

St. Columba's College Stranorlar



Communications Policy

December 2020

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Rationale

This is a whole school policy for students and staff in the school. It deals with communication within the school and between the school and our partners. To contribute to ensuring inclusivity and co-operation this policy emphasises maintaining and improving the current channels of communication among the users of the school and with the partners in education. The goal of this policy is to contribute to effective communication within the school, with the Board of Management, with parents and with the local community, so as to maintain a good working, social and personal environment. This will promote efficiency and contribute to achieving the objectives of the school.

Relationship to School's Mission Statement

In the light of our Mission Statement this policy aims to establish and maintain effective procedures for communication: which will foster an atmosphere which promotes self-esteem, honesty, justice and respect which will create a safe, healthy learning environment that nurtures self-discipline and encourages our pupils to take responsibility for their own learning which will promote co-operation, team-work and commitment within the school and community so that all are unified as partners in learning.

Objectives of Policy

In our school we strive to maintain clear and effective communications with all parents and the wider community. Effective communications enable us to share our aims and values, through keeping parents and the wider community well informed about school life. This reinforces the important role that parents and members of the community play in supporting the school. All communications in St Columba's College should:

- keep staff, pupils, parents, SNAs, Board of Management members, the Department of Education and other interested parties well informed
- be open, honest, ethical and professional,
- use jargon-free, plain language which aims to be understood by all
- use the method of communication most effective and appropriate to the context, message and audience, (see list below)
- take account of all relevant legislation and school policies
- be compatible with our core values as reflected in our Mission Statement.

Means of communication

This policy encourages the use of the most effective communications mechanisms, depending on context, while ensuring the rights of staff, students and parents.

- The school encourages openness in internal communication and the sharing of relevant and appropriate information through a variety of mechanisms. (see Appendix 1 for the range of communications mechanisms used in the school)
- The school is committed to consultation with staff and students over school matters, in a way that is consistent with effective management.
- The staff recognises the importance of face-to-face communication, in that it can frequently be more effective than written communication
- The school seeks constantly to improve communication and will consult staff and students to seek their views.
- All internal communication regarding sensitive information should be done using the person's initials rather than their full name for data protection purposes.
- As far as possible, staff and/or students are informed of important school issues at the earliest possibility.

Personal and confidential information

Personal data is protected in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018. The privacy of personal communications is preserved in accordance with the Human Rights Act. Some categories and items of information regarding both staff and students need to be kept confidential. All staff are bound to take care with the handling and transmission of confidential information, with regard to how and to whom the information is transmitted. Internal communications using electronic media must be conducted under the Acceptable Usage Policy of the College as well as with reference to the Data Protection Policy of St. Columba's College.

Communication through Online Platforms

Google Classroom and Email

Google Classroom is a free web service, developed by Google for schools which allows online teaching to take place. Students will use their Google Classroom account as part of Google Suite – a set of educational tools including Gmail, Docs and Calendar in order to communicate with their teachers, access learning material and complete assignments. St. Columba's College is a strong advocator of online learning platforms and their enhancement and benefit to students' learning, therefore, the following should be adhered to in any communication online between teachers and students:

- Online communication between a teacher and a group of students must be done through the teacher's school email address or on the class stream on Google Classroom

- Where an individual student contacts a teacher through their email, a one off query may be answered but prolonged individual communication with a student **is not advised**.
- All correspondence between staff and students should take place within the school week. Some work may have to be posted on Google Classroom outside of the school day. However, some work may be posted on the platform outside school hours but this should be limited from 8am to 8pm.
- In relation to communication on an online platform, the school Acceptable Usage Policy will be enforced.
- Both students and parents have access to Google Classroom codes, however, these codes should not be shared with anyone else, nor should the learning materials given to them by the teacher.
- Students will be expected to alert their teacher over any concerns for safety and security on any online learning platforms.

Facebook, Twitter and School Website

The St. Columba's College website, as well as the school's Facebook and Twitter pages are updated regularly. These are important methods of communicating with the wider community in recognising the accomplishments of all students. All of these online platforms aim to:

- Celebrate and affirm the achievements of our students
- Promote achievement and success in all aspects of school life
- Promote school activities
- Inform parents/guardians of events scheduled for the week ahead.

It is important to note that the College will not respond to any queries made via the school Facebook or Twitter pages, these must be done through the various methods indicated below. The school also has the right to moderate the page and those following. Any comments which are defamatory or abusive will be removed as will the account from which they came.

Communication Levels:

- 1. Phone** – Those wishing to contact St. Columba's College for any queries or to arrange a meeting with a member of staff can do so by telephone on: 074-9131246.
- 2. Email** – The College email address is admin@stcolumbasstranorlar.ie and any queries or requests sent to this address will be forwarded to the relevant member of staff.
- 3. School Website** – The school website can be found at: stcolumbascollege.ie where a variety of news, information and school policies can be found.
- 4. VSware** – The school's VSware can be accessed by parents whereby they are able to obtain information on their child's timetable, personal details, attendance record and their end of term reports. (Of course, if it is not possible to access the internet, end of

term reports can be posted by request.) This platform endeavors to create open and transparent communication between both school and home. A link to the school's VShare can also be found on the school website.

Policy in relation to some significant communication channels

Teacher-Teacher

- Verbal one to one - as appropriate
- Staff briefing - urgent information which needs to be communicated to staff quickly, but where white-board is considered unsuitable and a staff meeting is not necessary
- Staff meeting- a short meeting for information purposes.
- In Staff-room – whiteboard and main notice board- for day to day information for teachers. Dedicated notice boards for ongoing information re unions, JCT, TY, School Development Planning, etc - calendar - pigeon holes -for post,circulars, requested information, current policies and procedures, staff list, information about the school where necessary.
- College text system (Personal, but also to inform staff re closures and of notices to be sent to parents, obituaries, in relation to emails sent etc...)
- Induction of new staff members will be done as per the Droichead programme. All current school policies will be given to them during this programme also. They will be introduced to as many staff members as possible, for example at a break-time or a meeting.
- Communication from staff to care-taker or cleaners, if it involves a request for work to be done, should normally be done through the school maintenance and repairs log book located in Ann Marie's office.
- Information regarding the starting date of a new student will be at a staff briefing where possible (formal/informal) at the beginning of the year, although it would be a courtesy if the new pupil were introduced to the class tutor on the first day by the Year Head. Where this is not possible, teachers will be informed of the new student by email.
- If a teacher is taking a group of students out of the school in addition to informing parents, they must inform school management by putting the event into the activities book while also placing a list of students involved on the notice board in the staff-room. The Deputy Principal will update the organised event on the online calendar as well as the school Facebook page on a Sunday evening with a list of events for the week ahead.
- If a teacher is removing a student or a group of students from class, he/she will endeavour to inform any teacher affected in advance, except in exceptional circumstances.
- If a student is late to class because he/she is speaking to a member of staff, this member should write a brief note in the journal or accompany the student to the next class in person.

- Referral of a student to the student support team will be done through a consultation sheet located at the back of the staffroom.
- When reporting health and safety concerns, this may be done through the school maintenance and repairs log book.
- An accident or an incident should be reported as soon as possible to the Principal/Deputy principals and an accident report form filled in by the teacher and signed by the student involved.
- Staff wishing to have a meeting with the principal may request this verbally, or by a message through the secretary.
- If a student is suspended, an email will be sent by the Deputy Principal/Year Head to the relevant teachers indicating the dates of absence. Likewise, if a student is absent due to illness where known to the school, this will also be communicated to the relevant teachers.

Teacher - Student

The quality of the relationship between teachers and students is very important in supporting and promoting learning in the school. This relationship is best when based on mutual respect. The student contract found in the journal is the primary document articulating how to establish and maintain good communications and relationship between students and staff. To assist in creating and maintaining a safe and comfortable environment for learning, students are required to treat all school staff and students with due respect.

Teacher – Parent/Guardian

Maintaining clear communication between teachers and parents/guardians is important in achieving the objective of educating our students to the highest standards. An important aspect of this relationship is the subject teacher, class tutor, or year head reporting the student's progress and behaviour to the parent/guardian. The student's journal is an important channel of communication between the teachers and parents/guardians. Communication may also occur between teachers and parents/guardians using other means for example, a phone call, letter etc... as is considered necessary at the time. Any telephone correspondence with parents must be made during the school day and during school time. Likewise, all phone calls to parents must be made from a landline in the school building.

Teachers also report to parents in the end of term reports, at parent teacher meetings and at other times deemed appropriate.

Meetings occur between teachers and parents/guardians at the request of either party at a time convenient to both parties. Meetings can be for a number of reasons including the resolution of complaints and concerns. Please see website for complaints procedure.

The Parents Council are also actively involved in arranging information evenings for students and throughout the school year information evenings are held for parents on some of the following:

- Career Information for Leaving Certificate students
- Parents Information on JCT and CBAs for 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students
- Subject choice evenings for 3rd year and TY students
- Parent teacher meetings are also held for each year group throughout the school year

Student – Student

Learning good social and interpersonal skills with one's peers is an important part of school life. The school contract outlines the implementation of the policy in relation to this matter. Students are required to treat all students with consideration and respect and to have regard for other people's rights and feelings.

Communication with the Board of Management

The Board of Management meets each month. The Board also includes two teacher representatives. The function of the teaching staff nominees is to:

- Discuss staff issues at the BOM
- Through an agreed report, communicate on matters pertaining to the functioning of the school
- Protect the confidentiality on any issues raised

All communication to the Board must be done through the Secretary of the Board of Management.

Career Guidance

Counsellors play a critical role in communicating with students, staff and external agencies with regard to students' personal well-being and career planning.

- Guidance Counsellors have a responsibility to ensure that all communications of a personal and confidential nature are treated accordingly.
- Communicate with Year Heads, class-tutors and subject teachers with regard to student welfare
- Regular communication with Principal and Deputy Principals
- Meet with student support teams
- Liaise with Programme Co-ordinators – LCVP, LCA and TY.
- Communicate with SPHE Co-ordinator.
- Communicate with Resource and Special Education Needs teachers in relation to students with additional needs.

- Liaise with outside welfare agencies – Social Workers, Family Resource Centre, Jigsaw and CAMHS, Education Welfare Officer and other outside agencies
- Liaise with NEPS/ Make referrals to private Counsellors when necessary.
- Communicate with Parents/Guardians – one-to-one meetings and telephone calls
- Liaise with Employers, Colleges, Training Agencies and Professional Bodies.
- Present to parents at subject choice evening, Leaving Certificate Career Information evening and First Year parents evening

Review

The school will monitor, review on a regular basis, and evaluate the policy and all related work and procedures to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.

This Communications Policy was formally adopted by the Board of Management on 9th December 2020.

Signature: Date:
(Chairperson, St. Columba's Board of Management)

Signature: Date:
(Principal)

Date for Review: December 2022