



Horizons Specialist Academy Trust
Providing infinite opportunities

Parent, Carer and Academy Communication Policy

Working together to secure the best outcomes for every child and young person

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Statement of intent

Horizons Specialist Academy Trust (HSAT) is committed to open, respectful and effective two-way communication between its academies and the parents and carers of the children and young people who attend them, including those attending our sixth form provision.

We recognise that children and young people achieve their best when families and academy staff work together in a spirit of trust, honesty and mutual respect. Everyone involved should keep the child or young person at the centre of communication and work towards the shared aim of supporting their safety, wellbeing, learning, progress and preparation for adult life.

This policy establishes clear and fair expectations. It explains how parents and carers can contact academies, how academies will communicate, the response times that may reasonably be expected, the professional boundaries that protect staff wellbeing, and the steps the Trust may take where communication becomes abusive, threatening or unreasonably persistent.

The policy does not seek to prevent parents and carers from raising legitimate questions, concerns or complaints. It is intended to help those matters be considered through the correct route, constructively and without avoidable delay.

Equality monitoring statement

Under the Equality Act 2010, the Trust will ensure that communication arrangements are accessible, inclusive and applied fairly. This policy will not be used to discriminate unlawfully against anyone because of a protected characteristic.

Horizons Specialist Academy Trust has assessed this policy for potential adverse impact on individuals with protected characteristics. Implementation will be monitored to ensure that parents and carers have equitable access to information and opportunities to participate in their child's education.

The Trust and its academies will consider and make reasonable adjustments where required. Depending on individual need, this may include accessible meeting arrangements, alternative formats, additional time to process information, supported communication, interpretation or translation arrangements, or the use of an authorized representative or advocate. Parents and carers are encouraged to tell the academy about any communication needs so appropriate arrangements can be considered.

Legal framework

This policy has due regard to relevant legislation and statutory guidance, including, but not limited to:

- Education Act 1996, including the meaning of “parent” for education law purposes
- Education Act 2002
- Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004
- Education and Inspections Act 2006

- Equality Act 2010
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation
- DfE statutory guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education
- DfE statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children
- DfE guidance on understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility
- DfE guidance on school complaints procedures, insofar as it applies to academy trusts

This policy operates alongside the Trust's and each academy's relevant policies and procedures, including:

- Complaints Procedure (including Managing Unreasonable or Persistent Complaints arrangements, where applicable)
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Policy
- Online Safety or Social Networking Guidance, where applicable
- Whistleblowing Policy, where applicable

Scope

This policy applies to communication between HSAT academies, the Trust central team, and parents or carers of current children and young people. The term "parent or carer" includes those recognised as parents for education law purposes and others with parental responsibility or agreed caring responsibilities, as appropriate to the circumstances.

It covers communication by letter, email, telephone, messaging or parent platforms, video call, meeting, academy website, newsletter, social media and in person. It also applies to representatives or advocates communicating on a parent or carer's behalf, subject to appropriate consent and information governance requirements.

Separate statutory or Trust procedures may apply to particular matters, including admissions, exclusions or suspensions, safeguarding, data protection, staff grievances and formal complaints. Where another procedure applies, the academy will signpost the parent or carer to it.

Principles and Trust values

Our communication will reflect HSAT's vision, aim and values:

Value	What this means for communication
Inclusion and Equality	We will seek to remove barriers to involvement and communicate in ways that recognise individual circumstances, aspirations and needs.
Dignity and Respect	All parties should be listened to and treated courteously. Disagreement is permitted; disrespect, intimidation and abuse are not.
Safety and Wellbeing	Communication must support safe practice and the emotional and physical wellbeing of children, young people, families and staff.
Working in Partnership	Parents, carers and staff bring different knowledge and perspectives. We will share relevant information and work collaboratively in the child or young person's best interests.
Supportive	We will seek to understand, identify solutions and provide or signpost support where possible.
Aspirational and Personalised	Communication should contribute to high expectations, improved life chances and approaches suited to the individual child or young person.

Our commitment to parents and carers

Academies and Trust staff will, so far as is reasonably practicable:

- communicate in a professional, courteous, clear and accessible way
- listen carefully and seek to understand the question, concern or information being shared
- recognise the expertise parents and carers have about their child
- provide accurate information and correct material errors promptly when identified
- keep parents and carers appropriately informed about their child's education, progress, wellbeing and significant academy matters
- be clear about who is dealing with an issue and whether further information or investigation is required

- respect confidentiality and share personal information only where there is a lawful and appropriate basis
- seek to resolve questions and concerns at the earliest appropriate level
- make reasonable adjustments where required and consider additional communication support
- explain when a request cannot be met, including where this is due to safeguarding, confidentiality, legal duties, professional judgement, operational constraints or the needs of other children and young people
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries and support staff wellbeing
- each academy's Parent Support Advisor will help promote accessible communication, strengthen relationships with families and support parents and carers to access information, advice and appropriate services.

What we ask of parents and carers

Parents and carers are asked to:

- keep contact details and relevant information up to date
- read academy communications and respond where a reply, consent or action is required
- use the most appropriate published contact route and provide the child or young person's name, academy and enough factual detail for the matter to be understood
- raise concerns as soon as reasonably possible and, where appropriate, first with the member of staff closest to the matter
- allow reasonable time for staff to teach, care for pupils, gather information, consult colleagues and respond
- arrange appointments rather than expecting staff to leave teaching or other duties for an unplanned meeting
- communicate respectfully, even when disappointed, worried or in disagreement
- avoid copying large numbers of staff into messages unless this is necessary
- avoid repeated messages about the same issue while a response or investigation is pending
- respect confidentiality and the privacy of other children, families and staff
- use the Complaints Procedure where a concern has not been resolved through ordinary communication

Choosing the right communication route

Using the right route helps the academy respond efficiently. Each academy will publish or make available its contact details and may adapt the role titles below to reflect its staffing structure.

Matter	Usual first contact	Notes
Routine class, learning or pastoral matter	Class teacher, tutor or nominated key contact	Use the academy's published method. The staff member may consult colleagues before replying.
General family support, help accessing services, or advice about the most appropriate person to contact	Parent Support Advisor	Each academy has a Parent Support Advisor who can provide an accessible point of contact for parents and carers. They can listen, offer practical support, help families navigate academy communication routes and, where appropriate, signpost or refer them to relevant academy, Trust or external services. The Parent Support Advisor does not replace the appropriate member of staff responsible for educational, safeguarding, health or formal complaint matters.
Attendance or absence	Academy office or attendance team	Report absence using the academy's stated procedure and within the required timescale.
Transport	Relevant transport provider and/or academy office	Responsibility may sit with the local authority or commissioned provider.
Medication or health information	Academy office, school nurse (where applicable) or designated staff	Follow the academy's medication and health procedures. Urgent clinical advice should be sought from health services.
Safeguarding concern	Designated Safeguarding Lead or academy office	Do not rely solely on email where there is an immediate risk.

Matter not resolved at first contact	Relevant line manager or senior leader	Explain what has already been raised and the outcome sought.
Formal complaint	Route set out in the HSAT Complaints Procedure	This is a separate process with its own stages and timescales.
Trust-wide or strategic matter	Trust central team	Academy-specific concerns should normally begin with the academy.

Communication standards and response times

General standard

Staff will aim to acknowledge routine communications within two working days. Where a matter can be resolved quickly, a substantive response may be provided within this timeframe. Where further investigation, consultation or consideration is required, the acknowledgement will explain that a full response will follow and, where possible, provide an indication of the expected timescale. Complex matters, staff absence, safeguarding checks, consultation with external services or academy closure periods may result in a longer response time.

These timescales are service expectations for routine communication, not formal complaint deadlines. The separate Complaints Procedure contains the applicable stages and timescales for concerns or complaints being considered under that procedure.

Working hours and professional boundaries

Parents and carers may send an email or message at a time convenient to them. However, staff are not expected to monitor or respond to communications outside their normal working hours, during evenings, weekends, bank holidays, academy closure periods or annual leave. Sending a message outside working hours does not create an expectation of an immediate or next-morning response.

Individual staff working patterns vary. A response may therefore come from another appropriate colleague, or on the staff member's next working day. Automated replies may be used to identify absence or signpost urgent and alternative contacts.

Telephone calls and messages

Staff will aim to return routine telephone messages within two working days. Staff may be teaching, supporting children and young people, in meetings, undertaking duties or working off-site and may not be immediately available. The office may take details and identify the most appropriate person to respond.

Communication volume and duplication

Where several messages concern the same matter, the academy may provide one coordinated response. Copying multiple members of staff does not normally speed up a reply and may delay effective allocation. Parents and carers should allow the stated response period before sending a reminder unless important new information arises.

Meetings and visits to academy sites

Meetings should normally be arranged in advance, with a clear purpose and the right people present. Unplanned requests may not be accommodated immediately, particularly at arrival and collection times or when staff are teaching or undertaking pupil-facing duties.

All visitors must follow the academy's safeguarding, security and visitor procedures. Where there appears to be a communication breakdown in a meeting, e.g. an attendee perceives it to be abusive, threatening, discriminatory or otherwise unsafe, staff may end or pause it. A further meeting may be offered with additional arrangements, such as a senior leader present, a written agenda, an agreed time limit, an accessible venue or remote attendance.

With prior agreement, a parent or carer may bring a supporter, advocate or interpreter. The academy may request appropriate consent and clarification of that person's role.

Safeguarding, emergencies and urgent matters

A message sent by email, through a parent platform or on social media may not be seen immediately and should not be used as the only method of reporting an emergency or an immediate risk of harm.

If a child or young person is at immediate risk, parents and carers should contact the emergency services. Safeguarding concerns relating to an academy child or young person should be reported promptly using the academy's published safeguarding route. Outside academy hours, the relevant local authority safeguarding arrangements or emergency services should be used where appropriate.

The academy may need to share information without consent where this is necessary and lawful to safeguard a child or young person or another person. Staff will follow the Trust's safeguarding and data protection procedures.

Confidentiality, data protection and recordings

Communication will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR, the Trust's privacy notices and relevant safeguarding duties. Information about another child, family or member of staff may be confidential and cannot always be disclosed, even where it is connected to an issue raised.

Parents and carers should avoid sharing confidential academy correspondence, images or personal information about children, families or staff on social media or with people who do not need to receive it.

Meetings, telephone calls and conversations must not normally be recorded without the prior knowledge and agreement of everyone involved. Requests to record as a reasonable

adjustment will be considered on their individual circumstances. Where a recording is agreed, the purpose, storage, access and onward sharing should be clear.

Unacceptable, abusive or persistent communication

HSAT understands that parents and carers may contact an academy when they are worried, frustrated or upset. Staff will listen to legitimate concerns and will not treat a person as unreasonable solely because they are persistent or disagree with an outcome. However, the Trust will not tolerate abuse, harassment, discrimination, threats, violence or conduct that unreasonably interferes with the work or safety of an academy or the Trust.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour may include:

- threatening, intimidating, aggressive, abusive, insulting, humiliating or discriminatory language or behaviour
- shouting, swearing, personal attacks or malicious allegations
- threats of violence, damage, retaliation or harm
- harassment of staff through repeated calls, messages, visits or contact through personal accounts
- publishing or threatening to publish confidential, defamatory, abusive or identifying content
- demanding an immediate response when the matter is not an emergency
- contacting numerous staff or external bodies repeatedly about the same issue while it is being addressed
- refusing to use the appropriate procedure or repeatedly raising substantially the same matter after it has been concluded, without significant new information
- covert recording where consent or prior agreement is required
- behaviour on academy premises that causes fear, disruption or a safeguarding concern

Any action taken will be proportionate, time-limited where appropriate, kept under review, and will not prevent essential communication about a child or young person. Depending on the circumstances, the Trust or academy may:

- set clear standards and ask that behaviour stops
- end a call or meeting and confirm the reason
- require communication to be in writing or through a named single point of contact
- set reasonable limits on the frequency, timing, subject matter or method of contact
- provide a single consolidated response or decline to respond further where a matter has been concluded and no significant new information is provided

- require appointments for attendance on site or impose site-access restrictions where lawful and necessary
- report threats, harassment, malicious communications, hate incidents, criminal damage or violence to the police or another appropriate authority
- seek legal or professional advice

Where possible and safe, the parent or carer will be told in writing what restriction is being applied, why, how long it will last, how necessary communication about the child or young person will continue, and when the arrangement will be reviewed. Immediate action may be taken where there is a serious threat or risk.

Social media and online communication

Academy social media accounts are not normally monitored as channels for individual concerns or complaints. Parents and carers should contact the academy directly through its published routes.

The Trust encourages responsible online behaviour. Content that is abusive, threatening, discriminatory, defamatory, harassing, confidential or identifies children inappropriately may be documented, reported to the platform, referred to relevant authorities or addressed through legal routes where necessary. The Trust will distinguish between legitimate criticism and unacceptable conduct.

Staff must not use personal social media accounts or personal contact details to communicate with parents and carers about academy business unless expressly authorized within Trust arrangements.

Concerns and complaints

A concern is often capable of being resolved through early discussion with the appropriate member of staff. Parents and carers are encouraged to explain clearly what has happened, what remains unresolved and what outcome they are seeking.

This Communication Policy governs day-to-day contact and standards of behaviour. It does not replace the HSAT Complaints Procedure. If a concern cannot be resolved informally, or a parent or carer wishes to make a formal complaint, the matter must follow the separate Complaints Procedure and its published stages, responsibilities and timescales.

The Complaints Procedure is available on the Trust website: [Policies | Horizons Specialist Academy Trust - Providing infinite opportunities](#)

Repeated emails or calls do not escalate a complaint. A request to move to the next stage must be made through the route and within the timescale set out in the Complaints Procedure. Matters governed by another statutory or Trust process will be directed to that process.

Roles and responsibilities

Chief Executive Officer

- ensure the policy is implemented consistently across the Trust
- provide or commission guidance and support for Principals and senior leaders
- determine Trust-level restrictions or responses where appropriate and seek legal advice when necessary

Principals

- ensure academy communication routes and key contacts are clear
- promote accessible, professional and timely communication
- support staff in dealing with difficult or abusive communication
- make proportionate decisions about academy-level communication arrangements and site access, in consultation with the Trust where appropriate
- ensure records are maintained where concerns, restrictions or safeguarding matters arise

Parent Support Advisors

- provide a welcoming and accessible point of contact for parents and carers
- support positive relationships and communication between families and the academy
- listen to parents' and carers' questions or concerns and help identify the most appropriate route for these to be addressed
- provide practical information, early support and signposting to relevant academy, Trust or external services
- work with academy colleagues to support families where communication needs, access barriers or additional support requirements are identified
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries, confidentiality and records in accordance with Trust and academy procedures
- promptly refer safeguarding concerns, complaints or matters requiring specialist or senior decision-making to the appropriate member of staff

Staff

- follow this policy and relevant Trust procedures
- communicate in a professional, courteous, clear and accessible way
- use approved systems and maintain professional boundaries
- keep appropriate records of significant communication

- raise safeguarding, safety, data protection or conduct concerns promptly
- seek support where communication becomes complex, abusive or persistent

Parents and carers

- follow the expectations and communication routes in this policy
- provide accurate and relevant information
- engage respectfully and constructively
- use the separate Complaints Procedure when required

Monitoring and review

The Chief Executive Officer will oversee implementation of this policy. Principals will monitor recurring communication issues, accessibility needs, response arrangements and any restrictions imposed, and will identify learning or improvement actions where appropriate.

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner following a relevant change in legislation, statutory guidance, Trust structure or identified practice need.

Appendix 1: Communication Charter



Horizons Specialist Academy Trust
Providing infinite opportunities

COMMUNICATION CHARTER

WORKING TOGETHER FOR EVERY CHILD AND YOUNG PERSON

 01 WE PUT THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON FIRST Communication should focus on their safety, wellbeing, learning, progress and future.	 02 WE LISTEN AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND Parents, carers and staff each hold valuable information and perspectives.
 03 WE ARE RESPECTFUL We can disagree without being abusive, personal or threatening.	 04 WE ARE CLEAR AND HONEST We explain what can happen next, what may take more time and what cannot be shared or agreed.
 05 WE RESPECT PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES Staff are not expected to respond outside normal working hours.	 06 WE USE THE RIGHT ROUTE Routine questions, safeguarding concerns and formal complaints require different processes.
 07 WE FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS We raise issues promptly, provide relevant facts and work towards a fair resolution.	 08 WE MAKE COMMUNICATION INCLUSIVE We consider reasonable adjustments and remove barriers wherever practicable.



OUR VISION
Providing Infinite Opportunities – Ensuring the best education for our children and young people



OUR AIM
To do more and to do it better

OUR VALUES IN COMMUNICATION

 OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL - Inclusion - Equality	 OPPORTUNITIES TO CARE - Dignity & Respect - Safety & Wellbeing	 OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER - Working in Partnership - Supportive	 OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE - Aspirational - Personalisation
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These values underpin every conversation, decision and relationship across Horizons Specialist Academy Trust.

Together we make a difference



Appendix 2: Quick guide for parents and carers

Question	Answer
How quickly will I receive a reply?	For routine communication, staff will aim to acknowledge or respond within two working days. More complex matters may take longer.
Can I email in the evening or at weekends?	Yes, but staff are not expected to read or reply outside their normal working hours, at weekends, on bank holidays or during closure periods.
Who should I contact first?	Usually the class teacher, tutor, key contact, Parent Support Advisor or academy office, depending on the nature of your question or concern. The Parent Support Advisor can help you identify the right person or route if you are unsure who to contact.
What if the issue is urgent?	Do not rely solely on email. For immediate danger contact the emergency services. For safeguarding concerns use the academy or local safeguarding route.
What if I remain unhappy?	Use the separate HSAT Complaints Procedure. It explains how a concern or complaint is considered and escalated.
Can a meeting or call be recorded?	Not normally without everyone's prior knowledge and agreement. Requests linked to a reasonable adjustment will be considered.
What happens if communication is abusive?	The academy may end the contact, set boundaries, appoint a single point of contact, restrict the method or frequency of communication, or take further proportionate action.