



St. Michael's House Special National School

Raheny

PARENT SCHOOL COMMUNICATION POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

This policy was developed by the staff, parents and the Board of Management of St. Michael's House Special National School (SMH SNS), Raheny. The family and home are central to the educational development of the child. The staff of SMH SNS recognises that the child's education is more effective when the school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other. Therefore, by incorporating policy, procedures and practices in relation to communication between home and school and providing a formal complaints procedure, this document aims to encourage all the stakeholders to work together for the benefit of the child and their learning.

RATIONALE

Positive relationships between parents and the school is recognized as a major contributor to pupils' progress in the school environment. This policy explains how positive communication is facilitated between the school and parents. Under Section 28, Education Act 1998, schools are required to have procedures for processing complaints by parents. This policy also addresses this issue.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHARACTERISTIC SPIRIT OF THE SCHOOL

The school promotes positive home/school contacts and endeavours to enhance the self-esteem of everyone within the school community. This policy contributes towards these ideals.

AIMS

The aim of this policy is to formalise school practices in relation to home/school communication for the following reasons:

- (1) To provide the SMH SNS community with the policy, procedures and practices that will provide structure and guidance to parents and staff in relation to home/school communication so that positive collaboration can take place to enhance each child's educational attainment and thereby foster fruitful and trusting relationships between the school and parents.
- (2) To afford parents and staff an opportunity to express opinions/grievances through the framework of a clear and defined staged procedure in the event of a complaint or an issue arising that needs to be resolved.
- (3) To minimise the opportunity for conflict through affording parents an opportunity to firstly, liaise with the class teacher.
- (4) To ensure that the Board of Management meets it's legal obligations by providing an open and transparent process accessible to the whole school community and through which complaints or issues can be resolved in a fair, equitable and non-confrontational way.
- (5) To ensure that concerns of School staff, if any, are addressed in relation to their safety, health and well-being in the workplace and their right to dignity at work.

This policy does not cover:

- (1) Complaints that are dealt with through legal channels.
- (2) Matters of professional competence, which come under the remit of the Department of Education.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Role of Parent

Parents are encouraged to:

- Develop close links with the school.
- 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.
- Participate in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in the school.
- Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their children.
- Respond to written communications sent by the school promptly, if required.
- Attend school meetings and events when arranged.
- Become actively involved in the school/parent association.
- Keep children in school during term time.

Role of School

Structures in place to facilitate open communication & consultation with Parents:

- Written communication in the pupil's home/school communication notebook.
- Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting in October.
- IEP Review meeting in April. This is in the form of a Parent/Teacher Meeting and will be held outside of school hours as per Circular 14/04.
- Transition visits/meeting for new parents and pupils.
- Through the Parents Association, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of all school policies.
- Termly newsletters to keep parents up-to-date with school events, activities, holidays and school concerns.
- Invitation to events throughout the year e.g. Christmas concert, ASDAN award ceremony, religious ceremonies, as appropriate.

IN-SCHOOL PROCEDURES FOR PARENT/SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

REPORTING EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AND PROGRESS TO PARENTS

Circular 56/2011 Initial Steps in the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy Strategy has been adopted by the Board of Management. References to parent/school communication are:

Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development. Schools can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children in this way by sharing meaningful information with parents about the progress that children are achieving in the education system. This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that staff use, such as formal assessment tasks and outcomes, documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, and examples of pupils' work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich staff's knowledge of their child's progress through providing further information about their child's learning at home.

PARENT/TEACHER MEETINGS

1. Individual Education Plan (IEP) Meetings

Following a period of assessment (usually in September/October), teachers devise an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each pupil. Parents are invited to attend a meeting to discuss their child's IEP, usually in October. Each IEP meeting is scheduled to last for 30 minutes and parents will meet with the class teacher, the School Principal and any clinicians who are involved in the child's education, and who are available to attend. Should a clinician not be available for the meeting, the teacher will meet with him/ her beforehand to discuss the goals for the pupil in question.

The purpose of the IEP meetings are:

- To establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To help children realise that home and school are working together
- To set goals and targets for the pupils in conjunction with parents
- To review with the parent the child's experience of schooling
- To learn more about the child from the parent's perspective
- To learn more about parental opinions on what the school is doing
- To meet demands for accountability
- To share with the parent the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
- To identify ways in which parents can help their children
- To negotiate jointly decisions about the child's education
- To inform the parents of assessment results according to school policy

The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned, however, regrettably, the school will not be able to provide supervision for pupils or siblings during parent/teacher meetings.

All communication sent from the school will be sent to the child's home address as given on the enrolment form, unless otherwise requested by parents.

Requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings.

Regrettably, due to the large number of these meetings and their lengthy duration, it is only possible to reschedule dates/times in exceptional circumstances.

2. Parent/ Teacher Meeting (IEP Review)

A formal Parent/ Teacher meeting will be held once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04). Where possible it will be held in April. The class teacher will initiate this meeting and details regarding time, etc. will be worked out in consultation with parents. These times must take place outside the school day. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss the child's progress to date in relation to his/ her educational targets. This meeting is scheduled to last 15 minutes and is held with the Class teacher. The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned.

3. Informal Parent/ Staff Meetings

In addition to these formal meetings, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child, they may do so by requesting an appointment in writing and stating the purpose for the meeting. This is to ensure that staff can ensure that they are adequately prepared in advance.

Meetings with the class teacher at the class door to discuss a child's concern/ progress are discouraged on the following grounds:

- Staff cannot adequately supervise his/ her class while at the same time speaking to a parent.
- There is insufficient time and opportunity for the teacher to prepare for such an impromptu meeting.
- It is difficult to be discreet when staff and children are close by.

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

If parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, sports gear, etc., this can be done through the secretary's office. Children coming late to school should be dropped off at the classroom door. This is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

SCHOOL REPORTS

SMH SNS aims to help parents to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them, especially information gained from assessment tests. The National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) has provided a range of standard report templates to assist schools in reporting information about the progress of primary pupils to parents, including information from assessment tests.

The report cards provide for reporting in four key areas:

1. The child's learning and achievement across the curriculum
2. The child's learning dispositions
3. The child's social and personal development
4. Ways in which parents can support their child's learning

All primary schools **must** use one of the report card templates (available at www.ncca.ie) for reporting to parents on students' progress and achievement at school. However, special schools have been asked to wait for a specific template to be issued which will be designed for the specific purpose of reporting to parents of a child with special needs. In the meantime, SMH SNS will continue to use the existing school template.

TELEPHONE CONTACT

The school may, on occasion need to contact parents by telephone, e.g. if a child is unwell and/or excessively distressed for a period of time. **Parents are requested to ensure that they are contactable by telephone at all times during the school day.**

It is not acceptable for the school to be unable to make contact with parents, particularly when their child is unwell and/or distressed. This is particularly important in the case of an ill child for whom it is planned will transfer to respite care at the end of the school day or when a child is due to travel home by bus.

Parents are advised that Class teachers are not readily available to make or receive telephone calls as during the school day they are required to remain in their classrooms teaching and supervising their classes. If a parent wishes to pass information to their child's teacher, they may do so by

telephoning the school office and leaving a message or writing in the home/ school communication notebook.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her education. In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by staff.

REPORTING OF BEHAVIOUR/ACCIDENT/ MEDICAL INCIDENTS TO PARENTS

The reporting to parents of behaviour, accidents or medical incidents will take **written form** in the home/school communication book. Should further clarification regarding the incident be required, parents can request a face-to-face meeting with the Class teacher and School Principal. If parents wish to request such a meeting, they should contact the School office to arrange a suitable date/time.

In exceptional circumstances the Class teacher/ Principal may need to telephone a parent regarding a behaviour incident, an accident or medical situation. It is important that parents are available to take this call.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

The aim of this procedure is to assist people to raise a concern/ complaint and have it dealt with in as straight forward and quickly a manner as possible. It is not always easy for people to raise such an issue. It is therefore important that the procedure assist people to do so. The procedures outlined below do not pertain to:

- i. matters of professional competence and which are to be referred to the Department of Education;
- ii. frivolous or vexatious complaints and complaints which do not impinge on the work of a teacher/SNA in a school; or
- iii. complaints in which either party has recourse to law or to another existing procedure.

Procedures

A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint should, firstly, arrange a face-to- face meeting with the **staff member** through the school office with a view to resolving the complaint.

Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the staff member, he/she should arrange a face-to-face meeting with the **Principal** through the school office with a view to resolving it.

If the complaint is still unresolved the parent/guardian should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

The Chairperson will bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the staff member. A meeting will be set up between the Chairperson, staff member and where applicable, the Principal, with a view to resolving the complaint.

If the complaint is still not resolved, the Chairperson should make a formal report to the Board of Management and inform the Patron body, if applicable.

If the Board considers that the complaint is not substantiated, the staff member and the complainant should be so informed.

If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation it proceeds as follows:

- a) The staff member should be informed that that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage;
- b) The staff member should be supplied with copies of any written evidence in support of the complaint
- c) He/she should be requested to supply a written statement to the Board in response to the complaint
- d) The staff member should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of case to the Board and would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by another person at any such meeting
- e) The Board may arrange a meeting with the complainant if it considers such to be required. The complainant would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by another person at any such meeting.

Following the Board's investigations, the Chairperson shall convey the decision of the Board in writing to the staff member and the complainant. The decision of the Board shall be final.

**See Appendix A

BEHAVIOUR OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE SCHOOL

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school. This not only extends to the children 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 children 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 children.

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, including passive aggressiveness, are not acceptable and in addition, this extends to aggressiveness in writing through the home/school communication, which is also 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 rare cases, the Gardaí might be called.
- All stakeholders will treat our pupils 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 children's rights to privacy.
- When stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the time of meetings should be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Times of meetings will be agreed beforehand and these should be respected by all parties.

- 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 9:30 am and finish at 3:10pm 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 Boards of Managements and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

The Board of Management takes its duty of care to school employees very seriously. It is recognised that school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, including passive aggressive behaviour, shouting, bullying and threats. Additionally, assaults or other forms of intimidation may occur. This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

In respect of the occurrence of the above, 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 Appendix 2 and also in the school's Health and Safety folder.

REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

This policy will be reviewed as deemed necessary by the Board of Management (typically every five years) and also in the event of any future DES circulars or legislation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION OF THIS POLICY

The Board of Management ratified this policy on Tuesday, 24th February 2015. It is available to all parents on request and on the school website.

Signed: Catherine Whelan
Catherine Whelan, Chairperson, Board of Management

Date: 24th February 2015.