



Home-School Communication Policy

Approved by the
Governing Body:

Full Governing Body

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1. Introduction and aims

The school's primary function is to provide a high quality education to its pupils. Its resources should be heavily focused on this moral purpose and effective communication with parents will support this. However, the school has finite resources so the school needs to strike the balance to ensure that pupils' progress during their time at Bitham Brook is maximised. The policy is based on the premise that all members of the school community have the interests of the school's children (their own and others) at heart and that they are placed 'front and centre' in our priorities.

Clear, honest, structured communication between the school and parents/carers can support this aim as it has a positive impact on pupils' learning as it:

- Gives parents/carers the information they need to support their child's education and participation in school life
- Helps the school improve, through feedback on what is working well and whether areas of school life can be improved
- Builds trust between home and school, facilitating a sense of security and clear expectations for children
- Helps the school to recruit and retain the highest quality of teachers and support staff through promoting a positive working environment

The aim of this policy is to set out how home-school communication works by:

- Explaining how the school communicates with parents/carers
- Setting clear standards and expectations 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

Definitions and principles to help understanding in the application of this policy

- 'Parents' to refer to both parents and carers.
- Listening and agreeing are not the same. One can listen to a point of view but not agree.
- Balance of evidence. School are expected to make judgements based on the balance of evidence – have they reasonably judged whether an event is more likely to be true or not.
- Hearsay evidence does not carry more weight than first hand evidence even if presented by an adult.
- The school's Behaviour Policy provides the definition and structures that the school works to in its conversations with parents around behaviour. These definitions cannot be redefined by individuals.
- The interest of children will always come first and the school will apply policies and support fairly to all children without 'fear or favour'.
- The school is committed to dealing with all concerns fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to the best of its ability with the capacity that it has.
- Deliberately vexatious concerns damage the education of all children within the school as they divert precious resources from teaching and learning to managing the actions of adults.

2. Roles and responsibilities

2.1 Headteacher

The headteacher via the Senior Leadership Team is responsible for:

- Ensuring that communications with parents are effective, timely and proportionate
- Monitoring the implementation of this policy with the resources and staff available
- Ensuring that communication is efficient allowing the school to focus on its primary purpose
- Monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and recommending changes to the Governing Body

2.2 Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- Responding to communication from parents in line with this policy and the school's ICT and internet acceptable use policy
- Working with other members of staff to make sure parents get timely, pertinent information
- Working with other relevant staff if they cannot address a query or send the information themselves

Staff will **aim** to respond to communication during core school hours between 8.45 and 3.30 pm. In line with supporting staff wellbeing and helping our staff find a manageable work-life balance, staff may work around other responsibilities and commitments and respond outside of these hours, but they are **not expected** to do so. It is most likely that teachers will respond to parents between 3.45 pm and 4.30 pm.

In responding to routine contact from parents regarding classroom or playground matters:

- Staff will aim to reply within 24 hours but within a 48 hour window (teachers routinely have working commitments after school e.g. staff meetings, working with external agencies)
- Teachers will not respond to requests to contact parents during times when they are responsible for a class

Senior leaders:

- May decide who responds to a communication dependent on its nature and who is best placed to respond or manage it

All staff communication with parents will take place on the school site or using school equipment and/or school resources e.g. school email addresses, school telephone lines.

2.3 Parents

Parents are responsible for:

- Ensuring that communication with the school is respectful at all times and is congruent with the Parent/ Carers Code of Conduct
- Making every reasonable effort to address communications to the appropriate member of staff in the first instance and accepting guidance set out in this policy
- Respond to communications from the school (such as requests for meetings) in a timely manner
- Checking all communications from the school

Any communication that is considered disrespectful, abusive or threatening will be treated in line with our Parent/ Carers Code of Conduct.

Parents should **not** expect staff to respond to their communication outside of core school hours, at times when they are not working or during school holidays.

3. How we communicate with parents and carers

The sections below explain how we keep parents up-to-date with their child's education and what is happening in school.

Parents should monitor all of the following regularly to make sure they do not miss important communications or announcements that may affect their child.

3.1 Email

We use email to keep parents informed about the following things:

- Upcoming school events
- Scheduled school closures (for example, for staff training days)
- Payments
- Short-notice changes to the school day
- Emergency school closures (for instance, due to bad weather)
- School surveys or consultations
- Class activities or teacher requests
- Extra-curricular activities

3.2 Text messages

Because of the high cost of text messages, will text parents about:

- Urgent matters that need parents' immediate attention

3.3 School Events

Where possible, we try to give parents at least 2 weeks' notice of any events, trips or special occasions (including non-uniform days, special assemblies or visitors, or requests for pupils to bring in special items or materials).

Where pupils (who are representing or are representative of their classes) request participation in an event or to hold an event, the school will weigh these requests carefully. Timescales for communication may be effected by this.

3.4 Phone calls

Phone calls often provide a more efficient means of dialogue where understanding can be established quickly. Most communication with parents is straight forward and a phone will often quickly resolve matters. This is the most common means of communication with parents outside of face to face conversations at drop off/pick up times.

Phone calls will not be used if it is evident that information is not being kept confidential or there are concerns about how accurately conversations are being represented or recalled. If the Headteacher, an Assistant Headteacher deputising for the Headteacher, feels there is the need for unambiguous records of communication to be kept, future correspondence will be in writing or phone calls made will be supported by written records made by a supporting member of staff.

3.5 Letters

We send the following letters home for the following purposes:

- Letters about trips and visits
- Consent forms
- Our Class Newsletters outlining the curriculum, homework and PE days for the term ahead
- Termly newsletter giving a sample of life in the school
- Specific, individual matters

3.6 Homework

- Core homework activities will be set out in the termly class newsletters
- Children in KS2 may, from time to time, be given additional 'one-off' pieces of homework that support their learning in class. In lower KS2, this will be supported by a note given to the child by the teacher but in upper KS2, children will be expected to note the homework expectations for themselves as we want children to develop habits of responsibility prior to transfer to secondary school.

3.7 Reports

Parents receive reports from the school about their child's learning, including:

- An end-of-year report covering their achievement in each part of the curriculum, how well they are progressing, and their attendance
- A report on KS1 and KS2 SATs tests

3.8 Meetings

We hold two parents' evenings per year plus the opportunity to discuss the annual report. During these meetings, parents can talk with teachers about their child's achievement and progress, the curriculum, their child's wellbeing, or any other area of concern.

The school may also contact parents to arrange meetings between parents' evenings if there are concerns about a child's achievement, progress, or wellbeing.

Parents of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), or who have other additional needs, may also be asked to attend further meetings to work with the school to support the child's needs.

The Headteacher and Assistant Headteachers will frequently be outside and accessible to parents at drop off and collection times. There is no set pattern to this but senior leaders will go where they think they may be needed. This provides parents with the opportunity to ask informal questions or check on issues of interest. Many valuable insights into school life are passed on in this way as a sense of common thinking or common concerns can emerge.

3.9 School website

Key information about the school is posted on our website, including:

- School times and term dates
- Curriculum information
- Important policies and procedures
- Important contact information
- Information about before and after-school provision

3.10 Home-school communications app

The school use ParentMail to send letters, emails and text messages to parents.

4. How parents and carers can communicate with the school

Parents should use this list to find the right contact details for the question they have. This will ensure the quickest response. Please note that response times may be effected by demand.

Please start all emails with: 1. The child's first name and surname 2. The name of the class teacher 3. The year group. This will save a significant amount of administration time.

I have a question about...	Who you most likely to need to contact	How	Response times aimed for - if directed to the correct address (times refer to working days)
My child's learning/class activities/lessons/homework	Your child's class teacher	Reception: earlyyears@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Years 1-3: lowerschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Years 4-6: upperschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	The Deputy Headteacher (DHT) or Assistant Headteacher (AHT) for the phase will direct the message to the appropriate member of staff – this may be the Phase Leader, teacher or teaching assistant. A response should be expected within 48 hours in most cases.
Home learning due isolation	Your child's class teacher	Reception: earlyyears@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Years 1-3: lowerschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Years 4-6: upperschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	Work should be set (via Google Classrooms) for the next school day and daily for the period of isolation
Changing who is picking up my child	A member of the Office Team	pickupchanges@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	Any changes submitted by 2.00 pm will be processed by 2.30 pm and the class teachers notified. After 2.00 pm, an email must still be sent but a phone needs to be made to the school office as well and a message left. Emails should only be sent after 2.00 pm in an emergency. Messages <u>rutinely sent after 2.00 pm</u> may put children at risk as this is the busiest part of the office day and this part of the system should be for <u>emergencies only</u> .
My child's wellbeing/pastoral support	Your child's class teacher	Reception: earlyyears@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Years 1-3: lowerschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Years 4-6: upperschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	The DHT or AHT for the phase will direct the message to the appropriate member of staff – this may be the Phase Leader, teacher or teaching assistant. A response should be expected within 48 hours in most cases. The DHT or AHT may also ask the DSL for advice.
Urgent wellbeing or safeguarding concerns	Amy Leighton DSL	dsl@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk Please use the title 'Safeguarding' or 'Child	The DSL or DDSL will endeavour to contact you within 24 hours. For urgent Safeguarding concerns, a DSL or DDSL will contact you as soon as possible on the same day. The HT may also contact you if a DSL or DDSL

		Protection' if you think a child may be at risk. If the matter is urgent, please call the school or MASH on 0300 456 0108	is not available or the concern is related to the behaviour of an adult on the school premises.
Payments	A member of the Office Team	finance@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	48 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand)
School trips	A member of the Office Team	admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	48 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand)
Notification of absence and absence requests (2 weeks in advance)	A member of the Office Team	admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	For notification of absences due to illness - a follow up call is not usually needed unless additional information is needed. Requests for absence in term time – a form should be completed, this is available to download from the school website and paper copies are available in the blue racks in the foyer. Once the form has been returned, a decision will be made within 5 working days.
Bullying and behaviour (please the behaviour policy for the definition of bullying which will be worked to)	In the first instance, the class teacher. If this does not resolve the issue, the DHT or AHT for the phase will intervene. The HT will address matters still unresolved.	Reception: earlyyears@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	The first contact will be responded to in 48 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand). Timings after that will be dependent of the actions deemed to be needed.
		Years 1-3: lowerschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	
		Years 4-6: upperschool@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	
Special educational needs (SEN)	When raising an initial concern, please speak with the class teacher. SENCO Clare Robertson	SENDCO@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	The first contact will be responded to in 48 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand). Timings after that will be dependent of the actions deemed to be needed.
Family Link Worker	Sue Wells Family Link Worker/ DDSL	FamilySupport@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	The first contact will be responded to in 48 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand). Timings after that will be dependent of the actions deemed to be needed.
Before and after-school club administration	A member of the Office Team	admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	Within 72 hours
Governing board	Clerk to the Governing Body	admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	5 working days
Catering/meals	A member of the Office Team	admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	48 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand)
Concerns and complaints	Concerns should be addressed informally	admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	The response time depends on the nature of the complaint: o Safeguarding and child protection will be addressed asap and will

	with the relevant member of staff in the first instance. Concerns which are unresolved or formal complaints should be address to the HT.		be prioritised. If the DSL/ DDSL and HT agree it is a safeguarding issue, the school will follow its procedures. ○ If it is assessed to be an issue of a different nature, the HT may delegate it to the appropriate member of staff. The response time will depend on the nature of the issue.
Undisclosed issues that are not safeguarding		FamilySupport@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	48 hours if possible
Any other areas		admin@bithambrook.wilts.sch.uk	Up to 72 hours but 24 hours if possible (depending on demand)

4.1 Email

Parents should always email the school, using the guidance above, about non-urgent issues in the first instance.

We typically aim to acknowledge all emails within 2 working days, and to respond in full (or arrange a meeting or phone call if appropriate) within 5 working days. However, the guidance above gives a more detailed breakdown of this.

If a query or concern is urgent, and parents need a response sooner than the times set out above, they should call the school.

4.2 Phone calls

If parents need to speak to a specific member of staff about a **non-urgent** matter, they should email the school office and the relevant address above.

One needs to bear in mind that staff have teaching commitments and essential meetings which are critical to the quality of education children receive. This policy aims to balance that priority with the need for effective communication.

If the issue is urgent, parents should call the school office.

Urgent issues might include things like:

- Family emergencies
- Safeguarding or welfare issues

An emergency is a rare and one off event. The school only has the capacity to support genuine emergencies. For example, requests for staff to look after children after school or to provide individual collection/drop off arrangements are not feasible. **Regularly placing these types of demands on the school places at risk our ability to support parents with genuine emergencies.**

If it is difficult for a parent to access emails because of a disability, they should call the school office.

4.3 Meetings and contact with teachers

If parents would like to schedule a meeting with a member of staff, they should email the appropriate email address (see above).

We try to schedule all meetings within 7 working days of the request but this will depend on the nature of the request. Some requests will be assessed to be urgent and will take place as soon as the school (or outside agencies) deem necessary.

Teachers are available at the beginning or end of the school day at drop off/collection time if parents need to speak to them urgently, about quick, routine issues. Parents need to bear in mind that the teacher has responsibility for children in the class at this point and this is their priority. However, straight forward, quick messages can be passed on.

Parents will need to book appointments to discuss anything complex. This request can be made to teachers directly at drop off/collection time or via the email address above. Examples of complex requests include:

- Any concerns they have about their child's learning
- Updates related to pastoral support, their child's home environment, or their wellbeing

In our communications with one another, all adults are expected to act as role models exemplifying the values of the school and cordial relationships.

5. Inclusion

It is important to us that everyone in our community can communicate easily with the school.

We currently make whole-school announcements and communications (such as email alerts and newsletters) available in English.

Parents who need help communicating with the school can request the following support:

- School announcements and communications translated into additional languages
- Interpreters for set meetings or set phone calls

Please contact the school office to discuss these.

Parents who have a disability that makes it difficult to access written communication should call the school office to communicate with the school or discuss alternative arrangements with the Family Support Team.

6. Monitoring and review

The Governing Body monitors the implementation of this policy and will review the policy every 3 years.

The policy will be approved by the governing board.

7. Links with other policies

The policy should be read alongside our policies on:

- ICT and internet acceptable use
- Parent/Carer Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Complaints

Appendix 1

Concerns and Complaints

The school welcomes parents raising concerns with the school. We want all children's experience of school to be the best that it can be and we want parents' experience of school life to be positive and efficient to support family life and wellbeing.

Thoughts or concerns raised by parents often give insights that lead to more effective ways of working or highlight needs that may be hidden from sight. The school will look to use concerns or parents' thoughts to improve experiences for individual children, groups of children or systems.

However, there will be times when parents feel that a complaint has not been resolved adequately. In this situation, a parent should follow the school's complaints procedure.

Complaints systems are very important as they ensure that there are checks and balances in place to ensure that organisations, including schools, behave in a reasonable way. For schools, they are also an essential part of the safeguarding system within the sector and Bitham Brook fully supports all processes that are part of the process of protecting children.

Unreasonable Complaints – DFE model policy

Unfortunately, there are times when the complaints system is used in a vexatious manner and not in the interests of children. This can have a serious impact by:

- Persistently diverting resources away from the teaching and learning of other children within the school e.g. by taking up a teachers planning time, diverting curriculum leadership to dealing with a complaint
- Using the system to put pressure on the school to treat individual children, or children, in a manner that is contrary to statutory guidance or good practice or school policy
- Using the system to harass a member of staff reducing their ability to carry out their job effectively and damaging their wellbeing
- Aggressively using the complaints system to mask or divert attention away from safeguarding issues

Based on experience, this use of the complaints system is often accompanied by the use of social media to portray an unbalanced view as they know that schools do not engage with parents through social media. In addition, other parents are frequently cited as supporting the complaint.

The school's view is that this type of use of the system should be viewed as socially unacceptable behaviour within our school community as it harms the education and wellbeing of the children within the school community.

The DFE's model policy for 'Managing serial and unreasonable complaints' provides useful guidance as when an individual is behaving in a manner that hinders the fair consideration of a complaint. Their examples include:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education
- seeks an unrealistic outcome
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- uses threats to intimidate
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- knowingly provides falsified information
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.