

2023

Communications Policy

'Achievement for All'



Haslingden High School and Sixth Form





Contents

2	Contents
2	Introduction and aims
3	Context
4	Key features of our communication policy:
4	The Communication Statement
5	Haslingden's Golden Rules of Communication
7	What to do if I have a concern - A 5 step approach
8	How we communicate with parents and carers
11	How parents and carers communicate with the school
12	How students should communicate in school
13	Appendix 1 - 'Contact Us Form' Guidance

Introduction and aims

This policy aims to promote the essential partnership between the school, parents/carers, staff, students and the wider community through efficient and effective communication. Good communication should allow and encourage all stakeholders to participate in the development of the school and support our overarching aim of 'Achievement for All'. During our extensive consultation, we placed significant emphasis on creating the opportunity for all voices to be heard and ensuring that they were used to shape the development of this policy. Our communications policy has been created by our community, for our community.

The school believes that engaging and working with all stakeholders, particularly our parents/carers, is vital in our role to provide children with an excellent education and a safe learning environment, as well as helping our students become well rounded citizens with a strong set of values. We believe that effective communications underpin our [5 school aims](#). We remain committed to being an open and approachable school that engages with our community and puts children at the heart of our decision making. As a school, we also greatly value your support in enabling us to do this in an effective, timely and sustainable manner.

The context in which we work and why this policy is so important for your child and for the school

We recognise that so many of us lead increasingly busy lives and it is rare to hear of any employee, company or workforce that is not facing additional challenges in recent times. Working in a school is absolutely no different and it is fair to say that the collective role we play in school to nurture, educate and keep children safe, is much broader than it has ever been, yet the capacity of our workforce has stayed the same. In all honesty, I would argue that our workforce has actually diminished due to real term financial cuts faced by schools nationally, with our total number of teachers in school reducing from 101 to 93 over the last ten years.

The challenges faced each day in school are extensive and are due to a range of factors: government expectations including new, updated or additional responsibilities and guidance, other public services struggling to meet the demands thereby decreasing access to valuable resources, real term budget cuts, societal and parental expectations and every single underlying reason for additional pastoral/wellbeing support being much more common within schools.

Since the pandemic, the needs of our communities have grown dramatically and whilst we remain as committed as we have ever been to support young people, we cannot meet this additional need alone. Local services such as health, social care and the police are vital agencies and as parents, your support and commitment is more crucial than ever. We know that we are very fortunate to have the high levels of engagement and positive interaction from so many of the 4000 parents that form part of our community, yet we struggle to read, resolve and reply to all emails and phone calls. On an average day, we send and receive approximately 33,000 emails. This figure alone is a stark statistic and goes some way to highlighting the extensive communication challenges we face.

Linking back to my opening line, I want to stress that we know that so many members of our community are also working exceptionally hard and finding it a difficult period too. However, it is essential that we are clear and publicly share that we have long surpassed the point as a school where the demands placed upon us outweighs the resources available. In reality, this means that the teams in school, including all support staff and those in teaching roles, are having to work well beyond what I can reasonably expect from them and this is not sustainable. Regularly seeing midnight on their laptop, making calls to parents in an evening at the expense of reading to their children and experiencing regular illnesses in half terms through exhaustion, are just some of the signs that we have to do all we can to protect them and try to regain something resembling a sustainable work-life balance.

It is important to note that these are national challenges and far from unique to Haslingden High School and Sixth Form. We are currently working amidst a national recruitment and retention crisis and the ongoing industrial strike action in March 2023 demonstrated the strength of feeling within the profession. Currently, 2 in 5 teachers leave the profession within their first ten years and 1 in 5 teachers leave the profession within their first two years of teaching, largely due to the working conditions and expectations placed upon them. Further to this, many lessons taught nationally are being delivered by those who are not subject specialists. At present, this is something that we have managed to avoid, however, it is becoming increasingly challenging to maintain. Unless we can make the role more sustainable in the near future, this will inevitably impact on more schools and children in the future.

Key features of Our Communications Policy

One of the key roles as a Headteacher is to not only offer absolute commitment to your children but also, a similar commitment to the dedicated, talented and hard working staff in our wonderful school. This is far from a simple challenge to overcome; however, we firmly believe that the communications policy is part of a range of measures that we can adopt to support the currently unsustainable pressures our staff face, yet crucially, without compromising on the quality of the provision for your children.

There are three key features of Our Communications Policy that we believe should underpin all our communications involving the school:

1. *'Our Communication Statement'*
2. *'Haslingden's Golden Rules of Communication' guide*
3. *'What to do if I have a concern – a five step approach'*

We hope that they collectively provide clarity and a framework for all that ensures that all communications are both positive and purposeful and place the child at the centre of any discussion or decision.

Our Communication Statement

This statement is displayed in the reception of both of our main school and Sixth Form reception areas:

We strive to be an open and approachable school that remains committed to engaging with all stakeholders. We would like to thank the overwhelming majority of visitors and parents/carers who are consistently pleasant and polite in all their communications with the school. However, it is important to note that we have a duty of care to our staff as well as to our students and we remain wholeheartedly committed to both.

All staff at the school are expected to show respect for everyone that they come into contact with during the course of their duties by being polite and courteous at all times. They will endeavour to deal effectively with any reasonable request they receive from visitors and callers to the school. The school also expects all those who visit or contact our school to treat our staff respectfully and courteously at all times. The same level of courtesy is expected with email communication. We strongly encourage all those who may wish to communicate with our school to do so in a manner that does not discriminate against any member of our diverse community and consistently adheres to our Communications Policy. In particular, any correspondence should have due regard of the 'Golden Rules of Communication' and the 'What do I do if I have a concern - the 5 step approach'.

We take any aggressive behaviour or threatening language towards any member of our staff seriously, whether this is during a telephone conversation, email or during a visit to the school. If a caller or visitor's behaviour is deemed discriminatory, rude, abusive, aggressive or raises their voice to any member of our community, they will be advised to stop their behaviour. If the behaviour persists, we will terminate the call or ask the visitor to leave the premises.

Parents/carers and visitors should be aware that a request for an appointment must be made in advance if they wish to see a particular member of staff. We greatly value the support of parents/carers and the wider school community and thank you for adhering to this notice.

Haslingden's Golden Rules of Communication:

All communication should be kind, thoughtful and respectful

There is no place for threatening, violent or aggressive behaviour. Those who adopt this manner will be issued with a warning and a reminder of the policy from a member of the senior leadership team. Any further instances would mean the school would not engage with future communications.

Why do we say this?

In a staff survey conducted in March 2023, over 50% of school staff stated that their emotional wellbeing has been negatively impacted in the last 12 months due to external communications. This figure was over 90% for those staff who hold a pastoral role in school. Whilst we remain thankful for the wonderful manner in which the overwhelming majority of stakeholders liaise with the school, we have this rule in place to protect colleagues.

Our business hours are 8am-4.30pm

Staff are not expected to be available in the evenings or at weekends. If you wish to email outside of those hours, we politely ask that you use the [schedule send function](#) on your email.

Why do we say this?

External communications can be overwhelming and receiving emails outside of working hours inevitably reduces staff members time away from work and for many colleagues, limits the time available for marking, planning, attending school functions and crucially, for many, significantly impacts on the time spent with their families. We recognise that we cannot control emails sent but ask that all stakeholders use the schedule send function so that the email arrives when staff members are in work. Staff are strongly advised to take emails off their personal devices and refrain from reading them outside of business hours and this advice remains in place. However, emails can be difficult to ignore and we would greatly appreciate your continued support in protecting staffs' personal time.

We will respond within 3-5 working days

We want our communication to be timely as this is in the best interest of our students and we will endeavour to respond to all appropriate communications. The greatest challenge we face is the high volume of communications. We will prioritise communications based on need but must stress that we cannot operate as an emergency service. There may be times that we are able to respond sooner than this; however, there may also be times when school is exceptionally busy, when this timescale is not achievable.

Why do we say this?

There are occasions when external agencies and parents/carers share frustrations when we have not replied on the same day as their email or phone call was made. Given the high volumes of communications and the time needed to formulate an appropriate response, 3-5 working days is a realistic timescale to expect a reply. If parents/carers have an urgent concern where their child is at risk of immediate harm, we would review this carefully but also ask that consideration is given as to whether another service is better placed to deal with the emergency.

[Haslingden High School website: Safeguarding page](#)

Consider which communication method is best for the situation

Some conversations are best face to face, whilst others, given their nature, may be quickly resolved over the phone or via the 'Contact Us' form/email.

Why do we say this?

*The school communicates via a range of channels, with the aim of providing regular and timely information for all members of our school community. Ideally, the information provided through Edulink, the school website, texts, letters and emails would provide all stakeholders with the information that they require, thereby reducing the need to contact school on an individual basis. However, we greatly value the sharing of information and know that there will be times when you need to make contact with school. For most instances, this can take place via the 'Contact Us' form and **appendix one** of this document provides guidance of how this can be used effectively. We also understand that there may be times when sensitive information needs to be discussed and it may be more appropriate to telephone the school directly or arrange to meet in person. More details can be found in the '**How parents and carers can communicate with the school**' section later in this document.*

Members of our community must book an appointment with a member of staff in advance

This is to avoid disappointment. Many of our staff will be teaching or in meetings during the course of a school day. Anyone arriving to reception unannounced will be advised to request a meeting via the 'Contact Us' form on the website.

Why do we say this?

On a typical day, all colleagues will be engaged in a wide range of activities, many of which are planned in advance. It is unrealistic and unmanageable to deal with unannounced visits and we politely ask that all stakeholders contact the school in advance to agree a mutually convenient time to meet. We do recognise that there may be occasions where there is a genuine emergency that may prevent this taking place.

1. Should I be contacting school? Who might be better placed to help?

Why do we have this step?

The school is keen to play its role in supporting all students but must also acknowledge and accept that it does not have capacity to deal with all issues, particularly those that take place outside of school hours. On a regular basis, the school is asked to resolve issues that would be better placed with another service. We need the support of the Police, the NHS, Children's Social Care and parents/carers to reduce the volume of these communications and allow us to prioritise our workload effectively.

2. Clearly and calmly outline your concern and ask for the school's view prior to making a decision.

Why do we have this step?

In a small number of situations, this step has been overlooked and outcomes have been sought and at times demanded, prior to the school being given the opportunity to offer their perspective on a given situation. We appreciate that emotions can run high when something has happened that may involve your child and we remain committed to supporting students and their families with regard to this. However, it is important that any concern is presented to school in a clear and calm manner and avoids making any assumptions prior to the school being given the opportunity to gain a better understanding of events.

3. If necessary, school will look into it and inform you of the timescales.

Why do we have this step?

The school will outline any necessary actions and inform you of the timescales involved. This will depend on existing commitments and the urgency of the situation. Whilst we appreciate that a quick resolution is in everyone's best interests, there needs to be a recognition of the extensive commitments that will already be taking place in any given week. Patience and understanding are a key feature of this step and are greatly appreciated.

4. Discuss findings and agree on the next steps.

Why do we have this step?

The member of staff will discuss the situation having considered all perspectives and seek to outline any necessary support as well as any associated sanction that may be felt necessary. There are likely to be actions for all parties involved. All views will be listened to carefully and form part of the decision making process.

5. School and home/agency to work together. The issue may need to be revisited. It is a process.

Why do we have this step?

Whenever we deal with an incident, we know that the initial interventions may not be enough to resolve the situation on the first occasion alone. It can often be seen as a failure when the first intervention doesn't provide the desired outcome. We are keen to outline that any support is a process that may need to be revisited and refined depending on how the situation develops for those concerned. We expect all parties to continue to work together, to share information promptly, and remain committed to collectively finding a positive resolution.

Thank you - these simple steps make all the difference.

How we communicate with parents and carers

The sections below explain how we keep parents/carers up-to-date with their child's education and what is happening in school. We recommend that all parents/carers monitor the following regularly to make sure they do not miss important communications or announcements that may affect their child.

EduLink

Why we use this method:

Haslingden High School and Sixth Form uses EduLink as a communication tool between parents/carers and students, allowing access to a range of information including:

- Upcoming school events/trips
- School closures (for example bad weather / strike action)
- School surveys or consultations
- End of term letters from the Headteacher
- Timetables
- Attendance
- Homework

Why it helps:

We believe it provides parents with access to a wide range of information relating to their child in a clear and effective manner. It reduces the number of phone calls and emails being sent and also allows parents the opportunity to provide or update vital information such as contact details and attendance information.

Email

Why we use this method:

Email has the ability to serve as a quick and effective way of communicating. The school will use email to distribute non-urgent notices, updates and formal school reports. Parents/carers are encouraged to provide an email address for correspondence, ensuring to keep us informed should details change.

Why it helps:

If used correctly, emails allow for information to be shared in a timely manner and to a wide audience. We predominantly use this for sharing letters from members of staff in school.

Text Message

Why we use this method:

Text messages are used where there is a short message that is quite often time sensitive.

Why it helps:

Text messages give us greater flexibility and allow the school to contact at short notice, particularly for unforeseen circumstances such as the weather or as a reminder of a previous communication.

Social Media

Why we use this method:

The school uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as a positive tool to celebrate school life, events or student achievements. Subscription to these is not expected and therefore key messages will be relayed primarily through formal school communication channels e.g. email/school website.

Why it helps:

We are aware that social media has the power to reach a broader audience and it remains a privilege of our role to celebrate students' success. Whilst there are always risks posed with engaging with social media, provided we continue to use it as a one-way method of communication we believe it adds additional value to school life.

School website

Why we use this method:

The school website provides a range of information about the school. In the first instance, parents/carers should check the website for answers to general queries. The website includes information on the following areas:

- School times and term dates
- School aims
- Admissions
- Uniform
- Policies
- Homework
- Pupil Premium information
- Sixth Form
- Staff vacancies
- Important events and announcements
- Curriculum information
- Important policies and procedures
- Important contact information

We invest significant time in keeping our website up to date. It is designed to provide relevant information regarding all aspects of school life. The school calendar is housed within our website, alongside other features that are regularly visited throughout the course of any academic year. It is the primary source of information for all parents/carers or those with an interest in the school.

Why it helps:

We hope that it allows all stakeholders to gain valuable information without having to contact the school on an individual basis, creating a more efficient and more manageable experience for all. We use the website to advertise upcoming events, share our holiday dates and promote the schools' commitment to 'Achievement for All'.

Phone calls

Why we use this method:

Our school staff regularly communicate with parents and carers to discuss individual information relating to their child. We also hope to increase their use in celebrating achievements and positive behaviours.

Why it helps:

We know that some communications are better dealt with verbally due to their nature. A telephone conversation allows for all points to be raised and considered and often leads to a positive resolution.

Reports

Why we use this method:

Each academic year, parents and carers receive an interim report and two full reports which provide information on Attitude to Learning (ATL) and progress. These will be emailed directly to both parents/carers and students.

Why it helps:

This provides specific and up to date information in relation to progress and attitude to learning.

Meetings

Why we use this method:

Parents and carers are able to attend yearly parents' evenings via School Cloud. During these meetings, parents can talk with teachers about their child's achievement and progress, the curriculum or schemes of learning, their child's wellbeing, or any other area of concern.

The school may also contact parents to arrange meetings between parents' evenings if there are concerns about a child's achievement, progress, or wellbeing.

Parents of students with special educational needs (SEND), those who are looked after, or who have other specific requirements may also be asked to attend further meetings to address these additional needs.

Why it helps:

Meetings in school can be an effective tool to discuss complex issues or needs, serving to provide clarity whilst also preventing extensive email exchanges that may or may not sensitively communicate messages.

How parents/carers can communicate with the school

The following communication methods are available to all parents/carers and the advice offered below is designed to support efficient and effective communication for all.

Contact us form

If parents/carers need to speak to a specific member of staff about a **non-urgent** matter, they should use the 'Contact Us' form on the school website. This should be the primary method in which to make contact with the school. Parents/carers should use the list in **appendix 1** to identify the most appropriate person to contact.

EduLink

Parents/carers are encouraged to report absences using the EduLink App. This should be done as soon as possible on the morning of the absence to avoid a Truancy Call being sent. EduLink should also be used to review contact details and notify us of any changes. There is also a range of information available, including, timetables, homework and reports.

Email/letters

Parents/carers should aim to, where possible, use the 'Contact Us' form on the website for non-urgent issues in the first instance. We know that an email may be the most appropriate method where there are attachments to be shared. Staff will endeavour to reply to emails/letters within 3-5 working days. This response may be via letter, email, telephone or in person.

Phone calls

We recognise that there may be occasions where a phone call is the most appropriate channel of communication. Where possible, queries will be forwarded to the relevant colleagues in school but it is important to note that many colleagues will have existing commitments that may prevent them from taking the call.

If it is not possible to speak to the relevant member of staff (due to teaching or other commitments), someone will respond to schedule a phone call at a mutually convenient time. We aim to make sure parents/carers have spoken to the appropriate member of staff within 3-5 working days of the initial request.

Meetings

If parents would like to schedule a meeting with a member of staff to discuss their child's progress or wellbeing, they should use the 'Contact Us' form feature (see **appendix 1**).

Inclusion

It is important to us that everyone in our community can communicate easily with the school. Parents who need help communicating with the school are invited to discuss any additional support they may need. We will try to identify a family member, a member of staff or where possible, an external agency, to provide the following:

- School announcements and communications being translated into additional languages
- Organising an interpreter for a meeting or phone call

We will endeavour to make any additional arrangements as necessary. Please contact the school reception to discuss these or use the 'Contact Us' form.

Communications with your child throughout the school day

It is important to note that students are asked to not contact their parents/carers directly during the school day. Similarly, we ask parents to contact the school rather than their child throughout the course of the day. This is because we want to avoid any unnecessary worry (a common issue being a child contacting home to say that they are unwell, without having notified school and this prevents us being able to support your child effectively). There are 40 phones in school and we remind students that these are available should they wish to contact home.

How students should communicate in school

Effective and positive communication between students and staff is an essential part of school life. The school welcomes and encourages students to engage in conversation with all members of staff and we believe that the positive relationships between staff and students underpins our friendly, supportive and productive learning environment. When communicating with a member of staff, students should:

- Address the member of staff with their formal title e.g. Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Sir etc. Students should not refer to staff by their first name
- Be respectful. Students should not talk over, answer back, raise their voice or walk away before the conversation has concluded
- Follow all safe and reasonable instructions at the first time of asking

Students are expected to check their school emails at least once a day. The student bulletin is shared via email each Friday and provides relevant information for the week ahead. Students and staff should only communicate through school email, not personal email addresses.

All students should also be aware of our email protocol:

- Complete the subject line
- Use the formal title of the member of staff e.g. Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Sir etc
- Use Standard English, avoiding abbreviations or slang
- Sign email off appropriately with a 'thank you' or 'kind regards'

Communications with parents/carers during the school day

In line with the school's mobile phone policy, phones should not be seen or heard anywhere on the school site. Provision will be made, where appropriate, for students to use one of school's 40 phones to contact home.

Communication with peers

In line with the school's four expectations, respect should be a central theme in all interactions with peers. The first expectation is 'speak and behave respectfully to staff and students'. Communications with other students should be polite, kind and thoughtful.

We would expect the same standards of behaviour of all members of our community beyond the school day. We recognise that social media is a communication method that brings with it both positives and negatives. It is not our role as a school to investigate incidents that take place on an evening and weekend and strongly recommend that you adopt the same principles online as you would in school. We have provided a range of advice for students and parents in relation to safe and appropriate use of social media that can be found [here](#).

Appendix 1: Contact Us Guidance

Who should I contact?

The school has updated its '**Contact Us**' form and would encourage all parents to use this as their primary method of contact unless there is a more time sensitive issue, such as ringing to sort out forgotten PE kit for that day or an instance where an attachment needs to be included or forwarded.

The guide below provides a helpful list of the options available to you via the 'contact us' form. In all communications, we ask that you share your child's name, their form and the reason for your contact with the school. We politely ask that this communication adheres with steps one and two of the 'What to do if I have a concern - A 5 step approach'.

I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT...	WHO YOU NEED TO TALK TO & INFORMATION TO PROVIDE
A safeguarding concern	Designated Safeguarding Lead
Curriculum or subject related concern	Curriculum leader
My child's wellbeing/pastoral support	Form tutor and/or Head of Year
Payments / ParentPay	Assistant School Business Manager
School trips	Trip leader
Uniform/lost and found	School reception
IT (iPads/Edulink/accounts)	IT department
Attendance and absence requests	Attendance officer
Special educational needs (SEN)	SENCO
Before and after-school clubs	School Office
Hiring the school premises	School Business Manager
School events/the school calendar	We would ask that you check the school website in the first instance
Request a phone call/meeting	Name to be provided by parent/carer
General (something other than the above)	The school reception team will direct this to the most appropriate person
Sixth Form	Sixth form reception
Exams and exam results	Exams Officer
Careers, work experience and teacher training	Miss Finney
Admissions	Mr Mercer
Homework	Mrs Powell