Cotham School
School to Home
Communications Policy

Version control

The table below shows the history of the document and the changes made at each version:

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	November 2015	First published version

Review Date: September 2017

Contents

1. Purpose

To promote partnership between the school, parents and carers, students and the wider community through efficient and effective communication.

2. Definition of communication

Every member of staff has a responsibility to support effective communications and needs to recognise that the quality of their communications reflect on the school's reputation. Parents and carers, Governors and students also have a part to play in reflecting the school's reputation. We strive to ensure that communications between all members of the school community are clear, professional, timely and effective in their purpose.

3. Principles

Cotham School uses a number of different methods to maintain effective communication with parents and carers, other schools the wider community and outside agencies. Depending on the nature of the communication, the school will use the most practicable means to contact the recipient.

Communication on issues that affect the safety and wellbeing of a student will be treated as a priority. The school holds emergency contact details for all students; families are asked to alert the school immediately if contact information needs to be revised.

Staff will always seek to establish friendly relationships with parents and carers but they will ensure relationships are professional and parents will be addressed in a formal manner. Staff are to avoid developing close relationships with parents and carers. The use of a parent, carer or staff member's first name is not appropriate, therefore all communications will be to and from Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms, Dr etc.

Key school information will be translated into community languages where appropriate and possible and a translator if available, and if required, to ensure effective communication.

The Communications Policy embraces the principles of the Equalities Policy and E-Safety Policy.

4. Introduction

Cotham School recognises the importance of clear and effective communications with all stakeholders (students, parents and carers, staff, Governors, the local and wider community outside agencies, etc), and is committed to being open and accessible for all who have an interest in the school.

The key stakeholders for a school are parents, carers and students and this Policy addresses the main ways in which the school will ensure there is effective two-way communication between home and school.

5. Parents and carers as partners in their child's education

Parents and carers have a key role to play in their child's education. The school will make every effort to encourage and make arrangements for parents and carers to contribute to creating a shared view of their child's needs.

6. Aims of the policy

- To ensure that effective communication and consultation takes place between the school, parents, carers, students and other stakeholders
- To ensure robust processes for consultation between the school, parents, carers and students

The school recognises that engaging and working with parents and carers is a vital key in providing their child with an excellent education. Through the schools Cooperative Forum parents and carers are offered opportunities throughout the year to convey to us what they expect from and think of the school. Our wish is to involve as many parents and carers in their child's education as possible.

Our aims include the following:

- To make the school as welcoming and inclusive as possible. Signage will be clear, informative and positive
- All written and telephone enquiries will be dealt with promptly and parents and carers can expect an acknowledgement within 2 working days.
- A variety of forms of communication with parents and carers for example, telephone contact, E-mail, post and text
- Parents and carers are contacted for positive as well as negative reasons
- Information is given to parents and carers on what students will be taught and tips for helping their child will be provided
- Parents and carers will be encouraged to help or support their child's learning at school and at home. Information will be provided to enable this support to be effective.

7. Communication with parents and carers

7.1 Choosing the correct member of staff to address a query

Please see appendix A which details who to contact and how to progress any query that is not successfully resolved.

7.2 Letters

Staff will always reply to a letter from parents and carers as quickly as possible. A response to acknowledge receipt of a letter will be made by return, a more formal acknowledgment, by telephone, letter or email, **will be made within 2 working days and responded to within 10 working days**. Letters must be processed through the school administration team and approved by a member of the Senior Leadership Team before posting. Copies of correspondence with parents and carers will be placed on student files. Any letters of concern or complaint should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Concerns and Complaints Policy.

The school will use standard templates for letters where possible.

Whole school/non personal letters will be emailed to parents/carers on Friday each week during school term time. A copy of the weekly mailing will also be posted onto the parents section of the school website and our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) FROG.

Parents and carers are encouraged to provide the school with a current E-mail address for prompt and effective communication. However, If we are unable to obtain a current email address for any parent or carer, the weekly communication will be delivered home in hard copy by their child.

7.3 Postcards

Students will on occasions receive postcards from members of staff in recognition of a particular achievement, success or positive contribution to school life.

7.4 E-mail

E-mail is a quick, effective way of communicating necessary information and is the school's preferred method of communication. **E-mails received will be treated in the same way as letters: acknowledged within 2 working days and responded to within 10 working days.** E-mails should be short and clear and the same care and consideration should be given as when sending a letter. Any items longer than a paragraph should be attached in word format.

A staff contact list is published on the parent portal in the VLE (Frog).
Parents and carers may wish to contact the school via E-mail for a general enquiry as an alternative to telephone or letter. The school E-mail address is: info@cotham.bristol.sch.uk

Under no circumstances should staff contact students or parents and carers using their own personal E-mail address.

7.5 Telephone Calls

Effective telephone communication can sometimes be a problem in a school, where teachers may be teaching full-time and running clubs or working with students at lunchtime or after school. Parents and carers may be frustrated if they feel that a message elicits no immediate reply, when in fact there has been no available opportunity for the member of staff to reach a telephone to return a call.

In a non-emergency **a return call will be made within 2 working days, with any follow up action from the outline of the request /query/problem being dealt with within 10 working days.** Staff will make a file note recording details of any telephone conversations with a parent, carer.

7.6 Texts

Parents and carers may also be contacted by text, in a non-emergency, to inform or remind them of a particular event e.g. parents evening, or late arrival. Texts will also be used in the event of emergency closure.

7.7 Absence

If a child is absent, parents and carers are asked to contact the school as soon as possible on the morning of the absence. In the event of failure to notify the school on the first day of any absence a text will be sent or telephone call will be made requesting that the parent/carer contacts the school to confirm the student's absence (safeguarding).

7.8 Meeting with Parents and carers

Parents and carers wishing to meet a member of staff must contact the school to make an appointment. **This request should be responded to within 2 working days.**

Parents and carers should report to reception prior to meeting with a member of staff. A member of staff may ask a senior colleague to accompany them.

Staff should call a meeting to a close in the event of the parents or carers becoming angry or abusive. This should be reported immediately to a member of the Senior Leadership Team.

7.9   Social Networking

Other than social networking sites that have been established specifically for the purpose of teaching and learning/events fixtures etc staff will not communicate with parents and carers or students via any social networking sites nor will they accept them as 'friends'.

A number of Departments and subject areas within the school do host networking sites that provide school/subject specific information and resources. Your child's teacher will provide information and recommendations for accessing relevant sites appropriate to your child.

7.10   Parent and carer use of Social Networking and Internet Sites

Overview

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are now widely used. This type of media allows people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. However, such sites can be inappropriately used by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. This document sets out this school's approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures we will follow and action we may take when we consider that parents and carers have used such facilities inappropriately. When we refer to parents and carers in this document, we also include relatives or anyone associated with the school.

Objectives

The purpose of this section of the policy is to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents and carers;
- Safeguard students, staff and anyone else associated with the school from the negative effects of social networking sites;
- Safeguard the reputation of the school from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites;
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents and carers;
- Set out the procedures that the school will follow where it considers parents or carers have inappropriately or unlawfully used social media sites to the detriment of the school, its staff or its students, and anyone else associated with the school; and
- Set out the action the school will consider taking if parents or carers make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents and carers

Social networking sites have potential to enhance the learning and achievement of students and enable parents and carers to access information about the school and provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, the school recognises that many parents and carers and other family members will have personal social networking accounts, which they might use to discuss/share views about school issues with friends and acquaintances. As a guide, individuals should consider the following prior to posting any information on social networking sites about the school, its staff, its students, or anyone else associated with the school:

- Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give feedback or express these views;
- Would a private and confidential discussion with the school be more appropriate? e.g. if there are allegations or concerns being raised. Social media sites should not be used to name individuals. The school should be contacted directly to discuss any concerns you may have;
- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm which would not be justified, particularly if the school has not been given the opportunity to investigate any concern;
- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have on the school; any detrimental harm that the school may suffer as a result of the posting; and the harm that such a posting may have on students' learning.

Inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents and carers

Although social networking sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns about the school (and those associated with it), it is rarely appropriate to do so. Other channels, such as a private and confidential discussion with the school, or using the school's formal concerns and complaints procedure are much better suited to this.

The school considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites. (This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

- Making allegations about staff or students at the school (Cyber-bullying)
- Making complaints about the school or a member of staff at the school
- Making defamatory statements about the school or staff at the school
- Posting negative/offensive comments about school policy or practice

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking/internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents and carers explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents and carers are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media.

Procedure the school will follow if inappropriate use continues

The school will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents and carers in a professional and appropriate manner and understands that parents and carers may not always realise when they have used social networking sites inappropriately. Therefore, as a first step, the school will usually discuss the matter with the parent or carer to try and resolve the matter and to ask that the relevant information be removed from the social networking site in question. If the parent or carer refuses to do this and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the school considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

- Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this;
- Set out the school's concerns to the parent or carer in writing, giving them a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed;
- Contact the police where the school feels it is appropriate, for example if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed or in cases where it is considered to be grossly obscene or threatening violence;

- If the appropriate comments have been made on the school website or online forum, the school may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to the forum;

7.11   Reports and Progress

Parents and carers receive an annual report to provide information about their child's progress in each subject[MS2] . These reports are accessible on-line through FROG[MS3]

In addition, parents and carers have the opportunity to meet their child's subject teachers once a year, at parents evening.

Parents and carers should contact the school if issues arise about their child's progress or wellbeing. **The first point of contact should be the child's Tutor or Learning Co-coordinator**.

We welcome the presence of any other adult a parent or carer wishes to invite to a school meeting for support or to act as an interpreter. We will endeavor to make any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary to enable a parent or carer with a disability to participate fully in a meeting or to receive and understand a communication.

7.12   School Website

The school website provides a range of information about the school.

It is used to promote the school to a wider audience and is updated regularly. The website has a parents and carers area where key documents and information may be found.

7.13   Virtual Learning Environment- 'FROG' (VLE)

The VLE is a powerful tool for motivating students as it gives them more choice and flexibility about when and where they complete their learning. It also encourages parent and carer involvement in learning, especially with extended learning tasks.

The school VLE is a good source of general information and includes:

- Curriculum resources
- Holiday events / dates
- Copies of letters to parents and carers
- Information about lessons / additional study
- Special events
- Newsletters and updates
- Essential contact details

Parents will also have access to data about their child's attendance and progress via the VLE.

Staff E-mail details are located under the 'contacts' tab.

7.14   Home School Communication

Each student has a planner for noting down homework and the date for completion. It is also an important tool for communication between parents, carers and teachers. It contains, for example:

- Uniform list
- Timetables
- Holiday dates
- Notes for / from parents and carers

Parents and carers should use planners to check homework and other messages and to communicate day to day issues.

A calendar of planned school events is available on FROG and the school website and is updated as necessary throughout the year.

A newsletter is published on a termly basis, a link to an electronic copy of this is E-mailed to all parents and carers as well as being published on the school website and FROG. Hard copies of the newsletter are available from the school upon request.

7.15   Communication between students and staff

Two way communication between students and staff is an important aspect of school life. The school welcomes and encourages students to engage in conversation with all members of staff within the school. When communicating with a member of staff students should:

- Stand in front of the member of staff they are speaking with and make eye contact;
- Address the member of staff using their formal name e.g. Mrs Smith, Miss, Sir etc, never reffering to a member of staff by their first name;
- Be respectful, do not talk over, raise voice or walk away before the conversation has ended.

7.16   School trips, visits and activities

The school will endeavor to publish all proposed trips, visits and activities on the school calendar at the start of each academic year. Parents and carers will be notified by letter of trips, visits and activities that their child/children may wish to participate in as early as possible, and within at least six weeks of the proposed trip, visit or activity. Occasionally opportunities arise during the academic year to offer students additional trips, visits or activities that were not known or available when the school calendar was published. The school will always ensure parents and carers are notified of any additional opportunities for their child as soon as possible to ensure parents and carers have adequate time to plan for such events.

7.17   Severe weather and emergency closure

In the event of emergency closure communication will be made to parents and carers via text (SchoolComms),parents and carers should also tune in to local radio and check the school website and social media channels (e.g. Facebook and Twitter).

7.18   Other

In addition to the above forms of communication:

- The school prospectus is published on the website. Prospective parents and carers may receive a printed copy of the school prospectus upon request.
- Prospective parents and carers are invited to an Open Evening in the September of the year preceding their child's year of entry to the school
- Prospective parents and carers are invited to attend open mornings to enable them to see the school operating
- Prospective parents and carers are invited, along with their child, to an induction evening in July where the main channels of communication are outlined, and important information will be shared
- Parents and carers are invited to attend Senior Leadership Team 'open' surgeries every month, the dates of these are published in the school calendar

8. The co-operative forum

As a Cooperative Academy Cotham School has a Cooperative Forum, a group of elected people who form five constituencies:

- Students;
- Parents and carers;
- Staff;
- Community;
- Alumni

All parents and carers are invited and encouraged to become a member of the Forum.

The role of the Forum is:

- To make recommendations to Governors in relation to the role of the school in the community;
- To make recommendations to the Governors in relation to the exercise by the Governors of their powers of co-option;
- To perform such other functions as the Forum may be requested to perform from time to time by the governors

Forum representatives meet regularly throughout the school year, the meeting provides an opportunity for parents and carers views to be heard and for the Forum Representatives to put forward their recommendations for Governor Consideration.

If you are not a member of the Forum you can still ask it to consider your query or opinion.

9. Supporting parents and carers of students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The school recognises the importance of positive relationships with parents and carers of all students with additional needs. The revised SEND Code of Practice emphasises the importance of positive, supportive attitudes to parents and carers and user-friendly information and procedures.   All professionals will make every effort to ensure effective communication with parents and carers.

All staff within the school are expected to help parents and carers understand how to contribute effectively to their child's education and will make every effort to ensure that parents understand their rights and responsibilities. All relevant information will be provided in a way for all to understand and respond to.

When students have special educational needs, they are making less than the expected progress or if they are experiencing behavioural difficulties, we would expect to meet with parents and carers more regularly

10. Communication with other Schools and outside agencies

Prior to students joining Year 7, they are visited in their primary schools to gain further information about them to help and support their transition to Cotham School. We recognise that children have diverse needs, and we are supported by various agencies and groups of professionals who keep us informed on better ways to meet these needs, so that children may participate more fully. 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 Units. We recognise that children have a fundamental right to be protected from harm, that their protection is a shared responsibility, and that our school should provide a safe and secure environment (see the school Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy).

We hold information on all students in our school and from time to time we are required to pass some of this information to others for educational purposes. Details will be sent to parents about the types of data we hold, why we hold that data, and who we may pass it on to. This is a requirement under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Parents and carers have a right to view the information we hold and we have contact details of the agencies to which our information is passed.

Further information can be found in the schools Confidentiality policy and Data Protection policy.

11. Investigating incidents

When investigating an incident involving students, school members of staff interview all students involved and ask them to complete a written account. The school is not permitted (under Data Protection) to share any information that would identify any students. However, we fully co-operate with any police investigation and provide information to the police upon request.

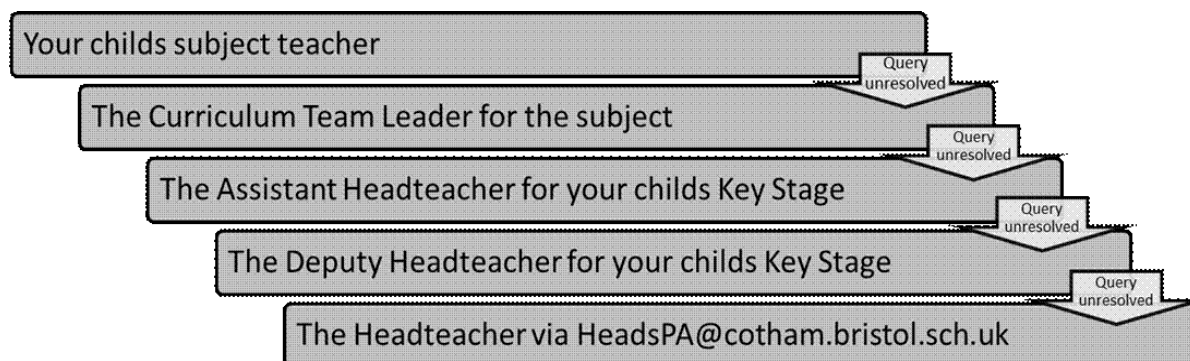## 12. Monitoring, evaluation and review

The school will review this Policy at least every two years and assess its implementation and effectiveness. The Policy will be promoted and implemented throughout the school.

Appendix A – To whom should my query or concern be addressed?

If you have a general query or concern, not specific to your child, please contact Reception on 0117 9198000 or by email at info@cotham.bristol.sch.uk
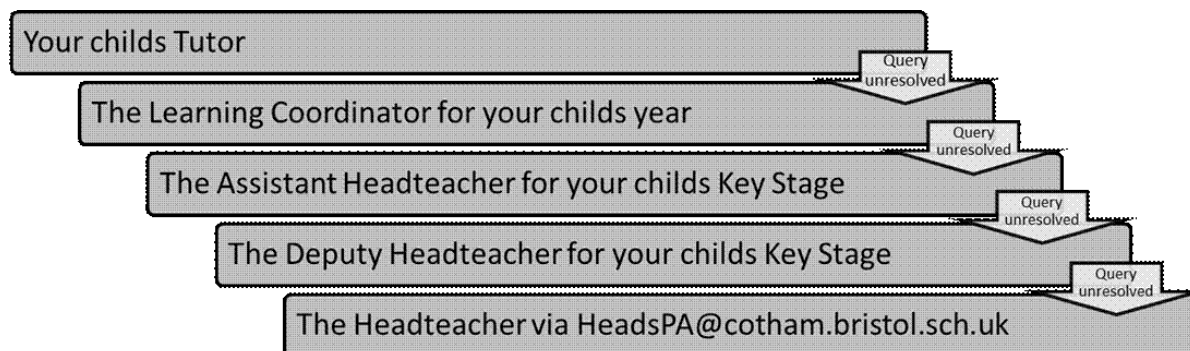
If your query or concern is about your individual child please follow the communications route applicable to your specific question below.

My query is about my child's learning

Your childs subject teacher
Query unresolved
The Curriculum Team Leader for the subject
Query unresolved
The Assistant Headteacher for your childs Key Stage
Query unresolved
The Deputy Headteacher for your childs Key Stage
Query unresolved
The Headteacher via HeadsPA@cotham.bristol.sch.uk

If, following the communications route above you are still dissatisfied with the response you may complain to the school, please refer to the schools Concerns and Complaints Policy available on the school website

My query is about my child's behaviour or non-compliance

Your childs Tutor
Query unresolved
The Learning Coordinator for your childs year
Query unresolved
The Assistant Headteacher for your childs Key Stage
Query unresolved
The Deputy Headteacher for your childs Key Stage
Query unresolved
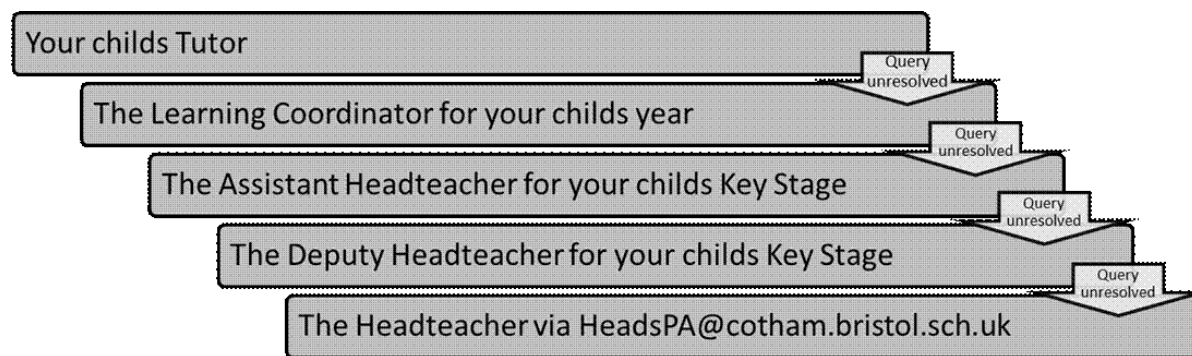The Headteacher via HeadsPA@cotham.bristol.sch.uk

If, following the communications route above you are still dissatisfied with the response you may complain to the school. Please refer to the schools Concerns and Complaints Policy available on the school website

My query is about my child's wellbeing

Your childs Tutor

Query unresolved

The Learning Coordinator for your childs year

Query unresolved

The Assistant Headteacher for your childs Key Stage

Query unresolved

The Deputy Headteacher for your childs Key Stage

Query unresolved

The Headteacher via HeadsPA@cotham.bristol.sch.uk

If, following the communications route above you are still dissatisfied with the response you may complain to the school. Please refer to the schools Concerns and Complaints Policy available on the school website