

Communication With Parents and Carers

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Target audience:	ALL ACADEMY STAFF MEMBERS

Introduction

At Tees Valley Education Trust, all curriculum policies are developed in close communication with academy and trust stakeholders and support the overall trust policies. All policies are shared between academies to ensure cohesion and continuity while allowing each individual academy to personalise these in order to best support the unique learning journey of their pupils.

The following policy has been written to support the ethos, vision and values of both Discovery Special Academy and Tees Valley Education Trust. As a special academy, the policy reflects the unique character of the academy and needs of the pupils while continuing to uphold the overall identity of the Trust.

At Discovery Special Academy we value our partnership with parents and carers and believe that clear communication between the academy, parents and carers is important to help pupils benefit as much as possible from their time with us. We are committed to improving parents and carers' understanding of our academy and in encouraging parents and carers to play an active part in their child's education. We welcome discussion with parents and carers on all aspects of their child's education, their personal and social development and care and welfare. This policy describes how staff will communicate with parents and carers about these issues and how we would like parents and carers to communicate with us.

We will communicate with parents and carers in a variety of ways - these are described below. This forms the basis of our policy for communication with parents and carers. However, we are aware that the way that we communicate needs to be personalised to meet your individual needs. We will always ensure we communicate in a way that supports you and your child. We work closely with the Ethnic Minority and Traveller team in Middlesbrough who are able to attend meetings and provide translation and interpreting services to help with communication between the academy and home. We are also able to have letters printed in braille.

Visiting the academy

Parents and carers are always welcome at the academy. Because the vast majority of our pupils are brought to the academy on transport, we miss the regular daily contact with parents and carers that most mainstream academies enjoy. If you are visiting the academy to attend a meeting, a member of our team will welcome you and show you to your meeting room or to where you can wait before the meeting. Parents and carers are always welcome to join us for special events, open afternoons and stay and share sessions that are held throughout the year – you will be invited to these events through a letter of invitation. You are welcome to make an appointment to come and speak to your child's teacher at any point during the year, communication is key to your child's success.

Contacting the academy by telephone

The academy office is open from 8.00am – 4.30pm, Monday – Friday. The telephone number is 01642 248333. Please contact a member of the admin team if you would like a message to be passed to your child's teacher or the pastoral team.

If you have an urgent enquiry that can't be discussed with your child's teacher, please contact a member of the admin team and ask to speak to a member of the senior leadership team.

The members of the Senior Leadership Team are:

- Miss J Duncan, Executive Headteacher
- Mrs A Titchener, Head of Academy

If a member of the senior staff is unable to speak to you when you telephone, we will try to contact you by the end of the academy day.

If you need to speak to a member of staff urgently or wish to have a meeting with a member of the senior leadership team, please telephone the academy office to speak to either the executive headteacher or head of academy who will arrange for you to see a senior member of staff as soon as possible.

Please understand that if staff are teaching or in meetings they may not be able to speak to you immediately. The member of staff who you wish to speak to will contact you at the earliest opportunity.

If you would like to speak to a member of the care team or NHS team supporting the academy, please let the office know and they will ensure the relevant team member contacts you as soon as they are available.

Home - Academy Communication Books

It is the academy policy that all children will be provided with a home - academy communication book. Staff will write in these as regularly as possible. However, it may not be possible or appropriate to write each day. All messages will be dated and include the initials of the member of staff who has written the message. We ask that you let us know that you've read each message in the book by writing your initials at the end of the message.

In addition, we would ask that you use the home academy communication book to let us know what your child has been doing at home and for any successes or concerns you wish to share with us. Family activities – visits to see family, shopping trips or other visits are useful to know to help us communicate with your child about their life outside of academy. If you wish to speak to your child's teacher and would rather note this in the home – academy communication book, please do so. Communication books are checked on a daily basis.

Academy letters

During the year we will write to you with information about activities that will involve your child – these could be educational visits, sporting activities or special events in academy. Please let us know if you would like this information to be emailed or posted to you rather than sent home with your child.

Additionally, if you need letters in large print, braille or translated into your home language, please let us know and we will do our best to ensure this happens.

Newsletters

The executive headteacher or head of academy will write a half termly newsletter. This will provide general information for parents and carers in addition to items of news and events. Newsletters will be published on the academy website and will be available to download.

In addition, the trust publishes a newsletter at the end of each term, which has articles and lots of colour photographs about some of the activities that have taken place at academy during the term.

Text messages

We use a text messaging service to contact parents and carers with reminders about academy events, the publication of newsletters and urgent information – for example if it is necessary to close the academy in an emergency. Please help us by making sure that we always have your correct mobile telephone number. A copy of the information that we have on the academy's records will be sent to you at the beginning of each academy year – please check this and return the information to academy as soon as possible, making any changes that might have taken place, for example your contact details.

Showbie

The academy encourages parents to sign up to the Showbie app. We will use this to send home information about your child's success, including photographs and videos, and keep you up to date with events and activities that are happening at the academy. Parents are also able to use the app to send messages,

photographs and videos to their child's teacher. A letter will be sent home at the beginning of the academy year with details on how to sign up to Showbie. If you need any further information, please speak to your child's class teacher who will be able to help you sign up.

Annual Review Meetings

Each year we will arrange a review meeting to discuss your child's progress, health and well-being and agree targets for their educational, social and emotional development. We will inform you of the arrangements for this meeting as soon as possible at the beginning of the academy year. If you are unable to attend this meeting, please contact the academy office as soon as possible and we will arrange an alternative date and time. When we inform you of the date of your child's review we will also ask you if there is anyone in particular that you would like to be invited to your child's review meeting – please let us know as soon as possible. We will invite the other professionals who work with you and your child to attend.

Consultation meetings

In addition to annual review meetings, we will arrange consultation meetings in the autumn, spring and summer terms to discuss key learning and therapy priorities for your child. These meetings will be arranged after academy hours and will provide an opportunity for a 15 minute consultation meeting with your child's class team. We do encourage you to attend these meetings so you have the opportunity to see your child's work and the classroom in which they learn. However, in exceptional circumstances we can arrange for your child's class teacher to hold a telephone consultation or a home visit for you to discuss your child's learning priorities.

Stay and share events

In the first term, we will hold a stay and share event for each class. This will provide an informal opportunity to meet your child's new class team early in the academy year. We will then hold coffee mornings each term so you can learn more about the activities and therapies your child is accessing.

Residential activities

If it is planned that your son or daughter will take part in a residential visit, you will be invited to a planning meeting when details of the visit and programme will be discussed. The group leader will make individual arrangements with each parent regarding communication during the visit and parents and carers will be provided with a telephone number to contact the group leader in the event of an emergency. The group leader will keep in regular contact with the academy and parents and carers will be provided with regular text and Showbie updates on how the visit is going.

Email

The academy does not generally communicate with parents via email. If you wish to contact the academy via email please use the email below. Individual staff email accounts will not be shared with parents.

enquiries@discoveryspecialacademy.org.uk

Website

The academy website contains information on the academy curriculum, newsletters, academy policies, term dates and other important and useful information. Each half term class teachers will update the curriculum information on the website to inform parents about what children will be learning, important dates and other useful information. If there is anything you feel we should include on the website that we have not already, please speak to your child's class teacher who will ensure this information is passed to the senior leadership team.

Contacting staff outside of the academy

We welcome discussion with parents and carers on all aspects of their child's education, and personal and social development. It is the academy's policy that these discussions must take place on the academy premises or in other professional settings. This enables us to have the right information available to discuss your child's needs.

Please note that discussions or contact with staff must not take place via any unofficial channels.

Please do not contact staff outside of their professional role or by personal communication such as their private email addresses, personal telephone numbers or via social media such as Facebook or Twitter. Staff should not be contacted outside of working hours or consulted in their own homes, as this represents an intrusion into their private life.

Parent groups

We understand that parents may choose to set up their own support networks through messaging services and social media groups. We are fully supportive of such networks. However, we do not expect these groups to be used to discuss concerns that relate directly to the academy or to hold conversations about staff members, we expect that you contact us to have these discussions so that we can offer the right support quickly and in context. Conversations about the academy and staff that are of concern, will lead to a personal reminder about these expectations. If such conversations continue, a written reminder will be sent.