

Character Education Trust Communication Policy

Trustee approval Date:	12-07-21
Committee Responsible:	Trust Board
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Rationale

At **Wrotham** School we believe that every student can make excellent progress academically. We challenge and support all our students to achieve. We believe young people achieve their best in an environment where they feel secure, valued and have high self-esteem. Additionally, we value working in partnership with parents and believe the mutual support we can give each other will be of great benefit to our students.

Purposes

All communication at **Wrotham** School should keep staff, students, parents, Governors and other stakeholders well informed in a timely manner. Communication should be honest, ethical and professional and should use the channel of communication that is most appropriate to audience, message and context.

This policy will be put into practice when communicating between staff, outside agencies, parents and students. Mike Cater (Head Teacher) is accountable for implementation and review. This policy can also be found on the school website. On-going monitoring will take place for impact and effectiveness.

Communication

This information can be located in the guidance published on the school website.

Students should refer to the relevant section of the school's website.

Aspects of relevant policies will inform curriculum planning and teaching and learning practices. Staff should refer to teaching and learning policies, student well-being, organisation, management and staffing and in the relevant sections of the school's website.

Parents/carers should refer to the induction booklet, home – school contract and in the relevant sections of the school's website.

We believe that effective partnership working is key to the implementation of our aims, values and policy aspirations. In particular this policy relates to our working closely with the Governing Body, Local Authority and other relevant organisations.

Internal Methods of Communication

Face- to- face communication

- Communication between colleagues should remain professional and friendly.
- All staff are expected to communicate regularly with colleagues. Nobody should work in isolation and opportunities should be found by staff to share information and network with colleagues in a way which enables them to fulfil their role. All staff should be made to feel included and welcome.
- Communication should be in person where possible. Where there is misunderstanding or disagreement between colleagues, face to face communication between the two colleagues should be undertaken in the first instance.

Email

This section outlines the schools expectations of email and electronic message protocol to ensure fluid, productive and appropriate communications in and out of school using the schools email servers and contact addresses.

Emails and electronic communication can be a huge time saving device and can be highly useful communication tools. They should be used, where possible to communicate effectively and reduce workload.

This guide has been developed through consultation with staff and is intended as a guide to good practice that is conducive to healthy work/ life balance and professional standards.

- All emails and communications should be succinct and to the point. They should not take excessively long to read or write.
- Emails and communications regarding work should only be sent or replied to between the weekday hours of 8:00 and 17:00. On weekends emails should only be sent between the hours of 10:00- 16:00 on Saturday and Sunday. There is no obligation to reply to any email after 17:00 on weekdays or on weekends. This includes emails from parents.
- We strongly recommend not replying to parental emails after 17:00 each day or at the weekend. This can lead to unrealistic expectations for other staff.
- Emails sent outside of this time should be sent with delayed delivery or saved as drafts so they arrive during the recommended hours.
- Urgent communications outside of these hours should be made via phone call, only if absolutely necessary.
- Staff should be aware that the tone of emails can be misinterpreted and that sensitive conversations should be had in person to avoid risk of misinterpretation.
- School email accounts must not be used for personal communications.
- Emails to parents or in response to staff requests should be responded to, if requested, within 48 hours or ASAP for serious or safeguarding concerns.
- Emails should be checked for spelling, punctuation and grammar and should be suitably checked for the intended recipient. There is a difference between informal and formal emails.
- Emails sent from/at work are monitored periodically and emails sent using the school email system may be monitored by the leadership team of the school to maintain safeguarding and professional standards.

- Confidential emails must be identified as such in the header of the email.
- Student initials should be used in the header of an email to ensure that confidentiality is not breached. Where possible names or initials should not be used in the headers of emails.
- Attention must be given to who receives or is copied into an email. All staff should only be emailed when the content is relevant to all staff. Groups or individuals should be identified and addressed to ensure unnecessary emails are kept to a minimum.
- Good communication with parents is important. If you are unsure of how to respond to a parental email please consult with a member of the Leadership Team before replying.
- Email communication with students should always be using a school email account and content should reflect appropriate and professional standards.
- Staff must not contact pupils or parents, or conduct any school business, from a personal email address or via social media.

Meetings

- All staff should have regular meetings with their Line Manager.
- All meetings that take place can be requested to be recorded appropriately. All formal actions should be noted. Following a meeting with a parent or carer written communication with the actions discussed should be shared.
- For all staff there is an integrated programme of meetings. All staff are invited to contribute to the content of the meeting. All meetings should be structured to reflect school priorities, preferably with the agenda shared prior to the meeting. Minutes should record actions from the meetings. Staff are expected to attend on time.
- For staff with management responsibilities, meetings should occur with their line manager. The frequency should be determined by the demands of their role. Both parties should feel free to bring up matters arising. Formal minutes with actions and deadlines should be taken and circulated by the line manager and should be forwarded to their own line manager.
- Where a member of staff needs more support, line managers can arrange a series of meetings. Formal minutes with actions and deadlines should be taken to evidence the support and participation.
- All meetings should be scheduled using the school's online diary system.

Written Communication

These are placed in staff pigeon holes. Staff are expected to empty their pigeon holes regularly.

Telephone Calls

- These should take place using the school networks.
- It may be preferable to use personal mobile phones to contact a member of staff, particularly if they are not available in their office. This is permissible but professional judgement should be used here.
- Staff should avoid using personal mobile phones to contact parents.
- Staff should never contact students using their personal mobile phone.
- Staff should endeavour to reply to phone messages with 24 hours (Mon-Fri), particularly regarding outside communications.

External Communication

- Communication should be clear and professional at all times.
 - Staff should endeavour to reply to phone messages within 24 hours (Mon-Fri), particularly regarding outside communications.
 - All communication should be responded to within 48 hours (Mon-Fri). Where more time is needed an acknowledgement of the communication should take place within this time period.
- Informal communication
- Where informal communication takes place, staff should be mindful of their professional responsibility. If issues or actions arise from the communication, this should be shared with relevant parties and logged on SIMS and any documents should be placed in the student's file.

Email

- External emails should be treated in the same way as internal emails.
- All letters and communication will be sent to parents and carers via **[inset name of tool e.g. parent mail]**
- All letters will be checked for accuracy and clarity.

Meetings

- All relevant parties should be invited to meetings.
- Meetings should be arranged at a time that is convenient to all relevant parties.
- Meetings, particularly with parents, should rarely take place without a prior appointment
- All meetings should be scheduled using the 'Outlook' calendar.
- All meetings that take place can be requested to be recorded appropriately. All formal actions should be noted. Following a meeting with a parent or carer written communication with the actions discussed should be shared.

Written Communication

- These are placed in staff pigeon holes. Staff are expected to empty their pigeon holes regularly.
- A letter received from a parent/ carer or outside agency pertaining to a student should be replied to in writing within 48 hours and placed on the student's file
- Any letter of complaint should be shared with line managers for advice.
- Any communication of complaint regarding a member of staff must be sent to the Head Teacher.
- If the complaint is about the Head Teacher this should be forwarded to the Chair of Governors (Sheila Smith) and the Executive Head Teacher (Matthew Wright).
- All letters of complaint and their subsequent replies should be forwarded to the Office Manager for logging.

Telephone Calls

- These should take place using the school network.
- When making a call, staff should introduce themselves, their role and the name of the school. They should establish who they are speaking to before continuing the conversation.
- Incoming calls should be announced by the receptionist. They should state the name of the caller, the institution they represent and or the students' name and the purpose of the call.
- Staff are expected to ensure that answerphones are checked regularly and that messages are responded to promptly.

Parental Communication

As a school we strive to ensure we communicate promptly and respectfully with our parent community. Our goal is to always try to resolve issues through respectful, polite and reasonable dialogue. We understand that in difficult times that usual tolerances can become frayed. However, we respectfully ask that all communications with the school are polite, respectful and reasonable. You should also expect the same level of manners and respect from the staff at the school and any other member of our community.

As well as an increase in aggressive, impolite or unreasonable communications we have seen a rise in emails and phone calls that make unnecessarily extreme statements, claims or demands. Sometimes these communications can come across more like an angry comment or sensational story posted on social media than a sensible and professional discussion with a school. This is not something we can or should tolerate.

Whilst the significant majority of communications with the school team are polite and reasonable this section of the policy outlines basic and reasonable expectations of such conversations. These apply to all members of our school community.

- While staff will always seek to establish open and friendly relationships with parents, relationships are kept professional and parents are addressed in a formal manner. Parents should work with, and show respect for, the professionals supporting their child.
- We aim to avoid jargon and use straightforward language. Written communication is made as accessible as possible.
- We aim to respond promptly to parents' letters and emails. The use of email communication between a parent and a class teacher can speedily and effectively deal with any problems that might arise. Teachers should not use personal addresses, but should have a dedicated school address. Copies of correspondence with parents will be placed on pupil files.

Parental Conduct

- All communications to and from the school are polite and respectful at all times.
- All communications are a discussion and avoid unreasonable or extreme demands or threats.
- Information provided and issues discussed should be based on fact and not assumption. Gossip, hearsay or 2nd hand information is often incorrect and misleading.
- An open mind should be kept at all times in relations to reports, enquiries or complaints.
- Judgement on outcomes of any discussion or complaint should be reserved until the school has had a reasonable chance to respond and resolve.
- A single or small number of complaints or personal opinion may not reflect the majority view.
- The views you express will be heard and considered but may differ to those of other parents.
- The school will always listen to your view and consider this within the best interests and feelings of the wider school community, as appropriate and in a balanced way.
- Some aspects of school and education are defined by law and at the professional discretion of the Head Teacher. Therefore, some of our work and the decisions we make are non-negotiable.
- Communications should always be clear, succinct and to the point.
- Unfair, or personal comments towards individuals, or unjust judgments on character should not be made.
- Formal complaints must follow the correct procedures.
- Extreme personal opinions, views or beliefs may not be recognised by the school or acted on when they do not represent the majority views, beliefs or ethos of the school, its parents, students and the wider community.
- A basic respect should be maintained for the significant professional knowledge and experience of the staff team in matters of education and student welfare.
- Concerns about any aspect of our work should be raised directly through the school and not discussed on social media; doing this can stop us from dealing with your concerns effectively.
- Communications received out of office hours will be answered the following school working day.
- The school may not be able to respond immediately to communications sent in the evening or on weekends and during holiday periods.
- We will always respond to polite, reasonable and respectful communication promptly and thoroughly but will consider our response if these basic standards are not upheld.
- The school reserves the right not to respond to communication which does not meet the expectations outlined above, and is considered to be abusive, unnecessarily aggressive, and/or bullying or harassing in nature. If staff judge your communication to be such, they may send a standard email response which can be found as Appendix A.
- If a member of staff believes that a communication they have received is abusive, unnecessarily aggressive, and/or bullying or harassing in nature, they will refer this to the Headteacher for his/her consideration.

Parent–Staff Meetings

- Any parent wishing to meet with a member of staff should contact the school in advance and request a meeting. This request should be responded in accordance with this policy regarding emails and letters. Parents should not come to the school to talk to a member of staff without an appointment. Parents who do come to the school without an appointment should not expect that the member of staff will meet with them. The member of staff may still choose to do so, but this is at their discretion.
- A member of staff may ask for their line manager to accompany them at meetings with parents. Where meetings occur away from the school premises, or outside normal school hours, the member of staff should try to ensure that another colleague is nearby.
- We appreciate that some meetings put the participants into contrary positions. We aim to remain professional in such situations and to focus on a constructive outcome. If a parent does become aggressive or abusive, the staff member should close the meeting and report the matter to his or her line manager.
- It is perfectly acceptable to call a meeting to a close in order to allow time for further investigation.

Dealing with Parental Concerns

We encourage parents to contact the relevant form teacher at the earliest opportunity if they have concerns regarding their child's progress or well-being. The Progress Tutor may then enable contact with:

- A subject teacher if there are specific subject problems
- A member of the senior leadership team if the issue is persistent or more serious.

Pupil Absence

If a pupil is absent from school and we have no indication of the reason, attempts will be made to contact a parent on the same day.

Newsletters

- We will send a newsletter to parents and carers at the end of each term, containing general details of school events and activities. This will usually be sent by **[inset name of tool e.g. parent mail]**, unless requested otherwise. We will send other information of a general nature when necessary.

Parents' Evenings

Parents are asked to meet their child's subject teachers once a year at parents' evening. We meet with parents more regularly if pupils:

- have special educational needs
- are making less than expected progress
- are experiencing behavioural or disciplinary difficulties.

Email/eCommunication

- Our aim is for all parents to sign up to the school's **[inset name of tool e.g. parent mail]** system to facilitate paperless communications.
- Staff sending emails to external organisations, parents or pupils must send a copy to their line manager.

Prospectus

The school prospectus is available on the school website and contains all the information required to give parents a complete picture of the school's delivery of education. It is updated every year, or more frequently if necessary.

Website

- The school website both provides information about the school and promotes the school to a wider audience. It also has a regularly updated area giving information and current awareness for parents.
- It also provides access to the school's policies and curriculum information.

Links with other policies

This policy links to the following policies and procedures:

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Complaints Policy
- e-Safety Policy

Appendix A [TO BE PRINTED ON SCHOOL HEADED PAPER]

STRICTLY PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

ADDRESSEE ONLY

[INSERT NAME]

[INSERT ADDRESS]

By [HAND/EMAIL]

[INSERT DATE]

Dear [INSERT NAME]

I write to confirm receipt of your [email/letter] of [DATE].

[I have enclosed/attached the School's complaint and communication policies for your information] OR [Please follow these links [INSERT] to access the School's complaint and communication policies for your information]. In particular, I would like to draw your attention to pages 7 to 9 of our Complaints Policy, headed "unreasonable complaints" and page 7 of our Communications Policy, addressing "parental conduct".

We do our utmost to address reasonable concerns and complaints we receive from parents in a professional, reasoned, and considered manner. We are not, however, willing to engage in correspondence when the nature of that correspondence constitutes a clear breach of our policies, most notably when the correspondence in our view is **[abusive, unnecessarily aggressive, and/or bullying or harassing in nature.]** Such communications are unlikely to be conducive to helping resolve the issue at hand and reaching a constructive resolution.

Our view is that your correspondence [of DATE] is **[clearly] [abusive, unnecessarily aggressive, and bullying or harassing in nature and in violation of or rules]**. Our policy, as explained, is not to engage with you when such an approach is adopted in the interests of all parties.

Whilst we appreciate you have strong feelings about the issues you have raised, we would strongly encourage you to reconsider the manner of your communications towards the School and its staff, who work hard to develop the children we teach. If you wish to re-submit a complaint in a reasonable and civil manner, clearly setting out what your concerns are and what you would like us to do to assist you, we will be willing to do so. If further correspondence is received of the type set out above, we will not be responding further.

Yours sincerely

[INSERT NAME]

For and on behalf of **Wrotham** School