

Staff Code of Conduct and Communications Policy

Clarity Independent School

Bridge Barn Farm
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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

To be read in conjunction with Staff Handbook

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1. Introduction

The overriding expectation is that employees, volunteers and those engaged to work in the school will adopt the highest standards of personal integrity and conduct both in and outside work. As role models they must behave, through their words and actions, at all times in a manner which demonstrates their suitability to work with children and which upholds the standards and reputation of the school.

This code of conduct provides an overall framework of the behaviours expected of individuals who work in the school. The code is not intended to be exhaustive and individuals should use sound professional, ethical and moral judgements to act in the best interests of the school, its pupils and its community.

This code should be read in conjunction with:

- other school policies and procedures
- the terms of any employment or service contracts and agreements
- relevant professional standards

2. Scope

This Code applies to all individuals employed by the school or those engaged by the school including:

- Relief/casual staff
- Supply staff
- Third parties providing services to the school (including the self-employed)
- Voluntary workers

For the purpose of elements of this code applying to all individuals set out above, they are collectively referred to as “workers”.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Proprietor

It is the responsibility of the Proprietor to establish and monitor standards of conduct and behaviour within the school, including the establishment of relevant policies and procedures.

Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team

It is the responsibility of Headteacher and line managers to address promptly any breaches of acceptable conduct and behaviour, using informal procedures where possible but implementing formal procedures where necessary.

Employees

It is the responsibility of all employees to familiarise themselves with, and comply, with this Code.

Any breaches of this Code of Conduct will be regarded as a serious matter which could result in disciplinary action, and in certain circumstances could potentially lead to dismissal.

Engaged workers/Volunteers

Engaged workers and volunteers are required to familiarise themselves, and comply, with this Code in so far as it is relevant to their role. Any breaches of this Code may result in the engagement of the worker/volunteer being terminated, in accordance with any applicable terms of engagement.

4. Reporting breaches of standards of good conduct

The school wishes to promote an open environment that enables individuals to raise issues in a constructive way and with confidence that they will be acted upon appropriately without fear of recrimination.

All employees, engaged workers and volunteers are expected to bring to the attention of an appropriate manager, any impropriety, deficiency in the provision of service or breach of policy or this Code. Where appropriate, individuals should also refer to the School's Whistleblowing Policy which is available from the school website.

5. Safeguarding and Child Protection

It is essential that all adults working with children understand that the nature of their work and the responsibilities related to it, place them in a position of trust. Adults must be clear about appropriate and safe behaviours for working with children in paid or unpaid capacities, in all settings and in all contexts, including outside work.

The relevant requirements specific to safeguarding and child protection are set out in:

- the school's Child Protection and Behaviour Management Policies and Procedures
- the Department for Education Statutory Guidance "Keeping Children Safe in Education" (as amended from time to time).

This is the key statutory guidance which all employees must follow and all employees and volunteers must, as a minimum, read Part 1 of that Document.

"Guidance for Safer Working Practice for those working with Children and Young People in Education Settings" issued by the Safer Recruitment Consortium sets out key expectations for adult interactions with children and young people – the full guidance is available [here](#).

In addition, individuals should be aware that it is criminal offence (s 16. Sexual Offences Act 2003) for a person aged 18 or over to have a sexual relationship with a child under 18 where that person is in a position of trust in respect of that child, even if the relationship is consensual.

Individuals should familiarise themselves with these documents, in conjunction with the body of the Code of Conduct and other relevant school policies and procedures.

Identifying and Reporting safeguarding concerns

Safeguarding concerns cover a wide spectrum from serious issues where a child is harmed or is at risk of harm to lower-level concerns where practice or behaviour is inappropriate, undesirable or not in keeping with usual expectations.

As part of our whole school approach to safeguarding, we promote a culture of openness, trust and transparency in which safeguarding is a shared responsibility and our values and expectations are lived, monitored and reinforced by all staff. **In this context, everyone is expected to report any and all safeguarding concerns, no matter how small, as soon as they arise.** This includes an expectation of self-reporting where an individual finds themselves in a situation which may be, or appear to be, compromising or where they have fallen short of expectations.

Who to report to

Concerns should be referred to the Headteacher or to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, who will share information with the Headteacher. Where the concerns relate to the Headteacher, they should be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, who, if they are in relation to safeguarding children, will report to the local authority designated officer(s) (LADOs). In a situation where there is a conflict of interest in reporting a matter relating to safeguarding children internally, it should be reported directly and confidentially to LADO.

Where children have been harmed or may be at risk of harm

Where a concern or allegation suggests that an adult has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child, and/or
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child, and/or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates he or she may pose a risk of harm to children, and/or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children,

the matter must be dealt with in accordance with the Dealing with Safeguarding Allegations against Adults Procedure, as required by Keeping Children Safe in Education.

Low Level Concerns Policy

A low-level concern is any concern – no matter how small, and even if no more than causing a sense of unease or a ‘nagging doubt’ - that an adult may have acted in a way that is inconsistent with the code of conduct, including inappropriate conduct outside of work (see 6. below), but which does not meet the “harm test” as set out in 5.2.

Examples of such behaviour could include, but are not limited to:

- being over friendly with children
- having favourites
- taking photographs of children on their mobile phone, contrary to school policy
- crossing boundaries between familial and employment/volunteering roles
- engaging with a child on a one-to-one basis in a secluded area or behind a closed door, or
- humiliating children.

Such behaviour can exist on a wide spectrum, from the inadvertent or thoughtless, or behaviour that may look to be inappropriate, but might not be in specific circumstances, through to that which is ultimately intended to enable abuse.

Our objective is to protect our young people and adults, by identifying issues and providing advice, direction and support to improve our collective and individual practice.

In this regard we want all adults, as well as pupils, to feel empowered and confident to report all concerns in the knowledge that they do so on a neutral basis and that issues raised will be dealt with in a sensitive and proportionate manner.

All low-level concerns will be taken seriously, investigated and may be dealt in the following ways as appropriate:

- Additional support and/or training.
- Provision of advice, guidance or direction either verbally or in writing.
- Through performance management, or in cases of serious poor performance, the Capability Procedure.
- Where there has been a breach of the code of conduct or disciplinary rules, through the Dealing with Safeguarding Allegations against Adults and/or Disciplinary Procedures.

To support our objectives, confidential records of all reported concerns and actions taken will be kept to identify any patterns, enable monitoring and to facilitate improvement in policy and practice.

6. Conduct outside work

The school recognises and respects individuals' right to a private life without interference. However, individuals connected with the school must not act in a way that would bring the school, or their profession, into disrepute or that calls into question their suitability to work with children. This covers:

- relevant criminal offences, such as violence or sexual misconduct
- inappropriate behaviour such as lewd or offensive action
- negative comments about the school or its community
- personal relationships which may present a risk by association

Workers must disclose to the school Headteacher (and in the case of the Headteacher to the DSL) immediately, any wrongdoing or alleged wrongdoing by themselves (regardless of whether they deny

the wrongdoing/alleged wrongdoing), including any incidents arising from alternative employment or outside of work which may have a bearing on their employment or engagement with the school.

Employees should also refer to the expectations set out in their contract of employment and the disciplinary procedures.

Where a person engaged to work at the school is in a close personal relationship with a person who may pose a risk to children (e.g. a registered sex offender), this must be disclosed to the Headteacher on a confidential basis so that appropriate measures can be put in place to protect the worker and the school.

In addition, any worker engaged in a post covered by the Childcare (Disqualification) Regulations 2009 ("the Regulations") must immediately inform the school of any events or circumstances which may lead to their disqualification from working in the post by virtue of the Regulations. The statutory guidance relating to Disqualification under the Childcare Act 2006 can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/disqualification-under-the-childcare-act-2006/disqualification-under-the-childcare-act-2006#disqualification-under-the-childcare-act>.

7. Confidentiality

Confidential information can take various forms and be held and transmitted in various ways e.g. manual records (files, reports and notes), verbal discussions and electronic records. As a general rule, all information received in the course of employment or whilst volunteering/being engaged by the school, no matter how it is received, held or transmitted, should be regarded as sensitive and confidential and must not be disclosed or divulged within or outside the school other than in accordance with the requirement of the role and/or where specific permission has been provided.

NOTE: All workers must be aware that they are obliged to disclose information relating to child protection issues and should make it clear to the individual either that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and/or decline to receive the information and direct them to a more appropriate person e.g. the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The school is committed to being transparent about how it collects and uses the personal data of its workforce, and to meeting its data protection obligations. The Data Protection Policy sets out the school's commitment to data protection, and individual rights and obligations in relation to personal data.

Any actual or suspected/potential breach of data protection must be reported immediately to the school's Data Protection Officer.

7(i) Preserving anonymity

The Education Act 2011 contains reporting restrictions preventing the publication of any material which could lead to the identification of a teacher in the event of an allegation against them made by a pupil at the same school. Any individual who publishes material which could lead to the identification

of the employee who is the subject of an allegation of this kind may be subject to criminal and disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

“Publication” includes any speech, writing, relevant programme or other communication in whatever form, which is addressed to the public at large or any section of the public. For the avoidance of doubt, this includes publishing details of an allegation or other information on a social media site which could lead to the identification of the teacher.

7(ii) Media queries

Workers must not speak to the press or respond to media queries on any matter relating to the school. All media queries should be referred immediately to the Headteacher/Proprietor.

8. Use of computers, email and the internet and social media

The school recognises that electronic devices and media are important tools and resources in an educational context and can save time and expense.

Those using the school’s equipment and networks are expected to do so responsibly and to comply with all applicable laws, policies and procedures, and with normal standards of professional and personal courtesy and conduct.

Personal use of social media and other on-line applications which may fall into the public domain should not be such that it could bring the school into disrepute and/or call into question an individual’s suitability to work with children.

Detailed expectations are set out in the school’s E-Safety and Acceptable Use Policy.

Any worker who is unsure about whether or not something he/she proposes to do might breach that policy or if something is not specifically covered in the policy, they should seek advice from their line manager or a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

9. Relationships

9(i) The internal school community

All workers are expected to treat members of the school community with dignity and respect and to work co-operatively and supportively. Bullying, Harassment and Victimisation will not be tolerated (see also the school’s Grievance Procedure).

9(ii) The wider community and service users

All workers have a responsibility to ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service delivery to all groups and individuals within the community. No favour must be shown to any individual or group of individuals, nor any individual or group unreasonably excluded from, or discriminated against, in any aspect of school business.

9(iii) Contracts

All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors, or potential contractors, must be made known to Proprietor. Orders and contracts must be in accordance with standing orders and financial regulations of the school. No special favour should be shown to businesses run by, for example, friends, partners or relatives in the awarding of contracts, tendering process or any other business transaction, they are all subject to the school's Contractor Verification Procedure.

9(iv) Gifts and Hospitality

Workers may not accept any gift or hospitality from a person intended to benefit from their services (or those whom they supervise) or from any relative without the express permission of the school. Parental gifts for the whole staff team must be brought to the office to share accordingly, individual staff gifts from pupils and parents of an appropriate measure, for example, an end of term card or box of chocolates, can be accepted with thanks. Individual gifts of higher value must be disclosed to the Headteacher.

Where an outside organisation wishes to sponsor or is seeking to sponsor a school activity, whether by invitation, tender, negotiation or voluntarily, the sponsorship should always be related to the school's interests and never for personal benefit.

Any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action.

9(v) Neutrality

Workers must not allow their own personal, political, religious or other views and opinions to interfere with their work. They are expected to be put safeguarding children first at all times, whilst presenting neutrally in their views in the course of their work at the school and to present a balanced view when working with pupils.

10. Close personal relationships at work

Close personal relationships are defined as:

- workers who are married, dating or in a partnership or co-habiting arrangement;
- immediate family members for example parent, child, sibling, grandparent;
- other relationships for example extended family (cousins, uncles, in-laws), close friendships, business associates (outside the school).

It is also recognised that situations arise where close personal relationships can be formed at work.

10 (i) Applicants

Applicants are required to disclose on their application form if they have a close personal relationship with any person connected with the school.

Applicants are asked to state the name of the person and the relationship. Failure to disclose such a relationship may disqualify the applicant.

Workers should discuss confidentiality with their Headteacher/line manager, any relationships with an applicant.

It is inappropriate for any worker to sit on an appointment panel, for those with whom they have a close personal relationship.

10(ii) References

It is expected that, for those working with children, professional references, and not personal references, are sought and provided. All references provided on behalf of the school must be signed by the Headteacher.

Anyone agreeing to act as a personal referee must make it clear in the reference that it is provided as a personal or colleague reference and is not a reference on behalf of the school. Personal or colleague references must not be provided on school headed paper.

10(iii) General Conduct

No-one should be involved in discipline, promotion, pay or other decisions for anyone where there is a close personal relationship.

Intimate behaviour during work time, in any workplace, such as holding hands, kissing, other close physical contact and discussions of a sexual nature is not permitted.

Unwanted sexual advances or harassment will not be tolerated and will lead to disciplinary action.

10(iv) Disclosure

All close personal relationships should be disclosed, in confidence, to the line manager/supervisor by the individuals concerned as this may impact on the conduct of the school.

Whilst not all such situations where those in close personal relationships work together raise issues of conflict of interest, implications can include:

- effect on trust and confidence;
- perception of service users, the public and other employees on professionalism and fairness;
- operational issues e.g. working patterns, financial and procurement separation requirements;
- conflicting loyalties and breaches of confidentiality and trust.

Open, constructive and confidential discussion between workers and managers/supervisors is essential to ensure these implications do not occur and that all parties can be protected.

It may be necessary in certain circumstances to consider transferring workers that form close personal relationships at work. Any such action will be taken wherever possible by agreement with both parties and without discrimination.

We are committed to promoting a working environment based on dignity, trust and respect, and one that is free from all forms of bullying, harassment, including sexual harassment, victimisation and discrimination.

Colleagues who feel they are affected by a close personal relationship at work involving other colleagues should at all times feel that they can discuss this, without prejudice, with their Head teacher/line manager or other manager.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are bullied or harassed while you are at work, including where a personal relationship has broken down, we encourage you to report this immediately and to follow our Grievance Procedure.

Both the aggrieved and the subject of the grievance will be supported under the school's Staff Wellbeing Policy, during and after the investigation, and should in no way be interpreted as disbelief of the aggrieved, taking sides, treating either with detriment or preferential treatment.

10 (v) Workers related to pupils

Any workers related to, or who are the carer of a pupil are expected to separate their familial and employment role.

Workers must not show or provide any preferential treatment to them or become involved in their education or care beyond their specific role as an employee/volunteer or their role as a parent/carer/relation.

11. Dress code

Adults in school are expected to adopt smart standards of dress which project an appropriate professional image to pupils, parents and members of the public. Dress should also be fit for purpose according to the specific role and activity for example appropriate dress for PE, outdoor activities etc. These standards will apply to all official school activities, including on-line/virtual teaching.

In all cases dress should be such that it:

- is not likely to be viewed as offensive, revealing, or sexually provocative;
- does not distract or cause embarrassment;
- does not include political, offensive or otherwise contentious slogans; and
- is not considered to be discriminatory and/or culturally insensitive.

Additional guidance and expectations is found in the Staff Handbook.

12. Use of financial resources

Workers must ensure that they use public and any other funds entrusted to them in a responsible and lawful manner. They must strive to ensure value for money and ensure rigorous adherence to Financial Regulations.

13. School Property and personal possessions

Workers must ensure they take due care of school property at all times, including proper and safe use, security, appropriate maintenance and reporting faults. If employees are found to have caused damage to school property through misuse or carelessness this may result in disciplinary action.

Workers are responsible for the safety and security of their personal possessions while on school premises. The school will not accept responsibility for the loss or damage of personal possessions.

The person responsible for Staff Code of Conduct is **Debbie Hanson, Head Teacher**

Appendix 1: Staff Communication Policy

Purpose

This policy sets out clear expectations for staff communication to:

- Protect staff wellbeing and work-life balance
- Maintain professional boundaries
- Prevent harassment and inappropriate conduct
- Ensure continuity of provision for all pupils, particularly those with SEND
- Support positive team relationships and culture
- Ensure compliance with safeguarding and data protection requirements

Scope

This policy applies to all staff members at Clarity Independent School.

Section 1: Work-Related Communications

1.1 Approved Channels

All work-related communications must use:

- School email accounts for written communication
- School telephone system (office or mobile phones in classrooms) for verbal communication
- Any school-approved communication platforms (e.g., school MIS e.g. Go4Schools)

Staff are not required to use personal devices, personal phone numbers, or personal social media accounts for work purposes, apart from in the following exceptional circumstances:

- Multi-factor authentication of work Microsoft email account assigned to staff member
- Multi-factor authentication for CPOMS, Pearson Edexcel software for specific staff roles

1.2 Right to Disconnect

- Staff are not expected to read or respond to work-related communications outside their contracted working hours, except in the circumstances outlined in Section 2 below
- Non-urgent communications should only be sent during core working hours (8:00am - 6:00pm, Monday to Friday during term time)

- If a leader needs to send a communication outside these hours (e.g., to manage their own workload), they should use the 'delay send' function or make clear that no response is expected until the recipient's next working day.

1.3 Professional Conduct

Professional conduct standards apply to all work-related communications, regardless of the platform used or time sent. This includes email, phone calls, text messages, and any messaging platforms.

Staff are advised that whilst use a thumbs up 👍 or celebration 🎉 emoji in response to an email is acceptable for workplace communication, the use of the heart ❤️, laugh, shock and cry emojis 😂 😳 😭 are considered unsuitable.

1.4 Data Protection and Confidentiality

- Staff must not share pupils' personal information through personal communication channels
- Staff must not share confidential school information (including about other staff members) outside approved school systems
- Staff should be cautious about sharing their personal contact details with colleagues and are not required to do so

1.5 Manager Responsibilities

Senior Leaders and Line Managers will:

- Model appropriate communication boundaries by not sending non-urgent work communications outside working hours
- Not expect responses to non-urgent communications outside working hours
- Use the school email system for all work instructions and official communications
- Only contact staff outside working hours for the purposes outlined in Section 2 below
- Respect staff members' right to disconnect

Section 2: Daily Absence / Late Reporting and Operational Arrangements

2.1 Purpose

To ensure continuity of provision for all pupils, particularly those with SEND, and to inform staff of arrangements for coming back to school where there are significant alterations to usual term-time days (e.g. beginning of term / INSET days / after a closure or other significant event) the school operates an early morning (and night before) communication system.

2.2 Designated Absence Reporting and Operational Coordinator Role

The Headteacher is the designated absence cover and operational coordinator. This role includes:

- Being available from **7:00am** each school day to read and respond to absence notifications (may be sent earlier, latest to be received by HT by 7.30am as per absence policy)
- Coordinating cover arrangements with Cover Supervisor to ensure SEND pupils' needs are met
- Communicating organisational arrangements to relevant staff
- Receiving staff input and collaboration on arrangements

This early availability is:

- Part of the job description and contracted duties for this role
- Reflected in the role's salary and/or time off in lieu arrangements
- Subject to reasonable limits (contact about absence received up to 7:30am on working days during term time). Staff may report absence any time to the Headteacher and may receive an immediate reply, but responses will only be sent to the staff group between 7.30am and 8.30am, and before 7pm if urgent the night before.

2.3 Staff Absence Notification

Staff who are unable to work must:

- Contact the absence coordinator by **7:30am or as early as possible (including the night before)**
- Use the designated contact method: **WhatsApp message to Debbie Hanson, designated school mobile, 07572 165 467, followed by phone call to school office number 01245 408 606 by 10am (as per absence procedure)**
- Not use personal social media, staff WhatsApp group or messaging platforms for absence notifications

2.4 Cover Communication and Operational Arrangements to Staff - Voluntary Opt-In System

Staff may choose to opt in to receiving notifications and organisational messages via **a staff WhatsApp group**.

If you opt in:

- You agree to check messages from **7:30am** each working day during term time
- You understand you may be asked to provide cover or adjust your duties*
- You can opt out at any time by notifying **Debbie Hanson (or any Senior Leader who will notify Debbie Hanson on their behalf)**
- Opting out will not affect your employment or be viewed negatively

- You will still be expected to arrive at your normal contracted start time and receive any necessary briefing then in person or by email

If you opt out*:

- You will receive cover information when you arrive at school at your normal contracted start time
- You may be asked to provide cover with less notice, but only for duties within your role and competence
- The school will make every effort to brief you appropriately

2.5 Communication Method for Absence Cover and Operational Arrangements

The school will use a **staff WhatsApp group** for communicating daily absence cover and operational matters. Staff members may use this group to report lateness whilst travelling to work (once stopped at the side of the road if driving / riding).

- The absence cover and operational coordinator will use **the designated school mobile assigned to Debbie Hanson, 07572 165 467.**
- Staff who opt in may use the platform on their personal devices if they choose, but this is not required
- The group will only be used for absence cover communications and important / urgent operational matters, not social chat or other work matters
- Messages will only be sent to the staff WhatsApp group between 7:30am-8:30am, and where necessary for the next day, after working hours until 7pm.
- Staff can mute notifications outside these times. This will not be viewed negatively.
- For individuals reporting absence directly to the Headteacher, direct responses may be sent by the Headteacher upon receiving their message, either in the morning (if received before 7.30am) and after work hours until 7pm the night before.
- The school will maintain a list of staff who have opted in to receive cover and operational WhatsApps.
- WhatsApps will be sent from the designated school mobile assigned to Debbie Hanson, 07572 165 467.
- Staff who opt in should provide a mobile number they're willing to check and respond to from 7:30am – 8.30am (and to receive messages after working hours until 7pm the night before where necessary, on / for working days, but with no requirement to respond at this time.)

2.6 Protecting SEND Pupils' Needs

When arranging absence cover and operational matters, the coordinator will:

- Prioritise continuity for SEND pupils who require specific support

- Ensure opportunity is provided for cover staff to be briefed on individual pupils' needs, support plans, and any relevant risk assessments
- Communicate any changes to parents/carers of SEND pupils where appropriate
- Maintain confidentiality of pupil information

2.7 Limits and Boundaries

This early morning communication system:

- Only applies to absence cover coordination and operational matters on / for working days during term time
- Is limited to the specified time window (7:30am-8:30am and between working hours until 7pm the night before)
- Must not be used for other work matters, social chat, or non-urgent communications
- Does not override staff members' right to be unavailable due to their own illness or emergency
- Will be reviewed regularly to ensure it's working effectively and not causing wellbeing issues
- Will use emojis appropriately, in tune with the holistic, warm, friendly approach taken with staff to encourage wellbeing and support in the workplace

2.8 Opt-In Process

Staff will be asked to complete an opt-in form (see Appendix 2) to confirm their choice regarding early morning absence cover communications.

2.9 Senior Leadership Communication group

Senior leadership team may need to communicate about urgent workplace matters privately outside working hours. The group uses WhatsApp, is voluntary and usual code of conduct applies. Opt-in is by accepting the invite to the group by the Headteacher.

Section 3: Optional Social Communication and Team Building

3.1 Purpose

We recognise that our nurturing small team values opportunities to celebrate together and maintain positive relationships. Staff may choose to participate in informal social communication with colleagues.

3.2 Voluntary Social WhatsApp Group

Staff may choose to participate in a social WhatsApp group for:

- Birthday wishes and celebrations

- Seasonal greetings (e.g., Happy New Year, festive messages)
- Celebrating personal milestones (e.g., new babies, engagements)
- Social event coordination (e.g., staff nights out, leaving gatherings)
- General team morale and support

3.3 Important Principles

3.3.1 Participation is Completely Voluntary

- You will not be disadvantaged in any way for choosing not to join or for leaving the group
- Not being in the group will not affect your working relationships, opportunities, or how you're treated
- You don't need to give a reason for not joining or for leaving

3.3.2 This is NOT a Work Communication Channel

- Work instructions, absence notifications, or operational matters must not be discussed in this group
- If work matters are raised, members should redirect the conversation to appropriate work channels (email/in person)
- The group administrator will remind members of this boundary if needed

3.3.3 Professional Conduct Still Applies

- Be respectful, kind, and inclusive in all messages
- Don't share confidential information about pupils, parents, or colleagues
- Don't share inappropriate content or make offensive comments
- Remember that screenshots can be taken and shared outside the group

3.3.4 Respect Boundaries and Wellbeing

- Members can mute the group and respond when convenient
- Don't expect immediate responses
- Be mindful that not everyone wants to share personal information
- Respect if someone doesn't engage with every message
- Consider the timing of messages (avoid very late at night or very early morning for non-urgent social matters)
- Consider the use of certain emojis carefully and the messages they may portray, such as (not limited to) those containing love hearts, hugs or kissing 🍷💕💞💞💞💞💞💞
- Signing off a WhatsApp message using a 'X' is recognised as a plutonic sign of affection and is considered suitable on the Staff Social WhatsApp group. Staff might like to consider its use carefully when sending direct messages to each other.

3.3.5 Privacy and Safety

- You can use WhatsApp privacy features (e.g., username instead of phone number)
- You can block individual members from contacting you directly outside the group
- The school cannot monitor this group as it's a personal social space
- Members are responsible for their own conduct

3.4 What to Do If You Feel Uncomfortable

If you experience any communication in the social group (or from a colleague through any channel) that makes you uncomfortable, you should:

Step 1: Consider your options

- You can leave the group at any time without explanation
- You can mute or block individual members
- You can speak to the group administrator if you'd like them to address an issue with the group as a whole (without identifying you)

Step 2: Report if needed

If the behaviour constitutes harassment, bullying, discrimination, or makes you feel unsafe, you should report it through the school's grievance procedures by speaking to **the Headteacher, Debbie Hanson**.

Grievances are concerns which affect the staff member *personally*, and may include:

- Repeated unwanted contact after you've asked someone to stop
- Offensive, discriminatory, or inappropriate messages
- Sharing of confidential information
- Behaviour that affects your wellbeing or ability to work
- Bullying

You will be taken seriously and supported. The school retains the right to investigate and take action regarding conduct that affects the working environment, even if it occurs outside work hours or on personal platforms.

(Whistleblowing is different to raising a grievance – it is the raising of concerns about dangerous, unethical, fraudulent staff behaviour and safeguarding children, which impacts public interest. Although advised to report to the Headteacher, such behaviour may alternatively / additionally be shared confidentially outside school with LADO where necessary, and criminal offences reported to the police, but it is never appropriate to share a staff *grievance* outside the school grievance procedure, as this constitutes data breach under GDPR 2018 and is an act of gross misconduct.)

3.5 Group Administration

To help maintain appropriate boundaries, the social WhatsApp group will have 3 administrators who will:

- Welcome new members and share these guidelines
- Gently redirect work-related conversations to appropriate channels
- Address any concerns about inappropriate content or behaviour
- Not monitor every message, but respond if issues are raised

Current administrators: Debbie Hanson, Michelle Deveney, Richard Clow

3.6 Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Content

✓ Appropriate for social WhatsApp group:

- "Happy birthday Sarah! Hope you have a lovely day x 🎂"
- "Happy New Year everyone! 🍷"
- "Congratulations on your new baby!"
- "Does anyone fancy going for drinks Friday after school?"
- "Good luck with your parent meeting tomorrow!" (but not discuss the parent meeting)

✗ Not appropriate for social WhatsApp group:

- "Can someone cover my class tomorrow?" → Use absence cover system
- "Has anyone seen the new behaviour policy?" → Use email or ask in person
- "I'm really struggling with pupil B" → Speak to Headteacher, Senior Leader, DSL or colleague in work
- Sharing photos of pupils → Never appropriate
- Complaints about colleagues or management → Use grievance procedures
- Gossip about pupils, staff or parents → Never appropriate

3.7 Alternative Ways to Celebrate

For staff who choose not to participate in the social WhatsApp group, the school will ensure celebrations are inclusive through:

- Birthday cards in the staffroom for everyone to sign
- Mentions of celebrations in staff briefings
- A physical noticeboard for social events
- Formal invitations to whole-staff social events via email
- Opportunities to attend work-organised socialising events during directed hours

Section 4: Keeping Work and Social Communication Separate

To maintain clarity, we will:

- Use the **work absence cover and operational system** (Section 2) for operational matters only
- Use the **social WhatsApp group** (Section 3) for celebrations and social connection only
- Use **school email** and telephones / school mobile phones for all other work communications

Staff should not:

- Mix these channels (e.g., don't send absence notifications through the social group)
- Feel pressured to join the social group to receive work information
- Feel excluded from work matters if they're not in the social group

Section 5: Reporting Concerns and Support

5.1 If You Experience Unwanted Contact or Harassment

If you experience unwanted contact, harassment, or inappropriate behaviour from a colleague (through any communication channel, at any time):

1. **You have the right to report this** through the school's grievance procedures
2. **You will be taken seriously** and supported throughout the process
3. **You will not face any detriment** for making a report in good faith

5.2 How to Report

- Speak to the Headteacher, or another senior leader you feel comfortable with or your mentor (if you have one)
- Put your concerns in writing using the school's grievance procedure (Staff Handbook)
- If the concern involves the Headteacher, report to **Michelle Deveney, DSL**.

5.3 Safeguarding Concerns (about children)

Any communication that raises safeguarding concerns about a child or an adult's conduct toward a child must be reported immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) as well as the Headteacher, regardless of when or how the communication occurred.

5.4 Support and Guidance

If you are unsure whether a particular communication is appropriate, or if you need support with managing communications from colleagues, please speak to:

- A senior leader
- Your mentor (if you have one)
- A member of staff more senior than you
- The Headteacher
- A confidential, external, professional service such as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Tel. 0800 047 4097 or Education Support Helpline 08000 562 561 for advice.

Staff wellbeing is a priority. If work communications are affecting your wellbeing, please speak to the Headteacher or a senior leader so we can address this.

Section 6: Protection from Detriment

Staff will not be treated unfavourably for:

- Declining to participate in the social WhatsApp group
- Opting out of early morning / after work hours till 7pm absence cover and operational communications
- Choosing to use privacy features or block colleagues on personal social media/messaging platforms
- Not responding to non-urgent communications outside working hours
- Reporting unwanted contact or inappropriate behaviour through proper channels

Section 7: The School's Position on Conduct Outside Working Hours

- The school respects staff members' private lives and personal relationships
- However, the school retains the right to investigate and take action regarding any conduct (whenever or however it occurs) that:
 - Affects the working environment
 - Involves safeguarding concerns
 - Constitutes harassment, bullying, or discrimination
 - Could bring the school into disrepute
 - Breaches professional standards

Respect Boundaries and Wellbeing

- Members can mute the person, ignore, block and / or respond when convenient
- Don't expect immediate responses
- Be mindful that not everyone wants to share personal information
- Respect if someone doesn't engage with every message

- Consider the timing of messages (avoid very late at night or very early morning for non-urgent social matters)
- Consider the use of certain emojis carefully and the messages they may portray, such as (not limited to) those containing love hearts, hugs or kissing 🍷💕💞💓💔 and ensure they are reciprocal.
- Although signing off a WhatsApp message using a 'X' is recognised as a platonic sign of affection and is considered suitable for Staff Social WhatsApp Group messages, staff might like to consider its use carefully when sending direct messages to each other to ensure it is reciprocal.

Section 8: Breaches of This Policy

Breaches of this policy may be dealt with under the school's disciplinary procedures and could constitute gross misconduct in serious cases.

Section 9: Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if:

- Staff feedback indicates it's not working effectively
- There are changes to relevant legislation
- There are concerns about staff wellbeing related to communications

The next review date is as per front page.

Appendix 2: Operational Communications - Opt-IN / OUT Form

Purpose: To ensure appropriate cover for SEND pupils and maintain continuity of provision, the school operates an early morning (7.30am – 8.30am) and after working hours (until 7pm) notifications for absence cover arrangements and other urgent operational communication.

I understand that:

- Opting in is entirely voluntary
- I will not be disadvantaged in any way if I choose not to opt in
- If I opt in, I agree to check **the Staff WhatsApp group** between **7:30am and 8:30am** on working days during term time (and understand that notifications may be sent about the next day after working hours until 7pm to which there is no expectation to respond)
- I may be asked to provide cover or adjust my planned duties based on these communications
- I can opt out at any time by notifying **Debbie Hanson**
- This communication channel will only be used for absence cover and operational coordination, not other work matters or social communication
- Professional conduct standards apply to all communications

☐ I opt IN / ☐ I opt OUT of receiving early morning and night before until 7pm communications via **Whatsapp** in the **Clarity Staff Operational WhatsApp group**.

My preferred contact number/username is: _____

I understand if I opt out, I will receive any necessary briefing when I arrive at school at my contracted start time.

☐ I opt IN / ☐ I opt OUT of taking part in communications via **WhatsApp** in the **Clarity Staff Social Whatsapp group**.

My preferred contact number/username is: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Staff WhatsApp Group - Welcome Messages

"Welcome to our staff social WhatsApp group! 🤝"

This is a space for birthdays, celebrations, and keeping in touch socially.

A few quick reminders:

- *This is NOT for work matters (please use email or Operational Staff Group for those)*
- *Be kind and respectful*
- *Be careful in your choice of emojis*
- *Feel free to mute and check when convenient*
- *You can leave anytime without explanation*
- *If you ever feel uncomfortable, speak to any of the administrators or report through our grievance procedures*

Looking forward to celebrating with you! 🎉"

"Welcome to our staff Operational WhatsApp group! 🤝"

This is a space for communicating about cover and urgent operational matters, for the smooth running of Clarity Independent School.

A few quick reminders:

- *This is not for social matters (they will be gently redirected to the social group by an administrator)*
- *Be kind and respectful*
- *Be careful in choice of emojis*
- *Feel free to mute and check when convenient*
- *You can leave at any time without an explanation*
- *If you ever feel uncomfortable, speak to any of the administrators or report through our grievance procedures.*

Thank you