

COMMUNICATION POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

This communications policy sets out all the expected procedures for oral and written communication, which should be adhered to by the school community.

The purpose of this communication policy is to provide guidance on how a message is communicated; the responsibility for communication and how to effectively communicate within the specified timelines.

ABOUT COMMUNICATION

Communication is the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium. Good communication is much more than the exchange of information, including:

1. The management of relationships and the need to involve people.
2. The understanding that communication goes beyond the message and is as much about attitude and behavior.
3. The knowledge that communication is two way and it involves listening.
4. The responsibility from the whole school community to support effective communication and to recognize that the quality of their communication reflects on the school's reputation.

The social health of our school community is reflected in our commitment to be clear, openly communicate and be transParent. High levels of professional confidentiality must be maintained to ensure confidence in school communications.

PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNICATION POLICY

To ensure that the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust is a thriving and successful school, we must communicate effectively with each other, with our students, their Parents, and with other members of the wider community. We need to ensure that communication between all members of the school community are consistent, clear, professional, timely, and appropriate.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNICATION POLICY

1. Keep Staff, Teachers, Students, Parents, Board, and broader community informed.
2. Be open, honest, ethical, and professional in the communication.
3. Give timelines for when the communication needs to be actioned.
4. Give guidelines on the methods of communication that are most effective and appropriate to the context, message, and audience.
5. Ensure that communication is compatible with our core values as reflected in our policies and ethos.
6. Allocate the communication responsibility to various designations.
7. Provide remedial measures for crisis management, poor communication, and complaints.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This section highlights the communication responsibilities of the different groups within the school.

A. THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Board is the oversight body of the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust. They are accountable to the Parent Body and overall school community. The Board has the following communication responsibilities.

1. Communicating to the Parent Body during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) wherein they give a report of how the school is fairing and the current and future strategic plans for the school.
2. Communicating with the Pedagogical Team leadership and School Manager during Board meetings to make strategic decisions for the school.

B. SCHOOL MANAGER

The School Manager is the head of school and is accountable to the Board. The School Manager has the following communication responsibilities:

1. Acting as the Board Secretary who takes minutes at Board meetings and presents monthly reports.
2. Communicating to the Board on matters about the school.
3. Communicating with the Teachers to ensure school documentation is maintained and up-to-date in accordance with the set school procedures.
4. Communicating with members of Staff on matters of importance to them.
5. Communicating with external agencies including but not limited to government bodies, other schools, and other official bodies.
6. Acting as the head of communication within the school and the leader in any crisis or emergency communication.
7. Managing complaints from Parents or from the school community.

C. HUMAN RESOURCE COORDINATOR

The HR Coordinator addresses issues raised by the Employees, helps in hiring of new Staff, and organizes training and development of Staff. Their communication role includes:

1. Communicating with all Employees and Management to encourage excellent human resource practices.
2. Communicating with all Employees on key development areas.
3. Communicate with all Employees on compliance to their job descriptions.
4. Communicate with all Employees during non-compliance of the job descriptions.

D. FINANCE COORDINATOR

The Finance Coordinator is in charge of financial matters in the school and their communication role includes:

1. Communicating with the Board on the budget for the school.
2. Communicating with the Parents on school fees and financial policies.
3. Communicating with the School Auditors.
4. Communicating with the Staff on their payroll.
5. Communicating with the school suppliers and vendors.
6. Preparing financial reports which are communicated to the Board and Parent Body.

E. MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER

The Marketing and Public Relations Office s in charge of events, marketing, and advertising. Their communication role includes:

1. Communicating on social media.
2. Communicating to the school community through a newsletter.
3. Updating the school website regularly.
4. Communicating school events to the school community.
5. Communicating with prospective Parents who visit or make inquiries to the school.
6. Communicating with the media relating to school events and the Waldorf movement.

F. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

The School Administrator is the first point of contact for the school. They are in charge of many of the school communication mediums such as e-mail, phone, mail, etc. They act as a personal assistant and are accountable to the School Manager. Their role includes:

1. Forwarding communication to the relevant person/s.
2. Communicating with Parents on the school calendar.
3. Sending SMS messages of key events to the school community.
4. Communicating bulletins and other school notices.
5. Sending e-mail communication to the school community.

G. HEAD OF PEDAGOGY TEAM

The Head of Pedagogy, also known as the PT Leader, is the leader of all Teachers in Primary and Kindergarten and is accountable to the School Manager with the following responsibilities:

1. Acting as the liaison between the Teachers and Administrators and therefore communication should be two way to reflect the communication of these two groups.
2. Communicating with Teachers to ensure they are up-to-date with reports, curriculum, and lesson plans.
3. Communicating with the School Manager on matters affecting the Teachers.
4. Communicating with the Board on pedagogy matters.

H. FACULTY LEADER PRIMARY / KINDERGARTEN

The Faculty Leader represents the Teachers either in Primary or Kindergarten and they are accountable to the Head of Pedagogy. The Faculty Leader has the following responsibilities:

1. Communicating to the Teachers on what is required from them.
2. Communicating feedback from the Teachers to the Head of Pedagogy.

I. CLASS TEACHER

The Class Teacher oversees communication between Students and Parents and reports to the Faculty Leader. The Class Teacher's communication responsibilities include:

1. Communicating with the Faculty Leader on a regular basis.
2. Communicating to the Students through teaching, providing guidance, and offering advice.
3. Communicating with the Parents on the developments, progress, behavior, and achievements of the Students.
4. Writing termly reports on the Students.
5. Communicating with other Staff members on their progress and challenges.
6. Communicating with the Parent Representative on matters that should be communicated to Parents.

J. PARENT REPRESENTATIVE (REP)

The Parent Rep is the go between the Class Parents and the Class Teacher. Their responsibilities include:

1. Communicating the needs of Parents to the Class Teacher.
2. Disseminating information received from the Class Teacher to the Parents.

K. PARENTS

The Parents are key stakeholders in the school and have communication responsibilities which include:

1. Communicating to the school on matters concerning their child.
2. Communicating to the school on common welfare matters from which the school benefits.

METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

A. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

1. E-mails

E-mail is a quick, effective way of communicating information; however, it should not replace face-to-face meetings where discussion is required.

To ensure that each member of Staff is up to date with information, it is vital that Staff check their e-mails once a day. The School Administrator may receive a large amount of Parent communication throughout the day and they are directed not to disturb Teachers during lessons, except in emergency situations.

2. Written communication

Written communications should be placed in pigeon holes in the staffroom, which Staff must check daily and clear regularly.

3. Face-to-face meetings

Face-to face meetings are one of the most effective tools of communication as all participants receive immediate feedback.

All formal meetings must be planned, structured, and communicated in good time to the attendees and minutes taken. Members are invited to contribute to the agenda. It is important that time is put aside for structured opportunities for Staff to engage in team working and to contribute to subject leaders' reflection on priorities, activities, and future plans.

For all formal meetings, minutes should be taken, action points progressed, responsibility allocated, and feedback given to Staff. Minutes are key for formal meetings for follow up and record of what took place. Without minutes in formal meetings which are signed and shared to attendees, that meeting is not considered to have taken place.

4. Mobile phones

Personal mobile phones must not be used during class hours; they must not be on view during class or when class is in session.

In exceptional cases, such as family illness, the school mobile phones may be permitted however the specific circumstances should be discussed with the School Manager.

During trips and off site provision, Staff must ensure they can be contacted by mobile phone at all times; the school has mobile phones available for this purpose. During off-site visits Staff may use their own mobile phone to contact school or Parents in the case of an emergency.

Students should not bring mobile phones to school. Any exceptional circumstances must be discussed with and approved by the School Manager.

5. Communication with Students

All Staff are expected to talk to Students with respect, following agreed procedures and the Child Protection Policy. Communications with children must be clear and unambiguous.

Wherever possible, two members of Staff should be present if there is a need to discipline a child and any action should follow the Behavior Policy.

6. Communication with Parents

Good communication between the school and the home is essential, and children achieve more when schools and Parents work together. Parents can naturally help more if they know what the school is trying to achieve.

The Nairobi Waldorf School Trust aims to have clear and effective communications with all Parents/care givers. Effective communication enables us to share our aims and values through keeping Parents well informed about school life. This reinforces the important role that Parents play in supporting the school.

Whilst Staff will always seek to establish open and friendly relationships with Parents, they will also ensure that the relationships remain professional. To this end, Parents will always be addressed in an appropriate, professional manner. It is preferable that titles and surnames are used, rather than first names, however the use of first names may be appropriate and this decision is left to the professional judgement of the member of Staff.

Telephone and verbal messages from Parents regarding their children are passed on to Class Teachers as a message. The administrative team have been instructed to only disrupt Teachers in emergency situations.

7. Reporting to Parents or to the Teacher about a Student

When concerns are raised regarding behavior, the behavior of a Student should be considered over time and reflection taken on how this has been managed in the classroom.

Only teaching Staff should discuss concerns with a Parent. All support Staff should discuss their concerns with the Class Teacher.

The school encourages Parents to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity. Teachers should arrange to see Parents as soon as possible. Many Parents have the opportunity to talk to the Teacher when they collect Students at the end of the day. At the start of the day, Parents are asked to speak to the School Manager so class times are not disrupted.

8. Reporting to Parents through letters/e-mail

Staff will endeavor to respond to Parents' letters/e-mail within 2 days of receipt. All written communication to Parents must be professional and abide by the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust communication guidelines. Copies of all correspondence with Parents, including e-mails, should be filed in the Student's physical or electronic files.

9. Reporting to Parents about Staff absenteeism

An e-mail will be sent to Parents when a Teacher is expected to be off 2 days prior. When a Teacher has to attend to an emergency the school must update the Parents of the absence. This communication must include what procedures have been put in place during the absence.

10. Reporting to Parents at the opening and closing of the term

Every beginning of term Parents must receive a curriculum and time table for the term from the Class Teacher. In the curriculum the Teacher highlights a summary of the blocks they will be teaching during the term. The Teacher must also highlight the expected outcomes that the Students must have at the end of the term. This e-mail may also include the term's events.

On closing the term, the Teacher must send an e-mail highlighting what was covered during the term and activities that took place. They can also include a summary of the direction the class will be taking in the next term.

B. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

1. Letters

All formal letters sent out by the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust must be read and authorized by the School Manager.

All authorized letters must include the standard school letterhead and be read and signed by the School Manager or by the School Administrator on behalf of School Manager.

All letters to Parents must be handed to the office a minimum of 5 working days prior to their needing to be sent. The School Manager should be aware of all correspondence that needs to be sent out to Parents.

2. Text messages (SMS)

The school has a text messaging system it uses to announce key school activities. This communication must be spell/grammar checked and approved by the School Manager before being sent.

3. E-mails

E-mail is the preferred mode of communication to the school community and should be used whenever possible as it has a paper trail. E-mail communication is to be used for formal communication. All persons concerned in the message must be copied in on the communication.

E-mail addresses must always be kept up-to-date.

4. Newsletters

The school newsletter should be sent, at minimum, the beginning of the term, mid-term, and end of term. The newsletter is used to update Parents on the happenings in the school. Any newsletter communication that needs to be sent to Parents must be approved by the Marketing and Public Relations Officer, the School Administrator, and the School Manager.

The newsletter is sent out as a soft copy to the school community via e-mail. Both a soft and hard copy of the newsletter should be archived for future reference.

5. School website

The school website provides information about the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust, Waldorf education, calendared events, admission details, and contact information. The content should be regularly updated. Administrative rights should be held by the School Manager, all School Administrators, and the Marketing and Public Relations Officer.

6. Social media and networking

The school maintains Facebook and Instagram pages. These pages connect the school with a broader audience, give the wider community access to events and information about the school, and serve as marketing tools.

Social media pages are managed by the Marketing and Public Relations Officer. Administrative rights should be held by the School Manager, all School Administrators and the Marketing and Public Relations Officer.

The Nairobi Waldorf School Trust Staff must not communicate with Parents or Students via social networking sites (such as Facebook or Instagram) or accept them as their “friends” on their personal pages. They must keep their relationship professional and avoid instances for conflict of interest.

7. Telephone calls

Incoming telephone calls should always be answered professionally using “Good morning/afternoon, this is _____ from Nairobi Waldorf School Trust, how can I help you?”

Administration Staff must not interrupt Teachers or Staff to answer a telephone call, but should instead take a message and place it in the staffroom pigeon hole.

Telephone numbers must always be up to date.

8. WhatsApp

The messaging application WhatsApp can be used for a class to maintain a WhatsApp group. The WhatsApp group members are the class Parents and class Teacher and it is managed by a class representative. The sole purpose of this group is to keep Parents abreast on class related events such as class meetings, trips, and class socials. There should always be a minimum of 2 administrators for continuity purposes. The members of the group should only include Parents who have children at the school and members should be removed if they leave the school.

WhatsApp communication should not be used for any other purpose other than the above specified purpose.

9. Written reports

Once a term ends, Parents are provided a full written report outlining their child's progress in the class. This report identifies what was covered during the term and how the child is fairing. It also includes information on assessments that may have taken place.

10. Parent-Teacher meetings

Parent-Teacher meetings take place once a term. The Teacher updates the Parents on the child's milestones and areas that need improvement. The Teacher also lays out specific actions that are tailor made to meet the specific needs of each child.

Parent-Teacher meetings must be documented and filed in the child's file for future reference.

11. Communication between Teachers and Students

In the classroom and throughout all school activities, there is an expectation that communication from the Teacher to the Student is clear, loving, and with definite and well understood boundaries. In addition, Teachers are expected to assess if their communication and intention has been clearly understood by the Student.

12. Communication with prospective Parents

The school prospectus contains a range of information intended to give a prospective Parent a full picture of the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust, the Waldorf movement, and admission details. The school prospectus is developed and distributed by the Marketing and Public Relations Officer.

13. Emergency communication

Emergency communication to Parents is done via SMS if to the wider school community or by phone call if just to a concerned party. All emergency communication must be approved by the School Manager and a Board member who has legal and/or public relations background. The communication should never be alarmist in nature and should be reassuring to Parents. A message to call back the school should be left if one is unable to reach the Parent.

COMMUNICATION PRIVACY

A. DATA PROTECTION

The Nairobi Waldorf School Trust aims to ensure that all personal data regarding Staff, Students, Parents, Trustees, Visitors, and other individuals is collected, stored, and processed in the strictest confidence.

B. CHILD PRIVACY

All information about individual Students is private and should only be shared with the Staff on a need to know basis.

1. Personal information

All medical and personal information about a Student should be held in a safe and secure place which cannot be accessed by individuals other than administrative and teaching Staff. All Students have a right to the same level of confidentiality irrespective of gender, race, religion, medical concerns, or special educational needs. Any data that is generated in school by these categories should not identify an individual Student.

2. Photo release

All Parents will be asked to sign a photo release form. Following consent, photographs of Students can be used by the Nairobi Waldorf School Trust for marketing purposes, on social media, and in an image archive. At no time should the Student's name be used with a photograph so that they can be identified. The school will take great care in respecting the wishes of Parents in regards to child privacy and safety.

COMMUNICATION PROCEDURE

If a Parent has an issue/inquiry/question about their child, their child's education, or what is happening in the classroom, the first step is to speak directly with their Teacher or Subject Teacher. The process for establishing this forum is as follows:

1. Request a meeting with the Teacher either in person, via a call to the school administrator, or via e-mail.
2. Arrange and confirm an individual meeting at a mutually convenient time.
3. Indicate the issue to be discussed to provide an opportunity for the Teacher to give thought to the matter.
4. Unless deemed necessary by the Teacher, it is generally not appropriate for the Student to be present during the meeting.

If a Parent is dissatisfied with a previous communication surrounding a question, the process is as follows:

1. Provide concerns in writing to the Head of Pedagogy Team on pedagogy related matters or the School Manager on other matters outside pedagogy.
2. State the issue and request that a facilitated meeting be established with the Teacher and the person concerned.
3. The School Manager is responsible to ensure that this facilitated meeting occurs within one week from the meeting request being received.

The purpose of a facilitated meeting is to ensure that:

1. The Parent can accurately convey their concerns to the Teacher.
2. The Teacher fully understands the Parent and that they have been witnessed and recorded by another member of the school.
3. The Teacher has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns.
4. The nature of the Teacher's response has been heard and understood by the Parent.
5. A clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps is made and that a member of the Administration be assigned to support its implementation.

All meetings should be fully documented with records kept in the Student's file.

If this initial facilitated meeting does not result in a satisfactory outcome, the Parent/s or Teacher should then address their concerns in writing to the School Board. The School Board will then determine the most effective process to resolve the concerns. This may include another facilitated meeting.

COMPLAINTS AND ESCALATION PROCEDURE

If one wishes to register a complaint, consideration should be given as to who is best able to resolve the issue. Refer to the communication hierarchy on page 16 of this document. Different designations have different communication responsibilities, so the complaint must be addressed by the relevant department.

If the complaint is not being addressed properly, escalate your complaint in writing to the next person above the communication hierarchy. The School Manager will address the complaint if the appropriate responses have not been given or received. Write to the School Manager and inform he/she that you wish to be addressed. The School Manager will acknowledge the communication and respond in a timely manner; within five working days, depending on the seriousness of the complaint.

In assessing the complaint, the School Manager will consider:

1. The grounds for the complaint.
2. Who the complaint concerns.
3. What steps have been taken prior to needing the intervention of the School Manager.
4. If the complaint is a symptom of an underlying issue relating to responsibilities occurring, in some combination, of organization, Teacher, Parent and/or Student.

On that basis the School Manager may:

1. Address the complaint directly. This will provide a clear description of their assessment of the matter to evaluate their understanding of the complaint.
2. Identify a time frame to revert on the matter.
3. Share the details of the complaint with the person concerned who will, in the first instance, be asked to reply to the complainant with a direct written response to the issues indicating how the concerns will be addressed and in a specified time frame.
4. After receiving the response, revert to the complainant to inform them of the corrective measures that have been taken. They will also indicate a time frame during which the corrective action should be taken.

If, after this response, the complainant is still dissatisfied, they may follow up with the Grievance Procedure.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

This Grievance Procedure is invoked only in situations where the previously prescribed steps have been followed and one or both participants are still unhappy with the outcomes on the grounds that they were:

1. Unfair or unreasonable, and/or
2. That they believe that due process as described previously was not followed.

Grievance procedures may be followed in issues of communication between Staff members and between Staff members and Parents. The school will not attempt to resolve disputes between Parents.

To begin a formal Grievance Procedure a written request must be filed with the School Manager. It must state the evidence to support the claim of unfair or unreasonable treatment and/or the grounds for the belief that due process has not been followed. The School Manager will acknowledge the receipt of the letter within two working days and inform the Board Chair that a Grievance has been filed.

The Board Chair will notify the entire Board that a Grievance has been filed (with or without relevant specifics) at a suitable time. If there is a conflict of interest by the Chair, the Vice Chair or other designated Board member will be advised, who will then advise the entire Board, as above.

The School Manager will assess the nature of the complaint and assign relevant school representatives to a Grievance Team to follow up the matter. The School Manager will, in most instances, act as the school representative.

The school representative will contact the individual to discuss their written statement and to inform them of the next steps. The school representative, in consultation with the Grievance Team, will then promptly initiate appropriate actions to resolve the Grievance. Appropriate action includes but is not limited to:

1. Making enquiries.
2. Reviewing reasons for the contentious decision or the cause of Grievance.
3. Reviewing the process of arriving at the contentious decision or the cause of Grievance.
4. Engaging external mediators to work toward reconciliation.

The School Manager will then be responsible for:

1. Tabling a report which includes clear recommendations for the resolution of the matter the Chair of the Board of Trustees.
2. Providing a written reply to the complainant informing them of the outcome.

All parties to the Grievance are to sign and date a written agreement to the resolutions to the Grievance. A Grievance which was filed to question due process will result in the Board's Governance Committee reviewing the process and submitting to the Board a report on the review.

EVALUATION PROCEDURE

This policy will be monitored through on-going school self-evaluation. The School Manager will use a variety of methods to evaluate this policy with Staff, Parents, and the Board.

COMMUNICATION HEIRARCHY

