



## **Communications Policy**

### **Introductory Statement**

This policy was developed by the staff of St Mary's National School, the Board of Management and the Parents' Association in the school year 2024.

Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents and staff on parent/staff meetings and parent/staff communication in St. Mary's. The family and home are central to the social and intellectual development of the child and the nurturing of good, moral values. The school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other so that the child's education can be effective. All the stakeholders aim to work for the benefit of the child and their learning.

### **Parents are encouraged to:**

- Develop close links with the school
- Participate in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in the school
- Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their children
- Share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinctive character
- Become actively involved in the school/parent association
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.

### **Structures in place to facilitate open communication & consultation with parents**

- Two meeting for parents of incoming Junior Infants – April and mid June
- Formal Parent/Teacher meetings one-to-one in November
- Parents meet with teachers to discuss school support plans three times during the year.
- Parents receive school report of each pupil at the end of each school year
- Consultation throughout the year
- Regular communication is through the Eolas app and email through Databiz
- Written communication
- Regular updates on our website. [www.stmarysfairview.ie](http://www.stmarysfairview.ie)
- Through the Parents' Association, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of all school policies. Decisions taken to change current policies and

procedures or to introduce new ones will be made known to all parents in written format via the school newsletter

- Regular newsletters keep parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and school concerns
- Homework is emailed to parents. Children in senior classes receive homework through Google Classroom.
- Parents are invited to events throughout the year e.g. Sports Day, Summer Fairs, school masses and school concerts
- Involvement of parents in the 'Grow in Love Programme' section for parents, RSE, Stay Safe Programmes
- Participating in HSCL numeracy/literacy programmes every year.
- Parenting courses are provided for the parents depending on the need and in consultation with the parents.
- Home visits by the HSCL coordinator to parents of children who have enrolled in junior infants.

Parents of Infants are also welcome to make an appointment any time throughout the year. Infant teachers will be available between 1:40 and 2:30 for this when necessary.

If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she can contact the school secretary to arrange a suitable time.

**It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her education** In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by staff.

### **Parent/Teacher Meetings**

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings will be held once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04). Where possible, they will be held in the first term, towards the end of November for all classes. They will be initiated by the school staff and details regarding time, etc. will be worked out by the class teacher, in consultation with parents. The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned.

- All communication sent from the school will be sent to the child's home address as given on the enrolment form, unless otherwise requested by parents
- In the case of separated parents, requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings.

Meetings may take place in classrooms, support rooms or communally in the PE Hall. The teachers use prepared guidelines for the meetings and collaborate in advance about the progress of individual children. A short written record of the meeting is maintained by each teacher.

The purpose of the Parent/Teacher meeting is:

- To establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To help teachers/parents get to know the children better as individuals
- To help children realise that home and school are working together.
- To meet demands for accountability
- To share with the parent the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
- To review with the parent the child's experience of schooling
- To learn more about the child from the parent's perspective
- To learn more about parental opinions on what the school is doing
- To identify areas of tension and disagreement

- To identify ways in which parents can help their children
- To negotiate jointly decisions about the child's education
- To inform the parents of standardised test results according to school policy.

### **Reporting to parents**

Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development. Schools can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children in this way by sharing meaningful information with parents about the progress that children are achieving in the education system. This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that staffs use, such as conversations with the learner, data-collection and documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, examination of students' own self-assessment data, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment tasks and tests, and examples of students' work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich staffs knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information about the students' learning at home.

### **Report card templates**

Schools should help parents to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them, especially information from any standardised tests. The NCCA has provided a range of standard report templates to assist schools in reporting information about the progress of primary pupils to parents, including information from standardised tests. The NCCA report card templates were developed through a process of consultation with schools and parents can take account of research commissioned by the NCCA.

The report cards provide for reporting in four key areas:

- The child's learning and achievement across the curriculum
- The child's learning dispositions
- The child's social and personal development
- Ways in which parents can support their child's learning

All primary schools **must** use one of the report card templates (available at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)) for reporting to parents on students' progress and achievement at school with effect from the date of this circular.

## **Special Education Needs**

### **Formal Meetings- Continuum of Support**

Formal timetabled parent/staff meetings on the subject of the **School Support Plan** will take place in September/October and February. However, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child, they may do so by prior appointment.

### **Informal Parent/Staff Meetings**

1. The School encourages communication between parents and staff.
2. Meetings with the class teacher at the class door to discuss a child's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds:
  1. Staff cannot adequately supervise his/her class while at the same time speaking to a parent
  2. It is difficult to be discreet when so many children are standing close by
  3. It can be embarrassing for a child when his/her parent is talking to staff at a classroom door.

If parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, sports gear etc, this can be done through the secretary's office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

Parents are strongly discouraged from taking pupils out of school during term time in order to

facilitate family holidays.

### **Complaints Procedure**

Complaints are infrequent but the school would wish that these would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. The following is the agreed complaints procedure by CPSMA, An Fóras Pat rúnacha, NABMSE and INTO to be followed in primary schools from January 2024.

### **Discussion**

- 1.1 Parent/guardian meets teacher A parent/legal guardian who wishes to make a complaint in respect of their own child, should, seek an appointment with the teacher concerned with a view to resolving the complaint. Further meetings with the teacher can be convened as appropriate
- 1.2 Parent/guardian meets Principal Where the parent/legal guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the teacher, they should seek an appointment with the Principal with a view to resolving the complaint. Further meetings can be convened by the Principal as appropriate.
- 1.3 Parent/guardian meets Chairperson Where the complaint remains unresolved, the parent/legal guardian should seek an appointment with the Chairperson of the Board of Management with a view to resolving the complaint. Further meetings can be convened by the Chairperson as appropriate.
- 1.4 Complaint resolved. The complaint may be resolved during this stage.

### **Written**

- 2.1 Written complaint sent to Chairperson If the complaint has not been resolved at stage 1, the parent/ legal guardian who wishes to pursue the matter further should submit the complaint in writing to the Chairperson of the Board of Management. This commences stage 2.
- 2.2 Chairperson provides a copy to the teacher The Chairperson should provide a copy of the written complaint to the teacher against whom the complaint has been made, without delay.
- 2.3 Chairperson convenes meeting(s) The Chairperson should seek to resolve the complaint between the teacher and the parent/ legal guardian within 10 school days of the commencement of stage 2.1. This may require one or more meetings to be convened by the Chairperson with the teacher/ parent/legal guardian and other school personnel as deemed appropriate by the Chairperson.
- 2.4 Complaint resolved. The complaint may be resolved at this stage.

### **Board of Management**

- 3.1 Chairperson makes a formal report to the Board If the complaint remains unresolved following stage 2 and the parent/ legal guardian wishes to pursue the matter, they should inform the Chairperson in writing of this fact. The Chairperson should make a formal report to the Board of Management within 10 days of receipt of this written statement. At this meeting, the Board can decide to proceed to either stage 3.2 or 3.3.
- 3.2 Complaint concluded Where the Board considers the complaint, the process may be concluded at this stage, if the board considers that: a) The complaint is frivolous/vexatious; b) The complaint has already been investigated by the board; c) The complaint is more appropriately dealt with through a more relevant DE circular, or; d) where recourse to law has been initiated. Where the Board determines the complaint is concluded at this stage, the parent/legal guardian should be so informed within five days of the Board meeting.
- 3.3 Proceed to a hearing Where the Board decides to proceed to a hearing, it should proceed as follows: a) the teacher should be informed that the complaint is proceeding to a full hearing and the Chairperson must ensure the teacher has been supplied with all documents which are being considered by the Board. b) the Board should arrange a meeting with the parent/legal guardian if it considers such to be required. The parent/ legal guardian is entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting. c) the teacher should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of their case to the Board. The teacher is entitled to be represented by a friend or a union representative, who may be accompanied for the purpose of assistance and note taking. d) the teacher should be requested to supply a written statement to the board as the employer in response

to the complaint. This written statement will be confidential to the employer and will not be shared with any third party. e) the meeting of the Board of Management referred to in 3(b), (c) and (d) will take place within 10 days of the meeting referred to in 3.1. in so far as possible.

#### **Decision**

4.1 Written decision from Chairperson The Board will consider the complaint and the response provided and will adjudicate on the matter. The Chairperson should convey the decision of the Board in writing to the teacher and the parent/legal guardian(s) within five days of the meeting held at stage 3.3.

4.2 Complaint concluded The decision of the Board shall be final.

#### **Behaviour of all Stakeholders in the School**

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school. This not only extends to the children but to all of the stakeholders e.g. the staff, parents and the wider community. Anyone entering our building should feel safe to do so. While the behaviour of children in our school is of vital importance, adults in the school community also have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour models the types of behaviour expected of children.

It is important that all stakeholders are responsible for their own behaviours in the school.

Examples include:

- All stakeholders will treat each other with the utmost respect at all times.
- All stakeholders are expected to speak to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones are not acceptable. It is acknowledged that teachers have to raise their voices from time to time to gain children's attention.
- If a stakeholder displays anger or aggression to another member of the school community, they may be asked to remove themselves from the building. In certain cases, the Gardaí must be called
- Members of staff should not be asked to speak about another parent's child. The staff of the school will respect every child's right to privacy so it is asked that parents respect other children's rights to privacy. Equally parents are asked not to make comments about teachers or openly discuss issues in public areas where a teacher's right to privacy may be violated.
- When stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the time of meetings should be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Times of meetings should be agreed beforehand and these should be respected
- If a parent needs to have a discussion or meeting, an appointment should be made at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved. Class time from 8:50am to 2:30pm should not be interrupted.

#### **Safety, Health and Welfare at Work**

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for Boards of Management and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

It is recognised that school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

In this respect, all staff should be aware of **DES Circular 40/97** which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours. A copy of this circular can be found in the school's Health and Safety folder.

## **Staff Communication**

This document is being developed as part of our wider Communications policy. The staff of St. Mary's recognises the importance of positive working relations in the school environment. The following **key practices** help determine the climate and culture in our school and each teacher is asked to play their role in upholding the promotion of a healthy working environment for all.

- **Internal Communication**

Regular, transparent, open and direct communication is encouraged.

There are regular staff meetings (i.e. at least one per term) where staff are fully aware of the agenda in advance and are given an opportunity to submit items for discussion. There is an aim for clarity about the issues discussed, decisions are taken and the agreed follow-up actions are outlined. At the following staff meeting, minutes are adopted and a report is given on follow up actions if necessary.

- **Process of Decision Making**

In some instances decision making is relatively automatic, particularly if governed by clearly established rules and regulations. In other cases the staff is called upon to make decisions on the basis of consultation and consensus within the school community. This is particularly the case in drafting school policies, eg discipline, home/school links, RSE, etc.

The processes of decision making gives due regard to the role of the principal teacher and the board of management in accordance with DES Circular 16/73 and relevant legislation. In order to foster collaborative decision making, all members of staff should be willing to make constructive contributions, to listen and respect each others viewpoints, to be prepared to be flexible and to compromise if necessary and to uphold the majority decision. Those chairing staff meetings should encourage such open and constructive discussions.

- **Effective School Policies and Procedures**

All staff are aware of and have access to copies of school policies and procedures covering the curricular and administrative areas.

Administrative policies cover such areas as dealing with parental complaints (complaints procedure), dealing with parents (home/school links), disciplining pupils, bullying among pupils, supervision, dealing with child protection issue etc.

These policies and procedures are approved and adopted by the school's board of management. The staff recognises that consistency and fairness are paramount in all of our dealings with students, parents and work colleagues; and the staff will endeavour to present a whole school approach to areas such as these. Staff meetings will be used to regularly review best practice.

- **Mutual Respect**

Each member of staff performs a different role in the school and each is fully entitled to be treated with professional respect and with dignity.

- **A Sense of Fairness**

Individual staff members are aware of the importance of demonstrating a sense of fair play, tolerance and goodwill.



- **Unacceptable Behaviour**

There are certain behaviours which are not acceptable among staff members and which create negative staff relations. Such behaviours include, workplace bullying, sexual harassment, rudeness, aggressiveness, offensive language, threatening or intimidating behaviour, victimisation and harassment. Each member of staff should respect the integrity and dignity of his/her colleagues. The Board of Management recognises that all employees have the right to a safe and healthy work environment and is fully committed to ensuring that all employees are able to enjoy that right.

- **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict generally arises, where two or more people disagree over issues of organisational substance and/or experience some antagonism towards each other. In so far as the school as a workplace is concerned, it is important to recognise that: a) over a period of time conflict is inevitable; and b) that it is critical to resolve conflict at the earliest opportunity and before it is allowed to fester. In the vast majority of cases, teachers deploy conflict resolution skills, informally, effectively and constructively, such as:

- listening;
- identifying the source of conflict;
- addressing the issue early and in a constructive manner;
- putting forward options for resolution which may include reaching compromises;
- acknowledging if errors have been made and likewise accepting that errors may have been made by another party or that misunderstandings may have occurred;
- accepting solutions whether as a compromise or otherwise;
- closing the matter; and
- moving on.

Most areas of disagreement\conflict are dealt with informally by teachers themselves. Occasionally the principal may be asked to intervene between two parties, seek to mediate and resolve a staff relations difficulty. Where difficulties cannot be resolved there are agreed procedures for staffs and Boards of Management to follow outlined in the document 'Working Together- Procedures and Policies for Positive Staff Relations' (INTO)

This policy has been made available to school personnel, is readily accessible to parents and pupils on request, and has been provided to the Parents' Association. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department and the patron if requested.

This policy and its implementation will be reviewed by the staff and Board regularly.

Signed: Patricia Hughes  
Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 10/4/2024