BANDONBRIDGE NATIONAL SCHOOL

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Parents/Guardians, Staff and the School Community

Ratified by the Board of Management: June 2023

Date of review:

1. Mission and Rationale

Bandonbridge National School seeks to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment in which the dignity of every student is valued, respected and equally cherished. The school recognises that respectful, timely and effective communication between home and school is central to students' learning, wellbeing, inclusion and sense of belonging.

This policy is informed by Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools, the partnership approach promoted in the Primary Curriculum Framework, and the Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect. It should be read alongside the school's relevant policies and procedures, including Student Safeguarding, Data Protection, Dignity at Work, Parental Complaints, Custody and Separation, Acceptable Use and Staff Right to Disconnect.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to set clear, practical expectations for communication between parents/guardians and school staff. It applies to communication concerning students, school activities, administration, meetings, digital communication and contact with the Parents' Association.

- Parents/guardians have a right to be appropriately informed about their student's progress and wellbeing.
- Staff have teaching, supervision, administrative and planning duties and cannot always respond immediately.
- Communication should be student-centred, respectful, proportionate and conducted through approved school channels.
- Staff are entitled to disconnect outside their normal working arrangements, except where an agreed or genuinely urgent circumstance requires otherwise.

3. Shared Principles

The Board of Management and staff are committed to:

- building and maintaining constructive, positive relationships with parents/guardians;
- recognising parents/guardians as the primary educators of their students;
- supporting meaningful parental participation in school life and appropriate consultation;
- protecting the privacy, dignity and safety of students, families and staff;
- providing clear routes for raising concerns and resolving difficulties.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to:

- develop close links with the school and share relevant information that may affect their student's learning or wellbeing;
- recognise teachers, SNAs, the Principal and ancillary staff as professionals with defined roles and responsibilities;
- keep contact, guardianship, custody and emergency details up to date;
- use the agreed communication channels and allow reasonable time for a response;
- engage with the school in a polite, calm and solution-focused manner.

4. Approved Communication Channels

School-related communication should take place through official school channels. Personal staff email addresses, personal phone numbers and personal social-media accounts should not be used for school business. Where a staff member must use a mobile telephone for a school call, the number should be withheld where appropriate.

The school will generally use paperless communication where practical. Aladdin notices, text messages and emails will be sent using the contact details held by the school. Parents/guardians are responsible for ensuring that these details remain current. Parents/guardians are required to provide an emergency contact in the event neither parent/guardian can be contacted. Additionally, the family GP's name and contact information must be provided; the Principal, or a teacher assigned by the Principal, may be required to act in loco parentis in case of an emergency need for medical intervention.

The school may also communicate through annual reports, parent-teacher meetings, the school website, agreed reports of the Board of Management, school events and other appropriate channels.

Channel	Appropriate use	Notes
School office	Attendance, absences, urgent messages, general enquiries, administration, data-access requests and matters for the Principal/Board.	Use phone or official school email. (see also Aladdin)
Aladdin	Classroom-related messages, routine notices, changes to collection, appointments and school updates.	This is the preferred direct messaging channel for teachers. The Aladdin noticeboard can also be used to message the office or the principal
Meetings	Detailed discussion, ongoing concerns, progress, wellbeing or sensitive matters.	By appointment, except in genuinely urgent circumstances.
Written notes / journals	Routine information where appropriate.	Sensitive or complex matters should be discussed privately.
School website / blog	General notices, information and celebration of school life.	Not a channel for individual student matters.

5. Contacting the School

Queries about a student's learning, progress, classroom experience or day-to-day wellbeing should normally be directed to the class teacher in the first instance, including where a student has access to an SNA. Matters relating to student protection, court orders, custody/guardianship, formal Board correspondence or urgent school-wide issues should be directed to the Principal or school office.

Short messages may sometimes be exchanged at arrival or collection, but these times are primarily for student supervision and are not suitable for detailed, confidential or sensitive conversations. A meeting or Aladdin message should be used instead.

6. Response Times and Right to Disconnect

The school office is monitored during the school day. Teachers will check official electronic communications at a reasonable point outside teaching and supervision time. Messages are not expected to be monitored while teachers are teaching or supervising students.

- Staff will normally aim to respond as quickly as possible: at the end of the school day or the following day. More complex matters may require additional time to gather information or consult relevant staff.

- An acknowledgement may be sent first, followed by a fuller response when the necessary information is available.
- Urgent matters should be communicated through the school office, preferably by telephone or in person.
- There is no expectation that teachers or other staff will read or answer routine messages in the evening, at weekends, during school holidays or while on leave.
- A message sent outside school hours does not create an expectation of an immediate response. Staff may use scheduled sending or out-of-office messages where helpful.

7. Meetings and Appointments

Meetings with teachers should normally be arranged in advance. This allows staff to prepare, protect teaching time and provide an appropriate private setting. Where another staff member's attendance would be helpful, parents/guardians should be advised in advance where practicable.

- The class teacher is normally the first point of contact before escalation to the Deputy Principal or Principal.
- This sequence does not apply where the matter concerns student protection, custody/guardianship, court orders, or another matter that appropriately requires direct contact with the Principal.
- In a genuinely urgent situation, the Principal/Deputy Principal may facilitate contact during the school day while seeking to minimise disruption to teaching and learning.
- Formal complaints should be addressed through the school's current Parental Complaints Procedure.

8. Privacy, Confidentiality and Family Circumstances

The school will respect the privacy of students, families and staff and will process personal information in accordance with applicable data-protection requirements and school policy. Staff will discuss a student only with persons who are legally entitled to receive information about that student, subject to safeguarding duties and any applicable legal arrangements.

Parents/guardians should ensure that all relevant legal guardians are identified in school records and should provide the Principal with written notification of significant changes to guardianship, custody, access or court orders. The school should not be asked to discuss another family's student or confidential circumstances.

9. Reporting to parents/guardians

Parents/guardians have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development. Schools can strengthen the capacity of parents/guardians to support their students in this way by sharing meaningful information with them about the progress that students are making in the education system. This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that school staff uses, such as conversations with the learner, data-collection and documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, examination of students' own self-assessment data, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment tasks and tests, and examples of students' work. In turn, parents/guardians will often be able to enrich teachers' knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information about the students' learning at home.

Structures in Place to Facilitate Open Communication & Consultation with Parents/Guardians

- Meetings for parents of new Junior Infants – mid-June
- Parent/teacher meetings in November
- Parents receive school report for each student at the end of each school year (see below)
- School Support and School Support Plus Meetings with parents whose students have special educational needs in the autumn and early in the new year
- Consultation throughout the year, as required
- Written communication: Aladdin notices, emails, letters, forms etc.

- All school policies and the School Improvement Plan are available to parents/guardians and the wider community on the school website https://www.bandonbridgens.net/policies
- Useful information relating to health and wellbeing, professional support agencies, the school curriculum, resources for parents/guardians to support their child's learning etc. are updated regularly on the school website and circulated via Aladdin where relevant https://www.bandonbridgens.net/useful-advice
- Regular newsletters, blogs, emails, Aladdin notices etc. keep parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and school concerns
- Staff may choose to use an education platform: i.e. Seesaw, Microsoft Teams, Class Dojo etc.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to engage with the Parents Association, attending the AGM, joining the committee, volunteering to help with the PA's events, attending fundraising and social events
- Parents/guardians are invited to events throughout the year e.g. Sports Day, church services, social/fundraising events etc.
- Involvement of parents/guardians (and grandparents or other adult family member) in teaching and learning where particular expertise is relevant to the curriculum: Green Schools committee, gardening, science etc.
- Parents/guardians are welcome to make an appointment any time throughout the year when they have concerns about their child's schooling. If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she should contact the relevant teacher directly using the Aladdin noticeboard to arrange a suitable time or contact the school secretary if parents wish to speak with the Principal.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your student 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 staff. (See the Custody, Separation and Family Arrangements Policy) Please ensure the information provided is accurate; contact information for both parents/legal guardians must be provided (except in the event of a bereavement).

Parent/Teacher meetings

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings will be held once a year for all classes. Where possible, they will be held in the first term, generally in November for all classes. The class teacher may ask a support teacher, the EAL teacher or the principal to join the meeting on occasion where their input is helpful.

These meetings take place after school over a number of afternoons. A notice about the meetings will be posted on Aladdin Connect and parents can log-on to the app to select a meeting time. If possible, a student's parents/legal guardians who do not live together, should arrange to attend the same meeting. However, if that is not possible, teachers will accommodate separate meetings. Meetings are usually held at the school but may be held remotely by phone or via conference call when circumstances are not conducive to meeting in-person (i.e. during the Covid-19 pandemic, a parent is out of the country, work commitments).

Support teaching meetings will be held at least twice a year; usually October and February. These meetings facilitate discussion of the individual student's needs and the proposed targets/action plan to be focussed on.

The purpose of Parent/Teacher meetings is:

- To establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To help teachers/parents get to know the students better as individuals
- To help students understand that home and school are working together
- To meet demands for accountability
- To share with the parent the problems and difficulties the student may have in school
- To review with the parent the student's experience of schooling
- To learn more about the student from the parent's perspective

- To learn more about parental opinions on what the school is doing
- To identify areas of tension and disagreement
- To identify ways in which parents can help their students
- To negotiate decisions about the student's education jointly
- To inform the parents of standardised test results according to school policy.
- To discuss school attendance.

End of Year Reports

Report cards are made available to parents/guardians on the Aladdin app in early/mid-June to allow parents/guardians to arrange a meeting with their child's teacher to discuss the report card before the end of term, should they wish to do so.

Report cards for students in 6th class form part of their Education Passport. Parents/guardians complete a profile document on their children and the students themselves also complete a personal profile. Copies of these three documents will be sent, on request, to the secondary school in which they have enrolled. An additional Student Transfer document will be completed and forwarded by the class teacher/SET for students with special educational needs.

The report cards provide for reporting in four key areas:

- The student's learning and achievement across the curriculum
- The student's learning dispositions
- The student's social and personal development
- Ways in which parents can support their student's learning

10. Respectful and Reasonable Communication

All members of the school community are expected to communicate in a manner that models the respect expected of students. Communication should remain polite, calm, student-centred and focused on resolving the issue.

- Send one clear message where possible and allow reasonable time for it to be read and addressed.
- Avoid repeated messages through multiple channels about the same matter unless new or urgent information arises.
- Do not demand immediate responses where the matter is not urgent.
- Do not use aggressive, abusive, discriminatory, racist, threatening or otherwise inappropriate language.
- Do not contact staff through personal numbers, personal email or personal social-media accounts.
- Anonymous communications will not normally be acted upon unless they raise a credible safeguarding, safety or legal concern that the school is obliged to consider.

Where communication becomes disrespectful, excessive, threatening or otherwise unreasonable, a staff member may end a conversation or meeting, request that future contact be in writing, refer future communication through the Principal, or ask the Board of Management to determine appropriate arrangements. Any such response should be proportionate and should not prevent legitimate safeguarding concerns, statutory rights or genuine school matters from being raised.

11. Communication with the Parents' Association

The Parents' Association is an important partner in school life. The Principal or Deputy Principal may attend Parents' Association meetings. The PA committee's role includes fundraising, parent-led activities, whole-school events and issues of general school interest. Matters concerning an individual student, family, teacher, class or staff member are not appropriate agenda items and should be addressed through the relevant school procedure. All communication from the PA is circulated through school channels i.e. Aladdin noticeboard, email or text message.

11. Related Policies and Reference Framework

- Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools.
- Primary Curriculum Framework and Department of Education guidance supporting partnership with parents/guardians.
- Workplace Relations Commission Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect.
- Education Act 1998, as amended, and applicable education legislation.
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Students First Act 2015 and the current Student Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.
- School policies/procedures on Student Safeguarding, Data Protection, Dignity at Work, Parental Complaints, Custody and Separation, Acceptable Use and Right to Disconnect.

12. Ratification, Implementation and Review

This policy will be communicated to staff and parents/guardians and will be available through the school's normal policy-access arrangements. It will be reviewed periodically, and earlier where changes in legislation, Department guidance, technology or school practice make this necessary.