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RETNS POLICY ON COMMUNICATIONS

Policy No. 2/18

Introduction:

The Board of Management, BOM, recognises that good communication is essential to the smooth and efficient operation of RETNS and it identified the need for an overarching policy on communications within the school. Input from staff and the school community was sought and the policy was subsequently ratified by the BOM on 12 November 2018. The communications policy will be reviewed at regular intervals.

Purpose:

RETNS BOM is committed to maintaining the ethos and values of its patron body, Educate Together, in providing an educational model that is equality based, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run. Good communication at all levels is essential to achieving that aim and to the effective running of RETNS. The purpose of this policy is to provide information and guidance to staff and parents/guardians on communication, both formal and informal, within the school environment.

This policy identifies the different forms of communication within the school community and is intended to promote and foster good communication structures at all levels and to ensure ongoing improvements in communication mechanisms. The BOM wishes to ensure positive relationships among staff, between staff and pupils and with parents/guardians by ensuring communications are respectful and positive.

Scope:

This policy applies to staff members, pupils, and parents/guardians. It should be considered in conjunction with other school procedures and policies, such as the code of behaviour, the anti-bullying policy, and the data protection policy.

Policy statement:**1. Introduction**

The aim of the communications policy is to ensure the school community is supportive of pupils, staff, parents/guardians and all those involved in the wider school community. RETNS adopts an inclusive, child-centred, equality based and democratic approach to all facets of school life and this extends to communications.

Positive and respectful communication is of considerable importance in RETNS and this extends to all members of the school community. Communication is conducted through a variety of channels, including verbal and written communication in paper-based and electronic forms. Communication can be both formal and informal.

This policy aims to establish procedures for the sharing of information on pupils' progress and needs, and to promote a culture of partnership in the education of the children in the school.

Confidentiality needs to be maintained regarding some categories of information relating to staff and pupils. Staff are aware of their responsibilities regarding the handling and transmission of sensitive/personal information and parents/guardians are asked to be mindful of their responsibilities regarding requesting and/or discussing information relating to pupils and staff.

2. Internal communications - staff

RETNS encourages openness in internal communication and sharing of relevant and appropriate information in a number of ways, such as formal and informal meetings. Good relationships between all staff are encouraged through best practice in communication.

The school is committed to consultation with staff on school matters to ensure the views of staff members are encompassed in all aspects of the school's activities and processes.

Internal communication should be clear and direct and make use of the most effective communications mechanism relative to the context, for example, email, text, telephone call or other electronic platforms.

Staff are encouraged to share their expertise and to discuss teaching/learning topics or ideas for school developments and improvements. The Principal may also ask staff to give presentations on specific topics where a staff member has a particular interest or knowledge of a subject that would be beneficial and informative to other staff.

Forms of communication between staff include regular staff meetings, information shared on notice boards in the staff room and around the school, announcements to staff in the staff room and information shared via email or other mobile communications apps.

Procedures are in place for informing the Principal and School Secretary if, for example, a teacher is unable to come to school. The Principal or School Secretary communicates the message to the rest of the staff.

New or temporary staff receive an induction/welcome pack outlining such procedures and the various communication channels within the school.

Administrative staff are fully involved in the running of the school and play a key role in supporting the operation and development of the school. The School Secretary is a key link in the communication process and helps ensure the smooth operation of the school on a day to day basis.

3.1 Communication - parents/guardians

The BOM encourages parents/guardians to develop close links with RETNS and it actively encourages the involvement of members of the school community in the development of school policies and plans.

Parents/guardians are encouraged to get involved in school activities through the Your Child Your School Your Child Your Time project, class trips, class reading groups and other events.

Parents/guardians are expected to treat each other, pupils and staff with respect. Shouting and aggressive communication is not acceptable. The school respects all children and parent/guardians' right to privacy and parents/guardians should not seek information about any child other than their own. Parents/guardians are also reminded of their responsibility to respect the privacy of teachers and staff.

Parents/guardians should exchange information through the homework diary or by letter. Parents/guardians may pass on urgent information regarding individual children at 8.50 a.m. Parents/guardians are expected to be mindful of privacy issues and of avoiding disruption or delays to class work if they wish to speak to their child's teacher in the classroom.

If the issue is of more significance and requires discussion, parents/guardians should arrange to meet the class teacher through the homework diary or by contacting the School Secretary to arrange a suitable time.

Parents/guardians should inform the school of any family issues/events that may cause their child anxiety and affect him or her in school.

Regarding resolving issues of concern, parents/guardians are reminded that the staff of RETNS are always prepared to listen and it is in the best interest of pupils to resolve difficulties at an early stage. A parent/guardian who has an issue of concern should, at all times, bring it to the attention of the class teacher. If the issue remains unresolved, it may be necessary to bring it to the attention of the Principal. All meetings with the Principal can be organised through the School Secretary. When

making appointments, it is helpful to indicate the purpose of the meeting. On occasion, the Principal may request the presence of another staff member at the meeting.

Parents/guardians should not take photographs or videos of groups of children, such as at sports day or other school event, even if the pictures/videos include their own child(ren), and publish them on social media fora, such as Facebook or Twitter, or otherwise. This is for child protection reasons but also to ensure the privacy rights of children and their families are respected and upheld.

All junior and senior infant children are collected from the front door. The school should know at all times who is collecting junior and senior infants. The School Secretary and class teachers should have a list of those authorised to collect children from infant classes and their contact information. In emergency situations, parents/guardians must leave a message with the School Secretary or speak to the Principal/class teacher.

Regarding absent days and illness, children who are unwell should not be sent to school. Parents/guardians must report contagious illnesses/infections immediately to the Principal or class teacher. Notes are circulated to parents/guardians informing them of contagious infections within the child's class. When a child is absent, a written note of explanation must be furnished to the class teacher; verbal or phone messages are not acceptable.

Parents/guardians are reminded of their responsibility to keep their contact details up to date with the School Secretary. This is particularly important regarding enrolment where offers are made via email.

They are also reminded of their responsibility to read communications issued by the school promptly and to keep themselves informed.

In situations where both parents are not living in the family home, parents/guardians should notify the school if they want separate communication from the school.

The School Secretary is a key link in all aspects of communication among the school community. While the school's office is closed during school holidays, messages can be left on the School Secretary's answering machine. During the summer holidays, messages should be sent via email. These are responded to as soon as possible.

3.2 Communication from RETNS to parents/guardians

Positive and respectful communication is of considerable importance in RETNS and this extends to all members of the school community. RETNS endeavours to share important information and updates promptly and to foster good communication links between the school and parents/guardians. Written communication is generally by email, and email is the primary method of communication with parents/guardians. Letters are usually only issued when documents are required to be signed and returned and texts are generally only sent when the message involved is urgent.

Parents/guardians are communicated with in a variety of ways:

- Parents/guardians who are new to the school are invited to an open day before their child starts in junior infants and receive a welcome pack
- Information meetings on the relevant class curriculum early in the first term
- Meetings with parents/guardians of children with specific needs
- Parents/guardians-teacher progress meetings early in the second term
- Annual reports on their child/children's progress are provided to each family
- Homework diary – to remind pupils of their homework and to relay messages between parents/guardians and teachers
- Class Dojo is used by some teachers to update parents/guardians on class activities
- Weekly update issued electronically by the Principal
- Emails about current activities or reminders for school-related payments
- Newsletters issued electronically at term ends
- The school's website
- Invitations to attend school events, for example, new flag award ceremonies or celebrations
- Text messages for class relevant or school relevant events
- General information about local community events, such as library events or open days.

In general, communication from staff members will be via the School Secretary. Staff members will not share mobile phone numbers or email addresses with parents/guardians with the exception of PA reps.

3.3 Communication – pupils

Pupils are encouraged to engage in respectful communication among themselves and to adults and staff. The development of good social and interpersonal skills is a core element of the RETNS ethos and pupils are obliged to abide by the school's code of behaviour. Pupils should treat their fellow pupils and staff with respect and consideration and have regard to what impact what they say and how they say it might have on others.

Parents/guardians of children who feel it is essential that their child(ren) bring a mobile phone to school must apply in writing to the Principal giving a reason as to why it is necessary. A special form will be provided for this purpose. Pupils may not use their phones during the school day.

3.4 – Communication by the Board of Management

The BOM plays a key role in developing and maintaining positive and productive communication links among the school community. It endeavours to foster these links through its Report to the School Community after each monthly meeting of the board.

It also responds without delay to matters brought to its attention by staff and members of the school community.

4. Parents' Association – class lists

It has been the practice for Parents' Association, PA, reps in each class to collect contact details for parents/guardians and to circulate this list to the parents/guardians of children in the class. Parents/guardians should refer to and follow the guidelines prepared and circulated by the PA on the appropriate use of class lists.

While such lists are useful tools for communicating specific class-based information, parents/guardians are reminded that they are not obliged to provide these details or to have their contact information circulated.

Parents/guardians are also asked to be mindful of the purpose of such lists and to ensure that they are used appropriately at all times.

5. General communication

The school's website is updated regularly with items of interest related to the general operation and activities of the school, such as important information on school closures or events or external information, for example, from the National Parents' Council or local community events that may be of interest to families.

Best practice is followed in the publication of web pages and information, particularly with regard to individuals' privacy and the updating of information.

On occasion, important school information is communicated via text or email. Parents/guardians are reminded of the importance of ensuring their contact details are up to date.

Roles/responsibilities:

The roles and responsibilities of the Principal, the BOM, staff, parents/guardian and pupils are detailed above but all are expected to ensure that all communication among the school community is positive, respectful and clear at all times.

Related documentation:

The code of behaviour and complaints procedure

Anti-bullying policy

Data protection policy – personal data and confidentiality

"Welcome to our Classroom"

Mobile phones policy

Internet Acceptable Use guidelines

Review date:

This policy was developed and ratified by the BOM in November 2018 following consultation with the school community. It will be reviewed periodically, and any necessary amendments made.

Contact details:

Queries about this policy should be addressed to the Principal in the first instance:

The Principal

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