Home-School Communication Policy

Clarity Independent School

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Woodhill Road
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Clarity Independent School is committed to safeguarding...

"Our school is committed to our whole-school approach to safeguarding, which ensures that keeping children safe is at the heart of everything we do, and underpins all systems, processes and policies...We promote an environment where children and young people feel empowered to raise concerns and report incidents and we work hard in partnership with pupils, parents and caregivers to keep children safe."

Clarity Safeguarding Policy September 2026

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Our Home-School Communication Policy

Policy Aims and Rationale

- To enable effective communication between home and school
- To maximise efficiency in communication with parents and caregivers
- To protect teaching and social time spent with the children when they are in our care between 9am and 3pm

At Clarity Independent School, our teaching staff start their directed hours at 8.15am and finish at 4pm, some 4.30pm, but many staff start much earlier and stay on much later than that voluntarily, as dedicated, committed professionals. They work hard to fit so much into their working hours. With the development of this policy, the school aims to assist staff in managing workload by maximising efficiency of home-school communication.

Daily / Regular Home-School Communication with Keyworkers for Updates

We offer all parents and caregivers a choice of how they wish to be contacted for updates about their child, by phone or email, and the regularity of that contact across the week and note these as a quick note on our school communication system, Go4Schools. If a parent wishes to change their preferred communication method for receiving updates (phone or email) and / or the frequency of this regular home-school communication, they are encouraged to email their preference to their child's keyworker to update the records on Go4Schools and action this accordingly.

Data protection regulations (GDPR) state that personal, sensitive information needs to be stored and transmitted in a secure, private manner to keep personal data safe. Home school communication therefore takes place via phone call directly to the parent / carer, or by direct email.

How to communicate with school - by email

Parents are asked to email the school wherever possible, rather than phone. This is to enable easy forwarding of the email to the right person in a timely manner and prevent written notes needing to be made from phone calls which then need to be relayed to staff, which delays communication. This will ensure that someone is able to respond and act more promptly.

How to Communicate with School Before 9am

Before the children arrive at 9am, staff are working hard to prepare activities and lessons for their arrival; therefore, parents are asked to email any messages to relevant member of staff AND COPY IN the Office staff on admin@clarity.essex.sch.uk, rather than phoning the

school, where possible. This is so that their message will still be received by the office and passed quickly to the most suitable person, should the intended recipient be absent from work that day and their email not be seen. The office staff will respond to the sender to let them know their message has been received and passed on.

Before 9am, if parents and caregivers prefer to telephone the school rather than email, there is the facility to leave a brief answerphone message, which automatically sends a voicemail to the office by email. The voicemail is picked up by the Office staff and will be immediately passed on to the relevant staff member by email and before the children arrive. This prevents the main phone line being blocked by an individual caller, enabling access for more callers. The office staff will email the parent / caregiver to confirm receipt of the message.

How to Communicate with School Between 9am and 3pm

Between 9am and 3pm, teaching staff are working hard to provide quality education, supervision and care to the children in the classrooms. Keeping them safe and prioritising their wellbeing is our upmost priority. Teaching staff are, therefore, unable to come out of classrooms to take or make phone calls, attend to emails, or have communication with parents / caregivers until after the children have gone home after 3pm.

If parents / caregivers wish to make contact with the school between these hours, they are encouraged to:

- Phone the main school office on 01245 408 606 and leave a brief message with the Office staff or on the school voicemail system
- Email the person they wish to speak with AND COPY IN the Office staff on admin@clarity.essex.sch.uk. The person they wish to speak with will respond after 3pm on the same day where possible. Please note, it might not be possible to reply to communication received after 4pm, until the next day, but we will definitely get back to you.

Staff email addresses can be found on the school website 'About Us' page.
https://www.clarity.essex.sch.uk/about-our-staff

Occasionally, in order to give a full response, it may be necessary for staff to meet to collaborate, share information and decide about something before responding and this may not be possible to do on the same day. In these cases, a member of staff will reply to the parent / caregiver to acknowledge receipt and estimate a time frame for their reply later that day or during the week.

If there is an urgent message that member of teaching staff needs to communicate with parents / caregivers, for example if a child is ill, this will be passed to the Office staff, who

will make the call home on their behalf to enable the member of teaching staff to stay with their class.

Alternatively, a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) may contact a parent / caregiver during the day about these or other matters.

How to Communicate with School after 3pm

Once the children leave at 3pm, staff have a team de-brief, sometimes full staff meeting, and collaborate on planning, admin and preparation for the next day.
Regular calls to parents are made by teaching staff after 3pm.
The school office is manned until 4pm; therefore, any incoming emails and / or voicemails can be relayed to teaching staff.
Please ensure to leave a voicemail if the line is busy so that we can direct your message. We aim to respond the same day; however, calls made after 4pm might not be able to be replied to until the following day.
If emailing teaching staff or SLT directly, please ensure you copy in the admin@clarity.essex.sch.uk email address to ensure we can forward to the right person, should the intended recipient not be available.

Class Teachers Calling Home After 3pm

Class teachers use the classroom mobile phones to make outgoing calls to parents / caregivers as part of our regular communication updates about pupil wellbeing and progress.

These phones are ***unable*** to receive incoming calls, texts or voicemails and they are not manned throughout the day; therefore, we do not make the numbers available publicly.

All parental contacts have been entered into the mobiles with a preceding '141', to automate the process for class teachers to withhold the classroom mobile number to prevent call back to these phones.

Class teachers, therefore, use the 'Contacts' feature of the phone to make the call, rather than typing the phone number in manually, to prevent accidental sharing of the classroom mobile phone number publicly.

All stakeholders may contact the school through the usual channels, which are the main school phone line, or emailing the relevant staff member (copying in the school office for forwarding in case of staff absence.)

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Communicating with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

Being a very small special needs school, each staff member carries several roles, and our working days are extremely full. This is why we have a system of delegated roles, including different types of communication.

Parents wishing to speak to a member of the SLT are encouraged to:

- Preferably send a brief email to the SLT member giving the information or sharing their concern and its level of urgency (please copy in the office in case of absence.)
- Alternatively, phone the school main office number and leave a brief message with the Office staff or voicemail, stating the nature of their call and its level of urgency. It may not be possible to speak to the member of SLT immediately; therefore, the message will be passed on to the SLT member to respond in a timely manner, *aiming* for the same day.
- Parents / caregivers wishing to speak with the Headteacher, are guided to follow the same procedure (i.e. email first where possible). It will not be possible for office staff to re-direct a phone call to the Headteacher directly without knowing the reason of the call, its urgency and the brief information surrounding this. This is to allow the most urgent communications (e.g. safeguarding a child, health and safety and wellbeing) to be responded to as early as possible and before less urgent matters, which may be responded to later or by an alternative member of staff.
- Parents / caregivers wishing to communicate with SLT about a safeguarding issue, are guided to follow the same procedure, and contact the school Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy Safeguarding Lead, which are listed on the school website; 'Learning' tab -> 'Pastoral'.

If a parent has repeated concerns of a similar nature, which they wish to send by regular emails and phone calls, they will be guided to follow the school's Complaints Policy which can be found on the school website, so that their concern / complaint may be heard and responded to in the best way.

If a parent / caregiver wishes to make a formal complaint, they are encouraged to follow the school Complaints Policy. Complaints will not be able to be heard within daily ongoing email conversation threads or regular phone calls, due to their complex, detailed nature and to enable the most efficient investigation and best outcome to be achieved for all parties. In these cases, the complaints will be acknowledged and the parent / caregiver guided to follow our Complaints Policy.

If a member of SLT is contacted with a query which could be responded to by another member of teaching or office staff, it will be passed to them for response and the person making the contact will be informed of this and the timescale.

Clarity Independent School Operates a Zero Tolerance Policy

Our staff work extremely hard to go the 'extra mile' every day to ensure that the children *are* safe, *feel* safe and have the best learning experience here at Clarity Independent School. We will always try to be as helpful and polite as possible, even when handling sensitive issues.

We understand the sometimes-overwhelming circumstances involved in looking after children with special educational needs and are keen to support families in the best ways possible. However, we do not believe our staff should experience shouting, swearing, intimidating, threatening or unpleasant language or behaviour, all of which will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

At Clarity Independent School, we teach the children about the Fundamental British Values:

- **Democracy**
- **Rule of Law**
- **Respect and Tolerance**
- **Individual Liberty**

Clarity Independent School caters for children with high anxiety, which can be easily triggered by them sensing conflict between home and school; therefore, we believe it is important for us all to work together to promote the best working relationships to maximise this. Our school ethos also places love at the centre of all we do, to ensure that everyone experiences: respect and tolerance; has a free choice; is covered by the law; and has liberty and freedom.

Therefore, to ensure that children feel safe at their school and do not sense (or have the opportunity to overhear) conflict, we have implemented the following guidelines for staff to follow regarding how to soothe communication which may have started to escalate.

Best Practice

All staff have been trained to implement the following best practice procedure for when communication begins to become challenging:

- Acknowledge concerns (without becoming defensive)
- Stay calm
- Reassure that they are there to help and support the caller, use the Clarity Empathic Response Script, for example:
    - 'I am listening, how can I help?'
    - 'Please tell me more, so I can understand'
    - 'I appreciate your frustration and I want to help resolve this situation'

  - ‘I understand that this is a sensitive topic and has caused you to feel some stress’
  - ‘I understand this situation is frustrating for you’

- Listen patiently and take brief notes of the main points, but intervene politely if the caller is finding it difficult to know when to stop sharing
- Be honest
- Avoid over-use of technical teaching-language, which may frustrate the caller who may not understand the terms - explain where necessary
- Reflect the main points back to the caller to ensure correct understanding
- Remind the caller that they are there to listen to the caller's concerns and will action them accordingly
- It may not be possible for a decision to be made or information to be given there and then, and it may be necessary to explain that they will speak to the relevant staff member(s) and reply once information has been gathered and/or a decision made
- Suggest an action plan to the caller and ensure that they agree with your intended actions, e.g. 'I would like to speak to ... and gain all the information so that I can come back to you with some suggestions of solutions.'
- Confirm with the caller when they are to expect a response

All staff have been trained to implement the following best practice procedure for communication begins to become hostile:

- Remind the caller politely that they are there to listen, support and find the best way to help them
- Remind the caller that to do this, they will need to be able to stay calm so that they can communicate their concerns in a way that we can help them
- Assist the caller to remain calm by not reacting, rather being empathic and reassuring them they are there to help and support
- If needed, remind the caller that they can take a break from the call for a few minutes to get a drink or have a walk and some fresh air, and the staff member will still be available to speak in a few minutes, to enable a calm, relaxed conversation to resume.
- If needed, and if all other options have been explored and remain unsuccessful, explain to the caller that it is not possible to continue the call and work within the school's Home-school Communication Policy; therefore, the call will need to be postponed to another time to ensure that calm, positive conversation is able to be conducted by both parties.
- Alternatively, the caller may wish to send a brief email instead, listing the main points of their concerns for effective communication to resume.

- They may also wish to alternatively follow the school's Complaints Policy and make a formal complaint so that the matter can be dealt with that way.

Further information about communication via social media is available in the Appendices.

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the school's Anti-Bullying Policy and E-safety Policy, which are available on the school's website.

This policy will be updated every two years in accordance with relevant guidance and regulations.

Overall responsibility for home-school communication in **Clarity Independent School** rests with the Head Teacher, Debbie Hanson.

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Appendix

Tips on E-Safety and Social Medica Communications

Whilst electronic communication can be extremely positive, unfortunately, it is also open to abuse, for example, over-sharing a person's own or another person's / child's sensitive information, which they did not wish to be shared.

We all want to be positive role models to the children, to inspire them with our own conduct, and ensure that they are fully supported to navigate their journey positively through school. We all want to encourage our pupils to trust staff and feel safe and looked after at school, and this is important when communicating online too.

Please refer to our E-safety, Anti-Bullying and Behaviour policies for more information on this, in addition to the signed E-Safety agreement within the E-safety policy, that we make between home and school when the children first begin attending the school.

Accurate Information

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to follow the communication procedures in the above policy if they have a concern or complaint, rather than sharing information about the school, the children attending, staff members or anything else on social media.

We work with extremely sensitive situations, which can easily be misinterpreted through second hand witnesses or when receiving partial information and this can be damaging to children and adults when shared publicly.

We teach the children about misinformation in our e-safety lessons; that not everything received on social media is true, even if it appears to be so. Even hearing true facts may not represent the whole truth about a situation. We teach them about the ease with which people can use statistics to manipulate opinions, scam others, use hearsay to sway view-points and use testimonies to manipulate the truth.

If a parent hears negative information or a rumour on social media about the school, its procedures, staff or a child attending, they are encouraged to follow recommended procedures and report the information to the Internet Watch Foundation, alert the school and block the person. The school will be happy to confirm the correct information with the person who is concerned, to maintain trust, if it does not break data protection laws or a person's privacy. This is better than believing misinformation viewed publicly, which can easily lead to the person losing trust with the school and its staff.

The school is keen to work together early, to sort out any issues before they escalate.

Social Media and Privacy

At Clarity Independent School, we all belong to a small community where sensitive, personal information is not possible to keep completely confidential from other children and parents / caregivers all the time, because we are aware that children share the same learning and recreational spaces and naturally discuss things with their families as part of discussing their day.

We encourage families to model and promote a sense of dignity and privacy about sensitive information shared at home and remind the children of good practice regarding being respectful about each other and keeping each other's sensitive information safe and private, and away from social media, even in a private chat.

This is because of the opportunities for second-hand sharing to a wider audience once information has been shared to one other person. Once information about a person's disabilities, their needs or their personal issues has been shared, it can cause the child and their family irreversible, immediate and often long-term distress and harm. Once shared online, it is impossible to fully recall and it is then open to being forwarded, shared, exploited or reported to the authorities and / or safeguarding authorities.

Social Media and Discrimination

At Clarity Independent School, we believe everyone is valued and has equity. This does not necessarily mean that everyone is treated the same, because people have different needs and reactions to interventions and learning practises. Everyone should have equal access to our facilities and education. Please see our Equality Policy and our Accessibility Policy for more information.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp has a minimum age limit restricted to 13 years due to the likelihood of it being mis-treated, especially by children younger who have not yet matured in their knowledge of online etiquette and how to keep themselves safe.

Clarity Independent School, therefore, does not support the use of WhatsApp by children younger than 13, due to the frequency of mistreatment, upsets, arguments and cyber-bullying incidents leading to police involvement for the parent and child.

Parents and caregivers are asked to supervise their children very closely online and when using Whatsapp, due to the dangers that children with social and emotional communication can frequently face and their increased risk of cyber-bullying or inadvertently becoming the cyber-bully.

Viewing and Sharing Appropriate Material

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to supervise their child online and ensure children are safe and only looking at or sharing appropriate material.

Parents are encouraged to consider restricting access to devices and / or the internet / social media and messaging platforms to times when they can be supervised if it is not possible to supervise them all the time (e.g. if a parent is at work when the child is at home and an alternative supervision is not in place.)

Children with SEN can be more vulnerable to viewing and sharing inappropriate material, becoming drawn into inappropriate language or behaviour, being exploited and unwittingly becoming a victim, witness or even perpetrator of cyber-bullying themselves. In the worst cases, the consequences can sometimes lead to prosecution.