Heron Hill Primary School: Communication Statement

Guidance for parents on communicating with school

Introduction

It is our aim to enjoy professional and productive relationships with our parents so that our young people can achieve their potential. Heron Hill is a large primary school and as such we need to have clearly laid out systems and protocols for communicating with parents so that we can respond promptly and consistently. This communication statement articulates how parents and carers should communicate with school and how the school will respond.

Reporting an absence

To report an absence please telephone school at 01539 721276 and leave a message or email admin@heronhill.cumbria.sch.uk. This includes part-day absences.

Information sharing

If there is information relating to a pupil that you would wish staff to know about, the first point of contact is the class teacher; parents should approach the teacher after school, write a note or telephone the office to arrange an appointment.

Emergencies

In case of emergencies, parents should contact the school by telephone, 01539 721276.

Concerns

We are delighted that parents choose to place their children in our care. The contract between Heron Hill and its parents is laid out clearly in the Parent and Pupil Home Learning Page and Parent Communication Page on the school website.

During school time the school is '*in loco parentis*' meaning that school is empowered legally to make decisions on behalf of pupils and in their best interests. There may be, from time to time, concerns that parents wish to raise. We will do our best to address concerns promptly and consistently. It is important to emphasise that a number of issues, in particular setting, uniform and sanctions (including detentions), are entirely internal matters for the school and therefore not for negotiation.

Our preferred way to contact parents is via ParentMail – this is a dedicated and secure online system. To raise a concern, please contact the school office to make an appointment with the class teacher initially. If you are still concerned, please telephone or email the office and ask to speak to the SENCO, Key Stage Leader, Deputy Head or Headteacher. Please state your concern as concisely as possible to ensure we have all the necessary details. Your concerns will be passed on by the admin staff to the most appropriate person to deal with your query. In the case of concerns relating to subject issues it is likely that the Subject Teacher or Subject Leader will respond. Most concerns will normally be dealt with by the class teacher.

If we consider that your concern is urgent, please rest assured that we will respond to you promptly. For non-urgent issues, we aim to respond within five working days. The member of staff dealing with your concern may respond via email, by phone or may ask you to come into school. Staff emails are for internal purposes only; emails sent to individual staff addresses will not receive a response.

During the school day, staff are involved in teaching and learning and the day-to-day running of a busy school and therefore we regret it will not be possible to transfer telephone calls directly to staff. The receptionist will transfer any concerns or requests to the appropriate person who will respond as soon as possible.

When attending for an appointment, parents must sign in at Reception on arrival. A visitor's badge will be issued and a member of staff will escort parents to a meeting room. Please note that abusive or threatening behaviour will not be tolerated, either on the telephone or in a meeting.

Contacting a pupil in school

Pupils are not allowed to leave lessons to come to the telephone to accept an incoming call. Parents who wish to contact pupils to relay an urgent message may do so by telephoning the school office. To minimise disruption to teaching and learning we would request that a message is left. This facility should be reserved for emergencies. Any urgent messages will be passed to the pupil concerned. Pupils must keep their mobile phones in the office during the school day.

Children's mobile phones and smart watches with phone or messaging facilities

Mobile phones and smart watches are not allowed to be used by children, in school. If a child needs to bring them to school, they should be handed in to the school office as soon as they arrive and collected at the end of the school day. If pupils use a mobile phone during the school day this will be treated as a significant breach of the school child protection and behaviour policy.

Parents meetings and reports

Heron Hill school offers termly parents' evenings. Additionally, there will be two reports, one in autumn and one in summer. Parents are also invited for special assemblies throughout the year or enhanced learning opportunities within the year group. Parent workshops are offered from time to time. These supports home-school cooperation with learning and with the needs of anxious children. There are additional meetings put in place for children with Special Educational Needs. In view of the increasing number of parents with anxious children, teaching staff and the full-time Pastoral Learning Mentor have additional meetings to support needs.

Website

The school website has specific pages for parental and community information, policies and forms. Each year group has its own specific page. There are also curriculum overviews for each subject for parents to reference their child's learning.

From January 2024 year groups 1-6 will update their class pages regularly, which help parents to see weekly activities or topic themes in their own child's class. Reception and Nursery will continue with Tapestry for the academic year 2023-24. Year 1 use Seesaw messaging service. It is expected these services will be used for simple information requests. Any negative use of this service will result in a parent's ability to message being blocked.

News

Half termly newsletters celebrate successes and share any significant changes in school. ParentMail is used for additional information for whole school events or specific class notices.

Parental use of social networking sites statement

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are now widely used and these types of media allow people to communicate in ways that were not previously possible. Unfortunately, such sites can be used inappropriately by some as a means of expressing negative or offensive views about schools and their staff. This document sets out this school's approach to parental use of such sites and sets out the procedures that will be followed (and action that may be taken) when it is considered that parents have used such facilities inappropriately. Where there is reference to "parent" in this document this also include carers, relatives or anyone associated with the school.

Objectives

The purpose of this statement is to:

- Encourage social networking sites to be used in a beneficial and positive way by parents;
- Safeguard pupils, staff and anyone associated with the school from the negative effects of social networking sites;
- Safeguard the reputation of the school from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites;
- Clarify what the school considers to be appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents;
- Set out the procedures the school will follow where it is considered that parents have inappropriately or unlawfully used social networking sites to the detriment of the school, staff, pupils or anyone else associated with the school and
- Set out the action the school will consider taking if parents make inappropriate use of social networking sites.

Appropriate use of social networking sites by parents

Social networking sites have the potential to enhance the learning and achievement of pupils and enable parents to access information about the school and provide feedback efficiently and easily. In addition, the school recognises that many parents and other family members will have personal social networking accounts which they might use to discuss/share views about school issues with friends and acquaintances. As a guide, individuals should consider the following prior to posting any information on social networking sites about the school, staff, pupils or anyone else associated with the school:

- Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give this feedback or express these views?
- Would a private and confidential discussion with someone in the school be more appropriate? If there are serious allegations being made/concerns being raised, social media or internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments. Parents should contact the school to discuss any concerns they may have.

- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm which would not be justified, particularly if the school has not yet had a chance to investigate a complaint?
- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have to the school, any detrimental harm that the school may suffer as a result of the posting and the impact that such a posting may have on pupils' learning.

Inappropriate use of social networking sites by parents

Although social networking sites may appear to be the quickest and easiest way to express frustrations or concerns about the school (and those associated with it), it is rarely appropriate to do so. Other channels such as a private and confidential discussion with the Headteacher or member of the Governing Body, or using the school's formal complaints process are much better suited to this. The school considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites (this list is non-exhaustive and is intended to provide examples only):

- Naming children or posting any inappropriate or negative comments about children's actions in Heron Hill Primary School
- Making allegations about staff or anyone else connected with the school
- Making any posts that could be deemed to be cyber-bullying
- Making complaints about the school or staff at the school
- Making defamatory statements about the school or staff at the school
- Posting negative or offensive comments about staff or any other individual connected to the school
- Posting racist comments
- Posting comments which threaten violence

Parents should also ensure that their children are not using social networking and other internet sites in an inappropriate manner. It is expected that parents explain to their children what is acceptable to post online. Parents are also expected to monitor their children's online activity, including in relation to their use of social media. Please note that most social networking sites require the user to be at least 13 years old but some only allow access to those aged 13-18 with parental consent.

Procedure the school will follow if inappropriate use continues

The school will always try to deal with concerns raised by parents in a professional and appropriate manner and understands that parents may not always realise when they have used social networking sites inappropriately. Therefore, as a first step, the school will usually discuss the matter with the parent to try and resolve it and to ask that the relevant information be removed from the social networking site in question. If the parent refuses to do this and continues to use social networking sites in a manner the school considers inappropriate, the school will consider taking the following action:

- Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this
- Set out the school's concerns to you in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed
- Contact the police where the school feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed or, in cases where the posting has a racial element, is considered to be grossly obscene, grossly offensive or is threatening violence

- If the inappropriate comments have been made on a school website or online forum, the school may act to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum
- Contact the host/provider of the social networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information
- Take other legal action against the individual.