

Ripponden J&I School

Home/School Communication Policy

January 2024 – to be reviewed January 2026



The following outlines the school policy with regard to email communication between home and school.

All communication must respect the dignity of the recipient.

1. Within 48 hours - receipt of an email will be acknowledged (during term time but not over a weekend).
2. Within 5 working days - provide a response to the email by telephone or in writing (including an email). This may include informing the sender that more time is required to provide a full response. If this is the case staff should indicate a timeframe in which a response should be expected.
3. If a member of staff is not able to deal with the email directly then they will pass it on to the most appropriate person and inform the sender that they have done so.
4. Staff will not be expected to monitor or respond to emails out of their normal working hours (including weekends and published school holidays). Whilst parents may compose emails at all sorts of hours to suit their own needs I would ask that emails are not normally sent outside of a member of staff's normal working hours. Mobile phones and other electronic devices that enable staff to access their school emails when away from school can make it difficult to 'ignore' a message from a parent, leading to unnecessary worry and anxiety on the part of the staff.
5. Whilst this is rare, if a member of staff receives an email which is of an aggressive tone, sets unreasonable demands or could otherwise be interpreted as harassing, they will refer this to a senior line manager in the school, who will decide if consideration needs to be given to dealing with further communication under the schools 'Persistent Complaints and Harassment Policy'.

The reason for implementing this policy

In recent years, communications between home and school have shifted quite dramatically from pen and paper to email; with email becoming the preferred and predominant mode of communication.

Email provides us with a quick, cheap and easy means of communication. As a result, it is used for such a wide range of communications, it has also become increasingly difficult to distinguish between formal and informal communications.

The ease of communication via email has many advantages but these are proving to have ever diminishing returns, as the expectation for almost instantaneous reply, in a well-informed, considered and timely manner appears to be on the increase, with complaints following when this has not been the case.

As a school our first priority is to deliver high quality teaching and learning. The ability and ease of email communication directly with your child's teacher is a privilege. Many

schools would not make this facility available to parents, as frequent requests for updates and information can distract teachers from their primary focus, teaching.

On any one day a teacher will have a plethora of demands on their time including up to five lessons teaching (and duties, meetings and after school practices and clubs). Teachers cannot and are not expected to monitor and manage their inbox during lessons or at other times in the day, when they should be planning and preparing for lessons, assessing children's work or carrying out school duties.

The school (and you) expect teachers to be fully prepared, focused and engaged with students and supporting their learning. Whilst administration staff, support staff and senior leaders may be able to access emails more routinely, their primary function is to support teachers and students. Constantly monitoring and responding to email leads to what is commonly referred to in the aviation industry as 'task fixation'. In aircraft terms this leads pilots to be so fixated on the task in the flight deck that they forget to look out of the window. Whilst less dramatic, in a school it leads to staff focusing on the immediate task of responding to an email instead of concentrating on the delivering and supporting teaching and learning.

As parents we may feel that it is perfectly reasonable to ask for updates about our child's progress or behaviour. The occasional request might be manageable but if the parent of every child a teacher teaches asks for bespoke feedback just once in a year that would, on average, generate 190 required responses. In a similar vein parents cannot micro manage their child's education via email.

The school works hard to provide parents with timely and informative information concerning their child's progress throughout the year. Currently these are: 3 parents' evenings, open day activities, one full report and other welcome activities and workshops. In addition to this staff may also telephone, write or email a parent to inform them of a serious incident or serious ongoing concerns about a child's behaviour or attitude to learning. They would not be expected to maintain a running dialogue about such matters, unless it has been agreed as part of a Learning and Development Plan.

Other things to consider

When communicating with the school, please bear in mind that a great many staff are putting their heart and soul, and many, many hours into trying to help our children achieve well. We would never wish to discourage parents from communicating with staff, establishing a relationship and working together. Parental communication is essential, we do not always get it right and we need your feedback to help us to continue to improve.

On occasions staff face criticism over an activity which they may be doing entirely out of goodwill, be it running a trip, or a team, or a concert, or a play and an ill crafted email from an upset parent, even when the point is justified, can result in hurt being caused and a reluctance from staff to continue to go the extra mile, that we so much appreciate of them. Likewise, even when a communication is about a core school responsibility, our communications need to be respectful. Couching a point as being 'direct', 'blunt' or 'honest' does not make it any less destructive to a relationship that should be based on trust and mutual respect. This applies to all communication and as staff we need to be just as careful in how we show we value our children and parents. We do not always get it right but we constantly aim to do so and to improve when this is not the case.

Many of you will be facing the same challenges in your own workplace from an increasing expectation of anytime, anywhere communications. Some readers may be of the view that this is simply the way the world works now. However, the school has a duty of care to staff, as it does to children. This includes a responsibility to ensure that the staffs' workload is manageable and does not unreasonably intrude in to their private life.

Finally

There are enough good teachers leaving the profession as a result of not feeling very valued, and there is no need for us to add to this. Indeed, the letters and emails of thanks and appreciation that we do receive are very much appreciated. We have an incredibly dedicated team of staff at Ripponden and we want to retain them and make them feel valued. It is therefore essential that we respect them and help them to maintain a sustainable workload.