

Parent / Visitor Communications Policy

Review Cycle	Date Reviewed	Date to be reviewed
Every 2 years	July 2026	July 2028

Linked Policies:

- GDPR/ DATA PROTECTION
- E SAFETY/ ACCEPTABLE USE
- SAFEGUARDING POLICY
- STAFF COMMUNICATON POLICY

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Introduction

This policy is designed to ensure efficient, productive and considerate communications are maintained by all stakeholders in the school.

This policy applies to parents, carers, family members and any other external person making communication with the school.

Equality Statement

The school is strongly committed to ensuring equity and equality of experience for all users and members of our community. In regards to the communication policy this relates to equal opportunity to access communication with the school regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality or disability. Where adaptations are required to enable equal and equitable access the school will listen and work hard to accommodate these.

Rationale

At Aylesford School, part of the Character Education Trust, we believe that every student can make excellent progress academically. We challenge and support all our students to achieve. We believe young people achieve their best in an environment where they feel secure, valued, and have high self-esteem. Additionally, we value working in partnership with parents and believe the mutual support we can give each other will be of great benefit to our students.

All communication at Aylesford School should keep staff, students, parents, Governors and other stakeholders well informed in a timely manner. Communication should be honest, ethical and professional and should use the channel of communication that is most appropriate to audience, message and context.

The communications policy upholds the school and trust values of:

- Good character
- The best interests of our students, staff and the core purpose of the school to educate and safeguard children.
- The Nolan principles of selflessness, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.
- Equality and equity for all including the protected characteristics of gender, race, religion, disability and sexuality.
- Solutions focussed, reasonable, productive, considerate and respectful behaviours.

Ways of communicating with the school:

- Telephone
- Email
- Written Letter
- Face to Face meeting

The school is committed to excellent communication with parents and therefore ensure that our parents receive the following:

- A 24/48 hour (Mon- Fri) response to all communications with the school.
- A polite and helpful response to support you in supporting your child achieve and succeed.
- A fully monitored safeguarding email address – safeguarding@Aylesford.kent.sch.uk
- A clear communications list to help you reach the best person to resolve your concerns. <https://www.aylesford.kent.sch.uk/info/contact/school-contact-details>
- Regular parent surveys to report back and have your voice heard on your experience of the school.
- A robust complaints policy to ensure any complaints are handled appropriately and efficiently.
- Regular parent evenings, open events and celebrations for parents to visit the school and meet staff to discuss and celebrate student's achievements.
- Dedicated and well-staffed progress, pastoral and leadership teams to manage your concerns quickly.
- A regularly updated website, parent mail, SIMS parent and school WhatsApp channel to keep you up to date with what is going on at the school and to share important messages.
- 3 X school newsletters per year.
- Regular communications regarding events/ trips/ visits etc via parent mail.

Availability

The school has a policy of replying to all communications within 48 hours between the office hours of 08:00- 17:00, Monday to Friday. Often you will receive a reply sooner.

Staff spend the majority of their day teaching and working with the children at the school. Therefore, it is important that time is given for staff to respond. The school looks after over 1100 families and it is important that we both support our parents and maintain our focus on our core business of providing an education to the students.

Face to face meetings and telephone calls with staff should take place between the working hours of 08:00- 17:00 Monday to Friday.

Communications with staff and the school are significantly reduced during holidays/ periods of school closure.

Emails sent outside of school hours will be replied during work hours.

Correctly addressed safeguarding concerns will always be prioritised and where there immediate risk to the safety of a child that relates to the school you will receive a rapid response, as soon as possible using our safeguarding@Aylesford.kent.sch.uk email address which is monitored throughout the week/ weekend/ during holidays. If you have a concern relating to the immediate safety of a child you should contact **999**.

Communications lists

A communications list can be found on the school website – this should be used to ensure you are directed to the correct member of staff to resolve your issue.

In a school with over 1000 students and 2000 parent/ carers, it is not always possible to meet directly with the headteacher or the senior team. Like any workplace, staff are employed to

undertake individual roles. It is important that these people are used to help you resolve any issues. Communications may be re-directed to the right person to resolve your concern.

<https://www.aylesford.kent.sch.uk/info/contact/school-contact-details>

Email

Email is our preferred and most efficient form of communication. We recommend email use for most communications with the school.

- General communication and queries.
- Requests for absence
- Contact with staff/ teams
- Complaints/ queries
- Information requests.

Emails are checked regularly and you should expect a response within 48 hours, often much sooner, within office hours (08:00-17:00. Mon- Fri – term time).

To best meet your needs and requests please ensure the following:

- Emails are clear, short and to the point,
- Make clear what you wish achieve/ desired outcome.
- Emails conform to our communication expectations at all times.
- They are addressed to the right person/ team.
- Are checked before sending.

Face to Face Appointments

Face to face meetings take place at school events, open evenings, parent evenings and other review and reward evenings. These are an important part of our community relationship and can serve the best interests of the students well.

Face to face meetings also include online video based meetings using TEAMS/ Zoom etc.

We also meet with parents individually when agreed that meeting face to face is the best way to support you and your child.

The school will arrange face to face appointments with parents if:

- It is appropriate to meet face to face and the issue cannot be better addressed by email/ telephone.
- An appointment has been made in advance – we do not meet parents who arrive at school and request an immediate appointment.
- The meeting requested is with the correct member of staff.
- Why and what will be discussed is made clear in the request. We cannot/ will not meet if we do not know what the meeting is about.
- The timings/ duration of the meeting are appropriate and manageable.

The school will not meet with parents if:

- The appointment is not agreed in advance.
- Communications are threatening or otherwise inappropriate.
- The parent will not describe the purpose of the meeting.

Face to face meetings are best for:

- Meetings with you and your child/ family.
- Serious/ complex or sensitive issues relating to your child.
- To discuss complaints that have not been resolved once email/ telephone conversations have been exhausted

The school reserves the right to refuse to meet with parents/ visitors if these criteria are not met. Although we try our best, the school may not be able to fit meetings around parental working hours. When this is the case, it is for the school to set the timing of any meeting and for families to judge if the issue/ situation is serious enough to warrant attending this meeting at this time or seek alternatives such as email/ telephone calls that better suit individual circumstances.

Meetings relating to serious behaviour issues/ suspension/ exclusion are set by the school and are not negotiable.

Meetings can be terminated at any stage by the school staff leading the meeting if they feel that our expectations have been breached.

Telephone:

Contacting the school by telephone is best for letting us know of pick up/ drop off changes; asking for information on timings and events; notifying us of an emergency issue that requires immediate attention and requesting email/ contact details.

Staff may arrange a telephone call with you to discuss your child's progress, behaviour, safeguarding or to follow up on concerns you may have. These arrangements are normally agreed by email. Phone calls are not as efficient as email for contacting a member of staff directly, raising concerns are booking a meeting/ appointment.

Telephone meetings are best for:

- Urgent communication with the school or to discuss an issue at length with a single person.
- Immediate safeguarding/ behaviour concerns.
- To catch up or discuss a low/ mid-level concern regarding your child.
- Arrange an unexpected pick up/ drop off
- When location or work commitments or physical restrictions prevent meeting in person (see face to face).

Written Letter

Whilst written letters are now rarely used, there may be times where lack of access to IT equipment or email means this is a valid means of communication. If using written letter please make sure this is addressed correctly to the correct recipient and is handed to reception.

In general, we strongly recommend email as the priority method of written communication. Emails will be/ are considered with the same level of importance and formality as hand written or printed communications and will often receive a quicker and more nuanced response.

The school does not respond nor act upon anonymous letters or communications unless they relate to the safeguarding of a child/ adult.

When choosing the method of communication with the school it is important to agree and choose the format that will best achieve what is needed.

Website

Our school website is updated regularly and contains valuable information about the school, our policies, our curriculum and news from the school.

www.Aylesfordschool.com

Parent evenings

Parent evenings take place throughout the year and provide an opportunity to meet with your child's teachers face to face. Please see our school calendar for details, you will also be contacted in advance regarding appointments.

WhatsApp

Our WhatsApp group is a one way communication channel that allows parents to "follow" the school to receive regular updates about our work and quickly access important information and news.

The school cannot interact with parents directly on WhatsApp and cannot send/. Receive messages.

Parent details are not shared with the school when choosing to follow us.

Communication Conduct and Protocol

- All communications to and from the school should be **polite and respectful at all times**.
- Communications should always be clear, succinct and to the point.
- The school does not tolerate racist, misogynist, homophobic or other recognised discriminatory views or language. Extreme personal opinions, views or beliefs may not be recognised by the school or acted on when they do not represent British values, the majority view or ethos of the school, its parents, students and the wider community.
- Communications received out of office hours (08:00- 17:00) will be answered the following school working day (or sooner- at staff discretion).
- Any parent wishing to meet with a member of staff should contact the school in advance and request a meeting. This request should be responded in accordance with this policy regarding emails and letters. Parents should not come to the school to talk to a member of staff without an appointment. Parents who do come to the school without an appointment should not expect that the member of staff will meet with them. The member of staff may still choose to do so, but this is at their discretion.
- Meetings should only be attended by parents/ those with parental responsibility. Other family members, including siblings or friends should not attend meetings and cannot meet with the school on a child/ parents behalf. If a parent would like to be accompanied by a third party this should be requested when making the appointment.
- A basic respect should be maintained for the significant professional knowledge and experience of the staff team in matters of education and student welfare.
- An open mind should be kept at all times in relations to reports, enquiries or complaints.
- Judgement on outcomes of any discussion or complaint should be reserved until the school has had a reasonable chance to respond and resolve.
- The views you express will be heard and considered but may differ to those of other parents or the majority view. The school will always listen to your view and consider this within the best interests and feelings of the wider school community, as appropriate and in a balanced way.
- Some aspects of school and education are defined by law and at the professional discretion of the Head Teacher. Therefore, some of our work and the decisions we make are non-negotiable.
- We cannot discuss other children in meetings by name or provide other information that is protected/ not for sharing. All communications are managed under GDPR and data

protection law and any breach should be notified to the school immediately.
<https://www.Aylesfordschool.com/information/privacy-and-data-protection/>

- Unfair, or personal comments towards individuals, or unfounded judgments on character should not be made.
- Formal complaints must follow the correct procedures as per our complaints policy.
- Information provided and issues discussed should be based on fact and not assumption. Gossip, hearsay or 2nd hand information is often incorrect and misleading.
- We do not tolerate any form of harassment of our staff including unfounded, libellous, slanderous or demeaning communications.
- Repeated or large volumes of communications must be avoided, specifically when in quick succession, when not allowing the school to respond or when the same request is made when the school had made its position clear and the outcome has been made clear.
- Concerns about any aspect of our work should be raised directly through the school and not discussed on social media as this can prevent us from dealing with your concerns effectively.
- The school reserves the right not to respond to communication which does not meet the expectations outlined above, and is considered to be abusive, unnecessarily aggressive, and/or bullying or harassing in nature. If staff judge your communication to be such, they may send a standard email response which can be found as Appendix A.
- Gossip, Hearsay and rumour are not considered by the school and all parents are asked to avoid being involved in such. The school will only deal with and respond to factual, reasonable or evidenced information.
- A member of staff may ask for their line manager or a member of the leadership team to accompany them at meetings with parents.

The school reserves the right to not respond to communications, including the termination of phone calls and meetings if the following occurs:

- Abusive, aggressive or threatening language.
- Unreasonable demands, requests or time frames as judged by the school.
- Rude or inappropriate tone and language.
- Unnecessarily repeated communications or complaints despite responses being previously made.
- Threats and/ or malicious communications.
- If the communications do not relate to our responsibilities or work as a school.
- Knowingly false or unfounded/ un-evidenced comment, suggestion or allegation.
- Not following our complaints policy correctly.
- Intentionally addressing emails to the incorrect person – for example escalating communications before the person they are addressed to have had a chance to reply.
- Threats of unreasonable escalation to “the local MP”, “Ofsted” or “The Press” before the school has responded and as a means to achieve a specific outcome.
- The school does not respond nor act upon anonymous letters or communications unless they relate to the safeguarding of a child/ adult.

Where communications breach these expectations the school may choose to restrict or remove access to communications with the school as appropriate. When this is the case, the school will formally write to parents/ carers notifying them of this. This can range from restricted communications to a full or partial ban from school site.

Complaints

The school has a robust complaints policy for dealing with serious complaints and concerns about our work. This can be found here:

<https://www.Aylesfordschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/CET-Complaints-Policy-Nov-2023.pdf>

This must be followed/ used when making a formal complaint.

GDPR/SAR REQUESTS

Information on how to make SAR requests can be found on our website.

Whilst we will always comply with our legal responsibility to provide data and information, we do ask that parents and outside agencies consider any request carefully and note the limited capacity of the school staff team before making SAR or data requests. Often, we can help you find exactly what you need without huge amounts of time being spent processing and completing these. Time otherwise better spent on our core business of education and welfare.

Members of the Public/ Non School related enquires

Whilst we always do our best to communicate with other outside of the school. Please be aware that this is not our priority. Therefore, external communications will be reviewed carefully and responded to as appropriate. This may fall outside of the time frames of this policy and will be based on priority need.

General Enquiries should be made to info@Aylesford.kent.sch.uk