



PARENT/ STAFF COMMUNICATION POLICY



Parent/Staff Communication Policy Jonah Special School

Introduction

This policy was developed by the Principal, Teaching staff and Clinical Director of Jonah Special School, in consultation with the Board of Management. Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents, teachers and special needs assistants on parent/teacher meetings and parent/teacher communication in Jonah Special School. The ethos of Jonah Special School is to support individuals with a diagnosis of Autism and Complex Needs and their families to achieve their full potential and to participate in family and community life. The environments of home and school, and consistency between these two settings are central to the development of the child. The school and the family must strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other so that the child's education can be effective.

Parents are encouraged to –

- Develop close links with the school.
- Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their child.
- Share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinctive character.
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.

Structure in Place to Facilitate Open Communication & Consultation with Parents –

- School office hours are between 9.15am and 4.00pm. The school team are contactable by email, landline or school mobile during these times. Communication outside of these times is not facilitated and staff will respond as soon as possible on the next working day.
- IEP meetings with parents are ideally in the first half-term in order to identify shared goals and design Behaviour Support Plans (where necessary). These meetings will be forty-five minutes in duration.
- IEP review meetings will be held in April. These meetings will be forty-five minutes in duration.
- Consultation throughout the year is encouraged and facilitated as much as possible. However, it is dependent on the availability of teachers and staff and mindful of the need for them to be in their respective classrooms. Meetings outside of the IEP will be at the discretion of the Principal and will be allocated thirty minutes in duration.
- Daily communication between school and home is encouraged. The form of this will depend on different factors. As the majority of our students avail of transport, a handover between the bus escort and parent may be possible. The class teacher may follow up with a phone call if necessary. For students that are collected by parents a brief handover will be facilitated by the staff member working with the student on the day.
- Parents and families are invited to school events which may take place throughout the year.



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 students, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by the teachers.

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 staff use, such as conversations with the learner, data-collection and documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, 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 the staffs' knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information regarding the students learning at home.

Parent/Teacher Meetings

An IEP/BSP meeting will take place in October/November, and this will be reviewed in the Easter term. Informal Parent/Teacher meetings may take place at various stages throughout the school year. These Parent/Teacher meetings will be initiated and at the discretion of the Principal or class teacher and details regarding time, etc. will be worked out by them. Meetings will take place in the staff room and a short written record of the meeting will be maintained by the class teacher and if appropriate, Principal or the Clinical Director. These meetings will be thirty minutes in duration.

The Purpose of any Parent/Teacher Meeting Is –

- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school.
- To inform teachers on how children are coping outside school.
- To learn more about parental opinions on what the school is doing.
- To identify and address areas of tension and disagreement.
- To identify ways in which parents can help their children.
- To negotiate joint decisions about the child's education.
- To establish and maintain an ongoing relationship and communication with parents.



Informal Parent/Teacher Meetings

- Communication between parents and the teachers is to be encouraged and facilitated.
- Arranging parent/teacher meetings within the school day while children are in school is difficult. However, parents are welcome to speak to the Principal or teacher(s) at an appointed time by prior arrangement with the Principal or class teacher. The school will do its best to have these meetings in a timely fashion but scheduling is dependent on staffing, supervision requirements, staff availability and school activities.
- They should not exceed thirty minutes as the teacher is out of their respective classroom and to ensure the running of the school day for all students maintains priority.
- For students that do not avail of transport, there will be a brief handover by the staff member working with the students at the beginning and the end of the school day, where pertinent information may be shared.
- For students who avail of respite services, a brief handover will be given to the staff of the service once prior permission has been granted by the parents/legal guardians.
- Prolonged conversations with the class teacher at the class door to discuss a child's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds –
 - a) A teacher cannot adequately supervise his/her class while at the same time speaking to a parent.
 - b) It is difficult to be discreet when so many children are standing close by.
 - c) It can be unsettling for a child when his/her parent(s) are talking to the teacher at a classroom door.

In exceptional circumstances there may be an occasion when a parent needs to speak to a teacher urgently. Sometimes these meetings need to take place without prior notice. The Principal will facilitate such meetings to the best of their ability, making every effort to ensure that the children in the class do not lose out on any of the teaching/learning time. It may not be possible to have all relevant staff present at these times. For this reason, it should only be used in urgent situations.

- 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 as long as guardianship has been established. However, one meeting would be preferable so all parties can discuss and agree on goals. In the case of two meetings, times offered and availability may be more limited to accommodate both parties.



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 are expected to speak to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones are not acceptable. 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.
- All stakeholders will treat our children with the utmost respect while on the premises.
- Staff should not be asked to speak about another parent's child. The staff of the school will respect your child's right to privacy so it is asked that parents respect other children's rights to privacy.
- When stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the time of meetings should be kept to a reasonable length of time. Times of meetings should be agreed beforehand and these should be respected. IEP meetings are kept to 45 minutes and other meetings will be afforded 30 minutes.

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 Board of Managements 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 students, 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.

Complaints Procedure

The following is the agreed complaints procedure to be followed in Primary Schools –

Stage 1

1. A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint should firstly approach the class teacher with a view to resolving the complaint.



2. Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher he/she should approach the Principal with a view to resolving it.
3. If the complaint is still unresolved, the parent/guardian should raise the matter with the Chairperson of the Board of Management with a view to resolving it.

Stage 2

1. If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further, he/she should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the Board of Management.
2. The Chairperson will bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the teacher and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3

1. If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Chairperson should, subject to the authorization of the Board –
 - a. Supply the teacher with a copy of the written complaint.
 - b. Arrange a meeting with the teacher, and where applicable, the Principal with a view to resolving the complaint. Such a meeting should take place within 10 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 4

1. If the complaint is still not resolved, the Chairperson should make a formal report to the Board within 10 days of the meeting.
2. If the Board considers that the complaint is still not substantiated, the teacher and the complainant should be so informed within 3 days of the Board meeting.
3. If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation, the following steps should be followed –
 - a. The teacher should be supplied with copies of any written evidence in support of the complaint.
 - b. He/she should be requested to supply a written response to the complaint to the Board and should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation to the Board and to be accompanied by another person to that meeting.
 - c. The Board may arrange a meeting with the complainant, who may be accompanied by another person to this meeting.

Stage 5

1. Following the Board's investigations, the Chairperson shall convey the decision of the Board in writing to the teacher and the complainant within 5 days of the meeting of the Board. The decision of the Board shall be final.



References

- *DES Circular 40/97.*
- *Health and Safety at Work Act 2005.*

Jonah Special School

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This policy was adopted by the Board of Management of Jonah Special School at its meeting held on:

Ratified by the Jonah Board of Management on: _____

Date

Signed: _____

Principal

Signed: _____

Chairperson, Board of Management

Next Review Period: *December 2025*