# The Free School Norwich Communications Strategy

**Good Communications Practice**

The Free School Norwich believes that effective and open communication promotes awareness of others' interests and needs. Therefore, understanding the necessary skills and tools that encourage open communication is very important.

Good communication builds trust in working relationships. Just as communication skills are essential, listening skills are also needed for effective communication. The school must take the time to understand its audiences, practise face-to-face communication and listen to feedback and suggestions.

By setting aside time to meet and keep people informed, for example, at school assemblies, staff meetings, parents' evenings and events, we can establish and maintain open communication channels within our school community.

**For most effective communication the school believes that:**

- **Face-to face opportunities should be taken where possible.** Although this may appear time-consuming, it is well spent and worth investing in. Face-to-face communication helps to ensure messages are not misunderstood, and it gives the other party a chance to respond, ask questions and give feedback. Face-to-face communication also helps to build stronger working relationships because the time devoted shows a commitment by the school to its employees, pupils and the school community.

- **We should make use of the communication tools available to us.** This includes resources available to us and which will be the most effective in reaching our intended audience, whether it is staff, pupils or other internal contacts. Such communication tools may include meetings and briefing sessions, supervision, school assemblies, newsletters, e-mails, display boards, TEAMs and websites.

- **We should understand our audience.** We should research how our intended audience likes to be communicated with and what they want to hear about. This information can be gathered informally through discussion with those in school and through more formal surveying.

- **We need to use clear messages.** We should always strive to communicate using clear and simple messages and language that our audience will find easy to relate to and engage with. Where discussions involve operational decision making, outcomes should be minuted and circulated amongst those affected. A record of minutes from meetings should be available to all involved.

**External communications**

External communication includes parents, the local community, professional visitors in school, and other agencies that come into the school or have relationships with the school.

The school reviews how it markets itself regularly to ensure that it is promoting itself internally and externally.

Areas of review:

- Leavers' destinations and stories
- Pupil numbers – informal audit of current capacity and occupancy levels
- Admissions process review
- Open Days
- Events
- Key messages
- Website
- Promotional materials and their reach
- Word of mouth/ School Council/ PTA/ Parent/Teacher meetings
- Community outreach and comms opportunities
- Look of school, first and lasting impressions
- Survey, evaluation and review
- Audit of market demand, competition and parent profile
- Review of school model in comparison to competitors re: proposition, breakdown of pupils, reputation and proposition
- Costs (internal and external influencers)
- Government directives and impact

**Connecting with parents**

This is vital to the relationship between the school and parents and, ultimately, a child's success. We communicate with parents in the following ways:

- Face-to-face at the beginning or end of the school day.
- Direct e-mails sent via the office.
- Telephone calls at a mutually agreed time for general discussion.
- Telephone calls as necessary to discuss more urgent issues.
- Parents' evenings twice yearly and an optional one at the end of the academic year.
- **Weekly** information email sent out on a Friday which includes reminders of dates for the following week, reminders for the rest of the term and useful links to the school website.
- **Termly** support newsletter sent out in week 2 offering signposting advice and guidance on a given topic.
- **Termly** celebration newsletter sent out on the last week of term detailing trips and events that have happened over the term.
- Word of mouth approaches:

- At the end of the school day, children are encouraged to think about two things that went well and one thing they could do better so they can discuss these aspects with adults at home. The activity improves children's mental health by allowing them to realise the positives in the school day. It also enables early understanding of any problems or difficulties that children are experiencing and allows them to be supported at once.

The school believes that parents who receive consistent information about their child's school performance are likely to have a higher degree of commitment to helping their children improve. If parents are satisfied with the level of communication from the school, they are more likely to get involved with the school in other ways.

We encourage parents to contact the school and allow them to get involved. This includes a welcoming reception, helpful office staff and being proactive with phone calls to parents and keeping them informed. The school has a communications policy for responding to parents. This outlines, in further detail, the way staff communicates with parents and guardians.

The school has a very effective PTA which meets regularly with the Principal.

The school has a set of guidelines for responding to parents, even if this is just to acknowledge their contact and let them know when it will be dealt with. These are as follows:

| **E-mails** |
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| Send all e-mails to office@freeschoolnorwich.co.uk |
| The secretary will send the e-mail to the appropriate person to deal with it in the first instance. The e-mail will be responded to as soon as possible and within three days |
| Issues that cannot be resolved at the Teacher or Key Stage Level will be referred to the Principal |

| **The Concerns and Complaints Policy** | **Response time** |
|---|---|
| Informal Concerns to the Class Teacher | Straightaway if possible, but within three days |
| Stage 1<br><br>Formal Complaint in writing to the Principal | Acknowledgement within 3 days and parents informed in writing of investigation and outcome within ten school days. |
| Stage 2<br><br>Panel Hearing | Acknowledgement within 3 days.<br><br>A meeting date with trustees and parents will be arranged within 10 school days. |

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| | Once the meeting has occurred, parents will be informed of the outcome within 10 school days. |

**Managing serial and unreasonable complaints**

The Free School Norwich is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high-quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our school. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

If the behaviour continues, the Principal will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact The Free School Norwich causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

**Feedback**

Feedback is essential to create strong relationships with parents and the local community as it helps to ensure that we listen to suggestions and continually improve our communication with others. We collect feedback from parents and the community in different ways, and these can be used for different circumstances:

- **Direct (face-to-face).** At planned events or meetings such as parents' evenings, Christmas and Summer productions and other events, we must take the time to talk to parents and the public and allow them to comment and express their opinions.
- **Questionnaires and feedback forms**. Questionnaires and feedback forms are a great way of collecting a high quantity of views and opinions that we analyse and identify key themes and issues important to parents. Another survey is planned for next June to gather feedback on this year's progress. More informal forms of feedback will be used during the interim period.
- **Suggestions box** is positioned outside the main office.
- **Feedback by telephone, e-mail, social media or letter**. We encourage feedback, and this is always acknowledged where possible. Comments are received through the main office or the school's Facebook page. Parents are encouraged to e-mail their feedback to the main office rather than discuss this publicly on social media. The school's Facebook page is monitored, and comments have to be authorised by a moderator before posting.

The school believes that not only is it important to listen to feedback, but it is also vital that we respond to feedback where possible. Although it is never possible to please everyone, and some suggestions are not feasible, we must respond and make changes where possible. Depending on the feedback received, responses could include the following:

- Direct individual communication through a face-to-face meeting, telephone call or e-mail.
- Information provided in a subsequent newsletter or any other social media.

**Connecting with Children**

The school believes that children should have opportunities to speak up, be heard and develop caring relationships with those around them through communication. These skills are taught through our **CUTHRIVE** programme, which runs throughout the curriculum.

Curriculum opportunities, such as PSHE, challenge children to look at their behaviour towards others. Similarly, during themed units, children learn to express themselves and listen to and understand the thoughts and ideas of others. Through discussion, appropriate challenge and support in their learning and the growing capacity to think critically, they can lead change for themselves, others and the wider world.

**Connections with other schools**

The Free School Norwich has good connections with a range of local schools in the following ways:

- Transitions to the school from nurseries: staff are encouraged to visit local nurseries, and key workers from nurseries can visit the school to ensure a smooth transition for children.
- Transitions from the school: staff closely connect with local high schools and communicate during transition times. High school staff are encouraged to visit the children. The school allows children to visit high schools as often as they need, often arranging additional transition days to ensure the well-being of children on moving schools.
- Some school staff visit other schools to provide training on areas of expertise.
- Children from KS2 have PE lessons at a local high school.
- School staff visit other schools to receive additional training where appropriate.
- Some school staff have close links with the Virtual School and have helped to write training packages and lead training at the Norfolk Professional Development Centre.

**Media communications**

The school believes that sending out news releases and media alerts is a good way of celebrating achievements and successes. However, we acknowledge that there are a few imperatives:

- Anyone speaking to the media should never distort the basic facts.
- Children's privacy and safety should be respected.
- Consider if providing a statement proactively may be a more appropriate way to respond to a story or report.

- News releases can help set the tone of a news story and provide ready-made quotes for a journalist to use and for this reason, the tone must be carefully considered. The release will highlight positives about the school and include things that the school is proud of.
- Understanding that any chance for the school to respond to a story will be a compromise between what the school wants to publish and what the media wants to print.
- Children should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary media intrusion.

**Principal:** Darren Webster
**Chair of Trustees:** Julia Virgoe
**Review Date:** February 2027