

SOUTH HAMS FEDERATION COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

(Incorporating Media and Social Media)

Approved 16.07.18

Review July 2020

1. Introduction

The South Hams Federation places high importance on clear, open and honest communication between governors, staff, carers, pupils and the wider community. Communication is a two-way process and this policy aims to establish a set of principles to create open channels of communication at all levels. We aim to keep staff, carers and pupils informed and to build trust in the working relationships that are needed for the effective running of a school federation.

1.1. Experience shows that there are few problems that cannot be prevented or solved by effective communication. There is a lot that can go wrong when there is a lack of it.

1.1.2 In all communication about school matters, all parties should expect dialogue to be conducted in a polite, friendly and constructive manner without the use of threats or strong language. Federation staff and governors are advised that it may be better to postpone any conversation immediately if, at any point, they feel threatened or if they sense that emotion on either side may hinder meaningful discussion.

1.1.3 In all communications, Federation staff and parents should be aware of the rules of defamation – slander and libel. They should be aware of the legal consequences of making a defamatory statement – a claim which may damage the reputation or standing of a third party.

1.1.4 Staff who consider they may have been defamed are normally advised to consult their professional association.

1.1.5 This policy sets out the responsibilities of Federation staff and governors and outlines the expected responses from parents, carers, pupils and any others with whom the Federation has contact on school matters.

1.2 *For ease of understanding, in this policy:*

“The Federation” refers to the South Hams Federation of schools, its governing body, the schools within the Federation and all their employees, permanent or part-time.

“Federation Staff” refers to all school governors, teachers and administration staff appointed or employed by the Federation.

“Parents” refers to all parents and registered carers of children at any of the Federation schools.

“Pupils” refers to all children registered to attend any of the Federation schools.

1.3 The Federation supports 4 main channels of communication:

1.3.1 Face to face. There is no substitute for a proper conversation. This should be the ultimate goal for all communication on important matters, even if the initial contact is via email or a telephone message passed via a school office. A telephone conversation is also acceptable where distance or timescale prohibits a face to face meeting.

For important conversations, parents should make appointments to see teachers at a mutually convenient time. Members of staff approached without an appointment at the beginning or end of the school day may not have had time to prepare for your

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conversation and may not be able, at that moment, to deal with your issue.

Parents will be invited to attend parents evenings to discuss their child's progress with their teacher at least twice in every academic year.

1.3.2 Pupils Homework & Reading Records. These are for daily communication on routine matters relating to pupil's schoolwork or class projects. Parents can write notes for teaching staff and should check the books daily for notes from school to home.

1.3.3 Weekly newsletters. These are sent out to all parents on Friday afternoons. These contain notes of key happenings and forthcoming events at the schools, along with reminders about school trips, notes of pupil achievements and forthcoming dates for diaries. The Federation's preferred method of sending these out is via email, but parents without access to a computer may request hardcopies, which will be sent home with their children.

1.3.4 School Websites. Each school's website contains background details on the school, key contacts, dates and also all the statutory and key Federation policies, procedures and codes of practice.

1.4 Contacting the School / Federation

1.4.1. Parents must judge what they consider to be the best way to contact the school depending on the urgency of their message and the time of its delivery. Concerns about a child's welfare should be communicated to the school during office hours at the earliest opportunity.

Where a response is necessary, The Federation will aim to acknowledge contact from parents as follows:

Communication from Parent / Carer:	Acknowledgement Response Time:
Any communication about a child's welfare.	Immediate acknowledgement of call (as soon as is possible) Immediate attention to the issue.
Phone calls.	Returned within 24 hours of call.
Email	Email reply within 48 hours of receipt.
Written letter	Acknowledgement of letter within 72 hours.

1.4.2 Where a query is not immediately answerable or an issue immediately resolvable, the Federation will endeavour to give an assessment of the time scale for response. If resolution is likely to take some time, for instance if it needs full Governor or County Council input, the school will explain why there is likely to be a delay.

1.4.3 The Federation and/or the Executive Head should not be rushed into

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decisions or announcements by any criteria, other than in exceptional circumstances.

2 Media

2.1 All contact from bona fide media organisations – whether print or broadcast should be referred, in the first instance, directly to the Executive Head or the Chair of Governors.

2.2 All approaches to the media must be made via the office of the Executive Head or the Chair of Governors.

2.3 The Executive Head may appoint a small panel of staff or governors with media expertise to advise on handling a media approach, particularly if an urgent response is needed. The Executive Head may seek additional assistance from the Local Authority Media & Press office.

3 Social Media

3.1 While the Federation encourages individual school PTFA's to use social media channels such as Facebook & Twitter to promote events and fundraising activities, the Federation itself has a blanket policy of not using social media for any purpose. The Federation will not engage in social media debate about school matters.

3.2 The Federation may, however, take steps to address or remove malicious or untrue allegations that circulate on networking sites.

3.3 Parents and carers should note that when seeking changes or additions to school policy & practice the Federation will NOT be swayed by social media campaigns. The "weight of public opinion", should the Federation ever wish to assess it, will be gauged on the number of people who have made direct and appropriate representation to their school, using the correct channels.

3.4 Parents and carers are asked to monitor their children's usage of social media and to dissuade them from making disrespectful or derogatory remarks about staff, fellow pupils or events that happen in school.

3.5 Parents of Pupils are asked to read and discuss the Use of Internet Agreement and sign to say they have discussed it with their child and agree to follow the on-line safety rules and support the school approach to on-line safety including extremism and radicalisation and not deliberately upload or add any images, sounds or text that could upset or offend any member of the school community.

3.6 Federation staff, Governors and Visitors who use the internet must sign the Use of Internet Agreement Form.

3.7 Staff and governors are forbidden from using social media to discuss school business, however, innocuous it might seem.

3.8 Federation staff must abide by the Employee Code of Conduct Policy.

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4 ICT, Data Protection and Mobile Devices

ICT, Data Protection and Mobile Devices have implications for communications. The South Hams Federation has separate, existing policies for both, accessible through individual school websites.

5 Complaints

Complaints to the Chair of Governing Body will be dealt with in accordance with the Federation's complaints policy. Complaints relating to information handling may be referred to the Information Commissioner (the statutory regulator).

6 Review

Communication is a constantly evolving process fuelled by changes in both human behaviour and technology therefore this policy will be reviewed as it is deemed appropriate, but no less frequently than every 2 years. The policy review will be undertaken by the Executive Head, or nominated representative.