficult issues to deal with. The School will create opportunities for parents/guardians to meet with or have contact from key Pastoral Care staff, particularly when families are new to the school. (Related policies: Pastoral Policy; Positive Behaviour Policy and Child Protection Policy and Procedures).

- 3:4:1 For less serious one-off classroom discipline issues (disrespect for others, interfering with the learning of others, being unsafe etc.) the classroom teacher would apply normal classroom management strategies; they should record the incident in the Class Behaviour Incident Report Log. Parents/guardians may be contacted by a note in the Homework Diary or by a phone call. Similarly, the Homework Diary/Pupil of the Week/Principal Praise Notes etc. may be used to communicate improvements in attitude or effort by a pupil.
- 3:4:2 Where a classroom teacher or Head of Key Stage has concerns regarding pastoral issues or ongoing/serious classroom discipline issues relating to a pupil, it would be appropriate to first check for any pastoral or discipline alerts or pupil history. It may be necessary to contact the Head of Key Stage; Vice Principal or Principal.
- 3:4:3 For on-going classroom discipline issues or serious one-off classroom discipline issues the classroom teacher should discuss the problems with their Head of Key Stage.

- If a serious problem is identified, parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as possible (preferably on the day but no later than 24 hours) by phone, by the Head of Key Stage, Vice-Principal or Principal.
- Notes are to be made of any phone contact or face to face interviews and filed for future reference and communication.
- A formal letter will be sent by the Head of Key Stage, Vice-Principal or Principal to inform the parents/guardians of the outcomes of any investigation, particularly where sanctions are being applied.
- Information will be emailed to relevant academic/pastoral staff so that they are aware of the situation and can access relevant details.
- Follow-up contact with parents/guardians will be organised to review the situation within an agreed timeframe.

3:4:4 For serious discipline issues outside the classroom:

- The Principal or Vice-Principal will contact parents preferably on the day of the event, but no later than 24 hours. If an investigation has not been completed, this contact is to inform parents/guardians that the matter is under investigation;
- Notes are to be made and kept of any phone contacts or face to face interviews;
- A phone call should be made, followed by a formal letter to inform parents or guardians of the outcomes of any investigation, particularly where sanctions are being applied;
- Follow-up contact with parents/guardians will be organised to review the situation within an agreed timeframe;
- When an investigation results in the possibility of serious sanctions being applied, such as a suspension or expulsion, then the matter would be referred to the Principal. The initial contact will be a phone call, followed by a formal letter sent by the Principal to inform the parents/guardians of the outcomes of any investigation and any sanctions imposed;

3:4:5 For Pastoral issues where there may be concern for the welfare of a pupil, the matter will initially be referred to the Vice Principal (DTCP). The decision to contact parents/guardians would be taken following investigations and consultation with the Child Protection Team.

- When the pastoral issue is “reportable” (refer to Child Protection Policy) the matter must be reported direct to the designated Child Protection Officer, Vice Principal (DTPC) and Principal (DDTPC). Decisions to contact parents or guardians would be based on the procedures outlined in the Child Protection Policy.

3:5 **Responding to and following up Parent/Guardian Enquiries.**

This section deals with responses to parent/guardian enquiries to teaching staff about pupil related issues.

- 3:5:1 Where a parent/guardian has contacted a staff member by phone or personal meeting, notes should be taken and all aspects of the conversation should be clarified.
- 3:5:2 When the contact is by email or if the staff member was not available to take the initial phone call, the parent/guardian should be responded to within 24 hours of the initial contact.
- 3:5:3 Where some action is agreed on following a meeting or communication, a time-frame should be established to either review progress or resolve the issue.

Procedures for Staff Communication with Parents & the Wider School Community.

Should a staff member be directly approached by telephone, email or in person to answer specific factual questions on financial, logistic and/or high level administrative matters then they should refer the enquiry on to someone with access to such information or to the Principal or Vice Principal. A response to this kind of enquiry will be made by the Principal or the Vice Principal.

Matters of a private or sensitive nature regarding a teacher's work or the work of others and questions inviting a teacher to offer judgements or personal views should not be discussed.

If questions are not factual but enquire into the area of policy and procedures, reasons or rationale for policies and procedures staff should courteously explain that a member of the SMT would be better equipped to answer the query and refer it on as outlined above.

Internal Staff Communication procedures:

1. Communication with colleagues should be conducted in a professional and courteous manner.
2. Confidentiality and privacy are to be respected and maintained at all times.
3. All forms of communication with colleagues should reflect an understanding, empathy and respect for individual circumstances, differences and needs.
4. There is no time or room in this 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.
5. If you are uncomfortable or are concerned about matters that have been communicated, implied or suggested to you, and do not conform to this policy in fact or spirit you are to refer it to your Key Stage Co-Ordinator. If that could be compromising for your Key Stage Co-Ordinator, then refer the matter to the Principal.
6. It is your responsibility to report any breaches of this policy to your Key Stage Co-Ordinator or other appropriate authority.
7. We have a responsibility to hold each other mutually accountable for maintaining and promoting a safe and respectful working environment.