

# Communications Policy

## Rationale

Thomas Keble School recognises the importance of clear and effective communications with all stakeholders including parents and carers, pupils, governors, external agencies and our own staff community. We are committed to being open and accessible for all who have an interest in the school. This policy addresses the main ways in which the school will ensure effective two-way communication. This policy has two parts:

- Part A: concerns external communications to and from school. This will be published annually and made available via the school's website.
- Part B: concerns internal communications between staff. This will be published annually and made available via the internal staffshare folder along with all other policy documents.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- ICT Users Policy

## Part A: External Communications

Communications can take a variety of forms: verbal (via meetings or telephone conversations); written (through letters, notes in planners or email). Occasionally, a communication may be received second-hand or via an intermediary.

Effective telephone communication can sometimes be a challenge in a school, where teachers may be teaching full-time and running clubs or otherwise working with pupils during times other than lessons. Parents may perceive that a message elicits no immediate response and this can be frustrating. However, it is important to be aware that during any school day, there may be no available opportunity for the member of staff concerned to reach a telephone to return a call. The intention with this policy is to set out some parameters for communication between school and home so that all stakeholders are aware of the protocols we have in place to facilitate effective communication that enables us to work with parents and guardians to support our students' learning.

## Aims of the Policy

1. To maintain a high quality of provision for students at Thomas Keble School by ensuring that effective consultation and communication takes place between school, parents / carers, students and other stakeholders.

## Communication

Communication between school and parents / carers operates in the following ways:

## **Calendared Communication**

- Prospective parents are invited to an Open Evening in the October preceding the year of entry to the school. All prospective parents also have access to a copy of the school prospectus and a range of key informative documents via the school website.
- Prospective parents are invited to an induction evening in July where the main channels of communication are outlined and information about the school is presented. As part of this process, parents are asked to fill in key contact information including an email address and emergency contact details to assist with communication.
- Parents are invited to a Year 7 tutor evening in Term 1 to review how Year 7 students have settled in.
- Parents are invited to a range of themed Parents' Evenings to gain access to information that is relevant to their child at certain points in their school career. These include Options Evening; Post 16 Evening; Mental Health Awareness and various pastoral support information evenings.
- Parents are invited to attend a subject parents' evening once per academic year to review progress in different subject areas.
- Parents receive information about student progress via an annual report which details performance against expected progress; effort and homework etc.

## **Additional Information and Communication Methods**

- Our School Gateway provides access to information about attendance. It also provides copies of assessment and progress updates as well as a copy of a student's most recent report.
- A newsletter is published 5 – 6 times a year and provides information on a range of issues including key dates for the calendar and term dates.
- Our school website provides access to all key policies as well as access to information on the curriculum studied in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- Staff will often use a student's planner as a way of communicating with home. Planners are checked regularly by tutors, and parents can also use the planner as a way of communicating short notices to staff. It is a student's responsibility to show any notes from parents that are written by a parent to the member of staff it is intended for.
- We also use an electronic Schoolcomms messaging service to send electronic communications by email and text. This helps to inform parents about issues such as emergency school closures; bus route delays and helps to ensure we keep parents informed on topical issues such as e-safety alerts.

## **Contacting the school**

As a school we welcome contact with parents in helping us to support our students and work with home in a supportive partnership. The vast majority of parents communicate with school in a timely and appropriate manner which is appreciated. However, on the rare occasions where staff receive abusive or defamatory calls and / or emails, staff will not respond and such incidents will be referred to the Headteacher. In the case of telephone calls, staff are advised to end any abusive calls.

In order to support effective communication, the following is intended to guide and assist:

## By telephone

If a parent wishes to contact the school for any reason, the best way to do this is to telephone the main school number: 01452 770301. The switchboard is covered between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm Monday to Friday and there is an answerphone service available outside of these hours. Messages are checked every morning and passed to the relevant colleague. When telephoning, callers will hear a number of options:

- Press 1 to report a student absence
- Press 2 to be put through to the student support (pastoral) team
- Press 3 to be put through to the main reception.

We aim for your call to be answered to enable callers to speak directly with a member of our administrative support whenever a call is made during the school reception hours of 8:00am to 4:30pm.

## By email

The proliferation of email traffic over the last few years has allowed us to communicate more efficiently and effectively. We are entering an even greater period of email use as students now benefit from having school and personal email addresses. In order to ensure that all stakeholders (staff, students and parents) find that email continues to be effective and not overly burdensome, we suggest the following guidelines for email etiquette.

### Email Etiquette

- Emails are most effective when used to convey key information. This is what we would expect emails to be used for most of the time. Messages that contain a lot of emotion can often be misconstrued in emails and we would always recommend that where the subject matter is anything other than information based, a telephone conversation or meeting is preferable.
- Try to avoid using email as a replacement for personal contact. A simple 'rule of thumb' is to consider if you would say what you have written in your email to the person if they were in a room with you.
- Avoid using emails as a way of making a complaint or as a means of venting about an issue. If you feel strongly about an issue, it is often better to talk over the telephone or request a meeting as this allows a discussion to take place. It is often the case that staff can reassure or explain something very quickly in a phone call. A copy of our complaints procedure can be found on our website if required.
- Try to keep emails brief. Include a clear subject line as a header so that recipients can check if the email is intended for them.
- Consider who you need to send the email to. Use 'To' if you need that person to action something and 'cc' if you wish a person to be aware.
- Please check who you are sending an email to. Bear in mind that the 'Reply to All' option is most effective when everyone on the distribution list needs to see your reply.
- If you need to send emails to more than one person, it is better to send different emails to each recipient to avoid confusion. Try to avoid emailing several people about the same issue to avoid confusion.
- The emails that might regularly be used by parents to contact school include:
  - a. Main school admin. team: [admin@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:admin@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk)

- b. Student support and pastoral team: [studentsupport@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:studentsupport@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk)

### Students to staff emails:

- When emailing staff, students should only use staff members' school email addresses. Consider whether it is absolutely necessary to email staff or whether it might be more appropriate to speak to a staff member face to face in a lesson or at a suitable time during the school day.
- The best use of email is to give simple, factual information. The basic rules of politeness are expected.
- All student to staff emails should contain name and tutor group either in the subject bar or in the form of an electronic sign off.
- Email should not be used as a way of avoiding a conversation with a member of staff.
- ***It is not permitted to use another student's email account to send emails in school.***

### Parents to staff contact:

- If a concern or query arises, parents should consider who the best person will be in school to address the concern. The usual points of contact for the vast majority of queries will be either a child's tutor; the Senior Pastoral Lead for the year group (Head of Year) or the Subject Leader of a specific subject.
- Please contact a member of staff either by telephoning the school (01452 770301) or by emailing the main school email address: [admin@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk](mailto:admin@thomaskeble.gloucs.sch.uk) You can use the subject bar in your email to identify who the email is intended for. Eg. FAO Miss Maunder.
- ***Please do not email a member of staff directly, even if you know their email address. Staff can be away from school for a number of reasons and using the main school email address ensures that all emails are picked up and passed to a member of staff who can assist.*** If you are unsure who to address your email to, please contact the school reception for assistance.
- Please include your child's name and tutor group in your email. This avoids confusion where we have students with identical names. It is also helpful to include a contact number if the number we have on SIMS may be incorrect. This will support a timely response.
- Due to the difficulties of arranging interviews for teaching staff during a timetabled teaching day, parents are asked to seek a mutually convenient time to meet with staff in order to discuss any issues. It is helpful if parents can advise of two or three possible times when they are available to enable staff to consider when they might also be available.
- Please note that teaching staff are often committed to teaching, meeting other parents or other staff throughout the working day, which runs from 8:30am. Parents who arrive at school without an appointment expecting to meet staff will be asked to make an appointment via the usual channels. This helps to avoid disappointment given the demands on time.

## Section B: Internal Communication - Emails

The proliferation of email traffic over the last few years has allowed us to communicate more efficiently and effectively. We are entering an even greater period of email use as emails can be set up to be forwarded to smartphones and tablets. It is **not** obligatory to set up emails to receive them on personal devices. However, if staff choose to do this, they should ensure such devices are password protected to ensure all work emails are confidential to the staff member. It is also important that we consider the additional pressures that such access can present and agree a way of working that minimises such pressures:

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- Avoid using emails as a way of making a complaint or as a means of venting about an issue. If you feel strongly about an issue, it is often better to talk face to face to enable a dialogue to take place.
- Try to keep emails brief. Include a clear subject line as a header to recipients can check if the email is indeed intended for them and relevant.
- Consider who you need to send the email to. Use 'To' if you need that person to action something and 'cc' if you wish a person to be aware.
- Please check who you are sending an email to. Bear in mind that the 'Reply to All' option is most effective when everyone on the distribution list needs to see your reply.
- If you need to send emails to more than one person, it is better to send different emails to each recipient to avoid confusion. Try to avoid emailing several people about the same issue to avoid confusion.

### Staff to staff email

- Consider why – think carefully whether you actually need to send an email. Is it the most effective means of communicating your message? Can the answer be found through other means? Can it wait until you see the person?
- Consider when: Avoid sending emails after 6pm and at the weekend. Many of us like to work at that time but it is easy to save the email in draft form (hit cancel / X in Outlook and it gives you the option to save to draft.) This then enables you to send the email the next working day. If the matter is urgent, please flag the email as 'high importance' to ensure staff are able to prioritise this within the working day and before they leave the school site.
- Who? – Avoid sending emails to large groups of other staff. Please do not use 'All staff' unless absolutely necessary. Consider using one of the pre-established distribution groups or set up your own for groups you regularly want to email. Consider whether Friday Notices could be used instead.

### **Staff to students email**

- Do not email students via personal home email addresses. Only a student's school email address should be used.
- Why? – Email can be a good way to send resources and to collect work from students. Ensure any email is clear and that a suitably professional tone is used. Avoid responding to simple requests. It's important to encourage students to come and talk to us and not just fill up inboxes with questions.
- When? – Do not email students outside of the school office hours (8am to 4:30pm). In particular, do not email students at the weekend or in the evening. It creates an expectation that you are also contactable at these times.

### **Staff to parents email**

- Class teachers and support staff should try to avoid emailing parents directly. The exception to this would be where a parent requests purely factual information in which case, a short, factual email is appropriate.
- If a parent emails you directly, please forward to your Subject Lead and / or Senior Pastoral Lead (depending on the nature of the email). The Subject Lead or Senior Pastoral Lead should then send a holding email acknowledging receipt. A digital signature is a useful way of ensuring parents are aware of who they are dealing with in response to any email.
- Any lengthy communication, particularly if it contains bad news or complex information, should be communicated via a letter, by telephone or preferably face to face meeting called to address any specific issues. Such forms of communication help to support staff as all letters are checked before sending with copies retained on file for future reference and telephone calls / meetings can take place with witnesses present if needed.

### **Staff and Social Media**

- Many staff make use of social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook to stay in touch out of school. Such platforms are convenient ways to correspond socially outside of school. Staff are respectfully reminded, however, that any operational matters related to school or students, should be discussed through normal school communication channels.