

Parent/Staff Communication Policy

Introductory statement

This policy was developed by the staff of St Augustine's School, the Board of Management and the Parents' Association in the school year 2016-2017.

Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents/guardians and staff on parent/staff meetings and parent/staff communication in St Augustine's School. The family and home are central to the social and intellectual development of the child and the nurturing of good, moral values. The school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other so that the child's education can be effective. All the stakeholders aim to work for the benefit of the child and their learning.

St Augustine's School seeks to enable each student to develop his/her potential in a caring environment where the talents of each child are valued. We understand that this work is best achieved where there is a high level of open communication between school personnel, parents/guardians and students. Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development. However, the education of our students is viewed as a partnership process between parents/guardians and the school. Effective communication between parents/guardians and the school is essential for the success of this partnership.

All of the stakeholders strive to create an open and welcoming atmosphere where good communications are fostered, developed and maintained.

Aims of Policy:

- To provide information and guidance to staff and parents/guardians on the Home/School Partnership approach that benefits all of our children
- To promote a culture of partnership and work together in the best interests of our students
- To provide information and guidance to staff and parents/guardians on the management of parent/teacher meetings in order that meetings are held in a positive, respectful manner
- To establish procedures for collaborating with each other in developing the full potential of our students

School staff and families strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other and this approach is central to St Augustine's ethos. The partnership between the school and parents is seen as a positive working relationship. We share a sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to listen and learn in the best interests of the student's overall development and progress.

Parents/Guardians and Staff are encouraged to:

- Work together in the best interests of our students
- Participate in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in our school
- Collaborate with each other in developing the full potential of our children
- Share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinctive character
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them
- Speak directly to each other if there is a concern
- Become actively involved in the school and Parent's Association

Structures in place to facilitate open communication & consultation with Parents

- Meeting for parents/guardians of new students – end of August
- School tour in year prior to starting
- Formal parent/teacher meetings (one-to-one) during the first term and at the end of the school year
- Parents/Guardians receive school report of their son/daughter at the end of each school year
- Consultation throughout the year
- Written communication e.g. Discipline for Learning (DFL) card
- Through the Parents' Association, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of school policies. Decisions taken to change current policies and procedures or to introduce new ones are made known to all parents
- Regular newsletters, texts and letters home keep parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and school concerns
- Homework diary is used to relay messages which are signed between parents and teachers. Parents requested to sign diary each night to certify that homework diary has been checked for communication
- Parents are invited to events throughout the year e.g. sports day, school masses, parent information meetings, curriculum information meetings and school concerts
- Involvement of parents in religious programmes.

If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she can contact the school secretary on 01 2881771 to arrange a suitable time.

Parents/Guardians are encouraged to inform the school immediately if family events/situations occur which may cause anxiety to their son/daughter and may adversely affect his/her education. In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of students, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by staff.

Parents/Guardians liaise with the Deputy Principal if their son/daughter has any medical conditions and is taking medication.

Parent/Teacher meetings

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings are held at least once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04). Where possible, they are held in the first term. They are initiated by the school staff and details regarding time, etc. notified to parents/guardians by letter. The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned. Any requests for rescheduled meetings are in consultation with parents and class teachers. Meetings may take place in classrooms, support rooms or communally in the School Hall. The teachers use prepared guidelines for the meetings and collaborate in advance about the progress of individual students. A short written record of the meeting may be maintained by each teacher.

The purpose of the Parent/Teacher meeting may include some of the following:

- To establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To help teachers/parents get to know the students better as individuals
- To help students realise that home and school are working together
- To meet demands for accountability
- To share with the parent the problems and difficulties the student may have in school
- To review with the parent the student's experience of schooling
- To learn more about the student from the parent's perspective
- To learn more about parental opinions on what the school is doing
- To identify areas of tension and disagreement
- To identify ways in which parents can help their children
- To negotiate jointly decisions about the student's education

Reporting to parents

St Augustine's School acknowledges/understands

- Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development.
- The capacity of parents to support their children, by sharing meaningful information with parents about the progress that children are achieving in the education system.
- Parents/Guardians may often enrich staff's knowledge of their students' progress by providing information about the students' learning at home.

Staff update parents using different sources of evidence such as

1. conversations with the learner,
2. data-collection and documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning,
3. examination of students' own self-assessment data,
4. documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks,
5. outcomes of other assessment tasks/ tests and
6. examples of students' work.

Formal Meetings-IEPs

Formal timetabled parent/staff meetings take place during the first term. However, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss his/her child, they may do so by prior appointment.

- All communication sent from the school will be sent to the student's home address, as given on the Registration Form, unless otherwise requested by parents
- In the case of separated parents, requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings
- If parents so request on the Registration Form, both parents' addresses will be included on the mailing list
- Changes of address to be notified, in writing, to the school, with as much notice as possible (particularly if 'minibus' transport is required and a National Council for Special Education (NCSE) form will need to be submitted to the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO)).

Informal Parent/Staff Meetings

1. The School encourages communication between parents and staff.
2. Meetings with the class staff at the class door to discuss a student's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds:
 1. Staff cannot adequately supervise his/her class while at the same time speaking to a parent
 2. It is difficult to be discreet when so many students are standing close by
 3. It can be embarrassing for a student when his/her parent is talking to staff at a classroom door.

Occasions occur where a parent needs to speak to a staff member urgently. Sometimes these meetings need to take place without prior notice. The Principal will aim to facilitate such meetings making every effort to ensure that the students in the class do not lose out on any of the teaching/learning time.

Parents may drop in lunch boxes, sports' gear, etc. to the secretary's office in order to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

Parents are strongly discouraged from taking students out of school during term time in order to facilitate family holidays.

If students are being collected early from school, teachers should be notified in writing beforehand and bus drivers notified. Primary and post primary students should be collected at the front door (beside the Deputy Principal's office) and pre-vocational and vocational students should be collected at reception. Staff will bring students to these collection points.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints are infrequent but the school would wish that these would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. The following is the agreed complaints procedure to be followed in primary schools.

Stage 1-informal stage

1. A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint should, firstly approach the **class teacher** with a view to resolving the complaint
2. Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher he/she should approach the **Principal** with a view to resolving it
3. If the complaint is still unresolved, the parent/guardian should raise the matter verbally with the **Chairperson** of the Board of Management with a view to resolving it. The Chairperson may be contacted through the school secretary on 01 2881771.

Stage 2-formal stage

1. If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further, he/she should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management
2. The Chairperson will bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the staff and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3

1. If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Chairperson will, subject to the authorisation of the Board:

- a. Supply the staff with a copy of the written complaint and
- b. Arrange a meeting with the staff and where applicable, the Principal with a view to resolving the complaint. Such a meeting will take place within 10 school days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 4

1. If the complaint is still not resolved, the Chairperson will make a formal report to the board within 10 school days of the meeting
2. If the Board considers that the complaint is not substantiated, the staff and the complainant will be so informed within 3 school days of the Board meeting
3. If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation, the following steps will be followed:
 - a. The staff will be supplied with copies of any written evidence in support of the complaint
 - b. He/she will be requested to supply a written response to the complaint to the Board and will be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation to the Board and to be accompanied by another person to that meeting
 - c. The Board may arrange a meeting with the complainant, who may be accompanied by another person to this meeting.

Stage 5

Following the Boards investigations, the Chairperson shall convey the decision of the Board in writing to the staff and the complainant within 5 school days of the meeting of the Board. The decision of the Board shall be final.

Behaviour of all Stakeholders in the School

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school. This not only extends to the students but to all of the stakeholders e.g. the staff, parents and the wider community. Anyone entering our building should feel safe to do so. While the behaviour of students in our school is of vital importance, adults in the school community also have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour models the types of behaviour expected of students.

It is important that all stakeholders are responsible for their own behaviours in the school. Examples include:

- All stakeholders are expected to speak to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones are not acceptable. If a stakeholder displays anger or aggression to another member of the school community, they may be asked to remove themselves from the building. In certain cases, the Gardaí may be called
- All stakeholders will treat our students with the utmost respect while on the premises
- Staff should not be asked to speak about another parent's child. The staff of the school will respect your child's right to privacy so it is asked that parents respect other student's rights to privacy
- When stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the time of meetings would be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Times of meetings will be agreed beforehand and these should be respected
- Staff are generally available to listen to an important issue in the morning and after school. However, should a parent need to have a discussion or meeting, an appointment should be made at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved. Classes begin at 9:20 a.m. and finish at 2:50 p.m. and this time should not be interrupted.

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for BoMs and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

It is recognised that school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from students, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

In this respect, all staff should be aware of **DES Circular 40/97** which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours. A copy of this circular can be found in the school's Health and Safety folder.

Ratified by the Board of Management

Chairperson: Marian Coughlan

Date: 6th April 2017

Review Date: September 2020

Person responsible for review: School Principal