



Communication Policy (developed in response to the Covid-19 outbreak)

Policy written by Mrs Debbie Shaw

Developed from with 'The Granta School'
Communication Policy

Due for review September 2020, or as required.

Policy Aims

The aim of this policy is to continue and develop the already excellent communication Heltwate School has with our parents and carers during a time of unprecedented national health crisis and uncertainty.

During this time, we recognise that for some of our students, attendance may be in fact inappropriate or unsafe, depending on the stage of national response, and guidance from Health England.

Introduction

Heltwate School always welcomes contact with parents and carers because this fosters mutual understanding and collaborative support and partnership in our student's best interests.

This positive and child centred relationship becomes especially important when school attendance becomes unsafe, especially if this is for a health reason.

When this becomes the case, we want to continue to work together with parents and carers to support a pupil's engagement with learning at home and to provide meaningful activity and social support at a time of potential isolation.

We further want to ensure that parents and carers always have an appropriate and helpful response to their communications no matter what the issue raised.

However, in reality, the professional duties of staff can sometimes make it difficult for them to speak or meet with parents or carers during the school day. For this reason, we offer home/school communication books so that parents and carers are able to raise a concern with staff as soon as they need to do so. In the majority of cases, such written communication will receive a response by home time on the same school day, even if this is in acknowledgement of the contact pending next steps.

Due to their teaching commitments, our teaching staff will typically not be available between 8.30 am and 3.15pm each day unless the whole school is closed to all pupils. This is because even if particular classes close, those working teachers and other staff may be redeployed to cover absent colleagues elsewhere.

It is absolutely vital that we have up to date contact details including email addresses/ phone numbers/ mobile numbers and where possible two emergency contacts for our parents and carers or other trusted close family members, so that they can be contacted in the event of an emergency situation regarding our students.

Principles for response to parents/carers

The following principles will be engaged wherever possible:

- A welcoming response to contact from parents and carers;
- responding as quickly and fully as possible;
- liaising with other colleagues to provide the best and most accurate information whilst maintaining an uncomplicated key contact system
- sharing information openly and transparently as often and as fully as possible with parents and carers outside of specific requests
- Liaising with services such as health and social care to support pupils at home

Our main routes of communication will remain via **Class Dojo** and the **school website** at <https://www.heltwate.co.uk/>

Wherever possible, we would encourage ALL parents and carers to sign up for Class Dojo, and advice, guidance and training on how to use this method of communication will be individually available on request.

However, we will also continue provide hard copies of relevant information for families who we know do not have online devices or who lack confidence in using technology, so that all information is shared equitably and universally across our school community.

Continued effective communication

If school remains open either for reduced or normal hours, the following guidance will apply on a daily basis;

Every effort will be made to respond to messages as soon as possible, but this may prove to be on an occasional basis if school is closed.

Please be patient, we will respond as soon as we can

Telephone Calls

- **Messages:** The majority of telephone calls will be received through the main office. A message will be taken and sent to the relevant person as soon as possible. Staff will normally take details of the caller's name and telephone number and their purpose in calling. The eventual intended recipient of this message will try to respond as soon as is possible but as a maximum by the end of the school day.

The school's telephone number is 01733 262878

- **Urgent calls:** If the school is open, urgent calls will be put through to the most appropriate or first available senior member of staff or a message will be taken and passed on immediately

- **Messages for pupils:** Should a change of arrangements be notified by parents or carers, where appropriate, the student involved will be advised to support their processing needs and thereby hopefully reduce any unnecessary resultant anxiety and uncertainty caused by change of expectations or routine.
- **Busy times:** At these times, and in the case of school closure, calls may be recorded on an answer machine. This is checked regularly and if a message is left, it will be passed on and a response will be personally delivered in due course. Again, we appreciate your patience in such circumstances.
- **Telephone calls made at arranged times:** If teachers have made contact arrangements with parents or carers for them to receive calls at specific times, those teachers will endeavour to ensure that they are available as planned. Should other commitments or events make this impossible, a staff member will take a message and the person concerned will try to call back the same day.

Class Dojo

Heltwate School has now adopted 'Class Dojo' as our main and easiest method of group/community and individual communication with parents and carers. Wherever possible it is extremely important that families are signed up for this application.

This has proved to be a fast, easy and highly effective way to communication important information on a regular basis or as and when required.

Should you require support to access Class Dojo, please call the school office and request help. A member of staff will call you back as soon as possible and talk you through the process.

Letters and emails

- The school will always try to **acknowledge** letters and emails received from parents/carers within five working days during term time. If the school is closed and therefore teaching duties are suspended or interrupted, emails will be acknowledged within 2 working days as a maximum. If the teacher you are attempting to contact is unwell, they will notify the respondent of this by setting an out of hours message, giving an alternative suitable contact email address.

Contact details for parents to use in the first instance are:

Mr Adam Brewster – Head teacher
 Mrs Alison Ashworth – Deputy Head teacher
 Mrs Kim Phillips – Assistant head teacher
 Mr Mike Nelson - School business manager
 Mrs Kerry Cole – Assistant head teacher
 Mr Barry Lesley – Assistant head teacher
 Miss Michelle Bull – Assistant head teacher

- Our postal address is Heltwate School, North Bretton, Peterborough. PE3 8RL
 - Our school telephone number is 01733 262878
 - Central office email is office@heltwate.net
- We will respond to postal letters as soon as is practicable, during 5 working days in normal circumstances and as and when the site is either accessible or inaccessible during school closures.

Wherever possible, if an urgent response is required, email or Class Dojo contact will be by far the most effective and quickest method of communication.

Sharing of activity and work during school closure

Class teachers who are well enough to work will be available in school subject to the restrictions advised in this policy.

Due to the diverse learning and communication needs of our students, class teachers will provide individualised work packs and/or online learning activities suitable to the academic needs of their groups. In the event of a school closure, new resources will come available and developed as required

Class teachers will aim to contact ALL families at least once per week to check on general well-being and discuss any concerns and issues – this is of course dependent on the health of the teacher.

This means you should expect contact via Class Dojo even if you do not specifically request it., and we would respectfully request that you respond accordingly, even if this is to simply say you, your family and our student are safe and well, and that you have no issues.

Complaints

Our Complaints procedure is advertised on the school's website, and this remains applicable when school is open even if individual pupils are not in attendance with us.

- During school closure periods **informal complaints** will be responded to by class teachers in the first instance.
- **Formal complaints** may be subject to amended timeframes depending on the necessary investigations and contacts required and these will be discussed and agreed when the formal and written complaint is first received.

Multi-disciplinary contacts and welfare needs

We hope that parents and carers will continue to feel able to contact us during period of non- attendance and self-isolation and share any concerns they may have.

- We further hope to be able to either help directly and individually with discussion, guidance and ideas or be able to otherwise support by means of signposting to other services who may be able to help.
- We will continue to be involved with family support systems when they are established.
- We will make every reasonable attempt to contact all families for a check in once per week.
- Information sharing of personal data will remain subject to the usual checks and expectations concerning the safeguarding needs of our pupils defined by GDPR - separate policies to explain this further are available on request

Safeguarding

Should you have any concerns regarding your own safety, safety of anyone in your household or any other child or vulnerable young person known to you or in the community then you can:

- **Email the school designated safeguarding team on cp@heltwate.net**

or you can call school on 01733 262878 and ask to speak to a member of the Safeguarding team.

or you can contact social care directly and details can be found at

<https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/healthcare/childrens-social-care>

If you are concerned that there is immediate risk, please dial 999 and request immediate emergency service support.

Helpful additional contacts regarding Safeguarding concerns can be found at:

www.NSPCC.org.uk

www.keep-your-head.com/cyp

www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents
www.womensaid.org.uk
www.cambsdasv.org.uk/website/support_help/84011
www.actionforhappiness.org

School Website

The school seeks to put as much information as possible on our website, more so during times of potential closure and uncertainty.

Parents/carers are encouraged look at the website on a regular basis.

Protocol for Communications

The school undertakes to treat all communications with parents and carers with courtesy and respect and we expect to receive the same in return. Both home and school should endeavour wherever possible to work collaboratively towards identifying and resolving problems quickly, efficiently and effectively.

Where difficulties cannot be resolved, team leaders and/or the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher may become involved. An Education Officer or other agencies such as Governors will be invited to become involved in situations which are particularly complex, and in an effort to move forward productively.

The school continues to reserve the right to take appropriate action if aggressive behaviour from any party occurs on our school premises or towards our staff.

Social Media

The school recognises that social media is increasingly and globally used as a form of quick, easy and effective communication.

- However, staff **will not** communicate with parents or pupils via social networking sites (such as Facebook).
- **Staff must not accept parents and carers as 'friends' on social media sites once a student has newly started attending the school, under any circumstances.** If this is later found to be the case, SLT will challenge the situation accordingly and further disciplinary steps may be taken.

Under the current situation specifically with regards to the current Covid-19 outbreak, the school will continue to consider alternative safe platforms and groups to effectively network families and pupils in the likelihood of prolonged isolation.