

# Edmund Rice College



## Communication Policy

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## Introduction

At Edmund Rice College we strive to build strong relationships with parents, guardians, and visitors. This helps create a stimulating, happy and safe learning environment which continues from school to home and the wider community, providing all our pupils with the opportunity to achieve their personal best. The trust, support and co-operation of parents is fundamental to the continued success of our school.

## Aims

**All members of Edmund Rice community have the right to work without fear of abuse (written or verbal) or violence at all times.**

This Positive Communications Policy outlines the manner in which everyone is expected to act as well as further detailing the type of behaviour which will not be tolerated.

We will only communicate with parents in respect of their own child at the school. Requests to raise a concern on behalf of another parent will be declined, as will be requests for information on another child. Should any correspondence be received from legal advisers then this will be shared with the school's legal advisers.

### **All employees of Edmund Rice College:**

- are required to demonstrate the highest possible professional standards at all times.
- deal with all pupils, fairly and consistently.
- communicate with all parents and visitors with professional courtesy.
- be aware of and conform to all safeguarding routines in the school.
- uphold the professional integrity of the school and teaching profession at all times.

Our staff come to work to educate and support our pupils and we believe it is important for everyone involved with school life to communicate in a respectful and productive manner, whether in person, on the phone, or online. In this way, staff, pupils, parents, guardians, and members of the public always behave respectfully to each other, which helps to promote the most constructive working and learning environment.

### **Edmund Rice College therefore asks parents, guardians, and visitors to:**

- Ensure that communication with the school is always respectful.
- Make every reasonable effort to address communications to the appropriate member of staff in the first instance through the school office, see **Appendix 1 – Communication Procedures**.
- Make reasonable requests for meeting times, and not expect to see any member of staff without a prior appointment.
- Check all communications from the school.
- Ensure the school has the most up-to-date contact and medical information for their child. This is to be provided in writing by emailing the school office.
- Inform the school office if they do not wish to use The School Gateway App.
- Positively support the ethos of the school by setting a good example in their speech and behaviour (including online communication) towards all pupils, staff members and other adults.

- Work constructively with staff members to resolve any issues of concern, including clarifying specific events in order to bring about a positive resolution.
- Refrain from communicating in a manner which could be perceived as accusatory, threatening, or unreasonable.
- Work alongside the school to support their child's behaviour where necessary, understanding and accepting that a positive behaviour policy is fundamental and necessary to a safe and purposeful learning environment.
- Agree to meet with the member of staff who is identified or delegated by the Principal. The member of staff will be appropriate with the stage and scale of the concern and we will not accept demands to communicate with a particular individual.
- Make every effort to positively promote the school to the wider community and not publicly undermine the school or the implementation of school policies or publicly manifest complaints or criticisms online, on social media platforms (e.g. WhatsApp / Facebook) or in public forums.

Whilst we welcome feedback and may consult with a range of stakeholders in making key decisions, ultimately the school must make decisions which we deem to be in the best interests of our pupils. Whilst it is never our intention to disappoint, it is not always possible to secure agreement or consensus and the school is not duty bound to do so.

Decisions around the operations of the school, teaching and learning or the strategic direction are at the discretion of the Principal and do not require consensus, consultation, or parental approval.

### **Parent/Guardian Contact Handling procedures**

**The school employs a triage system for handling parent/guardian contact through the office. Phone calls/emails/Gateway App messages will be handled by the administrative staff and then directed to the appropriate staff. Please see procedures on next page.**

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONTACT HANDLING PROCEDURES			
Postal Address	Telephone	Email:	Office hours
Edmund Rice College 96-100 Hightown Road Newtownabbey BT36 7AU	028 90848433	<a href="mailto:info@edmundricecollege.glengormley.ni.sch.uk">info@edmundricecollege.glengormley.ni.sch.uk</a>	Mon-Thu 8.30am-4pm Fri 8.30am-3.30pm
Message, Queries, Concerns	Person to Contact		
If your child is absent from school...	Please notify the school office each day of absence by 9.30am either by telephone on 028 90848433 (where you can leave a message) or via the Gateway App.		
If you have a quick message for your child's teacher about collection, concerns, home learning etc....	Email or <b>send a message via the school Gateway</b> and the administration staff will contact your child's Form Teacher		
<b>If you would like to discuss something related to a teacher</b>	Contact the office by phone, email, or the school Gateway App to request a call back from the Vice Principal.		
If you would like to talk about your child's learning progress <b>or aspects of the curriculum</b>	<b>Contact the office by phone, email or Gateway App and request a phone call and your request will be directed to the appropriate member of staff, i.e., Form Teacher, Subject Teacher Head of Year or Head of Department.</b>		
If you would like to discuss your child's special educational needs...	Contact the office by phone, email or Gateway App and request a phone with your child's Form Teacher who will liaise with the Head of Year, Head of Junior/Senior School, and/or Learning Support Co-ordinator where necessary.		
If you have a concern about your child's medical issues...	<b>Contact the office by phone, email, or Gateway App with your child's Form Teacher who will liaise with the Health Co-ordinator.</b>		
If you have a concern about your child's attendance	Contact the office by phone, email or Gateway App and request a phone call with the Attendance Co-ordinator.		
If you have a concern about your child's wellbeing...	Contact the office by phone, email or Gateway App and request a phone call with your child's Form Teacher who will liaise with the Head of Year and Head of Junior/Senior School (Deputy Designated Teachers for Safeguarding and Child Protection) where necessary.		
If you are concerned about social behaviours or bullying...	Contact the office by phone, email or Gateway App and request a phone call with your child's Head of Year who will liaise with the Head of Year and Head of Junior/Senior School (Deputy Designated Teachers for Safeguarding and Child Protection) where necessary.		
If you are concerned about <u>any</u> Child Protection concern	Contact the office by phone, email or Gateway App and request a phone call or with the Head of Pastoral Care (Designated Teacher for safeguarding and Child Protection).		
If you would like to find out about after school clubs or have a query...	Check the school website, Facebook and Twitter for details or email the office on <a href="mailto:info@edmundricecollege.glengormley.ni.sch.uk">info@edmundricecollege.glengormley.ni.sch.uk</a> with your queries.		
If you have a pay query ...	Enquiries can be made to the school's office staff.		
If you have a school dinner enquiry...	Enquiries can be made to the school's office staff and passed to the appropriate staff.		

## Communication with the school

The sections below explain how we keep parents up to date with their child's education and what is happening in school.

Parents should monitor all the following regularly to make sure they do not miss important communications or announcements that may affect their child.

### Meetings

- Other than a Child protection Concern or emergency, parents must email the school office to request an appointment and the school will aim to arrange that meeting within 3 working days.
- Outside of teaching hours, all staff have additional duties which they perform either before school, during break/lunch or after school so availability of staff outside of teaching hours should not be assumed.
- Should a meeting be requested the decision of which staff member will attend will rest with the Principal.
- We hold one parent teacher meeting per year. During this meeting, parents can talk with teachers about their child's achievement and progress, the curriculum or schemes of work, their child's wellbeing, or any other area of concern.
- The school may also contact parents to arrange meetings between parent teacher meetings if there are concerns about a child's achievement, progress, or wellbeing.
- Parents of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), will be asked to attend an annual review.
- Parents of pupils with other additional needs, may be asked to attend additional meetings to discuss their child's individual needs.
- Some meetings may be held virtually via Teams, links to these meetings will be sent in advance to parents.

### Email

- Email is a quick, effective way of communicating necessary information and is the school's preferred method of communication. Emails received will be responded to within 3 working days.
- Parents are welcome to email the school, about non-urgent issues in the first instance at [info@edmundricecollege.glengormley.ni.sch.uk](mailto:info@edmundricecollege.glengormley.ni.sch.uk)
- Under no circumstances should staff contact pupils or parents/carers using their own personal email address. Likewise, parents should contact staff via the office email and not through personal email addresses.
- Emails will be most helpful if they are concise, explaining concerns in a clear way. Lengthy and overly detailed accounts can make it more difficult to understand what is being explained and to respond in a timely or clear way.
- The school will aim to respond within 3 working days. If a response is unable to be provided within this timeline, which can be to ensure a full and considered response, then a revised timeline will be provided and communicated. We ask that parents await a response from the school and that further emails are not sent pending that response, unless the new deadline has passed.
- If there is a change in a child's medical needs, this information and the relevant paperwork must always be shared by email through the school office.

## **The School Gateway App**

We use the **Gateway APP** to keep parents informed about the following:

- Upcoming school events
- Scheduled school closures (for example, for staff training days)
- School surveys or consultations
- Class activities or teacher requests
- Consent form

The School **Gateway App** is our chosen communication route as:

- It removes the risk of data breaches caused by human error when sending emails to large groups of recipients.
- All messages from the school can be accessed in one place removing the risk of messages being lost amongst the email inboxes of our community.
- Parents will be invited to download the Gateway App onto their phone using a link. Parents who do not wish to use the Gateway App will receive emails.
- On occasion, a formal letter may be sent to an individual family. On these occasions, the school office will send attachments by email.

## **Phone calls**

### **School office: 028 9084 8433**

- If a query or concern is time sensitive and/or urgent the parent should call the school office, who will liaise as necessary at the earliest opportunity. In most circumstances, teaching and leadership staff are unlikely to be available to receive calls due to teaching and other commitments.
- If the query or concern is not time sensitive and urgent then parents should email or call the school office, a return call will be aimed to be made within 3 working days, with any follow up action from the request/query/problem being dealt with within a timely manner. If this is not possible (due to teaching or other commitments), someone will respond to schedule a phone call at a convenient time. Staff will make a log of a telephone conversation.
- For general enquiries, please call or email the school office.
- If parents wish to pass a message to their child, please contact the school office, parents are asked **not** to contact their child via their mobile either by call or text message.
- Pupils are not permitted to use their mobile phone during the school day to make phone calls or send messages (see Positive Behaviour Policy). This also enables the school to safeguard all our students from potential bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, or grooming.
- Staff will call parents if their child presents as unwell during the school day.
- Parents are expected to call or email the school office before 9.30am if their child is absent.
- We will call parents if their child has had a head injury, even if minor.
- The Principal will call parents if their child is admitted to hospital.

## **Social Media and Online Platforms**

- The school will not respond to concerns raised via social media or online platforms.
- Should the school be made aware of any physical threats or abusive behaviour towards staff members or children on roll at our school on social media, then the school will consider reporting this to the Police and seeking the removal of this content from the site.

### **School calendar**

- We use the school calendar on the website and the Gateway App or email to communicate with parents about upcoming events.
- Where possible, we try to give parents at least 2 weeks' notice of any events or special occasions (including non-uniform days, special assemblies or visitors, or requests for pupils to bring in special items or materials). Any such event will be included in the school calendar.

### **Reports**

Parents receive reports from the school about their child's learning, including:

- At Christmas Years 8, 9, 11 and 13 will receive a grade profile.
- An end-of-year report covering their achievement in each part of the curriculum, how well they are progressing, and their attendance will be sent out for Years 8, 9, 11 and 13.
- At Christmas, Years 10, 12 and 14 will receive a full report covering their achievement in each part of the curriculum, how well they are progressing, and their attendance.

### **School website**

Key information about the school is posted on our website, including:

- School times and term dates
- Notable events and announcements
- Curriculum information
- Important policies and procedures
- Important contact information
- Information about After-School clubs Parents should check the website and Facebook before contacting the school.

### **Inclusion**

It is important to us that everyone in our community can communicate easily with the school.

- Parents who need help communicating with the school can request the following support:
- Interpreters for meetings or phone calls through the EA Interpreting and Translation Service.
- We aim for all messages to be sent by email rather than phone call to allow parents to translate the written words.

### **Expected Behaviour**

We expect that all parents, visitors, and members of the public will treat each other, staff members, pupils and external agencies with dignity and respect. Parents should be aware of school policies and know that copies are available from the school directly. When raising a concern, we ask parents to ensure that they act in accordance with school policies and maintain a positive approach at all times whilst on the school premises and in communication with school.

### **Excessive Parental Contact/Demanding Behaviour**

- We are committed to working positively to effectively deal with any issues or concerns. However, we ask parents/carers to understand that we will not engage in excessive communications or lengthy and repetitive meetings.
- Once the school has given a reasonable amount of time to address an issue or concern, we

will not engage in further communication regarding those issues to which we have already responded.

- Any emergency situations will be dealt with separately.

### **Types of unacceptable behaviour and communication**

There are some types of behaviour / communication that the school considers unacceptable.

These are as follows:

- Any physical aggression e.g. slapping, hitting, punching, and kicking.
- Physically intimidating a member of staff, or pupils e.g., standing close to her/him.
- The use of aggressive hand gestures including finger pointing towards a member of staff or pupil.
- Spitting at a member of staff or pupil.
- Shaking or holding a fist towards a member of staff or pupil.
- Shouting at members of staff or pupils (either in person on school grounds, over the telephone or over video conferencing).
- Swearing, or using offensive language including derogatory language about a protected group or characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- Threatening or offensive comments about a member of staff or pupil of the school; this can include verbally, via texts, emails, social media, etc.
- Sending abusive messages to a member of staff, including via text, email, or social media.
- A large volume of emails in respect of the same matter over a short period of time.
- Continuing to raise the same issue despite it having been already addressed by the school.
- Posting defamatory, offensive, or derogatory comments about the school, its staff, on social media platforms.
- Disrupting, or threatening to disrupt, school operations (including events on the school grounds and sports team matches).
- Breaching or not conforming to the school's security procedures.
- Covertly recording phone calls or meetings with member of staff.
- Any other behaviour that is disrespectful, threatening, or offensive.

This list is not an exhaustive list but seeks to provide illustrations of such behaviour which has no place in our school community.

### **Actions**

Actions that may be taken by the school because of unacceptable behaviour and communication

- If parents/carers are rude, abusive or speak in an inappropriate tone over the telephone, our staff will end the call.
- If the unacceptable behaviour has occurred on site the school will ask the parent to desist and/or leave the site. If the behaviour is of a serious nature, then the police will be contacted.
- If any email is rude or inappropriate in tone, we reserve the right not to reply, or we may choose to take the action outlined within this policy.
- If parents/carers are rude, abusive or speak in an inappropriate tone during a face-to-face meeting or a virtual meeting, our staff will terminate the meeting immediately.
- In circumstances where school has listened to the request of a stakeholder, considered the request, and shared the outcome of this, should the stakeholder continue to repeat or labour the same request, the school reserves the right to cease communication or to limit

the reply with a repeat of key messages already shared.

- When the school judges email correspondence to be excessive, the school reserves the right to cease communication or only offer a reply with a repeat of key messages already shared.

Thereafter the school (Principal/Member of School Leadership team) will gather information on allegations of unacceptable behaviour. This may include talking to the parties concerned or others as witnesses to the behaviour.

### **Further actions**

If unacceptable behaviour is considered to have occurred the following actions may be taken by the school, dependent on the severity/gravity of the behaviour:

- The parent will be told verbally that his / her behaviour is unacceptable and, if it is not modified, the school will take further action.
- The parent will be told in writing that his / her behaviour is unacceptable and, if it is not modified, the school will take further action.
- Advising the parent that all future meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and will be minuted.
- Putting in place a contact plan to deal with any communication between the individual and school. For example, except in emergencies, communication to the school must be in writing only to a named individual and the school can set out timescales for school responses.
- A warning letter or an immediate ban from the school site.
- Contacting the Police where behaviour is criminal in nature.
- Seek advice from CCMS legal team regarding further action.
- The school will always seek to respond to an incident in a proportional way. The final decision for how to respond to the unacceptable behaviour and communication rests with the headteacher and, where necessary, the Governing Body.
- If a parent/carer behaves in a manner that this policy outlines as unacceptable (such as abusive, aggressive, inappropriate, or excessive contact, etc.) the school may choose to take appropriate action in line with our legal position.

This policy ensures that parents/carers are aware of expectations for future behaviour, the position of the school, our legal rights and protection, and any action that we might choose to take.

This policy does not impact on the right of parents and carers to make formal complaints in line with the school's complaints policy which is available on request.

Once the school has received notice of a formal complaint, the issues around the complaint can no longer be discussed outside of the Complaints Procedure unless it is in a way to find an informal or early resolution that the school is in agreement with.

### **Monitoring and review**

The Principal monitors the implementation of this policy and will review the policy every 3 years. The policy will be approved by the Board of Governor

