

Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust

School Communications Policy



December 2021
Reviewed: June 2024

About Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust (OMAT)

OMAT is committed to the development of inclusive schools, sharing a common purpose to provide excellent education and improved outcomes for pupils.

OMAT strives to provide high-quality education for all children within our local communities by inspiring innovation, creativity and aspiration through an enriched curriculum.

OMAT is committed to the principles of co-operation, collaboration and sharing best practice with a strong focus on staff development.

OMAT is also committed to the preservation of the unique identity of all schools within the trust: each school will have a Local Governing Board (LGB) which is involved in decision making at school level, with autonomy to make decisions for its own school in line with the Scheme of Delegation.

All Trustees and any schools joining must agree to share and uphold all of these principles now and in the future.

School Communications Policy

1. Principles

At Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust we believe that effective and open communication is essential in promoting an awareness of others' interests, needs and opinions. We endeavour to promote open, appropriate partnerships between school staff members, pupils, parents/carers, and the wider community through clear and effective communication. Effective communication builds trust in relationships in school.

Every member of staff has a responsibility to support effective communications and to recognise that the quality of their communication reflects on the school's reputation. Parents/carers, Trustees and pupils also have a role in maintaining the school's reputation. Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust strives to ensure that communications between all members of the school community are clear, professional, and effective.

Keeping stakeholders in school informed through assemblies for pupils, staff meeting for teachers and support staff, and parents' evening for parents/carers, and other methods will help establish and maintain open channels of communication within the school and Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust community.

The following principles are considered when communicating across all channels:

- **Purposeful:** Displaying sound reasoning for your message;
- **Positive:** Focus on positive whenever possible;
- **Accessible:** Ensuring communication is effectively received and understood by all parties;
- **Considered:** Taking time to listen to and really understand feedback or responses;
- **Measured:** Allowing time for decision making and thoughtful responses.

Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust considers stakeholders in school to be:

- Pupils;
- Staff;
- Parents/carers;

- Local community;
- Prospective families:
- Governors/ Trustees.

2. Aims of the Policy

Aims of this policy include:

- To promote Owlcotes schools as welcoming and inclusive environments;
- To ensure all marketing material for Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its schools is clear, positive and informative;
- To assure stakeholders that all email, written and telephone enquiries will be answered promptly and parents/carers can expect an acknowledgement of receipt as soon as possible and within the timescales in section 4.1;
- To assure stakeholders that a variety of forms of communications will be used by Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its school, for example, telephone, e-mail, post, website or text messages;
- To encourage parents/carers to help or support their child's learning at school and at home. Owlcotes schools will provide information to enable this support to be effective.

3. Communications within school

The best form of communication is face-to-face, if appropriate and safe. Face-to-face communication reduces the possibility of messages being misunderstood or ignored, and it allows both parties to engage with each other and get quick responses. Face-to-face communication also helps to build positive working relationships.

Other tools of communication within school may include staff meetings, assemblies, newsletters, emails, text messages, display boards, and messages on the school website.

Internal e-mails (during the working day) are an effective method of communication with staff and should be used alongside the preference for face-to-face communication.

Communication with new starter members of staff is essential so that those employees new to Owlcotes schools are aware of protocols, procedures and school policies as soon as possible. All new starters receive a pack of Trust and school policies and procedures and the staff handbook.

3.1 Responsibilities – Senior Leadership Team

Owlcotes school's senior leadership teams have a responsibility to ensure key information is made available to staff in a timely manner and via appropriate channels.

Owlcotes school's senior leadership teams have a responsibility to maintain open channels of two-way communication and to listen to feedback and comments from all staff.

3.2 Responsibilities – All School Staff

All school staff have a responsibility to communicate regularly with each other to ensure key information is disseminated and understood.

All school staff have a responsibility to ensure they are informed and have access to appropriate information channels in order to be as effective as possible in their role and to support their work within school.

All school staff have a responsibility to utilise open channels of two-way communication to keep the senior leadership team and colleagues informed of relevant information.

4. External Communications

4.1 Parents/Carers

Communication with parents/carers is vital to the relationship between Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its schools and parent/carers. When approaching communicating with parents/carers, Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its schools should consider the following:

- Publishing a school prospectus and/or ‘frequently asked questions’ on Owlcotes schools’ website at the start of every year to address the common questions that parents/carers frequently ask over the course of the academic year.
- Parents/carers consider good communication as an important aspect of their relationship with their child’s school and the Trust, therefore schools should endeavour to ensure that communication with parents/carers is as good and consistent as it can be.
- Effective communication from the Trust and/or school to parents/carers increases the likelihood of parents/carers engaging with their child’s school in other ways, including supporting their child’s learning at home.
- If the Trust and/or school has an important message to communicate, it should make use of as many distribution methods as possible taking account of the context of the school.
- The Trust and/or school websites are a valuable source of information for parents and this should be updated regularly to ensure all information is accurate.
- Proactively engaging in opportunities to seek the views of parents via questionnaires, school and Trust level consultations.
- Responding to appropriate communications from parents/carers should be done within a reasonable timeframe. Guidelines for responding to parents/carers are as follows:

Type of Communication from Parent/Carer	Suggested Response Time
Phone Calls	Returned within 24 hours (excluding weekends). <u>During school holidays:</u> An automated voice message should be enabled that notifies callers of the dates during which the school is closed and the date of re-opening.
Email	Acknowledgement of receipt of the email within 24 hours of receipt (excluding weekends). <u>During school holidays:</u> The school office email contact should enable an automated ‘out of office’ email reply which notifies senders of the dates during which the school is closed and the date of re-opening. <u>Complaints Policy:</u> If a complaint is received via email, the complaint will be acknowledged within 3 school days. Please see Appendix A for further information regarding complaints.

Written Letter	<p>Acknowledge receipt of letter within 72 hours (excluding weekends).</p> <p><u>During school holidays:</u> A notice should be published on the school website advising that written letters will be responded to when the school returns and the date of re-opening.</p> <p><u>Complaints Policy:</u> If a complaint is received via letter, the complaint will be acknowledged within 3 school days. Please see Appendix A for further information regarding complaints.</p>
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Any response from the school will be within working hours and school term dates. Specific time scales for detailed responses to enquiries via telephone, email, or written letter cannot be given as this will depend on the nature of the enquiry.

4.2 Letters

Any letters to parents/carers and outside agencies must be approved by the Headteacher before distribution.

Whole school information is included in weekly newsletters during school term time. These are emailed to parents/carers and are available on the school website, so are accessible to a wider audience than our own parents. Paper copies of the newsletter are available for parents/carers from the school office upon request.

Any letters of complaint received by the school should be managed in accordance with the Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust Complaints Policy.

4.3 E-mail as a means of communication

E-mails should be concise and clear and should take into consideration the nature of the information being shared, with due regard to protected information under the Data Protection Act and Equalities Act.

Consideration should be given that any email sent to an external email address will reflect on the Trust and/or school.

Under no circumstances should school staff use their personal email address to contact pupils or parents/carers.

Parents/carers may wish to contact their child’s school via e-mail for general enquires. Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its schools contact email addresses are:

- Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust – info@owlcotesmat.org
- Pudsey Primrose Hill Primary School – office@primrosehill.owlcotesmat.org
- Pudsey Waterloo Primary School – info@waterloo.owlcotesmat.org
- Calverley Parkside Primary School – office@cps.owlcotesmat.org
- Armley Park Primary School – office@armleypark.owlcotesmat.org
- Manor Wood Primary School – office@manorwood.owlcotesmat.org
- Spring Bank Primary School – hello@springbank.owlcotesmat.org
- Morley Victoria Primary School - office@morleyvictoria.org.uk

4.4 Telephone Calls

School office staff are expected to attempt to resolve any queries from external parties via telephone in as timely manner as possible. If office staff are unable to resolve the query, or need to refer the matter to another member of staff, office staff should note the name, contact phone number, and a brief summary of the query when contacted by external parties via telephone.

Relevant staff will make a record of any telephone conversations with a parent/carer regarding concerns about their child on Safeguard or the communication log depending on the nature of the concern.

Parent/carers should consider that schools can be a busy environment and that class teachers will do their best to respond to telephone enquires in as timely manner as possible. Parent/carers should be given an approximate timescale for a response to their query whenever possible.

4.5 Text Messages

Automated text messages using Scholarpack or Teachers to Parents software are sent to parent/carers for a number of reasons: as a reminder about forthcoming events; as a reminder about school protocols, and in the event of exceptional circumstances at school, for example, school closures for any reason.

Under no circumstances should school staff respond to a text message received from a parent/carer on their personal telephone. The member of staff should liaise with the Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher and respond using an alternative means of communication, such as email via the school office email address or telephone call using the school phone number.

Any phone calls made to parents should either be from the school landline, or, if using a personal mobile, the staff member should ensure that their personal phone number is hidden.

4.6 Responding to Media Enquires

If an incident occurs on any Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust premises that receives attention from the local, regional or national community, it is possible that the Trust or its member schools will be contacted by journalists or media outlet(s). If Owlcotes staff are contacted by media outlet(s) and a statement on behalf of the Trust and/or school is considered necessary, approval must be sought from Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust CEO.

Journalists or media outlet(s) are not permitted to interview or photograph children under the age of 16 in the absence of or without the consent of a parent/carer. Pupils must not be approached or photographed while at school without the permission of the school. There must be no payments to children under the age of 16 for materials involving the welfare of children, nor payments to parents/carers for material about their children.

Media outlet(s) are not permitted to identify children under the age of 16 who are involved in any capacity in ongoing police investigations.

4.7 Social Media

All postings by school staff to social media websites should be considered in the public domain. School staff should not use any form of social media to discuss any aspect of their profession that may be considered private or confidential and any use of social media should always be compatible with their professional role. Personal use of social media must follow the guidelines detailed in the school's Acceptable Use of IT Policy.

Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust and its schools each have separate 'X' (formerly Twitter) accounts which are used to provide updates to parents/carers and other stakeholders who are interested in subscribing to this, and to provide positive marketing for the Trust/schools. It is not compulsory to subscribe to these channels and any key messages published on social media will also be relayed through the formal school communication channels.

Primary school-age pupils under the age of 13 should not own an 'X' account as this violates the 'X' terms of service. Any pupil at Owlcotes schools found to be subscribed to or interacting with the Trust and/or school 'X' accounts will be asked to terminate their account.

Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust has a LinkedIn account which is also used to provide updates to parents/carers and other stakeholders who are interested in subscribing to this, and to provide positive marketing for the Trust/schools. Primary school-age pupils under the age of 16 should not own a LinkedIn account as this violates the LinkedIn User Agreement. Any pupil at Owlcotes schools found to be subscribed to or interacting with the Trust LinkedIn account will be asked to terminate their account.

5. Home School Communication

Class teachers will regularly update their class page on the school's website with information and/content so that parents are able to keep informed of events and learning taking place in school.

Home learning online packages are available at all times for all children. These are school specific and include packages such as reading eggs, times tables rock stars etc.

Parents/carers are encouraged to promote home learning to their children during periods of enforced absence in order to minimise the catch-up learning required.

In the unlikely event of a class or school closure, Owlcotes schools will provide enhanced remote learning in accordance with Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust's blended learning and delivery plan.

Appendix A: Guidance for Communications in Regard to a Complaint

At the Owlcotes Multi-Academy Trust, we value positive school to stakeholder relations and we aim to do everything we can to maintain them. This extends to the communication and management of complaints received by our schools or the Trust. This appendix provides a framework for how schools/the Trust will communicate with a potential complainant and how complaints are internally managed, with the goal of treating the complainant with courtesy and supporting the schools/Trust to reach a resolution to the satisfaction of all parties wherever possible.

Complaint for the attention of the Headteacher

If a complaint addressed for the attention of the Headteacher is received in writing or via email, this should be immediately directed to the Headteacher. If the complaint is received via email, this should be forwarded to the Headteacher and followed up by a phone call or face to face discussion to confirm the Headteacher has received the email. Receipt of the complaint should be acknowledged as soon as possible and within 3 school days.

All correspondence from the school/Trust regarding the complaint must be contained in a letter, including a school/Trust letterhead, the date on which the letter was sent, and the name and job title of the person writing the correspondence. This letter can be sent to the complainant as an email attachment – in these cases the letter must be attached to an email as a PDF file and the body of the email must not contain any details regarding the complaint.

Written and dated internal records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation, in regard to the complaint will be kept throughout. This must be stored on the school's safeguarding system. A written record will be kept by the school of all formal complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the stage 1 or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

Complaint for the attention of the Chair of Governors

If a complaint addressed for the attention of the Chair of Governors is received in writing or via email, this should be immediately directed to the Chair of Governors. This should then be followed up by a phone call to the Chair in order to make them aware of the complaint and to ask them to review the complaint as soon as possible. The Chair of Governors has the right to contact the Owlcotes Chief Executive Officer or Chief Information Officer for their assistance regarding the complaint. Receipt of the complaint should be acknowledged as soon as possible and within 3 school days.

All correspondence from the school/Trust regarding the complaint must be contained in a letter, including a school/Trust letterhead, the date on which the letter was sent, and the name and job title of the person writing the correspondence. This letter can be sent to the complainant as an email attachment – in these cases the letter must be attached to an email as a PDF file and the body of the email must not contain any details regarding the complaint.

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**This School Communications Policy was adopted by Owlcotes Multi Academy Trust
on 09/12/2021**

Chair of Trustees : Mrs Judith Norfolk		
Signature:		Judith Norfolk
Frequency of review:	3 years	
To be reviewed by:	OMAT Full Board	
To be approved by:	OMAT Full Board	
Date of next review:	June 2027	

REVIEW RECORD

Date of review	Reason for review	Date of next review
21/03/2024	Amendments to section 4. Removed references to communications to parent/cares regarding covid-19.	March 2027

Name:		Signature:	
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on behalf of OMAT Full Board

Date of review	Reason for review	Date of next review
20/06/2024	Addition of Appendix A.	June 2027

Name:		Signature:	
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on behalf of OMAT Full Board

Date of review	Reason for review	Date of next review

Name:		Signature:	
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on behalf of OMAT Full Board