POLICY DOCUMENT

For use by all member schools

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

	Name	**Date**
Written By	Niv Vitarana	27 May 2016
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Review		
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Aim

We need to ensure that communications from the Trust and schools to external parties are clear, professional, timely and appropriate.

Principles

All communications from Spring Partnership Trust schools and the Trust should:

- Keep parents/carers, Local Committee members, Directors and other stakeholders well informed.
- Be open, honest, ethical and professional.
- Use jargon-free, plain English and be easily understood by all.
- Be actioned within a reasonable time. The schools will ensure that they hold addresses (including email addresses) which enable us to inform parents/carers about school events such as parents evenings (unless this is not appropriate, for example, if there is a court order in place).
- Use the methods of communication most effective and appropriate to the context, message and audience.
- Ensure that all communication is carried out professionally and, in the case of video conferencing, in accordance with the guidelines in Appendix 1.

All Staff are responsible for:

- Ensuring information is made available in a timely manner and via appropriate channels, for example, reminders or letters to individual parents/carers or groups of parents/carers are sent to classes to be given out by the class teachers and must be given to children the same day.
- Ensuring that any sensitive information is dealt with in a confidential manner.

Internal Methods of Communication

- Full information regarding internal communication expectations are covered in the Staff Handbook/ Code of Conduct supplied to all staff.

External Methods of Communication

Schools have many lines of communication to maintain with parents/carers, other schools, the community and with outside agencies. Our aim is to have clear, effective communications with all parents/carers and the wider community. ParentPay is the predominant method of communication with parents/carers about school events. If parents are separated, and if the schools have been advised of the separation, the schools will ensure that both parents receive the same information in a timely manner.

Communications with Parents/Carers

- Letters: Staff will respond to parent/carer letters within 48 hours (2 school days). This may include a holding response from the school. Any letter of concern must be referred to the SLT as soon as possible. Replies to parents/carers must be approved by the SLT before they are sent. Copies of all correspondence to individual parents will be placed in pupil files. Any formal letter of complaint must be dealt with according to the Trust complaints policy as soon as possible.
- Email: The schools have an email system to communicate with parents/carers. Any communication that needs to be sent to parents/carers using this system must be sent via the admin address. Staff should forward relevant emails from parents/carers to the SLT if the content is a complaint. All emails requiring an answer should be responded to within 48 hours (2 school days). This may include a holding response from the school. In cases where parents/carers do not have access to emails a hard copy will be printed and sent home.
- Written Reports: Regular written reports are provided to each child's parents/carers on their progress in each area of learning. This report identifies areas of strengths and areas for future development.
- Websites: The Trust and school websites provide information about the schools and is an opportunity to promote the schools to a wider audience.
- The schools remind parents/carers to ensure their contact details are up to date on an annual basis.

In addition, parents/carers meet their child's teacher during the year for a consultation at Parents' Evening. This gives them the opportunity to celebrate their child's successes and to support their child in areas where there is a particular need for improvement. We encourage parents/carers to contact the school if any issues arise regarding their child's progress or well-being.

We will make reasonable adjustments to our arrangements if this will enable a parent with a disability to participate fully in a meeting at our schools or to receive and understand communication.

Social Media
- Staff will not communicate with pupils via social networking sites or accept them as "friends".
- It is best practice for staff to not communicate with individual parents/carers via social networking sites.
- Any communication on a social media platform on behalf of a school must be professional and not able to have the potential to cause any reputational damage to the school or the Trust.
- We request that parents/carers support the schools in ensuring pupils have responsible online role models when posting and sharing content on social media sites, and we ask that all members of the school communities consider how comments may be misunderstood or misinterpreted when shared online, and the possible impact and consequences on others.
- Parents/carers are encouraged to share any concerns they have about the school in accordance with the complaints policy, rather than publicly on social media.

Home/School Communication
- Home School Agreement regularly reviewed if in place at a school.
- Home visits will take place for those families with children in, or due to join, the Reception Class.
- School newsletters are sent to parents/carers regularly through ParentPay with paper copies available on request or sent to parents/carers who are not on the ParentPay list. It contains general details of school events and activities. We send other letters of a general nature when necessary and store copies on the relevant school's website.
- Children in all classes have a reading diary/record. This enables parents/carers to record a wide range of information about their child's reading.
- The schools encourage parents/carers to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity. Teachers will arrange to see parents/carers as soon as possible.
- We arrange various meetings for parents/carers throughout the year. Parents/carers are invited to Workshops to discuss various topics. Meetings are held prior to any residential trip to inform parents/carers of planning, content and arrangements. Meetings for new parents/carers are organised at an appropriate time for them to receive information prior to their child starting at school.

Unacceptable Communication
Communication with staff or pupils in any form, including through social media, that is considered to be intimidating, aggressive or malicious will **not** be tolerated. The schools reserve the right to restrict communication and/or access to the school site if inappropriate behaviour is reported. Such communication can also potentially be considered as a criminal offence and can therefore have serious consequences.

We recognise that children have a fundamental right to be protected from harm; that their protection is a shared responsibility and that Spring Partnership Trust schools should provide a safe and secure environment. We are in a unique position to identify and help any child needing protection. So when any member of staff has concerns about a child, these will be passed to the Designated Safeguarding Lead who may share this information with Social Services.

Appendix 1

Guidelines and Trust expectations for video conferencing

When staff use video conferencing facilities, whether to engage with pupils, parents/carers, other staff, or third parties there are certain Trust expectations as set out below. These are three of the key rules regarding video conferencing:-

Always Test Beforehand
Test video, audio, and your internet connection at least 10 mins before your call.

Treat it Like its In-Person
Dress like you were meeting in person to avoid looking unprofessional.

Clean Up
Rid your background of distractions or hide them behind a green screen.

In addition it is recommended that:-
- the 'mute' button is used when not speaking
- a slower pace is used for video meetings than those held in person
- you try to find a quiet room to use for the meeting
- try to ensure only one person speaks at one time
- you check your lighting so that participants who are lipreading are able to see a clear image
- meetings involving sign language interpreters or remote captioners need to be limited to 40 minutes. Participants should be advised in advance if a meeting is required to be longer than this
- Screen shots, recordings or photos of a call should only be taken once permission has been given.

Video Conferencing Software
All video conferencing between non TSPT employees, including those involved with governance, will take place using CISCO Webex or Google Meets/Hangouts.

Video conferencing between TSPT employees can be held on CISCO Webex, Google Meets/Hangouts or other suitable platforms.

Behaviour
All staff are expected to behave professionally at all times whilst taking part in a video conference meeting, and will adhere to the following:-
- Suitable, professional clothing must be worn
- Inappropriate language must not be used
- Disciplinary action will be taken if conferencing is conducted in a way that may cause reputational damage to the school or the Trust.

Video Conferencing with pupils

Consent
Consent for participation in each session will be assumed once the parent/carer has accepted the video call.
A date and time for the video calls is to be arranged prior to the session. Either party can end the session at any time during the session.

Teachers
- A parent/carer must be present in the room for at least the beginning and end of the lesson and must be within earshot for the duration.
- Teachers must protect themselves from accidental inappropriate contact with pupils by restricting their profile so that it does not automatically accept contact requests and is not accessible to pupils.
- Teachers must use a business like profile picture where appropriate and establish an appropriate manner when using video conferencing.
- Sessions must take place in a communal room within the pupil's home.
- Teachers and pupils must be appropriately dressed. If this is not the case, all parties should end the call and communicate the reason afterwards.
- Online sessions must be kept to the timetabled length.
- Language must always be professional and appropriate, including from any family members who might be in the background.
- Teachers must not give out their own mobile numbers or accept any pupil contact details including mobile numbers.
- Teachers must not share any content over social media
- Teachers must not friend or follow pupils on their personal social media accounts.
- Teachers should make a note of the conference timing and who participated, including those that arrived/departed early or late.

Parents
- A responsible adult must be present in the room for at least the beginning and end of the online session and must be in earshot for the duration.
- Parents/carers must not share the teacher's email address, mobile number or passwords
- Sessions must take place within a communal room within the home.
- Pupils' clothing must be appropriate, including any family members who might be in the background.
- Pupil contact details including mobile numbers must not be passed to their teacher
- Parents/carers and pupils must report any safeguarding concerns to the school safeguarding team.
- Parents/carers must not redistribute or record any content of the sessions

Safeguarding
All teachers should remember that safeguarding is just as important when teaching via video conferencing as it is when teaching and communicating face to face.
The staff member should take reasonable steps to ensure that the pupil is in a safe physical environment during the session. The parent/carer of the student involved in the session must supervise the student throughout the session.
The staff member must both inform the parent/carer of the pupil about the procedures for confidentiality, and the parent/carer of the responsibility to supervise the pupil involved in the session at the beginning of the conference call. Members of staff cannot be held responsible if the parent/carer of the pupil does not follow the procedures and advice given.

At the beginning of each session, the member of staff and parent/carer are to agree how to proceed if a technology breakdown occurs e.g. to try and re-connect after 2-5 minutes.
As with a face-to-face session, should the member of staff become aware that a parent/carer of the pupil, or the pupil, is sharing or giving an indication of a possible/probable safeguarding situation, the member of staff will contact the school Safeguarding team using the relevant software.