

Parent/ staff Communication Policy.

Introductory statement

This Policy was developed by the staff of Stepping Stones Special School, The Board of Management and the Parents' Association in the school year 2013/2014 and reviewed annually thereafter.

Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents and staff on parents/staff meetings and parent/staff communication in Stepping Stones Special 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/parent 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/November (through zoom)
- IEP goals sent home (via email)
- Parent/teacher meetings in May/June (Through zoom)
- End of year report card (sent via email)
- Christmas newsletter (sent via email)
- Consultation throughout the year (through zoom/phone call/email/DOJO)
- Written communication via DOJO
- Through the parents association (PA), 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 through our website.

- Parents are invited to events throughout the year e.g. 'School Leavers'/end of year celebration, fundraising (this depends on Covid 19 restrictions)
- 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.

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings will be held twice a year for all classes (Circular 14/04); they will be held in the first term in October/November and 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 will take place over Zoom/telephone. 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 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. It is recommended that 8.5 hours for language and communication and 3 hours 25 mins for maths be covered in the classrooms per week.

Reporting to parents

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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 plans (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.

End of the Year Report (Appendix 1)

The school should help parents to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them. 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) for reporting to parents' on students' progress and achievement at school with effect from the date of this Circular.

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.

- Due to Covid 19 restrictions, Stepping Stones Special School does not encourage visitors to enter the school building. If parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, communicative devices etc., we ask that parents ring the school and wait in their car for a staff member to go out and collect the lunch/device limiting the amount of close contact that is made.

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

1. 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

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- 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. Any one 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 maintain 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. Questions communicated through text are not appropriate and will not be replied to by staff.

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, and 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 2) which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours.

This policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on:

Chairperson: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 1



www.steppingstoneschool.ie

Stepping Stones Special School Annual Report Card (Junior)

2018/2019: Student name

Literacy, Speech, Language and communication (Fine and gross motor skills)	
Numeracy	
SPHE	
Wider curricular areas	
Play and social skills	
Routines, Independence and life skills	
Extra curricular activities (Shopping, swimming etc.)	
IEPs	
Comments	

Teacher: _____

Date: _____

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Principal:



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Stepping Stones Special School Annual Report Card (Senior)

2018/2019: Student name

Literacy, Speech, Language and communication (Fine and gross motor skills)	
Numeracy	
SPHE	
Wider curricular areas	
Routines, Independence and life skills	
Extra curricular activities (Shopping, swimming etc.)	
IEPs	
Comments	

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Teacher: _____

Date: _____

Principal: _____

Appendix 2



Note: This electronic version was re-typed from the original in March, 2006

Circular 40/97

**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PRIMARY BRANCH**

**CIRCULAR LETTER TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPALS
OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS**

ASSAULTS ON TEACHERS/SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

The Minister for Education wishes to bring to the attention of the school authorities his concern at the increase in the incidents of assaults on staff in primary schools. Violence in the workplace is an issue of grave concern for employees and employers alike. As in other workplaces, school employees are also the victims of violence in the workplace. During the course of their work, 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 pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

The Minister is anxious that every effort would be made to create and maintain a culture in schools where acts of violence are not tolerated and where incidents, when they do occur, are effectively and speedily dealt with.

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In this context, the Department of Education wishes to draw the attention of Boards of Management to the following issues:

- the Board's duty to provide a safe place of work for employees
- measures to be taken to prevent or minimise the risk of assaults to teachers or other staff employed in schools
- measures to be taken in support of staff who have been assaulted or threatened with assault; and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

1 Board's Duty to provide a Safe System of Work

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for Boards of Management and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 requires employers to ensure the safety and health of their employees. It requires employers to draw up a Safety Statement:

- Identifying the hazards
- Assessing the risks to health and safety
- Putting in place appropriate safeguards

In the Education Sector violence should be considered as a potential hazard and assessed accordingly and where there is a risk to health and safety from violence appropriate safeguards must be put in place. Account should be taken of the specific circumstances that pertain in each school.

There should be consultation with those at risk concerning the measures to be taken and monitoring their effectiveness. Information should be given to staff on protection and preventative measures which are essential.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 1993, provides that the Health and Safety Authority must be notified when an accident/ incident occurs in the workplace which requires treatment from a registered medical practitioner or treatment in hospital. An accident or incident which results in an employee being absent from work for 3 days or more must also be reported to the Authority.

2 Preventative Measures

Boards are urged to consider and implement measures which would prevent or minimise the risk of assault to the employees of the Board. The effectiveness of agreed procedures should be reviewed where necessary.

(a) External Liaison

Bearing in mind that communication between home and school should be frequent, open and positive; Boards in consultation with the principal and staff of the school should promote good practice for the conduct of communication between home and school.

In this context schools should develop and circularise to parents, policies to deal with the following matters:

- Admitting parents/visitors to the school

Parents who wish to have a consultation with a class teacher should make a prior appointment with the relevant teacher. In urgent cases where a pre-arranged appointment is not appropriate, parents should be encouraged to report in the first

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instance to the school secretary/principal. The practice of parents approaching classrooms directly during teaching time is discouraged. Specifically, access to teachers should be on an “appointment only” basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke a confrontation.

- Parent/teacher meetings

Arrangements for the conduct of formal parent teacher meetings should be addressed in the School Plan. Parents should be given adequate notice regarding the timing of such meetings and encouraged to raise issues of concern. Where sensitive issues are the subject of discussion, arrangements should be made for conducting such interviews in privacy. Particular care should be taken to ensure that parent/teacher consultations do not take place within the hearing of other pupils and/or parents.

- Code of Behaviour

Under the terms of Circular 20/90 schools are requested to develop a Code of Behaviour and Discipline for Pupils. This Code should be developed by the principal and staff in consultation with parents and approved by the Board of Management. Once finalised, this Code should be notified to parents. Any sanction imposed on a pupil should be in accordance with the Code of Discipline. Procedures for suspending pupils should be clearly set out in the school’s Code of Behaviour and should be adhered to.

- Complaints Procedure

Boards of Management should have in place a clear procedure for the processing of potential complaints. Some Managerial Associations have already negotiated such a procedure with the INTO. The terms of the complaints procedure should be notified to parents and parents should be encouraged to utilise stages of the procedure where necessary.

(b) Internal Procedures

The issues of internal school procedures should also be discussed from time to time at staff meetings. Staff should be familiar with all relevant procedures.

In circumstances of increased risk (e.g. schools for young offenders) training should be provided for staff:

- in identifying potentially violent situations, and
- in calming down potentially violent situations.

Specific examination should be given to circumstances where staff is:

- working alone on the school premises
- working in an isolated part of the school premises
- engaged in out of class activities
- working with pupils with behavioural difficulties
- engaged in home visiting.

3 Steps to be followed in the event of an assault

Boards should develop a clearly defined procedure to be implemented in the event of an assault on an employee. This policy should include a clear commitment on the Board’s part to be fully supportive of staff who has been subject to violence.

It is accepted that judgement will have to be exercised in each case. However, the following elements should be included in each procedure

- (i) The incident should be immediately reported to the principal teacher/other colleague.

The details of the incident should be recorded in an Incident Book kept for this purpose in the workplace. Situations in which members have been intimidated or threatened with physical violence should also be recorded.

- (ii) Where necessary immediate medical assistance should be sought.
- (iii) The matter should be reported to the Gardaí, where appropriate. This report would normally be made by the teacher who was assaulted.
- (iv) The Board of Management should be notified of the incident and where necessary an emergency meeting of the Board should take place. The Board should notify its legal advisors of the assault. The Board's insurance company should also be notified.
- (v) Where the assault is by a pupil the matter should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Discipline and as provided for in Rule 130(5) of the Rules for National Schools.
- (vi) Repeatedly aggressive pupils should be referred, with the consent of parents, for psychological assessment in order to assess the pupils' social and emotional needs and to determine how these can be best met.
- (vii) Where the assault is committed by a parent/guardian, the parent/guardian should be immediately instructed in writing not to make direct contact with the teacher/school pending full consideration of the matter by the Board. Subsequently the Board should correspond with the parent/ guardian stating:
 - that the Board considers the assault unacceptable
 - what action the Board intends to take
 - outlining what pre-conditions should be met before access to the school is restored.
- (viii) Applications for leave of absence, in relation to a member who has been assaulted, should be forwarded to Primary Payments Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Each application will be assessed on its merits.
- (ix) Where an employee's personal property is damaged in the course of an assault, compensation for its replacement value may be paid by the Board of Management under the extended school Protection Policy.

John Dennehy,
Assistant Secretary.

September 1997

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