

St Mary's Bryanston Square Church of England Primary School

Communicating with parents: meetings, 'phone calls, letters and emails.

1: Introduction

St Mary's School always welcomes contact with parents because this fosters mutual understanding and support which has a positive effect on pupil performance.

The school wants to ensure that parents always have an appropriate and helpful response to their communications. However, unlike some businesses and other occupations, the professional duties of teachers can make it difficult for them to speak or meet with parents during large parts of the school day.

Teachers may be teaching for up to 90% of the school week, and during the rest of their working week (some 50 hours on average according to a recent survey) they are working with, or for, children in a variety of activities. These include meeting pupils to discuss progress, behaviour or target setting, meeting with other teachers to prepare, plan and co-ordinate their work with children, marking, assessment, break and lunchtime supervision duties, training and development, etc. The important business of working with and responding to parents has to be managed by teachers within this professional context. Their work with children means that they are often unavailable to parents during the working day.

2: Routine Communication between school and parents

There are many regular, 'organised' opportunities for parents and teachers to communicate. For example:

- a. Nursery class interviews with new parents
- b. Annual new Reception class parent meetings
- c. Reception class to Year 1 transition meeting
- d. Year 1 to Year 2 transition meeting
- e. Year 3 transition meeting
- f. September: 'meet the teacher' meetings
- g. February: pupil progress meetings
- h. July: written, end-of-year reports
- i. Report follow-up meetings
- j. Governor/parents meeting (Autumn)
- k. School Journey meetings (Year 5)

- l. Secondary Transfer meetings (Year 6 specifically)
- m. Open morning for prospective new parents
- n. Workshops for parents
- o. Termly (6 times per year) information from class teachers at the start of each new term
- p. KS1/Lower KS2 information displays
- q. Weekly school newsletters
- r. Specific letters before trips/visits
- s. Special Educational Needs annual reviews.
- t. Website. *We now try to put as much up-to-date information as possible on our website. Most of the general information that parents might want can be readily found by logging on at www.bryanston.net. This includes our weekly newsletters, holiday lists, many school policies and general information for parents (see the 'documents' link).*

The school also encourages informal meetings with parents to deal with unplanned, sometimes urgent, matters as they arise. Sheelagh Leith, our Learning Mentor, is often available to parents at the start of the school day and may be able to help with some of these urgent matters.

3: Principles for Responding to Parents

In order to achieve the most effective balance for children, parents and teachers, we have always followed the following principles.

- welcoming contact from parents.
- responding as quickly and fully as possible to parents.
- involving parents in our work with children.
- sharing information as often and as fully as possible with parents

4: Guidelines on Responding to Parents

It may be helpful for parents to know how they can expect requests for meetings, telephone calls and their letters to the school to be dealt with. The following guidelines show how we aim to respond to parents.

Requests for meetings in person: Many parents will naturally approach staff directly, either at the start of the school day or end of the school day. Most of this communication is simple information sharing which is important for the staff to know and takes very little time. **Longer discussions about progress or difficulties cannot take place without notice.** Teachers should suggest making an appointment for these discussions at a later time and/or day. It may be possible to schedule this meeting on the initial contact, or parents may be directed to the school office to request a meeting. We aim that such

meetings should take place as soon as possible after the initial contact, bearing in mind the school's scheduled meetings (staff meetings, etc).

We realize that parents may sometimes feel aggrieved and this should inform the decisions that teachers make and the way that the interaction is conducted but it remains the case that, especially at the start of the day, it is rarely possible to find the time, and cover, to enable an effective meeting to take place. These situations must be dealt with sensitively.

Telephone calls: All telephone calls from parents are received through the main office by the administrative staff

Urgent calls: If the teacher asked for is not available, the call will be put through to the most appropriate or available senior member of staff.

Non-urgent calls: Administrative staff will usually take a message or may pass the caller to an appropriate extension if possible - for example, the Foundation Stage Unit - bearing in mind the time of day and availability of staff to answer.

The Administrative staff will normally take details of the parent's name and telephone number and purpose in calling. This information will be given to the teacher concerned who will try to respond as soon as possible and by the end of the next school day whenever possible.

Messages for pupils: In emergencies or at other times when it is unavoidable, administrative staff will help parents by taking messages for pupils.

Telephone calls made at arranged times: If teachers have arranged with parents for them to receive calls at particular times of the school day, those teachers will try to ensure that administrative staff know where they will be and they will try to make themselves available at those times. Should other commitments or events make this impossible, the administrative staff will take down the details and the teacher will try to call back the same day.

5: Responding to Letters and E-mail from Parents

The school will always try to **acknowledge** letters and e-mail received from parents within two working days and to **respond** fully within seven working days.

Written communications from parents (other than simple notes conveying information) will be shown to, and perhaps discussed with, a senior member of staff before a response is drafted. The response should also be shown to a senior member of staff before being sent.

Instant/quick detailed responses are rarely appropriate, except to acknowledge receipt of a letter (this is a particular problem with email). It is better that we provide a thoughtful response than an instant response.

If more time is required to provide a fuller response or to arrange a meeting, teachers will include in the acknowledging letter details of when a meeting can be arranged to provide a fuller response. Teachers will try to respond to the most pressing concerns of parents as quickly as possible.

When meeting with a parent to discuss concerns, the teacher:

- may have another member of staff present
- will be as well prepared as possible
- will listen to the concerns
- will make notes
- will agree the next steps to be taken
- schedule another meeting if necessary

Peter Hadfield
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