

St Mary's Catholic High School

Guidelines for use of e-mail



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The proliferation of email traffic over the last few years has allowed us to communicate more efficiently and effectively. We are entering an even greater period of email use as students and parents now also have the ability to benefit from this form of communication. In order to ensure that all parties (staff, students and parents) continue to find email use effective and not too burdensome, we ask that the guidelines listed below are adhered to.

Etiquette

- Try to decide if you are sending an email for the purposes of information giving, or for some other reason. Information giving is definitely the best use of email - but be careful with any other purpose, particularly any that involves emotion!
- Avoid using email for complaining or venting – this is not an appropriate use of the medium. Don't use email as an excuse to avoid personal contact. A simple 'rule of thumb' is to ask yourself if you would say what you have written directly to the person.
- Humour can also be easily misinterpreted, especially sarcasm. Try to avoid it unless you know the recipient very well.

- Try to keep the email as a whole brief, and to include a clear subject line as a header so people can identify swiftly whether or not it is relevant to them.
 - Double check everything you write, as errors can be harder to spot at certain times of the day, when you are rushing, or when you are occupied by other things.
 - Check to whom you are sending the email before sending it. Bear in mind that the 'Reply to all' option should only be selected if you really need everyone on the distribution list to see your reply. This should be used sparingly.
 - Please also think carefully before using the CC option. Only use it when necessary and in the understanding that it does not require a direct response but is for background information only.
 - If you are writing about more than one subject, do so in separate emails to avoid confusion. Messages are more easily missed if embedded in a long, wide-ranging missive. The best approach is to re-read your email to check for clarity before you send it.
 - Please make it clear if you require specific action in response to your email.
 - If the email you are sending requires specific action you should ensure that it is sent a minimum of 24 hours* (or 48 hours* where substantive action is needed) in advance of any deadline so that the recipient(s) are given sufficient notice.
- *Excludes weekends*
- Please note that defamatory or abusive emails should not be responded to. The receipt of such emails should be reported to your line manager.

Staff email

To staff:

Why? Think carefully about whether you actually need to send that email, sometimes we are just shifting work from ourselves to others. Can the answer be found through some other means? Would waiting until you can speak in person actually be more effective?

As a sender:

When? If possible avoid sending any emails after 7pm on weekdays and 5pm at the weekend. Many of us choose to work beyond these times but it is very easy to save the email in draft form. (Just click 'cancel' and you will be given the option to 'save to draft'.) You can then send your drafts the next day.

Who? Avoid sending emails to staff members to whom it is not relevant. It is easy to set up email groups if you regularly send emails to specific groups of staff. Please try not to use the 'All Staff' email unless it is absolutely necessary - the noticeboard in the staffroom or staff briefing might be more appropriate.

As a receiver:

Sometimes emails arrive at late times or over a weekend. We all use different times. Except for unusual circumstances (exchange of vital pupil information, OfSTED visit the next day etc.) you are not obliged to answer emails outside of reasonable



working hours. If you choose not to answer (you may not have even received it!) it will not be frowned upon as lazy or careless.

Pupils

Why? Email is a great way to send resources to pupils and to collect work from them. Ensure that you are clear with your pupils about what constitutes appropriate email use, for example that formal language and protocols are adhered to. Avoid responding to straightforward pupil requests. It is important that pupils still come and speak to us if they have an issue and don't just fill up staff inboxes with simple questions.

When? Be careful not to email pupils outside the school day or when they are engaged in someone else's lesson. Again, this can be avoided by saving emails to draft and sending them when you have the pupils with you, before school or at lunch time. This will avoid disturbing other teachers' lessons. It is possible to instruct pupils to go to general settings and toggle across the 'do not disturb' button in lessons. This will help pupils to stay focused if emails are accidentally sent to them at the wrong times.

Staff should ensure that they use pupils' school email addresses **ONLY**. The use of personal addresses would leave staff members extremely vulnerable. Therefore, for the protection of members of staff, pupils' personal email addresses **MUST NOT** be used.



Parents

It is important that, in most cases, staff do not email parents directly. The exception to this would be an occasion upon which parents require purely factual information. At such times, a factual email would be acceptable.

If a parent does send you an email, please ensure that you forward it either to your Curriculum Leader or Head of Year, who will respond accordingly. The Curriculum Leader or Head of Year should acknowledge receipt of the email immediately, and aim to respond fully to parental enquiries by phone or email within 48 hours (excluding weekends). Full contact details should be included so that parents know with whom they are communicating - particularly if out of normal school hours.

As far as possible, email communication with parents should be positive. If there is any sensitive information to share, communication should be undertaken either by phone or, preferably, face to face via a meeting organised specifically to address concerns.

Clearly, in addition to parents, members of staff often have cause to email a wide range of recipients. It must be ensured that all emails intended for external recipients are appropriately formal and professional in their content and tone.

Pupil to staff email

Pupils should make sure that they use the school email addresses of staff members at all times, and NEVER their personal ones. They should also consider whether it is really necessary to be contacting staff in this way - would it be more appropriate to see them face-to-face at the next opportunity? Email should not be used as an excuse by pupils to avoid speaking to their teachers. The best use of email is for simple, factual information - emailing staff is a privilege not to be abused, and should be treated as such. Pupils should ensure that basic rules of politeness are maintained.

Pupils must ensure that they include their name and form group on all communication. The easiest way to do this is to ensure that they have a clear 'signature' at the base of the email.

Parent to staff email

When a concern or query arises, parents should communicate with the Curriculum Leader or Head of Year in the first instance either by telephone through the school office, or by using the 'Contact Us' page on the school website.

Parents are requested not to email members of staff directly even if their email addresses are known. If parents are unsure as to how to direct a website message, they should contact the main office for assistance. Parents should include their child's name and form in the message, as well as the phone number upon which they wish to be contacted.

We request that parents refer all school-related matters back to the school, and do not approach other pupils or contact other parents directly about such issues. We are interested in working with parents to create solutions. Contacting other pupils or parents can complicate and even exacerbate problems, whereas referring a concern immediately to school will expedite a resolution. If parents have a complaint to make, they should contact the appropriate Curriculum Leader or Head of Department to discuss the best way in which to do this. The parent may be asked to put his or her concerns in writing. If so, an email to the appropriate person would be an efficient way in which to do this.



Due to the difficulties of arranging interviews with teachers during the timetabled teaching day, parents are requested to seek a mutually convenient meeting time with the staff member involved to discuss concerns. It is recommended that parents suggest two or three possible times at which they can be available and members of staff will reply at their earliest convenience.