**Knockconan N.S.**



**Communication and Confidentiality Policy**

**2020**

**Introductory Statement:**

This policy was formulated having been identified as an area that required review in the light of the availability of a wider number of new methods of communication. It is being shared with all members of staff and made available to the school community for feedback in advance of being proposed to the Board of Management for approval and ratification.

Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents and staff on parent/staff meetings and parent/staff communication in Knockconan NS. The family and home are central to the social and intellectual development of the child and the nurturing of good, moral values. The school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other so that the child’s education can be effective. All the stakeholders aim to work for the benefit of children and their learning.

**Aims:**

The Communications and Confidentiality Policy aims to:

* facilitate good communication between staff within the school
* facilitate good communication between staff, parents and the whole school community
* outline procedures for communication between staff and parents
* outline the school’s regard for the integrity of pupils’ welfare regarding confidentiality
* offer guidelines and protection for visitors, volunteers, student teachers and others who engage in work/work experience in the school
* provide assurance and confidence to parents in general and other staff members that those who engage in work/work experience in the school are unambiguously bound by strict guidelines and have due respect for your child’s privacy  
   **Parents are encouraged to:**
* Develop close links with the school
* Participate in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in the school
* Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their children
* Become actively involved in the parent association
* Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.

Knockconan N.S. is committed to providing information and guidelines to all members of the school community. Good communication, respect and confidentiality are essential to maintaining a positive working and learning environment. This requires that we use of a variety of channels of communication so as to ensure that the relevant people receive the necessary information.

**Members of the School Community**

The family and home are central to the social and intellectual development of the child and the nurturing of good, moral values. The school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other in relation to communication and confidentiality, to improve all children’s educational experience. This policy is based on the principles that all the stakeholders aim to work together for the benefit of the child and their learning.

**Behaviour in the School**

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school. This not only extends to the children but to all of the school community e.g. the staff, parents, visitors, psychologists, therapists etc. While the behaviour of children in the school is of vital importance, adults in the school community also have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour models the types of behaviour expected of children.

It is important that all members of the school community are responsible for their own behaviours in the school. Examples include:

 All members of the school community are expected to speak to each other with respect. Should a parent need to have a discussion or meeting, an appointment should be made at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved. Classes begin at 9.00a.m. and finish at 1:40p.m. for Junior and Senior Infants and at 2.40p.m. for all other classes. **This time should not be interrupted.**

**Any parent collecting a child should notify the school in advance and should go to the office.**

**No unauthorised or unvetted person should enter a classroom.**

 When members of the school community have a formal meeting, it is important to respect that the time of meetings should be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Times of meetings should be agreed beforehand and these should be respected

**The following tools of communication are in place in Knockconan N.S.:**

* Oral communication between staff
* Oral notices to teachers by the Principal
* Staff meetings
* Staff emails
* Staff text messages through Textaparent or Cadoo (one way communication)
* Regular classroom visits by the Principal
* Announcements/discussion in staff room at break times
* Staff room notice board
* Text messages
* Google planner
* School-related events
* Assembly

**Procedures for staff meetings**

 Staff meetings are held regularly or as the need arises and are recorded as part of Croke Park hours.

 This is a collaborative exercise with each staff member having the opportunity to nominate items/issues for inclusion on the agenda.

 Minutes are taken by the Principal, or by the Deputy Principal in her absence. The minutes of the meeting are recorded with a clear statement of the decisions made, actions to be undertaken and the delegation of responsibilities. A memo is distributed to the teachers for their records following the meeting. The principal keeps a hard copy record of all staff meetings including the date, details of the meeting and the meeting’s duration.

 Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and other ancillary staff may be required to attend staff meetings if issues relate to their work/responsibilities are included on the agenda. When these issues have been discussed and decisions taken, SNAs and other ancillary staff can leave.

**Home-School**

As per Circular 56/2011 ‘Initial Steps in the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy’,

“Parents play a critical role in supporting their children’s learning. Schools can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children in this way by sharing meaningful information with parents about the progress that children are achieving in the education system. This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that staff use, such as conversations with the learner, data-collection and documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, examination of students’ own self-assessment data, documented observations of the learner’s engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment tasks and tests, and examples of students’ work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich staff knowledge of their students’ progress through providing further information about the students’ learning at home.”

**School / Parent Communication**

The school endeavours to ensure clear communication and cooperation between school and home using the following:

* Phone calls to school landline or mobiles. It is **not appropriate** for parents to have a phone number of a member of staff (unless they are known to them outside of the school context) or to contact them through Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram etc.
* Regular newsletters keep parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and school concerns, these are also published on the school web site.
* Text messages (Textaparent or Cadoo) This facility is used to remind parents of events/changes to schedules etc as necessary
* School Twitter account (set up proposed March 2020). This will supplement the school web site (www.knockconanns.weebly.com)

**Emails** - Parents may email the school with general questions about school activities. The school principal or secretary will respond to these queries by email.

**Email enquiries should only be sent to the following email addresses:** [**knockconanns5@eircom.net**](mailto:knockconanns5@eircom.net)

* Any specific incident or questions relating to a child’s progress be made directly to the child’s class teacher, either by a written note or a phone call. Any email question about a particular incident or a child’s progress will be passed to the child’s teacher. The teacher make a phone call or arrange a formal meeting on these issues. The class teacher does not respond directly to emails.
* School website – [www.knockconanns.weebly.com](http://www.knockconanns.weebly.com)
* School events
* **Registration of new entrants:** Parents of all new entrants are required to complete an application for enrolment form prior to official enrolment and to attend an open day with their child.
* **Information meetings**are organized as the need arises to advise parents of educational and curricular matters of relevance to their child’s education and welfare.
* **Information leaflets/ forms**from the HSE, DES or other bodies directly connected with education and welfare of pupils in the school will be distributed to pupils from time to time.
* Notes to/from home in the homework folder (Infant Classes) - a teacher or a parent should communicate that a note has been placed here as children at infant level may not be able to communicate the presence of a note
* Homework notebook (from middle classes up) – each week has a section for notes. Parents or teachers may write in this. Parents should check homework for notes from teacher.
* Home-school copies – In individual cases, it may be deemed useful for parents and teachers to communicate to one another regularly. In this incidence, a home-school copy or communication diary. Comments in this should be accurate, concise and factual by both teachers and parents

**Formal Parent/Teacher meetings** will be held once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04). Parent-Teacher meetings in October/November. They will be initiated by the school staff and details regarding time, etc. will be worked out by the school, in consultation with parents. The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned and being cognisant of individual home-life situations. Meetings may take place in classrooms or support rooms if necessary. The class teachers prepare for the meetings and collaborate in advance with other teachers working with a child about the progress.

*In the case of parents who are separated, requests can be made by both parents to meet their child’s teacher.*

**The purpose of the Parent/Teacher meeting is**:

* To establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
* To let parents know how a child is progressing in school
* To provide parents with an opportunity to let the teacher know how a child is coping with their school work from their perspective
* To help teachers/parents get to know the children better as individuals o To help children realise that home and school are working together
* To share with the parent the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
* To review with the parent the child’s experience of schooling
* To learn more about the child from the parent’s perspective
* To identify ways in which teachers or parents can help a child
* To negotiate jointly decisions about the child’s education

**Pre-arranged face-to-face meetings between teachers, parents and/or other relevant agencies (by appointment).**

If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she can contact the school secretary to arrange a suitable time or briefly and informally request a time at the beginning/end of a school day. Parents with questions or issues about school policy or practice will be referred to the class teacher or the principal

**Support Plan (formerly Individual Education Plan or IEP) meetings** with a SEN teacher for parents of children with special educational needs generally take place in September and again in January. Parents will be invited to attend a meeting with the child’s SEN teacher. It is not possible/practical for class teachers to attend these also but the resource teacher will liaise with them for their input before and their feedback after the Support Plan meeting.

Special Needs Assistants may also attend this meeting if deemed necessary. Any other relevant professionals may also be invited to attend (Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapist, Educational Psychologist, etc.). However, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child, they may do so by prior appointment.

For further information, please see the schools’ Special Educational Needs Policy

During the school year, class teachers may organise **information nights.** Relevant parents will be invited to attend.

**School Reports**

* School reports are given out one week before the end of the summer term to ensure that any follow-up meetings can be facilitated if necessary. The school uses a standard NCCA report card template. In the case of parents who are separated, requests can be made for the issue of two report cards. The report cards provide for reporting in four key areas:
* The child’s learning and achievement across the curriculum
* The child’s learning dispositions
* The child’s social and personal development
* Ways in which parents can support their child’s learning

**It is vital that the school is immediately informed of any change in family events/situations that may cause anxiety to a child and therefore may adversely affect their education.**

**In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians named on the address or contact designated on file will be consulted by staff.**

**Absences must be notified in writing to the school in accordance with TUSLA requirements.** A separate attendance policy is available in the school.

**Informal Parent-Teacher/SNA Meetings**

**The school has always been very open to parent – teacher contact.** **Informal parent-teacher contact** **occurs regularly in the school as parents bring and collect children**.

***Regretfully, teachers are unable to enter into consultation with parents during formal teaching time. If a parent wishes to pass on information to the child’s class teacher during these times he/she should write a short note to the teacher. Alternatively, a message may be passed on through the school secretary or via email.***

Informal meetings should be used only for minor issues and not to discuss issues of concern/progress. This is discouraged on a number of grounds:

* + It is difficult for staff to adequately supervise their class while at the same time speaking to a parent
  + It is difficult to be discreet when so many children are standing close by
  + It can be unsettling or embarrassing for a child when their parent is talking to staff at a classroom door

**Regarding any changes in collection arrangements of children from school - it is requested that the school be informed through the office.**

**If parents need to drop in forgotten lunch boxes, sports gear etc., this can also be done through the secretary’s office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum. Under no circumstances should a parent enter a classroom during class time.**

**Complaints Procedure**

While complaints are infrequent, in the event of such, the school would wish that a complaint would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. This usually serves to minimise distress for all involved.

The complaints procedure should follow the steps below:

* Parents should always go to the class teacher first. In most cases, things can be resolved at this level. The teacher will inform the principal of any serious complaints
* At this stage, if a parent feels that the issue has not been resolved, they are welcome to make an appointment with the principal to discuss the matter further and complete an Issues/Complaints Form.
* All Issues / Complaints forms will be raised with the Board of Management of the school whether the issue has been resolved by then or not.

An agreed complaints procedure involving all the representatives in the education process (teacher unions, managerial bodies and DES) was devised in 1993 and the steps necessary to resolve school-related complaints are clearly laid out. The school’s complaints policy based on this procedure is available on the school web site home page.

It is not the role of either members of the Parent’s Association or the parents’ representatives on the Board of Management to act as a channel for complaints for other parents.

The parents’ representatives on the Board of Management primary obligation is as a member of the management team of the school and as such their role does not include representing the Parents’ Association or individual parents. They are not on the Board to represent parents. They are there as representatives OF parents. In effect their role is to bring a parental perspective on all issues.

**Separation in the home**

The staff encourage parents experiencing separation to come to speak confidentially to the class teacher and/or Principal. It is our aim to handle such matters with sensitivity and compassion, and ultimately, our primary concern is for the well-being and overall development of the child. The following are the key procedures that should be in place in the school with regard to parents who are separated:

* The parent/guardian of each child has full responsibility for informing the school in writing of any change in circumstances at home e.g. custody arrangement, protection orders etc.
* When a child spends time in two homes, it is requested that the school be provided with both sets of emergency/contact numbers and that it is made clear if there are particular cases under which a respective parent should be called e.g. dad should be called on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and mum on Monday and Wednesday
* It is assumed that when we wish to communicate with parents regarding their child, the parent who is contacted (i.e. the parent with whom the child principally resides) will inform the other parent of meetings, arrangements etc. Special requests for separate communication can be accommodated
* Regarding the collection of child/ren from school - it is requested that the school be informed of any significant changes to routine in collection arrangements in writing
* It is the school policy to offer the option of separate parent/teacher meetings, if so desired. However, for the child’s sake we recommend that both parents attend together. Each parent has a right to attend such meetings and receive school reports unless there is a court order to the contrary
* Regarding notes, school communication via schoolbags etc., it is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed. The school can provide such information to both parties but only if requested to do so.

**Safety, Health and Welfare at Work**

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989.  It is an important piece of legislation for BoMs and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time. It is recognised that school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation.  This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders. In this respect, all staff should be aware of DES Circular 40/97 which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours.  A copy of this circular can be found on the Department of education website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/40\_97.doc

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality pertaining to all school matters is of paramount importance to all those who work or visit our school, and especially those who are in contact with staff and students. For staff, this is explicitly stated in their contracts of employment as well as the school’s Child Protection Policy. This is also imperative in the case of visitors (e.g. guest speakers, parent volunteers, coaches etc.) who have direct contact with pupils.

Confidentiality when dealing with the children in school

* Some pupils may be experiencing difficulty or have varying learning styles. This is a sensitive area, requiring all involved to have due regard for the privacy and confidentiality the child
* Discussion about any child’s behaviour, needs or progress should only occur amongst the parties those directly involved with the child i.e. the child’s parents/guardians, teachers, SNAs, principal and/or relevant external agencies. Discussion beyond this remit will not be tolerated
* Staff should not be asked to speak about another parent’s child to a parent. The staff of the school will respect your child’s right to privacy so it is asked that parents respect other children’s rights to privacy.
* Information received about particular children and observations made in classrooms need to be handled sensitively and carefully and often are only to be shared with particular members of staff or individual parents.
* Confidentiality when dealing with the children in school
* Individual teachers/SNAs may be closer to some parents as they may themselves be from the immediate community and/or may/might have been parents of pupils in the school themselves. Some parents may therefore consider them more approachable than other staff members. It is very important therefore, that all teachers/SNA recognise the rules of confidentiality which govern their role as a member of the school staff. No discussion of any child, teacher, class or event pertaining to school should take place without consultation and agreement with the principal and the relevant parties
* SNAs allocated to particular children may be involved in the use of a communication diary which is used to keep the lines of communication between the school and the parent regular. The use of such a diary is agreed between the parents and the school in advance.
* It is not appropriate for other parents to communicate through SNAs.

**Success Criteria**

Our Communication & Confidentiality Policy will be seen to be working well when;

* we receive positive feedback from members of the school community
* there is good communication between staff within the school
* there is good communication between staff, parents and the whole school community
* staff and parents have access to these clear communication procedures
* all members of the school community have regard for the integrity of pupils’ welfare regarding confidentiality
* visitors, volunteers, student teachers and others who engage in work/work experience in the school are aware of their role in ensuring confidentiality for the school community
* parents in general and other staff members feel assured and confident that those who engage in work/work experience in the school are unambiguously bound by strict guidelines and have due respect for your child’s privacy

**Roles and Responsibility**

All members of the school community, under the positive and supportive leadership of the Board of Management and Principal, have both a role and a responsibility in successfully implementing this policy.

The policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by the policy committee through feedback from members of the school community.

**Implementation Date** This policy was implemented from ………………………………….

**Timetable for Review** This policy is to be reviewed during the school year 2022/2023.

**Ratification and Communication**

This policy will be communicated to members of the Board of Management prior to the meeting of the BOM on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Parents will be made aware in the next school communication that the policy is available for viewing on the school website.

Date of ratification: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ CHAIRPERSON OF BOM

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

PRINCIPAL