



**Stepping Stones**

Special School for Children  
with Autism & Complex Needs

# Communication with Parents Policy



# 1. P. Parent/ Staff Communication Policy

## Introductory statement

This Policy was developed by the staff of Stepping Stones Special School for Children with Autism and Complex Needs, The Board of Management and the Parents' Association in the school year 2013/2014.

Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents and staff on parent/ staff meetings and parent/staff communication in Stepping Stones School. The family and home are central to the social and intellectual development of the child and the nurturing of good and essential values. The school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other so that the child's education can be effective. All the stake holders aim to work for the benefit of the child and his/her learning.

Parents/Guardians are encouraged to:

- develop close links with the school.
- participate in meetings in a positive, respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members of the school.
- collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their children.
- share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinct character.
- to become actively involved in the school/parents' association.
- participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.

Structures in place to facilitate open communication & consultation with the parents:

- IEP meetings in October.
- parent/teacher meetings one-to-one in May/June.
- NCCA report card to parents at the end of the school year.
- termly newsletter (pilot).
- consultation throughout the year.
- written communication via home-school diaries.
- through the parents' council, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of school policies pertinent to them. Decisions taken to change current policies and procedures or to introduce new ones will be made known to all parents in written format via a Dropbox account opened for this purpose.
- parents are invited to events throughout the year e.g. 'School Leavers' celebration.

If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she can contact the school secretary to arrange a suitable time.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family/event situations occur that could cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her education. In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by staff.

## Parent/Teacher meetings.

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings will be held once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04); they will be held in the second term, towards the end of May for all classes. They will be initiated by the school staff and details regarding time etc. will be worked out by the class teacher, in consultation with the parents. Parents will be given the opportunity to select preferred times on a note from the class teacher. The school will attempt to

coordinate times where siblings are concerned. Meetings may take place in classrooms, offices, staff room, or in the OT room. The teachers use prepared guidelines for the meetings. A short written record of the meeting is maintained by each teacher.

The purpose of the Parent/Teacher meeting is:

- to establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents.
- to inform the parents of how their children are progressing in school.
- to meet demands for accountability.
- to share with the parent issues and challenges that child may have in school.
- to review with the parent the child's experience of school life.
- to learn more about the child from the parents perspective.
- to identify areas of tension and disagreement.
- to identify ways in which both school and parents can help the children.
- to negotiate, jointly, decisions about the child's education.
- to inform the parents of diagnostic or other assessment results according to school policy.

Circular 56/2011 Initial Steps in the Implementation of the National Literacy & Numeracy strategy has been adopted by the Board of Management. References to parent/school communication are:

## 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, data collection and documented progress on objectives and targets reached in their short and long-term planning, IEPs, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment

tasks and test, and examples of student's work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich staff knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information about the students' learning at home.

## Report card Templates.

The school should help parents to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them. The National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has provided a range of standard report templates to assist schools in reporting information about the progress of pupils to parents, including information from standardised test, if appropriate on diagnostic tests. The NCCA report card templates were developed in consultation with schools and parents can take account of research commissioned by the NCCA.

In Stepping Stones School we have taken into consideration the templates available and have created our own template which meets the needs of our learners. This format is sent to the parents at the end of the School Year.

The report cards provide for reporting in three key areas:

- the child's learning and achievement across the curriculum.
- the child's learning style and dispositions.
- the child's social and personal development.

All primary schools must use one of the report card templates (available at [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)) for reporting to parents' on students' progress and achievement at school with effect from the date of this Circular.

## Formal Meetings.

Formal timetabled Parent/ Teacher meetings take place in May. However, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child; they may do so by prior appointment.

## Formal Meetings – IEPs.

Formal timetabled parent/staff meetings on the subject of the Individual Educational Plan will take place in October/ November. A review meeting will take place during May / June.

However, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child; they may do so by prior appointment.

## Informal Parent/ Teacher meetings.

- The school encourages communication between parents and staff. Occasions occur where a parent needs to speak to a staff member urgently. Sometimes these meetings need to take place without prior notice. The Principal will aim to facilitate such meetings making every effort to ensure that the children in the class do not lose out on any of the teaching/learning time.
- The Behaviour Support Team provides support and guidance for children experiencing learning or behavioural challenges. Open communication between members of the Behaviour Support Team, parents/caregivers, classroom staff and other professionals is essential to ensure the needs of the child are fully understood and effectively met. This communication may take the form of classroom meetings,

telephone calls, written communication and informal meetings.

- If parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, communicative devices etc., this can be done through the secretary's office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

## Complaints procedure.

Complaints are infrequent but the school would wish that these would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly.

The following is the agreed complaints procedure to be followed in primary schools:

### **Stage 1- Informal stage.**

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- Formal stage.**

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 staff and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

### **Stage 3.**

- If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Chairperson should, subject to the authorization of the Board:

- a. supply the staff with a copy of the written complaint and
- b. arrange a meeting with the staff, and, where applicable, the principal with a view to resolving the complaint. Such a meeting should take place within 10 days of the 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 not substantiated, the staff 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 staff 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.

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

## Behaviour of all Stakeholders in the School.

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school. This extends to all stakeholders e.g. the staff, the parents, pupils and the wider community. Anyone entering our school should feel safe to do so. While the Code of Behaviour for our pupils



is of vital importance, adults in the school community also have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour displays and maintains dignity and respect towards others.

It is of paramount importance 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 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 may be called.
- all stakeholders are expected to be respectful of fellow stakeholders if publishing on social networks. e.g. Facebook, Twitter
- all stakeholders will treat our pupils 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; therefore it is asked that parents respect other children's rights to privacy.
- when stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the time of the meetings should be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Time of meetings should be agreed beforehand and these should be respected.
- staff are generally available to listen to a quick issue in the morning and after school. However, should a parent need to have a discussion or meeting, an appointment should be made at a convenient time for both parties; this ensures that issues can be resolved. Classes begin at 9.30 am and finished at 3.10 pm, and this time should not be interrupted wherever possible.

## Safety, Health and Welfare at Work.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at work Act, became operative on the 1st of November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for Boards of Management and for those who work in schools, as school 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 and/ or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members, external agency workers or intruders. In this respect, all staff should be aware of the DES Circular 40/97, (Appendix 1) which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours.

Ratified by the Board of Management on:

Signed: ..... Date: .....  
Please print and sign or add a digital signature  
(Chairperson)



# Stepping Stones

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