



# **Archbishop Temple School**

A Church of England Specialist College

## **EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

**Date Agreed : November 2020**

**To Be Reviewed : December 2021**

**Name of Policy:** Email Communications Policy

**Sub-Committee Responsible:** Personnel Committee

**Lead Responsibility in School:** Headteacher

**Source of Policy: (Please tick)**

- LA:**
- Diocesan:**
- School: X**
- Other – Please specify:**

This policy supports our work as a Church school as summarised in our Mission Statement:

**Purpose**

Archbishop Temple School seeks to care for young people and prepare them well for adulthood, valuing the whole person.

**Mission**

Through our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we strive to nurture each person's ability, gifts and talents so that they can 'have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10) and use it in the service of God and other people.

## **The rationale behind this policy**

In recent years communications between home and school have shifted quite dramatically with email becoming the preferred and predominant mode of communication.

Email provides us with a quick, cheap and easy means of communication. As a result it is used for such a wide range of communications, it has also become increasingly difficult to distinguish between formal and informal communications.

The ease of communication via email has many advantages but the school now faces an increasing expectation for an almost instantaneous reply, in a well-informed, considered and timely manner.

As a school our first priority is to deliver high quality teaching and learning. The ability and ease of email communication directly with your child's teacher is a privilege. Many schools would not make this facility available to parents, as frequent requests for updates and information can distract teachers from their primary focus, teaching.

Teachers and support staff have a plethora of demands on their time including up to five lessons teaching (and tutor time, lunch duties and activities, and after school practices and clubs). Teachers cannot and are not expected to monitor and manage their inbox during lessons or at other times in the day, when they should be planning and preparing for lessons, assessing pupils work or carrying out school duties.

The school (and parents) expect teachers to be fully prepared, focused and engaged with pupils and supporting their learning. Whilst administration staff, support staff and senior leaders may be able to access emails more routinely, their primary function is to support teachers and pupils. Constantly monitoring and responding to email leads to staff focusing on the immediate task of responding to an email instead of concentrating on the delivering and supporting teaching and learning.

Parents may feel that it is perfectly reasonable to ask for updates about a child's progress or behaviour. The occasional request might be manageable but if the parent of every child a teacher teaches asks for bespoke feedback just once in a year that would, on average, generate 190 required responses. The school works hard to provide parents with timely and informative information concerning their child's progress throughout the year. Currently these are: three progress and effort reports, and one parent teacher meeting each year for KS3 children and two each year for KS4 children. In addition to this staff may also telephone, write or email a parent to inform them of a serious incident or serious ongoing concerns about a child's behaviour or attitude to learning. They would not be expected to maintain a running dialogue about such matters, unless it has been agreed as part of a Pupil Support Plan.

We provide parents with an online system via Firefly that enables them to view their child's home learning tasks and resources from lesson, feedback from teachers about selected tasks and their child's current and historical academic reports.

## **The school policy with regard to email communication between home and school.**

All communication must respect the dignity of the recipient.

1. Receipt of an email will be acknowledged within 2 working days (during term time).
2. Provide a response to the email by telephone or in writing (including an email) within 5 working days. This may include informing the sender that more time is required to provide a full response. If this is the case staff should indicate a timeframe in which a response should be expected.
3. If a member of staff is not able to deal with the email directly then they will pass it on to the most appropriate person and inform the sender that they have done so.
4. Staff will not be expected to monitor or respond to emails out of their normal working hours (including weekends and published school holidays). Whilst parents may compose emails at hours to suit their own needs, emails should not be sent outside of a member of staff's normal working hours. The school is particularly concerned to protect staff as mobile phones and other electronic devices enable staff to access their school emails when away from school. However, this can make it difficult to 'ignore' a message from a parent, leading to unnecessary worry and anxiety on the part of the staff.
5. Whilst this is rare, if a member of staff receives an email which is of an aggressive tone, sets unreasonable demands or could otherwise be interpreted as harassing, they will refer this to a senior line manager in the school, who will decide if consideration needs to be given to dealing with further communication under the schools 'Persistent Complaints and Harassment Policy'.
6. It is usually not appropriate to CC/BCC an email to a member of staff to their line manager or a member of the senior leadership team. If this is done then the email may be ignored by the line manager or member of the senior leadership team.

### **Other things to consider**

When communicating with the school, please bear in mind that staff are putting their heart and soul into trying to help your child achieve well. We would never wish to discourage parents from communicating with staff, establishing a relationship and working together. Parental communication is essential, and we need your feedback to help us to continue to improve.

On occasions staff face criticism over an activity which they may be doing entirely out of goodwill, be it running a trip, or a team, or a concert, or a play and an ill crafted email from an upset parent, even when the point is justified, can result in hurt being caused and a reluctance from staff to continue to go the extra mile, that we so much appreciate of them. Likewise, even when a communication is about a core school responsibility, our communications need to be respectful. Couching a point as being 'direct', 'blunt' or 'honest' does not make it any less destructive to a relationship that should be based on trust and mutual respect. This applies to all communication and as staff we need to be just as careful in how we show we value our pupils and parents.

Many of our parents will be facing the same challenges in their own workplace from an increasing expectation of anytime, anywhere communications. Some parents may be of the view that this is simply the way the world works now. However, the school has a duty of care to staff, as it does to pupils. This includes a responsibility to ensure that the staffs' workload is manageable and does not unreasonably intrude in to their private life.

### **Finally**

The letters and emails of thanks that we do receive are very much appreciated. We have an incredibly dedicated team of staff at Archbishop Temple School and we want to retain them and make them feel valued.

## **Vexatious Complaints Policy**

### **1. The rationale behind this policy**

The aims are to:

- uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the school and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint;
- uphold the statements within the home school agreement;
- support the well-being of children, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the school, including governors and parents;
- deal fairly with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school.

### **2. Parent expectations of the school**

Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal concerns or formal complaints with the school can expect the school to:

- a) regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing:
  - (i) how and when problems can be explained with the school;
  - (ii) inform them of the existence of the school's complaints procedure, and provide them with a copy;
  - (iii) inform them of the existence of this guidance;
- b) respond within a reasonable time;
- c) be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils within the school and the nature of the complaint;
- d) respond with courtesy and respect;
- e) attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the school's Complaints Procedure, other policies;
- f) keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues

### **3. The school's expectations of parents/carers/members of the public**

The school can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise problems with the school to:

- a) treat all school staff with courtesy and respect;
- b) respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the school;
- c) avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property;
- d) avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;
- e) not use Social Media as a means of airing complaints, problems or issues, insulting the school or any of its staff in any way;
- f) recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond;
- g) recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time;
- h) (in the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Procedure.

#### 4. Risk assessment

At Archbishop Temple School we are fully aware of the need for personal safety and ensure that all staff know how they are expected to deal with situations where their personal safety or the safety of students may be at risk.

The following control measures are in place to protect staff:

- a) means of summoning assistance is available in key areas;
- b) individual consultations to take place in an area where staff may summon help if necessary;
- c) two members of staff should see a parent together when it is considered that the meeting could be difficult and notes are to be taken;
- d) emergency procedures are in place and are known and understood by all school-based employees; all staff are aware of how they are expected to deal with situations where their personal safety is put at risk.

Who is a persistent complainant?

For the purpose of this document, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the school, and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- a) actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious;
- b) prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- c) an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- d) an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- e) an insistence on only dealing with a specific member of staff on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- f) an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed.

For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in (a) to (f) above in such a way that they:

- a) appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- b) cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- c) have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community including individuals;
- d) are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient.  
This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

## **5. The school's procedures in cases of persistent or vexatious complaints or harassment**

In the first instance the school will inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken.

If the behaviour is not modified the school may take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- a) inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy;
- b) inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties;
- c) inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the school should be by letter only;
- d) (in the case of physical, or verbal aggression) take advice from Diocesan/LA HR/Legal Services (services purchased by the Governing Body) and consider warning the complainant about being banned from the school site<sup>(\*)</sup>; or proceed straight to a temporary ban;
- e) consider taking advice from the Diocese/LA on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation;
- f) consider taking advice from the HR/Legal Services of the Diocese/LA about putting in place a specific procedure for dealing with complaints from the complainant, i.e. the complainant will not be able to deal directly with the Headteacher but only with a third person to be identified by the Governing Body of the school, who will investigate, determine whether or not the concern/complaint is reasonable or vexatious and then advise the Headteacher accordingly.

If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the school may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances advice may be sought from the HR/Legal Services of the Diocese/LA.

## **6. Legal position<sup>(\*)</sup>**

The Headteacher should be aware that parents who have been banned from the school premises have a general right to seek an appointment to speak to school staff in relation to their child's welfare or educational progress.

Banning a parent from the school premises should not put their child/children at risk. The Headteacher will ensure that safe and effective arrangements are in place for delivery and collection of children to and from school.

The school will if necessary contact the Diocesan/LA legal departments to receive further guidance. (See above paragraph 5 section f).

## **7. Review**

The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once in a school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this guidance.