



# Parent Communications Policy

## November 2022

Approved by Local Governing Body

Chair of Governors: John Garner

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## Section 1: General Principles

### 1.1 Aim of Communications Policy

To support Ruislip High School as a thriving and successful school, all stakeholders must communicate effectively with each other; this includes students, parents and other members of the wider community. The school aims to ensure that communications between all members of the school community are clear, professional, timely and appropriate.

### 1.2 Definition of Communication

Good communication is much more than the exchange of information. It involves the management of relationships, expectations and the need to involve people. Communication is as much about attitude and behaviour as it is about the message.

### 1.3 External Methods of Communication

Whilst staff will always seek to establish open and cordial relationships with parents, they will also ensure that the relationships are professional. Parents will, therefore, always be addressed in a formal manner (i.e. Mr/Mrs, etc.) and parents and staff should avoid developing any type of friendship with one another. Parents should not ask staff for any personal information and should not be 'friends' with a member of staff through any social network. Therefore, parents must not communicate with staff via social networking sites (such as Facebook) about Ruislip High School, including their child's education.

The school's leadership appreciates that some parents may be known to Ruislip High School staff personally, especially those living in the vicinity of the school. It is imperative that any correspondence is of a personal nature and should never relate to Ruislip High School.

## Section 2. Roles and responsibilities

### 2.1 Headteacher

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Ensuring that communications with parents/guardians is effective, timely and appropriate
- Monitoring the implementation of this policy
- Regularly reviewing this policy

### 2.2 Staff

All staff are responsible for:

- Responding to communication from parents/guardians in line with this policy
- Working with other members of staff to make sure parents get timely information (if they cannot address a query or send the information themselves)
- Staff will aim to respond to communication during core school hours (8.00am - 3.30pm), or their working hours (if they work part-time). In line with promoting staff wellbeing and helping our staff find a suitable work-life balance, staff may work around other responsibilities and commitments and respond outside of these hours, but they are **not expected** to do so.

## **2.3 Parents**

Parents are responsible for:

- Ensuring that communication with the school is respectful at all times
- Making every reasonable effort to address communications to the appropriate member of staff in the first instance
- Respond to communications from the school (such as requests for meetings) in a timely manner
- Checking all communications from the school
- Supporting the school to uphold the school rules and expectations including behaviour, uniform, punctuality and attendance

Any communication that is considered disrespectful, unreasonable, abusive or threatening will be treated in line with our policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Parents should not expect staff to respond to their communication outside of core school hours (8.00am - 3.30pm), during school holidays or weekends.

## **Section 3: Initial contact with the school**

Parents can contact the school either by:

- Telephone - main office: 01895 464064
- Email - [office@ruisliphigh.org.uk](mailto:office@ruisliphigh.org.uk)
- Website – 'contact us' link
- Letter - addressed to the individual member of staff

All four modes of communication will be processed by the office staff. It would be helpful in any website, email or telephone message that parents state the member of staff and the nature/reason of the communication. It may not always be appropriate to respond by the initial method of communication and this will be assessed on an individual basis.

### **3.1 Response time during term-time**

Staff are expected to acknowledge or respond to a parent's communication within 24 hours, or 48 hours at the very latest in terms of working school days. It may be longer if staff are absent from school for reasons such as attending school trips, meetings or courses. It is important that parents recognise teachers' commitments during the school day are their lessons, after-school clubs and meetings, and therefore it is unlikely that they will respond the same day to a communication from a parent. This does not mean that teachers are not concerned with the correspondence, it is merely an issue of time. Non-teaching staff are, however, more likely to be able to respond the same day.

### **3.2 Telephone calls**

Staff can be contacted via the main office, and if the member of staff is not available the office team will relay messages. Staff will check messages each day and endeavour to respond to a parent's telephone message within the expected response time. If a member of staff is unable to contact parents by the next day, he/she is advised to refer it to an appropriate member of staff who will be able to deal with the matter in the first instance.

### 3.3 Email and website

Parents can email staff via the main office email account [office@ruisliphigh.org.uk](mailto:office@ruisliphigh.org.uk) and should note which member of staff it is for the attention of. Parents can also use the 'contact us' link on the website. Staff may forward emails from parents to a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to deal with if appropriate. The school discourages staff from entering into direct email conversation with parents unless for specific information.

### 3.4 Letters

The office will ensure all correspondence reaches the appropriate member of staff. The method of response will depend on individual queries.

## Section 4: School Meetings

The school encourages parents to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity. Parents should contact the relevant member of staff to request a meeting. Parents should appreciate that it can take several days for a mutually convenient time to be agreed. Parents must not arrive at school to request an immediate appointment unless in the case of an emergency.<sup>1</sup>

The school arranges various meetings for parents throughout the year. Parents' meetings allow parents to meet their child's teachers once during the year for a private consultation. This gives parents the opportunity to celebrate their child's successes and to support their child in areas where there is a particular need for improvement.

Some residential trip leaders hold a meeting in school prior to departure to outline the arrangements. Other residential trip leaders provide details in a final information letter. If a parent requires any further information about residential trip arrangements, they should contact the trip leader via the school office.

There are additional meetings held, including the following:

- Year 6 induction evening.
- Year 7 tutor meeting.
- Year 9 options evening.
- Year 10 information meeting (Success in Key Stage 4).
- Year 12 Success in the Sixth Form evening;
- Year 12 UCAS information evening.
- Year 13 higher education information evening.

The school welcomes the presence of any additional adult the parent wishes to invite to a school meeting to act as an interpreter. The school will also make any reasonable adjustments to its arrangements if this will enable a parent with a disability to participate fully in a meeting at school or to receive and understand a communication.

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<sup>1</sup> An emergency is defined as a situation that is and/or poses a serious risk to the child.

## **4.1 Surreptitious Recording**

Ruislip High School does not give anyone - parents, visitors, students, staff, governors, or third party employees - permission to surreptitiously record a meeting and/or conversation. This may be in contravention of the 2018 Data Protection Act. Legal advice will therefore be sought if any person is suspected of recording a meeting.

## **4.2 Meetings with the Headteacher**

The Headteacher will meet with parents, but only after the matter has been dealt with by the relevant members of staff. This is to ensure issues are handled at the correct level and to allow the relevant/appropriate staff to try to resolve a parental concern.

## **4.3 Complaints**

The school encourages parents to contact the school with any concerns, however minor, at the earliest possible opportunity. The relevant member of staff will contact parents and inform them how the matter will be investigated and any action to be taken. There is a Vanguard Learning Trust complaints policy which encourages parents to try to resolve issues with the school before making a formal complaint.

## **4.4 Parent Voice**

A member of the Senior Leadership Team leads the Parent Voice meetings. A range of parents make up this group and all parents are invited to take part. The group also has clear terms of reference that state that the focus is on school issues as a whole and not individual cases or grievances.

The purpose of Parent Voice group is to

- Provide a voice for parents in school on issues that are important to them;
- Improve the school's understanding of how to engage parents in their children's learning and in the life of the school;
- Support the school to develop strong home/school partnerships;
- Support improvement by discussing the school's strengths and areas for development from a parental perspective;
- Help make links with the wider community;
- Capture the unique and varied skills, interests, knowledge and experience that parents can offer.

Ruislip High School values the three-way partnership between parents / guardians, students and the school, and would like to ensure that parents / guardians have a forum to discuss issues affecting the school community. Being a part of the Parent Voice is also an excellent opportunity to meet parents / guardians of other students from all year groups.

## **Section 5: Written Communication**

### **5.1 Letters**

Letters are an important part of the regular and on-going communication with parents. Letters are always written for school visits and provide important curriculum information. In addition, the Headteacher writes to parents on a regular basis and these updates are sent via Class Charts. Parents are expected to ensure that they use a personal email address, as it is likely that by using a work email address, parents are contravening their employer's IT usage and/or Data Protection policy.

### **5.2 Tracking and Written Reports**

The school provides regular tracking reports that inform parents of their child's progress in each subject. These reports identify areas of strength as well as areas for future development. The school encourages parents to contact the school if any issues arise regarding their child's progress as highlighted in the report.

### **5.3 Google Classroom and Students' Planners**

Homework is set online via Google Classroom, and students can also use their planners to record due dates if they wish.

### **5.4 Parent Surveys**

Parents are requested to complete a survey annually at their child's parents' evening where they have the opportunity to express their opinion on many aspects of school life. The survey results are analysed and shared with the Senior Leadership Team, the Parent Voice group and Governors. An action plan is put in place to address the main areas of concern and progress is monitored.

## **Section 6: Attendance**

All evidence shows that students' attendance at school has a strong correlation with achievement. Parents/guardians should contact the school, via [office@ruisliphigh.org.uk](mailto:office@ruisliphigh.org.uk), to apply for exceptional leave, in line with the Exceptional Leave Policy.

If a student is prevented from attending school by reason of sickness or unavoidable cause, it is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to notify the school of the student's absence. The school should be notified on Class Charts on each morning of the absence together with any supporting evidence if applicable. If the school does not receive an explanation, or if the explanation is unsatisfactory, the school will not authorise the absence and this will be shown on their child's report.

If a student is absent from school with no indication of the reason, the school will contact a parent to find out the reason for the absence.

If parents need to apply for leave in advance, they should refer to the Exceptional Leave Policy, via the school's website. All applications need to be made in advance and parents

should be aware that the Headteacher can only approve an application under exceptional circumstances. He/she is not in a position to authorise family holidays.

The school has to refer all unauthorised absences to the local authority's Participation Officer, or as previously titled Education Welfare Officer. The Education Welfare Service may issue a Penalty Notice for unauthorised absence. This is a fine of £60 per parent per child that increases to £120 per parent per child if parents don't pay within twenty-one days. Failure to pay will result in a prosecution at Uxbridge Magistrates Court, for the original offence of unauthorised absence from school.

## **Section 7: Online Communication**

### **7.1 Parent communication**

The school recognises the importance of parental communication in student success. The school uses a number of channels to communicate effectively with parents including emails, updates from the Headteacher, the fortnightly Parent Bulletin, Class Charts, the school website, and social media such as Twitter.

The Class Charts app is a central communication tool between the school and home. The app allows the school to provide parents with up-to-date information on attendance, behaviour and rewards. The app is also used to send parents letters with information relating to trips, parents' evenings and events. As the school moves towards paperless reporting, it is imperative that parents download the app and are familiar with how to use it.

The school has published a fortnightly Parent Bulletin document which is available via the school website and also sent via ClassCharts. The Parent Bulletin provides a fortnightly update with a focus on news items and information about approaching key dates.

A typical Parent Bulletin includes 'good news' stories from the school community, alongside the promotion of upcoming events or elements of school life, such as the school's Above & Beyond programme. There are also links to relevant safeguarding information and links to recent letters.

The school's website has a 'contact us' section that allows parents/guardians to contact the school. The specific enquiry will then be conveyed to the relevant member of staff depending on the nature of the query.

There can be no doubt that parental engagement positively correlates to students' achievement and the school is committed to keeping parents informed and updated with how to support their child in the best way possible at Ruislip High School.

A calendar of school events is produced at the start of each year and issued to all stakeholders via the website.

A school newsletter is uploaded onto the website at the end of each school term and is also sent out via ClassCharts. It contains general details of school events and activities. Ruislip High School aspires to be a paperless school with a centralised communication system which is outlined in the model below.

## **7.2 Website**

The school's website provides information about Ruislip High and is an opportunity to promote the school to a wider audience. It is primarily for an external audience as ClassCharts is the preferred mode of communication between stakeholders. The school prospectus is available on the website. It contains a range of specified information to give parents a full picture of provision at school. The additional information booklet is updated annually.

## **7.3 Social Media**

The school currently has two social media accounts on Twitter and Instagram. These are updated weekly, with news focused on trips, school events, extra-curricular opportunities and other elements of everyday school life. The focus of the school's social media accounts is to promote the school and celebrate the achievements of the school community. Parents and students are encouraged to follow the school's social media via the Parent Bulletin. The school's Twitter feed is also linked on the school's website homepage.

## **Section 8: Communication with other schools and outside agencies**

Prior to students joining Year 7, students are visited in their primary schools to gain further information about them to help and support their transition to Ruislip High School. This comprehensive induction programme is a real strength of the school and helps ensure a smooth transition for Year 7 students.

The school recognises that students have diverse needs and is supported by various agencies and groups of professionals who inform the school on better ways to meet specific needs. Support comes from medical services (such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy), from educational psychologists, from health professionals and specialists. It also comes from various welfare-focused services, such as educational welfare, social services and child protection.

The school recognises that students have a fundamental right to be protected from harm, that their protection is a shared responsibility and that the school should provide a safe and secure environment. School professionals are often the staff who have day-to-day contact with students and are therefore in a unique position to identify students in need of support. If a member of staff has concerns about a student, they are passed to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, who may share this information with social services.

The school holds information on students in the school, and from time to time is required to pass some of this information to others for educational purposes. Details about the types of data held, why that data is held, and who it may be passed on to are detailed in the school's privacy policies which are available on the school website for both students and parents. This is a requirement under the 2018 Data Protection Act. Parents have a right to view the information held at school and are permitted to have contact details of the agencies to which information is passed.

## **8.1 Reporting incidents to the police**

The school works closely with the safer schools police officer. The school will automatically inform the police for the following reasons:

- when the school is the complainant, eg. theft of school property;
- when the school has information relating to illegal drugs – use and/or supplying – and the possession of weapons;
- When a member of staff has been assaulted by a stakeholder (either on or off the school premises).

In situations when there is a physical altercation between students, the school will support parents if they decide to contact the police should they wish to proceed with criminal proceedings by providing all the evidence gained through the school's investigation.

In terms of sharing information with the police, the 2018 Data Protection Act (1988) does not apply if the school receives a request that personal information is required for the prevention and/or detection of crime. In addition, information can be shared if school staff believe it is reasonable to do so. The school has a sharing information protocol which is part of the school's positive behaviour policy.

## **Section 9: Conduct of parents**

All parents should communicate with staff, both in person and via email, in a reasonable and calm manner. This is an expectation of the Home-School Agreement which parents sign when their child starts at Ruislip High School. Whilst the majority of parents are respectful of the professional relationship with staff, occasionally parents' communication is unreasonable and causes distress to staff.

The school's Headteacher and governors have a duty of care to ensure staff are not subjected to abusive or confrontational communication and must take necessary actions to deal with any incidents.

Ruislip High School has a policy for dealing with unacceptable behaviour on the school's premises. It can involve banning parents from the premises, restricting communication and/or taking legal action for vexatious complainants.

## **Section 10: Parents' knowledge of an incident**

If parents withhold information from the school, this will be taken into account if they decide to make representation to the school's headteacher and/or governors as part of the statutory exclusion process and/or the school's complaints policy. If the information is vital to the investigation, the headteacher and governors will apply the same principle as the legal system; senior staff and possibly governors will have to draw an inference as to why parents are not co-operating and a decision will be reached based on the balance of probabilities of the evidence, including the lack of it.

## **Section 11: Social media**

Whilst individuals have a right to express their opinions, in particular, through their own private social media accounts, the school expects that parents refrain from expressing negative opinions about the school and/or individual members of staff; it will be considered in

terms of defamation of character and harassment, in particular making false and malicious allegations. Legal action will be sought which could lead to further action if social media brings the school's name into disrepute and/or is defamatory about staff and/or members of the school community.