

Sawston Village College

Home-School Communication Policy



1. Aims of the Communication Policy

The purpose of effective communication with parents and carers is about much more than the simple exchange of information. It involves the management of relationships and the need to involve parents/carers as partners in the learning process. Secondly, communication is as much about expectations of attitudes and behaviour as it is about the message being conveyed. Thirdly, it is vitally important that as a school the quality of all communications model the highest standards of literacy and at the same time reflect the core aims and values of the College.

The aims of this policy and guidance are therefore to set out clearly the expectations and procedures that staff at all levels of the organisation will follow in their communications with parents, whatever the context or media used. Staff must adhere to GDPR.

2. Principles for effective communication

All communications from and within Sawston Village College should adhere to the following principles.

- To keep staff, pupils, parents, governors and the wider community well informed about the work of the College.
- Be open, honest, ethical and professional at all times.
- Use jargon free, plain English that is easily understood by all.
- Be actioned within a reasonable time. See guidance below regarding time frame.
- Use the method of communication most effective and appropriate to the context, message and audience.
- Be compatible with our core aims and values.
- Follow the 'corporate' College style.
- Characterised by a high standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Promote the College as a centre of excellence.

3. Practices and procedures

3.1 Communication by Email

Appropriate language is important in the use of email and emails should be proof read in order to check tone and appropriateness. The addressee and any persons copied in, should be double checked before sending. When responding to parents via email holding replies will be made within 48 hours. Detailed responses will be made within 5 working days. Where subject teachers send emails home, subject leaders must be copied in on replies sent.

In the interests of reducing waste, emails should only be printed if deemed essential for child protection/legal reasons or circumstances where home and school may be in dispute, otherwise all emails should be retained electronically for two years. Members of the senior leadership team should not be copied into emails sent to parents, unless by prior agreement, to ensure appropriate lines of communication and response are maintained.

Sensitive information should not be sent to parent home or work addresses, as these are unsecured communications.

Parents must be referred to by their formal title i.e. Mr, Mrs, Ms etc. and not by Christian name. Staff may use their full name or appropriate salutation i.e. Mrs Smith, Science Department. Staff should not respond by use of their Christian name only.

Where appropriate, documents sent to parents and other external bodies as email attachments should be converted to PDF format to avoid unauthorised alteration. Examples could include letters, policies, contracts and invoices. Office 2010 users can convert documents by choosing PDF from the Save As option list. Office 2007 users should contact IT Support for assistance.

3.2 Written Communication

Responses to letters from parents will be typed by the College Administration team to ensure consistency. Responses should be made within 48 hours. All staff will seek to make all written communications as accessible and inclusive as possible. Where parents find it difficult to access written or spoken English the College will seek support from the Local Authority.

The process for sending letters home is as follows.

Department/Faculty Letters

Step One: letter approved/amended by Subject Leader

Step Two: letter sent to relevant member of the Admin team, who will obtain approval from relevant SLT line manager

Step Three: following SLT approval/amendment, letter sent to Sandra Thornton for final check

Step Four: following check by Sandra Thornton, relevant Admin Team member produces the letter ready for signing

Year Lead/Other College Middle Leaders

Step One: letter sent to relevant member of the Admin team, who will obtain approval from relevant SLT line manager

Step Two: SLT approve/amend letter

Step Three: following SLT approval/amendment, letter sent to Sandra Thornton for final check

Step Four: following check by Sandra Thornton, relevant Admin Team member produces the letter ready for signing

Copies of all correspondence will be placed on pupils' files.

The College will keep a list of separated parents who have specifically asked for copies of reports, progress checks and newsletters. Parents are only added to this list if they make a request. Requests by parents may need to be supported by relevant documentation demonstrating they are entitled to receive such information.

Where parents are also members of the College staff, letters will be sent home in the normal manner and not left in staff pigeon holes.

3.3 Formal written communication: guidance on grammar, style and conventions

1. Formal salutations will be observed throughout the letter
2. Pupils should be referred to as such, not as 'students'.
3. 'College' is capitalised, as in 'the College feels that
4. Curriculum subjects are capitalised, as in Geography, Maths etc.
5. Use of colons, semi-colons and commas (please see Appendix 1)

3.4 Telephone Calls

College administration staff receive a huge volume of calls from parents and other individuals during the school day. They will attempt to reach the member of staff requested, otherwise the admin team will leave a voicemail message. Staff will then receive an email advising that they have a voicemail message waiting or that a parent was attempting contact. Parents should never be put straight through to individual lines. Responses to external calls should be made within 48 hours. Staff should retain a brief record of when they responded (date and time) and also a brief outline of the content of the conversation and any actions resulting from it.

Where staff contact home and are unable to reach a parent, and subsequently leave a voicemail message, staff must be clear who is calling and where from as well as indicating briefly the nature of the call. This prevents undue stress for parents and also supports the admin team when parents return missed calls.

3.5 Newsletters

The College's newsletter is published half-termly and is sent home to all parents. The newsletter will promote school successes and will incorporate other news relevant to parents. Members of staff are encouraged to contribute appropriate items to the newsletter which are then co-ordinated by the relevant member of the SLT. The conventions used should be those highlighted above to ensure consistency.

The Fountain magazine is produced termly and is intended to allow for a more in depth review of the College's work including the community dimension. Departments and faculties are expected to contribute articles each term and subject leaders should ensure there is a process within their teams for doing so.

3.6 The Website and other online information

An increasing amount of information is placed on the website and on other publically accessible areas online such as Go4Schools and ShowMyHomework. Staff are encouraged to use these platforms and to contribute to their development. All documents placed on online, other than in secured areas of GoogleDrive, must be viewed as public documents and as such must conform to the broad principles outlined in this policy. All items placed in these public places must conform to the expectations in appendix 1 below. Content for the website must be approved and checked by the relevant immediate line manager to ensure suitability and accuracy.

3.7 Social Networking Sites

Staff will not communicate with parents or pupils via social networking sites (such as Facebook) or accept them as their "friends". Under no circumstances will staff communicate with parents or pupils using their private email accounts. (See ICT Staff Code of Conduct for further guidance.)

3.8 Meetings with parents

Parent consultation evenings take place annually for each year group and a separate meet the mentor consultation take place annually for most year groups. Teachers should ensure they are well prepared for these meetings with relevant assessment data and examples of work where appropriate in order to illustrate their key points. It is important to keep the meetings focussed on strengths, areas for development and two/three key actions for pupil and parent. At the same time, teachers should try not to dominate the meeting but engage the parent, perhaps by asking how they feel their child is getting along in the subject, the amount of homework being done at home etc. It is also important to keep the conversation free of jargon and to remember that if the individual child has not been performing as well as they could do it will be a very depressing experience for the parent to hear yet another member of staff being incredibly negative about their son or daughter. Teachers should be concise and keep to time.

At other times in the school year it may be appropriate to meet with parents to discuss progress, and for Pastoral leaders, it is an integral part of their work. At all times, inform at least another member of staff that you will be meeting with a parent; do not arrange to meet with parents when other members of staff are not in the vicinity of the meeting room; and keep notes of the meeting, as a record of what has been discussed and agreed. Where meetings may be challenging, ask for the support of the line manager.

3.9 Disputes between home and school

The vast majority of parents are extremely supportive of the College and the work of its staff. However, there are some parents who may dispute a particular approach or viewpoint as to the behaviour or attitude of their child. Where staff are faced with potentially difficult or challenging communications with parents they should always seek advice from the relevant immediate line manager rather than enter into a dialogue which may become stressful for staff or make a difficult situation worse. Line managers should always look to support their colleagues in

these circumstances, where necessary taking over the communication from members of their team.

At all times it is vital to retain professionalism. Where parents become abusive or aggressive in their response, in whatever form of communication is being used, politely inform them that the communication will have to cease and that they may wish to speak to the relevant line manager. Inform the line manager immediately.

For persistent complaints and harassment, the relevant SLT line manager will discuss with the Principal whether the College's Persistent Complaints Policy should be applied.

4 Conclusion

The use of high quality communication is essential in promoting a strong working relationship between the College and parents, in order to support teaching and learning. This policy will therefore be kept under constant review by College leaders and administration staff, and reviewed every three years by the Governors.

JRU
November 2018

Policy approved by the Resources Committee of the Governing Body on 4 December 2018

Review: Autumn 2021

Appendix 1

Use of punctuation and grammar

The following is intended as guidance on those aspects of grammar and punctuation most used in College communications and also where there is either the biggest variance in approach or the most common mistakes.

Using Colons

A. To introduce an idea.

The colon has two main uses. Firstly it is used to introduce an idea that is an explanation or continuation of the one that comes before the colon. The colon can be considered as a gateway inviting the reader to go on. Have a look at these examples:

You are left with only one option: press on until you have mastered it.

There is one thing you need to know about coleslaw: it looks and tastes like slurry.

In the above examples you have some idea of what will come after the colon. It is important to note that the clause that comes before the colon can stand alone and make complete sense on its own.

If the initial clause cannot stand alone and make complete sense, you should **not** use a colon.

There is some debate about whether the clause following the colon should begin with a capital letter or not. If the colon precedes a formal quote, you should begin the language of that quote with a capital letter. If the explanation that follows the colon contains more than one sentence, you should use a capital letter.

B. To introduce a list.

The second main use of the colon is to introduce a list. You need to take care; many people assume that a colon *always* precedes a list. This is not the case. Again it is important to remember that the clause that precedes the colon must make complete sense on its own. Have a look at these examples:

The potion contained some exotic ingredients: snails' eyes, bats' tongues and garlic.

The magic potion contained sesame seeds, bran flakes and coleslaw.

In the first sentence, the clause preceding the colon has a subject and a predicate and makes complete sense on its own 'The potion contained some exotic ingredients.' In the second sentence a colon should not be used, as the clause that would precede it would not make sense alone 'The magic potion contained'.

C. To introduce quoted material.

The colon has other uses: it can also be used after a clause introducing quoted material. Have a look at this example.

The director often used her favourite quotation from Monty Python: 'I wasn't expecting the Spanish Inquisition.'

If the colon precedes a quotation, you should begin the language of that quote with a capital letter.

Using Semicolons

A. In complicated lists.

The semicolon can be used to sort out a complicated list containing many items, many of which themselves contain commas.

Have a look at this example:

In the meeting today we have Professor Wilson, University of Barnsley, Dr Watson, University of Barrow in Furness, Colonel Custard, Metropolitan Police and Dr Mable Syrup, Genius General, University of Otago, New Zealand.

In a situation such as this, only the mighty semicolon can unravel the mess.

In the meeting today we have Professor Wilson, University of Barnsley; Dr Watson, University of Barrow in Furness; Colonel Custard, Metropolitan Police and Dr Mable Syrup, Genius General, University of Otago, New Zealand.

In most lists a comma is enough to separate the items. In a complicated list like the one above, it is perfectly acceptable to use the semicolon to make the list more understandable.

B. Separating closely-related independent clauses.

The semicolon is also used to connect two closely-related independent clauses. Have a look at this example:

Terry always slept with the light on; he was afraid of the dark.

The two clauses here are closely connected but the link has not been made explicit. They could have been separated by a full stop.

Terry always slept with the light on. He was afraid of the dark.

They could have been connected by a conjunction.

Terry always slept with the light on because he was afraid of the dark.

Terry always slept with the light on, as he was afraid of the dark.

In this instance we have changed the second clause into a dependent clause; it is directly dependent on the first clause.

If you are going to use a semicolon to connect two clauses, it is very important that the two clauses are both independent. That means that each clause has to be able to stand alone and make complete sense without the other. If either one cannot stand alone, a semi-colon **cannot** be used.

Using Commas

The following are some of the situations in which a comma should be used:

A. To separate the elements in a list of three or more items.

The potion included gobstoppers, chewing gum, bran flakes and coleslaw.

There appears to be some debate about whether or not to include a comma to separate the last two items in the series. Omit the comma before the final 'and' unless there is a danger that the last two items in the series will merge and become indistinguishable without the comma.

His favourite puddings were ice apple pie, rhubarb crumble, and jelly and ice cream.

In this sentence it is acceptable to use a comma after the word crumble in order to indicate that the jelly and ice cream is considered as a single item in the series. This is called the Oxford comma. There are occasions where it is definitely needed in order to avoid unnecessary confusion. In the sentence below, the inclusion of the Oxford comma would have avoided some confusion.

I dedicate this work to my parents, Marie Smith and God.

B. Before certain conjunctions.

A comma should be used before these conjunctions: and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so to separate two independent clauses. They are called co-ordinating conjunctions.

She was a fantastic cook, but would never be as good as her mother in law.

He hated his neighbours, so he never invited them round.

A common mistake is to put the comma after the conjunction.

It is not usually necessary or indeed correct to use a comma with the conjunction 'because'.

We all had to move to higher ground because the floodwaters were rising quickly.

She really didn't feel hungry because she had already eaten a hearty lunch.

However, there are occasions when a 'because clause' needs to be set off with a comma in order to avoid any confusion of meaning.

I knew she would not be hungry, because my sister works in a restaurant and had seen her eating a huge meal earlier in the day.

In this example the reason for the person in question not being hungry is nothing to do with the sister's working in a restaurant as might be indicated if the comma were omitted.

C. Relative clauses adding extra information

The children who passed their exams got a prize.

Only the children who passed their exams got a prize. A comma is not needed.

The children, who passed their exams, got a prize.

All the children got a prize. The relative clause between the commas adds extra information. If you are adding extra information, use a comma. If the relative pronoun can be replaced by 'that' and still make sense, then it is a defining relative clause and a comma is not needed.

Capitalisation

Many people use far more capitals than are necessary. As a general rule, capitals should only be used for **proper nouns** – names and titles. You don't need to use them for general nouns.

Don't need capitalisation:

- seasons – spring, summer, autumn, winter
- points on the compass – north, east, south, west (unless used in a place name – Northwest England, North Korea)

Do need capitalisation:

- names – Sarah, James
- places – England, France, London
- first word of a sentence
- titles/formal names – Prime Minister David Cameron, Royal Mail, University of Cambridge
- calendar dates – New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day

Bullet Points

When listing a number of items, bullet points are often a good way of making things clearer and easier for the reader.

If your list is part of a sentence, introduce with a colon. No further punctuation is then needed and each entry should be in lower case.

For example:

The shopping list consisted of:

The shopping list consisted of:

- jam
- cabbage
- bananas

If your list is a series of stand alone sentences, then each entry should begin with a capital letter and end in a full stop (i.e. punctuated as normal).

- Read the instructions carefully.
- Check you have all the correct pieces.
- Begin constructing the furniture.

Alternatively, if you choose to list within the normal body of text, use an introductory colon and then semi-colons after each entry.

The day included: a raffle, with a range of prizes; a funfair; dance routines from local schools; and live music.

Remember – be consistent. If you are unsure, choose a format and stick with it throughout your document.

Apostrophes

Basic rule: Only use an apostrophe to indicate either possession (i.e. John's pen) or a contraction of two words (i.e. do not = don't).

Possession

If referring to one person or object, the apostrophe goes **before** the s. If referring to more than one person or object, the apostrophe goes **after** the s (to show that the word is plural).

The **boy's** book – one boy
The **boys'** book – more than one boy
One **week's** notice (notice of one week)
Two **weeks'** notice (notice of two weeks)

Be careful with plural words not ending in s – women, men, children. As these words are **already** plural the apostrophe should be **before** the s.

The women's football team
Men's changing rooms
Children's toys.

As there is no such word as **childrens** the apostrophe **must** go before the s for it to make sense.

Never use an apostrophe when you are just referring to plurals – book's, cd's, flower's. There is no need for an apostrophe here as you are not indicating either possession or contraction. **Plurals do not need apostrophes.**

Its/It's

The exception to the rule. **It's** means **it is** or **it has**. To show that you are referring to the possessive you must use **its**. This is to avoid confusing which meaning you are referring to.

Its - (possessive) the dog ate its bone

It's – (contraction of it is) It's likely that they will win

If you are confused about which form of **its/it's** to use, simply read out the sentence replacing the **its/it's** with **it is** and see if it makes sense.

The dog ate it's bone – this would mean **the dog ate it is bone** and so doesn't make sense. You now know to use **its** instead.

Other apostrophe rules:

Words ending in ss or ce take an apostrophe after the ss or ce – for goodness' sake.

Compound nouns take the apostrophe after the last word – his father-in-law's house (not his father's-in-law house).

Names ending in s can either be written as Mr Jones's or Mr Jones' (not Mr Jone's).

Dates and numbers do not need apostrophes – i.e. 1980s not 1980's.

Yours sincerely and Yours faithfully

The following rule applies for the use of **Yours sincerely** or **Yours faithfully** when writing a letter.

If you do not know the name and/or gender of the person you are writing to, address the letter **Dear Sir/Madam** and close with **Yours faithfully**.

If you are writing to someone by name, e.g. **Dear Mrs Smith**, end the letter with **Yours sincerely**.

Do not use a capital letter for sincerely or faithfully.

Pronoun agreement

When referring to an individual, singular pronouns should be used: he, she, his, her. When referring to more than one person, the plural pronoun should be used: they, their.

For example,

Your **child** should collect **his** or **her** uniform from the office.

Your **children** should collect **their** uniforms