



Harold's Cross Educate Together National School

Communication Policy

Date of Ratification: 15th November 2023

Date for Review: May/June 2025

Introductory Statement

This policy was formulated in consultation with the staff and parents of Harold's Cross Educate Together National School in September 2023. It was informed by a review of current communication practices within the school which was undertaken by the PSA, the Principal and the Board of Management, which included consultation with staff and parents.

Throughout this document 'parents' will refer to parents, guardians and caregivers.

Rationale

This policy was devised in order to provide information and guidelines to members of the school community in relation to communication between all parties. The school recognises that positive relationships are central to the effective functioning of the school. This is also reflected in a recent review of the school's Code of Positive Behaviour Policy.

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 and aim to work together for the benefit of the child and their learning, so that the child's education can be effective.

The Right to Disconnect

Following the publication of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect, in April 2021, a recommendation followed that all workplaces should work to develop a Right to Disconnect Policy. This Communication Policy will encompass and outline the Practice for Employers and Employees Right to Disconnect in Harold's Cross ETNS.

The health and wellbeing of the school staff is of the utmost importance, and staff are encouraged and supported to prioritise their own health and wellbeing. Disconnecting from work is vital for wellbeing, and to help achieve a healthy and sustainable work-life balance. Unless there is an emergency, every member of staff is entitled to switch off outside of their normal working hours and enjoy their free time away from work without being disturbed.

What is The Right to Disconnect?

- The right of an employee to not routinely perform work outside their normal working hours;
- The right to not be penalised for refusing to attend to work matters outside of normal working hours;
- The duty to respect another person's right to disconnect (e.g. by not routinely emailing or calling outside normal working hours).

The Staff and Board of Management of Harold's Cross ETNS believe that:

- Good communication between home and school is important because with positive and active partnership the child gets the best that primary education can offer.

- Teachers can do a better job where they are supported by, and work closely with, parents.

We know from research that children do better, behave better and are happier at school where parents and teachers work closely together and when parents are able to give their children support at home.

(National Parents Council Document: Working Effectively as a Parents Association)

The Staff and Board of Management of Harold’s Cross ETNS are committed to:

- Developing close effective links with parents
- Participating in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the central and fundamental role of parents as Primary Educators of their children (as per Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland)
- Maintaining the ethos, values and distinctive character of Harold’s Cross Educate Together National School
- Supporting and facilitating the Parent Staff Association
- Encouraging and facilitating the participation of parents in school policy and decision making

Parents are encouraged to:

- Develop close links with the school
- Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their children
- Share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinctive character
- Become actively involved in the school and Parent Staff Association
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.

In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians will be consulted by staff. It is essential that all parents and legal guardians are named on the enrolment form.

All adult’s communication 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 stakeholders e.g. the staff, parents and the wider community. Anyone entering our school premises should feel safe and welcome. Adults in the school community have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour models the types of behaviour expected of children. All adults will treat children, staff and other parents with the utmost respect.

- All adults within the school are expected to speak to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones are not acceptable. If any adult displays anger or aggression to another member of the school community, they may be asked to remove themselves from the premises and/or school site. In severe cases, and if required, the Gardaí will be called.
- The school will respect all children and parents’ right to privacy and confidentiality, so staff should not be asked to speak about any child with a parent, except with the parent of that particular child.

Things that the school needs to know to keep children safe and healthy:

- It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that may cause anxiety to a child and could affect his/her education. The first point of contact should always be your child's class teacher, and in serious situations the Principal should also be informed. All such information will be held in the strictest confidence and only shared with other staff on a need-to-know basis.
- The school should at all times know who is collecting a child. Upon enrolment, parents must nominate a list of people and their contact information who have been authorised to collect a child. Should this change the onus is on parents to inform the school of the change. Under no circumstances will a child be released to anyone unauthorised/unknown to the school. If, at any time, parents alter the pick-up arrangements for their child, the school should be given written authorisation by the parent immediately. In cases of independent dismissal for older pupils, this must be communicated in writing with the school. In an emergency situation, the parent must inform the school at the earliest opportunity.

Structures in place to facilitate open communication and consultation with Parents:

Annual Consultation/Communication throughout the year including:

- Welcome day for new Junior Infants and their parents in May/June each year. New families to the school in other year groups are welcome to attend too.
- Annual one-to-one parent-teacher meetings in November/February for infants (a short, written record of the meeting is kept on Aladdin).
- Class teachers / SET meet with parents whose children have additional educational needs
- Ongoing consultation and communication regarding development or review of school policies.

Written communication including:

- Aladdin notifications sent from Secretary/Principal/Deputy Principal/Other relevant staff members regarding whole-school matters
- Aladdin notices sent from class teachers and support teachers to parents, on a whole-class and/or individual basis where relevant.
- Aladdin notices sent from parents to the Secretary/Principal/class teachers or support teacher.
- Regular newsletters to keep parents up-to-date with school events, holidays and other relevant or important information from school and termly from class teacher.
- Annual end-of-year school reports (shared via Aladdin)
- Text messages for general reminders (e.g. specific events) or urgent information (e.g. emergency closure)
- Some pupils with SEN may have a communication diary. This is not a means of reviewing academic/social progress but rather serves as a useful tool to share information between home and school.
- Updates and information on the school website
- Updates and information on the school social media page

It should be noted that, generally, communication sent from the school will be 'paperless'. Aladdin notices sent from the school will be sent to the email address(es) provided at enrolment, unless otherwise requested by parents. All paper communication sent from the school will be sent to the child's home address as given on the enrolment form, unless otherwise requested by parents.

Other structures and processes including:

- Along with staff, and often-times pupils, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of school policies. This may sometimes take the form of a Google Forms, or may require focus/discussion groups or sub-committees. Parents will be sent draft updated copies of policies and requested to send feedback to the school. The policies are then ratified by the Board of Management and made available to all parents via the school website or in hard copy if requested.
- Parents are invited to participate in events throughout the year e.g. Sports Days, School Tours, Graduation and Intercultural events.
- Involvement of parents in curricular areas and focus weeks is also encouraged; e.g. Science Week, Inclusion Week, Book Fair, Literacy/Numeracy groups etc.
- In order to streamline school communications, the school requests all parents to sign up for **Aladdin Connect** for communication purposes, as well as for other items such as; updating of contact details, scheduling of Parent-Teacher Meetings, granting permission for events such as school tours, reporting and explaining pupil absences, making payments to the school, accessing and viewing homework information and viewing school reports.

Procedures for parents to initiate communication with the school

If a parent wishes to consult with a staff member on matters relating to their child, they must do so in the first instance with the **class teacher**.

Classes begin at 8:30am and finish at 1:10pm (infants) and 2.10pm (1st-6th) and this time should not be interrupted. Meetings/Discussions with the staff at arrival or dismissal times, or at the classroom door/ school yard to discuss a child's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds, as follows:

- Staff cannot adequately supervise their class/pupils, 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 put a pupil in an uncomfortable position if their parent is talking to staff in this way.

However, teachers and other members of staff may be available to listen to a quick issue in the morning and after school as long as confidentiality issues are not impacted. If matters raised cannot be resolved immediately or if the parent or staff member needs to discuss the matter further an appointment should be made at a convenient time for both parties.

On rare occasions a parent may need to speak to a staff member urgently. The Principal will aim to facilitate such meetings, making every effort to ensure that the children in the class do not lose out on any of the teaching/learning time. In such circumstances, the Principal or support teacher may be available to provide supervision. This can only be facilitated **in urgent, exceptional circumstances**.

Parents wishing to discuss a matter with a staff member by meeting or phone call, should request this on Aladdin – stating their request for the meeting, an indication of their availability and a brief outline of the topic to be discussed.

The Aladdin Noticeboard is not a suitable forum for lengthy messages/discussions/complaints, as such matters should be discussed in person or by phone. Parents are requested to use Aladdin for the following purposes only;

- **Requesting a meeting/phone call as outlined above, where matters can then be discussed further**
- **Providing brief information to school staff**
- **Requesting brief information from school staff**

If parents use the Aladdin Noticeboard for matters other than the above on a continuous basis, this will be referred to the Principal and/or the Board of Management so that a review of communication can be undertaken.

If parents require a reply from the teacher/school, they are asked to ensure that they have ticked the 'allow replies' option on Aladdin.

If parents need to drop any items to the school (e.g. lunchboxes, sports gear or other forgotten items) this must be done through the secretary's office so that learning is not disrupted, and so that the schools' Health and Safety, and Child Safeguarding Policies are adhered to. Parents cannot enter a classroom during the school day, without prior specific arrangement.

In the event that a parent wishes to make a complaint, they must do so in line with the school's complaints procedures.

In order to adhere to and respect the staff's right to disconnect, emails are only monitored by the school between the hours of **8:00am and 4:00pm, Monday – Friday**, unless there is an urgent, exceptional circumstance that the school needs to be made aware of outside of these times.

Within the Aladdin app, an 'out of office' feature is installed whereby parents are able to type and send messages at a time of their choosing, but the message will not be delivered until the next school day.

Urgent or exceptional circumstances should be communicated to the school office email.

Procedures for the school to communicate with parents on Aladdin

Staff will use **Aladdin** to communicate with parents on the following matters:

- Permissions- e.g. school trip
- Parent-Teacher meeting scheduling
- Notices relevant to class level, e.g. golden time, show and tell
- Individual notices to request meeting/phone call
- Individual notices with brief update relating to teaching and learning
- Notification of behaviour notice being sent home
- Notification of HSE/medical examinations e.g. Hearing and Vision tests

*Staff will contact parents on Aladdin between the hours of **8:00am – 4:00pm** and may use the **schedule send function outside of these times.***

If staff require a reply from the parent, they are asked to ensure that they have ticked the 'allow replies' option on Aladdin.

Staff will contact parents by **phone** on the following matters:

- Child seriously injured or feeling unwell
- Urgent discussion required with parents regarding incident/behaviour

The above is not, and cannot be, and exhaustive list.

Pupils may contact the parent body via Aladdin or on the school noticeboard about on the following matters:

- Student Council Updates

Procedures for Communication with and/or between the School, Board of Management (BOM) and Parent Staff Association (PSA)

Harold's Cross ETNS recognises the importance of open and transparent communication between the school, Board of Management and Parent Staff Association and acknowledges the importance of positive working relations between these various groups.

Systems: The following systems are in place to support effective communication in this regard;

- The Parent Staff Association liaise a termly report to the BOM via the Secretary to Board of Management (Principal).
- There are 2-3 staff representative on the Parent Staff Association. They attend meetings to provide a school's perspective and often share information on particular items in consultation with the Principal. The staff representative does not have voting rights on the PSA.
- The parent nominees on the Board of Management attend PSA meetings as members of the PSA.
- The Principal and Chairperson of the PSA (or another officer of the PSA/sub-committee member) meet monthly to discuss relevant items or plan events.

Procedures: The following procedures are in place to support effective communication with and/or between the school/BOM/PSA generally takes place as follows:

- Anyone wishing to communicate with the BOM should forward correspondence to the Principal, who is secretary to the BOM, by emailing the school with the subject line FAO Principal.
- The Principal or Chairperson communicates any BOM-related items to the school community via the Agreed Report.
- The PSA can be contacted by the parent body by email at ptahxetns@gmail.com: The purpose of this communication should be to make suggestions or correspond about PSA events. The PSA is not a complaints mechanism for the school and all such matters will be redirected to the school.
- The PSA will communicate with the wider parent body through the School and PSA Newsletter. The PSA must consult with the Principal/Deputy Principal in advance of the PSA Newsletter being sent out. The PSA may then send reminders about the previously sent Aladdin messages by another platform such as WhatsApp but the PSA must be cognisant that this is not a school-approved method of communication, and not all parents are users of WhatsApp. For reasons of transparency and inclusivity, all PSA correspondence should be through Aladdin.
- The PSA, when wishing to communicate with school staff, should forward a message to the Principal who will then forward this to the school staff.
- The PSA will hold an AGM to update the wider parent about activities of the PSA.
- The Principal/BOM representative will address the parents at the PSA AGM to provide an overview of the work and activities of the BOM.

Procedures for Communication with Outside Agencies

Harold's Cross ETNS recognises the importance of developing and maintaining links with the community, as well as with state bodies. The school and staff regularly communicate with: NEPS, the NCSE, the school SENO, the HSE, Tusla, the school EWO, local education centres, teaching colleges, other providers of professional learning and Oide (PDST, NIPT and CSL). As well as these, the school has developed links in the community with; local schools, community Gardaí, local events organisers, local sporting organisations, local businesses, external providers of extra-curricular activities etc.

Staff communication with each of these outside agencies/community links will be by phone or staff school email.

Procedures for Communication with External Extra-Curricular Providers/Childcare Providers

Harold's Cross ETNS values the importance of having extra-curricular activities and after-school care provided by external providers. A contract/lease is in place between the Board of Management and these providers, to cover such matters as the space which is leased and any cost/rental matters.

Any queries or complaints relating to these providers should be sent directly to the relevant provider, as their services are run as an entirely separate entity to the school.

Communication by email/Aladdin – response time

Response times to emails from the school secretary can vary depending on the demands of the office at any given time. It is considered reasonable that 3-5 school days are allowed for a response (with the exception of holiday periods during which email is only checked intermittently).

Response times to emails to the Principal can also vary greatly depending on the demands at any given time. Priority must be given to the pupils, staff and overall running of the school. A response time of 3-5 school days is considered to be reasonable.

Teachers are in class during the day and will prioritise teaching and learning during this time. They may be engaged in planning, meetings or personal matters before or after school hours and so, again, 3-5 school days is considered to be a reasonable response time. Teachers on leave of absence will not reply to Aladdin messages or to emails whilst on leave.

If a matter is urgent, please send a notice on Aladdin or contact the school by phone on 0831185960 or 012243551.

There may be occasions where a parent is trying to contact the school by phone and/or email and are not receiving a response. Office hours are limited and the secretary is not always at the desk and may be performing duties elsewhere in the school. We ask for patience during these times and ask that parents leave a voicemail on the phone which will then be responded to.

Implementation

(a) Roles and Responsibilities

All members of the school community are responsible for implementing this policy, particularly in relation to their own communication. The Principal/Deputy Principal should be made aware of any challenges with this, and this may be brought to the attention of the Board of Management.

(b) Timeframe

This whole-school policy will be implemented from the 2023/2024 school year.

Review

This policy will be reviewed in May/June 2025. The policy will be reviewed before then, should a need arise (i.e. if there is a need to change any aspect of this).


Ratification and Communication

The attention of all newly appointed staff will be drawn to this policy upon their appointment to the school by the Droichead Professional Support Team (PST). The attention of all parents will be drawn to this policy, upon the enrolment of their child in the school.

This policy will be published on the school website, and a copy of it will be provided to the Parent Teacher Association. A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and Skills and the Patron, if requested. Hard copies of this, and all school policies, are available at the school upon request.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on 15th November 2023.

Signed:  (Chairperson, BOM)

Signed:  (Principal)

Date: 15th November 2023

Date of next review: May/June 2025

WhatsApp Group Code of Conduct

As a school, we do not use WhatsApp groups to communicate with families. We use Aladdin to communicate with all families.

However, we are aware there are some class WhatsApp groups. The creation of WhatsApp groups presents a wonderful opportunity for fostering connections across the HXETNS school community. Having regard to the general principles and ethos of the school, we expect that parents will share information in a courteous and considerate manner.

On that basis, by requesting to join a school WhatsApp Contact Group, participants will agree to abide by the following:

- When communicating with individual members of the group, or when making reference to school-related matters, messages posted on school WhatsApp Contact Groups should always be respectful in language and tone.
- These groups should not be used for airing issues around individual pupil performance, school policies, teaching methods, school staff etc. Please deal with the school or teacher directly if you have an issue in this respect or, where relevant, with the School Principal.
- Parents should avoid posting messages that are not relevant to school business such as posting personal and/or business promotions.
- Any opinions expressed are the opinions of individual members and should not be considered representative of the whole group. Group administrators or the school are not responsible for any comments posted by individual members of the group.
- All communication in a WhatsApp Contact Group is considered private and should not be disseminated outside that group by any individual member without permission.
- To avoid breaching child protection policy on photographs and videos, please do not circulate any content in which a pupil appears unless that image has already appeared on the school website or other school platform or unless the student's parents have approved this – noting all the students are currently under 18 years of age.
- The group administrator will have the right to remove participants who do not abide by the Code of Conduct from school WhatsApp Contact Groups. We want to avoid anyone being put in that position.
- Always be mindful of the number of messages being posted and, except where unavoidable, please do not post on the groups after 10pm.
- By joining a WhatsApp group, you are sharing your phone number with other parents within your child's class group. Once you join, you will always have the option to leave the group.

Please follow these guidelines when using WhatsApp groups and speak with me if you have any queries or concerns.

Thank you,
Ruth