

Hornsea School & Language College



Communication Policy

Created by:	Hayley O'Connor	
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Introduction

The ethos of Hornsea School and Language College (HSLC) is to be kind, useful and to insist that students become the best that they can be. Our aim is that communication with, from and across the school meets this ethos. We believe that fostering strong communication with parents, carers and the wider community creates a supportive, meaningful learning environment that best supports our students. Mutual trust and respect through constructive communication is essential for students' success.

This policy seeks to define the best practice for communication and the range of ways in which dialogue can be established and conducted. It should be read in conjunction with the following HSLC Policies (which can be found on the school website):

- HSLC Complaints Policy
- HSLC GDPR Policy
- HSLC Whistleblowing Policy
- HSLC Home School Agreement
- HSLC ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- HSLC Plagiarism & AI Policy

This policy is intended to support open, constructive communication by:

- Explaining the range of methods via which the school communicates with parents, carers and the wider community;
- Explaining the manner in which feedback is sought from parents, carers and the wider community and how this is used, including the limitations;
- Establishing mutual standards for the conduct of communication;
- Defining appropriate methods of communication and timescales;
- Supporting effective communication by signposting the 'first port of call' for parents, carers, and the wider community

1. Methods of Communication

The following methods and platforms are used to communicate with parents, carers and the wider community.

School staff have the responsibility to ensure that information on these platforms is accurate, timely and in line with the HSLC ethos.

Parents, carers and the wider community are encouraged to consult the information shared via these methods before making direct contact with the school in order to minimise the volume of small queries made each day.

1. Arbor Platform

The Arbor platform is recommended as the place to locate individual information about your child.

- All parents should have access to the Arbor platform and can be supported in the set-up of their account and the Arbor app by our IT Technician Team.
- The Arbor platform gives access to a range of individual student information including but not limited to: student timetable; attendance profile; behaviour and reward points; academic review data via report cards and student progress sections; public examination entries; payment system
- Parents are asked to ensure that all elements of the student profile, contact information and medical information is kept up to date via this platform.

2. School Website

The school website is recommended as the place to locate documents, policies and whole school information. It is updated regularly in line with DfE expectations and the rolling process of internal school policy review.

- The school calendar is published here for the full academic year and contains not only term dates, training day information and parents' evenings, but also dates of wider school events, trips and activities
- School day information and guides
- Curriculum policies and subject overviews for all key stages
- School policies and procedures
- Statutory information and Ofsted reports
- Sixth Form information
- Attendance information and forms
- Online Safety Hub and links to wider Safeguarding information

3. Social Media

The school social media profiles on Facebook and Instagram are recommended as the place to locate immediate, current information on wider school events and activities. Postings include but are not limited to:

- Current student successes and celebrations
- Examples of students' work or activities
- School trips and visits experiences
- Key dates reminders
- Key policy reminders
- Current attendance figures
- Immediate or urgent messages, e.g. unforeseen school closures

4. Email

Email is used by all staff to communicate consistent messages across the school. This is the most frequent form of communication at school, department and class level and often will contain information that is student or group specific.

End of term letters and newsletters are sent via email.

Immediate or urgent messages are sent via email as well as being posted on social media.

Emails are usually sent by staff via the Arbor platform to the email address listed as the primary

contact. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that this email address is current and checked regularly.

5. SMS Messages

SMS Messages will be sent for any immediate or urgent information where time scale or wide reach of the message is particularly important.

Examples of when this may be utilised include school closures, bus delays, or when operational decisions are made in a limited time frame, such as adjustments to summer uniform due to heatwave warnings.

In most cases where the message impacts all students and families, social media and emails will also be sent to ensure the broadest range of communication is used to reach as much of our school community as possible.

6. Student Planners & Edulink

Students Planners contain a range of general school policy and information for use by students and to reinforce key messages around behaviour, uniform and conduct expectations.

Student planners are the place where the Positive Discipline reward stamps and written warnings issued in lessons can be located.

The Edulink platform for students contains the same information as the parent Arbor App with the addition of students' Independent Learning tasks.

Accessibility:

In general terms, we seek to ensure the accessibility of communication by:

- Using a range of methods, often simultaneously, to meet the preferences of the parent, carer and wider community audience/readership
- Ensuring communication is clear and direct
- Ensuring educational terms or school terms are defined and shared
- Using accessible formats

Parents who may need individual adaptations to access these methods of communication are welcome to contact the school to seek advice on reasonable adjustments that can be put into place.

2. Feedback, Consultations & Dialogue

Whilst communication is often a two-way process, as a school the Governing Body and Headteacher have the right in law to determine the key strategic and operational policies and approaches in all aspects of HSLC practice, in line with the guidelines set by the Department for Education (DfE), and to direct our staff in the implementation of these practices and approaches across daily operations.

It is important to recognise that, whilst we welcome feedback and regularly consult with stakeholders in making key decisions, ultimately, those decisions rest with the school and are made in good faith with the best interests of our students and safe, effective working of our school community at heart. It is never our intention to disappoint yet in a school serving 1300+ families, we must all accept that it is not always possible to reach agreement on all issues but that, equally, a consensus opinion is not required nor always sought.

We will endeavour to keep our school community informed regarding key decisions, where appropriate. However, to ensure that communications to parents are kept at an acceptable level and the workload created by enquiries is kept in balance, it is not always possible or necessary to share all decisions or enter into dialogue about the rationale.

Feedback and consultations will take place across the academic year. The following are examples of such activities:

- Acknowledgement & Response form sent with each Academic Review
- Ofsted Parent View Survey (used outside of simply Ofsted inspection days)
- Consultation on key policy changes e.g. 2023-24 Attitude to Learning Policy
- Surveys and feedback forms collected at the end of school events e.g. Y11 revision forum, open evenings
- Parents' consultation evenings with staff regarding student progress
- Individual parent meetings to discuss individual student matters, e.g. behaviour, attendance, SEND support, student wellbeing, safeguarding concerns.

Wider feedback and consultations are always undertaken under the following principles:

- That there is a clear focus to the purpose of the feedback / consultation
- That the method of consultation is accessible and publicised
- That the timescale offers a reasonable opportunity for responses to be made
- That where relevant and possible, outcomes will be shared with those who gave feedback or engaged with the consultation.
- That views and opinions sought will be individual but that the outcome is collective

We appreciate that parents, carers and the wider community may wish to offer feedback outside of these formalised opportunities and times, particularly when the feedback may be relevant only to individual children or circumstances. In these instances, it is recommended that a short overview email is sent to office@hslc.co.uk in order for us to best direct the feedback to the relevant member of staff (see section 4).

Across these forums and opportunities for feedback and dialogue, we will always listen to the views of parents and believe that working in constructive partnership is always key to supporting the best interests of a child. However, the act of listening does not necessarily mean a decision or policy will be changed, nor does not agreeing imply that we do not value your input.

There will be times when we may need to respectfully agree to disagree. It is important to note that HSLC policy exists for the benefit of all students and staff and a course of action or policy will not be changed based on how 'loudly' or persistently individuals or a group of individuals offer their views, especially as this does not always reflect the views of the majority.

Feedback is not the same as a complaint. Where complaints need to be raised, all stakeholders are advised to consult the HSLC Complaints Policy and to follow the instructions outlined within it to address such matters.

3. Standards & Conduct of Communication

As stated at the start of this policy, the ethos of HSLC is to be kind, useful and to insist that students become the best that they can be. Our aim is that communication with, from and across the school meets this ethos and will be conducted in a way that embodies mutual trust and respect.

All stakeholders are expected to communicate in a manner that upholds the following principles:

- **Treating all individuals with dignity and respect, remembering that we are all human**
- **Use appropriate language and forms, refraining from oppressive, demanding, personal or abusive words and tone that may cause individual distress**
- **Communicate in a constructive manner with a view that such communication is designed to best support the student and/or aims of HSLC policies and practice**
- **Understand that each party in a communication brings their own expertise, experience and insight and that one person's perspective is never the whole view**
- **Understand that listening is as much part of communication as speaking**
- **Understand that to 'be kind' may require messages to be shared that are not always the ones that are immediately easy to hear or desired; this does not invalidate the message being given**
- **Directing communication to the appropriate person (see section 4) and via the appropriate method, with the view that this will ensure a more effective and useful response.**

Increasingly and all too frequently, communication received by the school does not adhere to these guidelines. Whilst we appreciate that issues can often be emotive and can often seem urgent, we reserve the right to protect our wider staff welfare. This extends to both the workload generated by excessive communication as much as from abusive communication.

Where communication is deemed not to meet the standards outlined above, the following steps may be taken:

Verbal Communication:

In telephone calls, meetings in person or online, or at school events where the dialogue is threatening, abusive or unconstructive, school staff will state that this is the case before politely terminating the interaction.

Staff are not required to continue to engage with anyone who chooses to communicate in this way. Under Section 547 of the Education Act 1996, it is an offence to cause a nuisance or disturbance on school premises. Individuals displaying disruptive or aggressive behaviour may be asked to leave the site. In serious cases, the school reserves the right to issue a ban from school premises. If a person is banned, the school may take legal action to enforce this ban.

Written Communication:

Where written communication is received (via any platform or method) that does not meet the standards outlined above, staff will acknowledge receipt of the communication but are under no obligation to respond to the content.

In such instances, staff are asked to send the communication on to their line manager or member of the senior leadership team who will determine any next steps to be taken.

A line manager or senior leader may also determine that the abusive nature of the communication warrants only an acknowledgement without a response to content. They may also pursue actions under the persistent or vexatious communication process outlined below.

Persistent & Vexatious Communication:

Persistent and vexatious communication may be characterised by:

- communications or actions which are ongoing, obsessive, harassing, prolific, repetitive;
- prolific correspondence or excessive contact about an issue;
- uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- uses AI as a substitute for expressing own views/opinion/knowledge/experience and thus unnecessarily and unreasonably extends the scope of communication beyond that which is directly relevant to an individual parent, carer or student;
- pursuit of unsubstantiated complaints and / or unrealistic and / or unreasonable outcomes;
- repeated failure to adhere to the expectations detailed in this policy for the conduct of communication;
- an insistence on only dealing with the Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the organisational structure in the school designed to deal with such matters;
- an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful or contradicts LA or DfE policy or guidance.

Harassment for the purposes of this policy and in relation to communications is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions above in a manner which:

- appear to be targeted over a period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
- cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
- have a significant adverse effect on the school community and/or
- are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient and /or
- fails to adhere to the Equality Act of 2010 which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of protected characteristics, including race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and others. HSLC has a duty to uphold these protections in law.

Harassment could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

In all cases, the Headteacher and Governing Body have the right to determine whether a form of communication is excessive, abusive or unproductive and to undertake any of the following steps to address concerns. Whilst these are listed sequentially, there is no implication that every step will be undertaken in order and serious one-off instances will be addressed accordingly.

- Issuing the stakeholder with a warning letter outlining the issue and reminding them of the standards for communication
- Following any repeated breach following an initial warning letter, send a further final warning letter setting conditions for future communication, which may include restriction of communication methods, frequency or audience.
- Place any individuals on a time-bound communication plan, as per DfE policy, which may include restriction of communication methods, frequency or audience, as deemed appropriate to safeguard HSLC staff.
- Contact will be made where necessary with the LA, HR or Legal services in order to seek support in the implementation of such a communication plan, acting in accordance with our duty as employers and under the legal frameworks applicable.

All stakeholders should note the following expectations in relation to these standards:

Social Media

Social media and group communication platforms, such as WhatsApp, must be used responsibly. It is not a suitable format in which to raise concerns and frequently fails to actually address anyone who can take action or resolve a concern. Inappropriate posts, derogatory or defamatory posts, and cyber-bullying will not be tolerated and legal action may be pursued, both by HSLC and by individual staff, as is their right in such instances.

Staff should not be contacted regarding school matters via social media or group communication platforms.

Student information, other than that relating to your own child, should not be shared on these

platforms.

Recordings

If a meeting or call is to be recorded, either live or via online platforms such as Google Meet or Teams, this will be stated at the start of and consent sought from all parties.

Recording of meetings or calls without consent or the awareness of those involved is not permitted.

4. Methods for Communication

Our priority on a day-to-day basis is the safe, effective operation of a school. This is a responsibility that is immediate, unrelenting and takes priority over external communication. HSLC staff in student-facing roles will spend much of their directed working time with students and are expected to give them their full attention and focus, to best support the students' learning, wellbeing and conduct.

Therefore, whilst communication is welcomed, the expectations held by parents, carers and the wider community must be framed under these conditions and are entered into with an awareness of the working patterns of teaching, pastoral and support staff across the school.

Methods for Communication & Expected Response Timescales:

Email

Parents, carers and the wider community should email the school, or appropriate member of staff, in the first instance and as the preferred method of contact.

The school email address is office@hslc.co.uk and other email contacts are listed below.

Email is preferred as this enables staff to manage the workload of responses appropriately across the working week.

We aim to acknowledge emails within two working days and respond in full within five working days.

Telephone Calls

If a message needs to be relayed or the matter is time sensitive, HSLC reception can be contacted on 01964 532727 and they will be able to signpost callers to the most appropriate person. Issues where a telephone call might be appropriate include things like:

- Family emergencies
- Safeguarding or welfare issues
- Attendance concerns
- Pastoral issues

If you wish to speak with a member of teaching staff, it is better to email office@hslc.co.uk in the first instance so that a mutual time for a call can be agreed. For example, a full-time member of teaching staff in a 50 period fortnight is teaching for 45 of those sessions and will undertake duties at break times. They are unlikely to be available at the moment of your telephone call.

HSLC reception is open from 8.00am – 4.00pm Monday to Friday.

Meetings

All meetings must be agreed in advance through either of the methods above in order to ensure that the right HSLC staff and appropriate information can be available to support an effective dialogue.

Ad-hoc 'drop ins' to the school site are not permitted and will not result in a meeting being held.

All meetings are also under the scope of this communication policy with the same expectations for the standard and conduct applicable.

Timing of Communication:

Parents, carers and the wider community should not expect an immediate response from teaching, pastoral or support staff during their core hours of contact time, between 8.30am-3.00pm. Their other duties may frequently preclude them from doing so, whether or not they would like to respond. Timescales for acknowledgement of emails and responses are outlined above.

HSLC has a high number of part-time staff. It is not reasonable for them to be expected to respond on their non-working days. To support this expectation, when staff acknowledge emails, we ask them to share their working pattern for your awareness.

Communication to, from or within school sent after 4pm will not usually be viewed, acknowledged or

responded to until the next working day. Staff have a choice as to whether they engage with email and other platforms outside of their working hours and may choose to respond but this is not an expectation. Staff are encouraged to use the 'schedule send' function in Gmail to keep internal emails flowing during the working day rather than late evening or during holidays.

During all school holidays when school is closed to students, we enter what HSLC terms 'radio silence' where telephone lines are not usually staffed and emails/inboxes are not checked. During this time the central email support@hslc.co.uk is the only inbox that will be checked regularly to ensure that any vital safeguarding matters or urgent information can be shared.

'First port of call'

As noted in section 1, there are a number of ways HSLC shares information with parents, carers and the wider community. It is strongly recommended that this information is consulted before making direct contact with the school in order to minimise the volume of small queries made each day.

Directing communication to the right place in the first instance is key to ensuring effective and prompt response. The following table outlines the best methods / contacts for different categories of communication.

Topic of Communication	Who to contact	How to contact
General Queries	HSLC Reception	office@hslc.co.uk
Safeguarding	DSL – Kay Sullivan DDSL – Emma Webster	support@hslc.co.uk
Pastoral Concerns - Positive Discipline - Uniform	Head of PD – Ash Dexter Deputy Head of PD – Ruth Dickson	pastoral@hslc.co.uk
Attendance	To report absence use the Arbor Attendance> Log absence. If you are unable to access this platform, email attendance@hslc.co.uk or call 01964 530258/278	
ICT Technicians	Rob Coles Faye Dickinson	helpdesk@hslc.co.uk
Learning Enhancement Team - SEND - Looked After Children - Nurture Group provision	AHT for Inclusion & SENCo – Vicky Parnaby Deputy SENCo – Clare Hart Designated Teacher for Children Looked After or Previously Looked After – Debbie Dearing Learning Support Manager – Claire Hodgkins	parnabyv@hslc.co.uk hartc@hslc.co.uk dearingd@hslc.co.uk hodgkinsc@hslc.co.uk
Attitude to Learning & Overall Progress	Progress Leaders: Year 7: Phil Wilson & Matt Knaption	wilsonp@hslc.co.uk knaptionm@hslc.co.uk
	Year 8: Tracey Brocklehurst & Jack Havercroft	brocklehurstt@hslc.co.uk havercroftj@hslc.co.uk

	Year 9: Joe Oldroyd & Amy Wilson	oldroydj@hslc.co.uk wilsona@hslc.co.uk	
	Year 10: Helen Saltmarsh	saltmarshh@hslc.co.uk	
	Year 11: Shaun Leaf	leafs@hslc.co.uk	
	Year 12 & 13: Hayley Salisbury	salisburyh@hslc.co.uk	
	Assistant Head for Progress: Jon Raw	rawj@hslc.co.uk	
Curriculum/ Subject Matters	Curriculum Leaders:		
	Art: Jenny Egan	eganj@hslc.co.uk	
	Business: Hannah Bellerby	bellerbyh@hslc.co.uk	
	Computing & ICT: Laura Ridley	ridleyl@hslc.co.uk	
	Dance: Amy Thomas	thomasa@hslc.co.uk	
	Design Technology: Laura Field	fieldl@hslc.co.uk	
	Drama: Kirsty Maiden	maidenk@hslc.co.uk	
	English: Rachael Williams	williamsr@hslc.co.uk	
	French: Rob Field	fieldr@hslc.co.uk	
	History: James Slone	slonej@hslc.co.uk	
	Life Studies: Ella Rowbotham	rowbothame@hslc.co.uk	
	Maths: Clair Collins	collinsc@hslc.co.uk	
	Music: Jo Turnbull	turnbullj@hslc.co.uk	
	PE: Keane Naylor	naylork@hslc.co.uk	
	RE & World Views: Hayley Salisbury	salisburyh@hslc.co.uk	
	Science: Isabel Newsholme	newsholmei@hslc.co.uk	
	Social Sciences: Naomi Markham	markhamn@hslc.co.uk	
	Deputy Head for Curriculum: Rob Lewchenko	lewchenkor@hslc.co.uk	
	HSLC Sixth Form	Head of Sixth Form – Will Compston	sixthform@hslc.co.uk
	Chair of Governors	Mr Graham McDonald	mcdonaldg@hslc.co.uk