

# SEVENOAKS SCHOOL

<i>Policy reference</i>	AC1
<i>Policy Category</i>	A. Student and Parent Facing
<i>Name of policy</i>	<b>Communication Policy</b>
<i>Purpose of policy</i>	To lay out the rationale for and process by which communications are managed in the school, between staff and parents and between staff and students.
<i>Regulatory or legal requirement addressed by policy</i>	Not applicable
<i>Other policies referred to</i>	Behaviour Policy, including the Student Code of Conduct and IT Terms of Use. Parent Contract
<i>Policy owned by</i>	Senior Deputy Head
<i>Date effective from</i>	27 June 2024
<i>Published on website</i>	Yes

## COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

### 1. Introduction

A successful partnership between Sevenoaks School and its students, parents or carers (hereafter referred to as parents) is based upon open communication. We wish all members of our community to feel a strong sense of belonging and engagement with the rich life of the school and to be engaged in events and activities where possible and appropriate.

### 2. School Responsibility

The school is committed to including parents in the educational and pastoral life of their child and to keeping them aware of matters regarding their individual care as well as wider school events and issues. School communication with students and parents will be open and respectful, and mindful that we work together in partnership. We will educate those students who do not mirror this tone so that they understand the importance of courtesy and learn about their own impact.

### 3. Parental Responsibility

It is vital that parents keep the school informed as soon as possible about information or circumstances which might impact on their child's wellbeing or ability to learn. Health conditions, disability or special educational needs should be declared and updated, as appropriate, as should changes to family circumstances, including any financial circumstances that may affect your ability to meet your obligations under the Parent Contract.

The school will assume both parents have parental responsibility unless notified to the contrary when entering into the Parent Contract, or notified in writing to the Deputy Head Pastoral. We require proof if other family members (e.g. step-parents, other relatives) have parent/carer responsibility. Should parents wish guardians to be included in communications, they should notify [admin@sevenoaksschool.org](mailto:admin@sevenoaksschool.org) to arrange access to emails and communications via Parents Online.

The interests of the student must always be paramount, and it is important that parents agree on decisions to avoid the child or the school being involved in disputes including, for example, participation in school trips, or subject choices. Parents should be aware that in the event of disagreement, the school will endeavour to meet the student's choices or preferences where we judge it to be in his or her best educational interest. If one parent makes a request to the school, we will assume that this has been agreed by both parties unless otherwise stated.

To ensure a constructive relationship is maintained with the school we ask that parents treat our staff with respect, and ensure the tone, content and volume of communication with the school is reasonable and appropriate.

### 4. Means of Communication

The primary means of contact will be through email and the Parents Online portal, but the school also communicates information through the website, regular newsletters to parents, and social media channels.

### 5. Emergency Communications

Parents must ensure the school always has current contact telephone numbers and email addresses so that contact can be made in an emergency, such as unplanned closure due to power failure, or an injury to your child. We will attempt to contact you by telephone if your child is injured or taken seriously ill. Where an incident affects the whole school community, such as power failure or snow, the school will send all parents an email or text message and will endeavour to provide timely updates as necessary.

In the unlikely event of a more serious incident, the **first and greatest priority will always be to**

**look after the students.** Our next priority will be to give parents the fullest possible account of events as soon as possible; we will always inform a parent personally if their child is injured or has suffered some mishap unless the emergency services take this responsibility and instruct otherwise.

Boarding parents must allocate an educational guardian who lives reasonably close to the school who can be contacted in an emergency. The educational guardian must be able to accommodate the student in the rare event of a school closure, or if the student is ill or suspended from school.

## **6. Email**

Email is the simplest form of communication between parents and staff and between students and staff for those times when a face-to-face meeting is not possible.

The Tutor is the first point of contact for parents and should be emailed about any absence or concern regarding an individual student. Tutor details are included in the blue book that is available on the parent portal (School Documents: Parent Guides). Boarding administrative matters may be addressed to the BHM. Wider-ranging queries should be addressed to your child's Divisional Head or the appropriate Deputy Head.

The format for staff emails is: initials [\[abc\]@sevenoaksschool.org](mailto:[abc]@sevenoaksschool.org); initials can be found at the front of the blue book. [admin@sevenoaksschool.org](mailto:admin@sevenoaksschool.org) should always be copied into emails.

Teaching staff cannot check email constantly during the day, when they are likely to be teaching or with students, and neither are they expected to respond to emails after 6pm or on Sundays. They will endeavour to respond within two working days to any email. If a matter is urgent, please call the school and you will be connected with the relevant Divisional Head or Deputy Head.

Email communication regarding payment of a school bill should be addressed to [fees@sevenoaksschool.org](mailto:fees@sevenoaksschool.org) in the first instance, and the Finance Team may escalate your enquiry to the Director of Finance or Bursar as appropriate. Please note that non-teaching Support Staff (for example the Finance Team) usually work 9-5pm Monday to Friday.

Your child will be given an individual email account when they start at the school, which they are expected to check daily. Students can send and receive emails from computers in the school or remotely, through their own device. Emails between students and staff must only be through their school email account.

Boarders, their parents, guardians and boarding staff use an online system called Reach to monitor boarders signing in and out of the boarding houses, and for submitting leave requests.

## **7. Letters to Parents and Parents Online**

The Headmaster sends to all parents a video and letter at the start and end of the academic year to give general information on a range of matters that are likely to be of interest. Deputy Heads, Housemasters, mistresses, tutors and other members of staff will also write from time to time about matters of concern to a particular group of parents, such as a trip or visit involving one year group. Most letters to groups of parents are sent through Parents Online. This will notify parents via email, but letters are also stored on the Parents Online portal. Several termly newsletters are also sent out, detailing events, photos, videos and school news.

In addition to accessing communications sent by the school, the Parents Online portal also allows parents to access academic reports, their child's academic timetable and additional pastoral information. Where parents are separated or divorced, copies of communications will normally be sent to both parents.

## **8. Bulletin and School Calendar**

A daily bulletin is published within school to students at Tutor time and is available on Parents Online. The school calendar with details of term dates, trips and school events is available on the school's website and can be downloaded to a phone if desired.

## **9. School Website**

The website provides a range of information about the school. There is a dedicated area on the website for parents to access additional information. Access to Parents Online (see above), the Parents Evening booking system, Sevenoaks School Sport (with information about fixtures and results) and the School Calendar are all accessible through the parent pages of the website.

## **10. Mobile Telephones**

Mobile phones may be brought to school but should be kept out of sight in a bag. Students in years 7-11 should not take them out during the school day (08:30 – 16:10) without permission from a member of staff. Students in the Sixth Form may use a mobile phone during the day, but not in communal areas with other year groups, such as the Dining Room or Café. Mobile phones must be clearly named with indelible ink (using their student code). It is the responsibility of the student to keep them secure

We advise that Students in Year 7 and 8, if they have a phone at all, should have a phone with basic (non-smartphone) function.

In an emergency, students can go to reception in Manor House (or, once reception is closed, the Marshals in Claridge House) and ask to use a phone; boarders can ask house staff.

## **11. Other Digital Devices**

Students in Years 7 and 8 should not bring a device to school. They have access to a computer for those occasional lessons which necessitate their use. The only exception to this is when the use of a device in lessons has been recommended by the Learning Support Team.

Students in Years 9-11 will, from 2025, be allocated a school owned Microsoft Surface on a lease arrangement. These devices are controlled and monitored by the school. Middle School students may not bring in a personal device (for example a different laptop or tablet), unless by prior agreement as part of a Learning Support arrangement.

Students in the Sixth Form may bring a personal device to school. Boarding students in year 9-11 may bring a device to use in the boarding house though they must use their school issued device for school work, at all times.

Digital devices must be clearly named with indelible ink (using the student code).

## **12. All Digital Devices**

Internet access via the school network is subject to filtering which will protect users from inappropriate sites, but parents need to be aware that it is not possible for the school to filter or monitor websites accessed by students on personal mobile phones via their own data plans.

All students who do have a device in school are responsible for ensuring that their device is charged and ready to use throughout the school day. Students must use a mobile telephone or digital device responsibly and with reference to the School's IT terms of use, the Online Safety Policy and the Student Code of Conduct.

The camera on a digital device must not be used in a way as to harass or cause distress to another student or member of staff. This includes taking photos of staff or other students without their knowledge and consent, or posting to social media without consent. Parents and visitors to the school may not take photographs around the campus or at performances without specific permission.

Those boarders with laptops or other internet-enabled mobile devices may use Skype, Facetime or other video-calling services to contact friends and family at a reasonable time, subject to the technical restrictions of the school's network. Students should ensure that they are not compromising the privacy of another student when making a video call from a public area or boarding house.

### **13. Parents' Evenings**

The school will hold one Parents' Evening per year for each student in the school. Parents can access the booking system via the parents' section of the school website. Parents' Evenings are timed to be of maximum benefit to the student's school journey. We encourage students to attend Parents' Evenings with their parent(s) so that they can hear from their teachers first hand and reflect on their school experience.

We ask parents to liaise with each other about attendance at Parents' Evenings. In rare cases, we will endeavour to arrange for separate appointments at Parents' Evenings if required, but this will not always be possible if the member of staff teaches more than one set. Parents who have requested separate interviews in principle will be advised in advance if we cannot accommodate that. Students whose parents have separate appointments may not wish to sit through each interview twice, nor may it be desirable for them to do so.

### **14. Academic Reports**

The school publishes all academic reports to Parents Online. The schedule for these reports varies between different year groups and is designed to ensure parents are regularly informed about their child's progress in different areas at appropriate points in the academic year. It is also designed to ensure minimal overlap with Parents' Evenings. All year groups will receive either three or four written reports each academic year, two of which (with the exception of the Upper Sixth) are full reports, including a paragraph from each subject teacher, and the remainder of which are sets of shorter "comments". Parents also will receive reports and comments from other appropriate staff, including Tutors, Divisional Heads, Learning Support staff and Visiting Music Teachers. For students in Years 9 and above, grades for effort and achievement (and, if applicable, exam grades) are sent to parents alongside these reports.