



Mount Hawthorn Education Support Centre

Communication Policy

2017-2019

Introduction

At Mount Hawthorn Education Support Centre we believe that good communication at every level is essential to the running of the School. Communication takes on many forms,

- with parents, carers and family
- with students
- with staff
- with colleagues in other schools
- in the wider community

It is fundamental to the success of any organisation.

It is also critical in engaging our staff in the strategic direction of the School. This Policy outlines the responsibilities of all staff in maintaining good communication practice, the main communication channels available to staff and how and when they might be used to be effective.

Principles

The guiding principles of this Policy are:

- To ensure staff are fully informed of all relevant school activity, to enable them to be as effective as possible in their role and to support the strategic direction of the School
- To ensure all staff are aware of their responsibility for maintaining good communication practice
- To provide easy access to essential, useful and engaging information for staff
- To maintain good and appropriate communication with the Department of Education Central and Regional Offices, parents, staff from other schools, therapists and the wider community
- To provide effective methods of communicating during a serious incident

Within the School

This section details the responsibilities of all staff in communicating effectively within the School:

Administration

- To ensure information is made available to all staff in a timely manner and via appropriate channels
- To ensure teachers have the relevant information available to communicate with their education assistants effectively
- To maintain open channels of two-way communication and to listen to feedback and comment from all staff

- To communicate respectfully with potential and current parents, visiting therapists and the wider community

Teachers

- To communicate regularly with their education assistant teams, preferably face to face, to ensure information is available and understood within the context of the classroom and working environment and between staff on each day
- To ensure they and their education assistants are maintaining good communication practice in accordance with this Policy
- To maintain open channels of two-way communication, to listen to feedback and comment and to keep administration informed
- To ensure there is good communication between teachers-in-charge of classes and their DOTT teachers
- To ensure there is good communication between teachers-in-charge of classes and any relief teachers who may come in
- To communicate respectfully with potential and current parents, visiting therapists and the wider community

Education Assistants

- To ensure that education assistants are fully informed by teachers about any information that they might need for their classes
- To ensure that education assistants communicate with one another about students' needs
- To ensure that education assistants are aware of timetabling and any changes in rosters, day to day
- To ensure that education assistants are aware of what communication should take place between themselves and parents

All staff

- To ensure that all staff are fully aware of the School's strategic direction
- To ensure they are informed and have access to information in order to be as effective as possible in their role and to support the strategic direction of the School
- To ensure they are maintaining good communication practice in accordance with this Policy
- To use open channels of two-way communication to keep the Principal or Registrar and colleagues informed
- To feel confident that communicating with any colleagues in the School will be acknowledged and that their views will be well received

Committees and Staff Meetings

- To ensure all staff are informed about staff meetings in a timely manner via email or noticeboards

- To ensure minutes are made available online or on paper in a timely manner via the all-staff emails or pigeon holes
- To ensure all staff are informed about any departmental communications and professional learning opportunities via email or on noticeboards
- To ensure all staff are informed about any daily changes to:
 - staffing
 - timetables
 - rosters
 - student information

Categories of information

Different pieces of information will require different channels of communication and will be the responsibility of different people to disseminate. Here are the main categories of message within the School:

School management and strategic direction

This includes information from the Principal, and School Board regarding the overall management of the School and its strategic direction

- updates on regular activities or Finance Committee, School Board, School Board Subcommittee, Staff Meeting decisions
- new information and activities that need to be communicated to staff in a timely and appropriate manner

Day-to-day work related information

This is the information staff members require to carry out their work day-to-day. It is the responsibility of individuals and their colleagues to communicate this information effectively.

School Information

This is information that all staff or large groups of staff will benefit from and can be generated by any function within the School. Such information may be news items, forthcoming events, useful advice or more formal notices and is the responsibility of the administration (Principal or Registrar) to disseminate to all staff.

Serious incidents

The Emergency and Critical Incident Plan details what constitutes a serious incident. During a serious incident, the Principal (or Teacher who has been given Duty of Care in the absence of the Principal) and Registrar will be responsible for all communication and will advise relevant staff should assistance in communicating be required. Plans are in place for all effective channels of communication to be utilised where necessary

Communication channels

Here is a summary of the communication channels available to staff when communicating information.

Face-to-face communication

According to current research, face to face communication is by far the most effective method of staff communication. Staff at Mount Hawthorn ESC should use primarily face-to-face communication for individual communication whenever possible with:

- Principal
- Manager Corporate Services
- Teachers
- Education Assistants
- Parents/Carers
- Staff at other schools such as Mount Hawthorn Primary School
- Visiting Therapists
- School Psychologists
- Community

Teachers should ensure there are regular opportunities for face-to-face discussion with education assistants and their colleagues. Communicating in person with colleagues is considered to be the most beneficial method of ensuring information and knowledge are shared. The conversational nature allows for greater understanding of the context of the message and encourages reflection, questioning and feedback. Here are some instances of face-to-face communication within the School:

Prescribed communication

There are some school policies and processes where face-to-face communication is prescribed – for example the Performance Review process requires a one-to-one discussion, as does the Return to Work Policy and many others.

Strategic communication

In some circumstances, the Administration will require information to be disseminated through the School via teachers as quickly as possible and, as far as possible, via face to-face meetings where understanding of the information can be assured and feedback can be gathered and discussed. It is vital that all staff receive this information within a given timescale and that all staff understand the intent and the outcomes of the information and are given an opportunity to discuss, comment and provide feedback. It is important that provision is made for staff who are not working on the day of the primary communication so that they are also kept informed at all times.

Communication between School Staff and Parents

Communication between teachers and parents is available at any time by appointment. Parents should not assume that the teacher is always available for an unplanned meeting at the start or end of the day.

Communication between education assistants and parents should be kept to a minimum and education assistants should encourage parents to make appointments to talk to teachers. Topics which can be briefly discussed by EAs and parents would include any general housekeeping such as whether they ate their lunch that day or used the toilet appropriately. Any more detailed information such as student progress in behaviour management, emotional regulation or curriculum knowledge should on all occasions be referred to the teacher.

All other face-to-face communication

In all other circumstances as part of the working environment, staff are encouraged as often as possible to meet with colleagues or use the telephone to discuss issues verbally, rather than relying on email or printed material.

Whilst it is important to manage the amount of time spent in meetings, well-managed meetings or discussions are an effective and efficient way of sharing knowledge, solving problems and ensuring common understanding and appreciation of issues.

Research suggests that face-to-face communication engenders greater trust and understanding than any other communication method. It is important therefore, that staff have opportunities for one-to-one and group meetings with colleagues and their line managers on a regular basis and that dialogue in those meetings is two-way.

Email

Email is one of the most common methods of communicating, however it is often considered to be overused and inappropriate. Staff are reminded that general email communication remains the subject of the Department of Education Email Policy, Computer Use Regulations and the Code of Conduct, which provide details of appropriate use, email management, security and confidentiality.

All-staff email bulletins are sent by the Principal or Manager Corporate Services as needed. These may contain

- general information about the running of the school
- information that is being passed on from the Department and is relevant to staff
- professional learning opportunities
- advertising for equipment, resources, ideas, excursions that may be of benefit to students

Notice boards

There are notice boards in the school in various places displaying information for various sets and subsets of staff:

- in the kitchen
- in the Conference Room
- in the classrooms

Administration (Principal and Manager Corporate Services) or Teachers who place notices on notice boards should ensure that information is advertised in a timely manner and, importantly, is removed when out of date.

Social media and external websites

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and any other websites external to the Department of Education sites are not to be used as channels with which to communicate with and between staff about any school information at all.

Communicating with staff who have no access to internet or email

There may be members of staff who do not have regular access to an internet connection such as via an iPad, PC or smart phone to check their email accounts, in which case they may be missing important information. If this is the case, they should inform the Principal or Manager Corporate Services of this. It is the responsibility of the Principal and Manager Corporate Services to ensure that information is passed to these staff in a timely manner, either verbally or in print. All staff emails will be kept to a brief and concise format to allow them to be easily read in print.

Communicating change

Programmes of change within the School will be more widely understood and accepted if staff are aware of the programme as early as possible. An understanding of the objectives and an involvement in the process will help staff to accept and embrace change. Internal communication with all staff needs to be a consideration from the beginning of major projects within the School.

Professionalism in communication

In all communications staff are reminded of their responsibility to serve the interests of the School and ensure appropriate content at all times. Communication is undertaken on behalf of the School, therefore is subject to the Department's Code of Conduct, the principles being respect and dignity in all correspondence.

Staff should ensure appropriate response times are adhered to when communicating, particularly via email. During absence or when staff will not be able to respond in a

reasonable time, staff should provide an autoreply to their emails with details of an alternative contact.