



Knocknacarra Educate Together
National School

Communication Policy (including Complaints Procedure)

This policy has been formulated by Knocknacarra ETNS to provide guidance for all stakeholders in ensuring positive communication and the resolution of any disagreements in a respectful and democratic manner.

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Introduction:

This school policy on communication was written in consultation with staff as well as members of the Parent-Teacher Association and approved by the Board of Management of Knocknacarra Educate Together NS originally in 2016. It was reviewed in 2020 and again in 2023.

Background and Rationale:

Knocknacarra Educate Together NS recognises that there are multiple stakeholders who shape and influence our learning community: staff members, parents, pupils and community members. In order to support the continued healthy development of our developing school, it is important to set out modes of communication between the stakeholders.

Relationship to School Ethos:

Knocknacarra ETNS follows the key principles of Educate Together: equality-based, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run. Therefore, these principles are vital for informing the establishment of positive communication pathways among and between all members of the school community. As a community, we will endeavour to be inclusive in our communication methods, giving a real voice to staff members, parents and children, with respect and openness as critical aspects of all interaction.

Aims and Objectives:

- To identify modes of communication used in our school community.
- To support successful communication towards resolving challenges and disagreements.
- To establish clear procedures regarding the communication of concerns or complaints.

Policies and Procedures:

Modes of Communication

Communication between home and school is essential for promoting cooperation and a shared sense of ownership for the activities of the school. Equally, we also are endeavouring to establish links with the wider community.

Regular Communication

- The school website and Facebook page are key components in communicating with parents and the wider community.
- A newsletter, *An Focal Deireanach*, is written approximately weekly. This is sent as an email attachment to all parents, staff and Board members. The newsletter is posted on the school website.
- The school endeavours to use paperless communication when possible. These may pertain to excursions, additional teaching opportunities and verifying contact details on an annual basis. As required, emails and text messages using the Aladdin system are sent to parents. On rare occasions, paper documents may be sent home or notes may be written in homework diaries.
- Contact details of parents who give permission are made available to parents via the Aladdin Connect app.

- The Board of Management agreed minutes are posted on the school website.

Parent-Teacher Meetings

- Typically in November, class teachers meet with parents. Fifteen-minute appointments are made with each parent using Aladdin Connect. The meetings take place outside of school hours, in the afternoon and evening. Support teachers are on site and available to meet with parents as well. When necessary, these meetings may take place over the phone or using Google Meets.
- Parents are included in developing and reviewing support plans, as appropriate, which may involve face-to-face meetings or communication via email or online forms (see the Support Teaching Policy for more information).
- In the spring, children share their portfolios with parents. Children take their portfolios home, and parents are invited to request a follow-up phone call with the class teacher, if desired.
- Outside of these formal meetings, parents are encouraged to speak with any teacher whenever the need arises. A written note or email requesting a reply to a query or seeking an appointment is preferred practice. Parents can also phone the office to request a phone call from a teacher or to arrange a face-to-face appointment at a mutually agreed time.

Seesaw and Google Classroom

- Teachers communicate with pupils and families during times of distance learning or in some classes to share homework assignments. Further information about these tools are found in the school's Distance Learning Policy.

Decision Making

- Various school committees are established to give voice to the children of the school. These include the Student Council, Active School Committee, Green School Committee, Coiste Gaelbhratach, STEM Committee and Creative Schools Committee. Equally, at all ages, children are involved in making age-appropriate decisions in a democratic manner with the guidance of staff members.
- The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is open to membership of all parents/guardians and staff members. In addition to an Annual General Meeting, the PTA meets regularly and has a committee of officers. The PTA works closely with the Board and staff members to make decisions for the school community, to develop the school plan, to support fundraising and to influence the establishment of policies.
- The staff meets regularly, both formally and informally, to develop the curricular components of the school plan, make decisions regarding the day-to-day operation of the school and collaborate as colleagues. This is in the context of, but not limited to, required collaboration as outlined in agreements. Decisions are made in a way that honours the democratic nature of the school.
- The Board meets on a monthly basis during term time. Decisions are made through consensus, and the Board seeks consultation, as appropriate, with the other stakeholders in the school. Regular reports are made to the wider school community through the publication of minutes, excluding any information of a confidential nature, on the school website.

Points of Contact

The following information specifies, for parents and other members of the community, who should be contacted within the wider school community:

- Secretary
 - Payment of school expenses
 - Reporting absences
 - Updating contact details
 - Enrolment queries
 - Rent enquiries
- Class Teacher
 - Queries regarding academic progress
 - Behaviour concerns
 - Homework questions
 - All classroom-based activities
- Learning Support/Resource Teacher
 - Support plan development
 - Queries regarding all forms of support teaching, both in and out of class
- Parent-Teacher Association
 - Volunteering in the school
 - PTA-organised events and fundraisers
- Principal
 - Applications for additional teaching resources for children with special needs
 - Recruitment and employment
 - Building matters
 - Financial queries
 - Liaison with the Board of Management
 - Long-term school-wide curriculum planning
 - Policy development and review

Complaints Procedure

In general, the principle that applies is to address any problems or concerns according to the list above. Addressing any concerns or complaints as soon as possible and seeking early resolution are key components of the following procedures. If a concern or complaint remains unresolved, the matter can be referred to the next individual or group according to the following hierarchy, based on the agreed procedures identified by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) and school management bodies. The steps below refer to staff members, but the same procedures will apply if a complaint involves an individual working in a voluntary or contract position in the school.

Stage 1

1. Attempt to address the concern with the teacher or other individual involved, based on the concept of active listening and the assumption that all parties are acting in the best interests of children.
2. If the issue remains unresolved, it can be referred to the principal who will liaise with all parties to achieve a resolution.

3. If the issue originates with the principal, the matter should be referred to the Chairperson of the Board of Management.

Stage 2

If the issue has not been resolved satisfactorily, a formal written complaint to the chairperson of the Board of Management should be submitted. Acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint is required within 5 school days. The matter will be raised with the relevant staff member(s) in an effort to seek resolution informally.

Stage 3

If a successful resolution has not been achieved, the matter can be referred to the Chairperson of the Board of Management again, and a formal process will be initiated which may involve meetings with the staff member(s) and the principal. The Chairperson will give the staff member a copy of the written complaint.

Stage 4

If the complaint remains unresolved, the Chairperson will make a formal report to the Board within 10 school days of meeting formally with the staff member(s) involved in the situation. The Board may decide the complaint is unsubstantiated and will inform all parties within 3 school days of the meeting. If the Board believes the matter requires further consideration, the Board will provide a copy of all documentation to the staff member(s) and seek a written statement from the staff member(s). The staff member may present their point of view in a meeting to the Board and is entitled to bring someone with them. Equally, the Board may ask the complainant to, who may also bring someone with them to the meeting. The Board will make a written response to the matter within 5 school days of the meeting. The decision of the Board is final.

Only if the complaints procedure is followed by the complainant, the concern may be raised with the Ombudsman for Children if the query relates to protecting the rights of children or The Teaching Council (if the staff member is a teacher) if the matter is related to perceived breaches of professional conduct. If the matter is of a serious nature related to child protection, the complainant should refer the matter to the school's Designated Liaison Person, as described in the Child Protection Policy.

Implementation and Review:

The policy has immediate effect and will be reviewed as required and no later than 2026.

Ratification and Communication:

The revised policy was ratified by the BoM on the date below. It will be posted on the school website.

Paul Adams, chairperson

Date of ratification: 15th February 2023