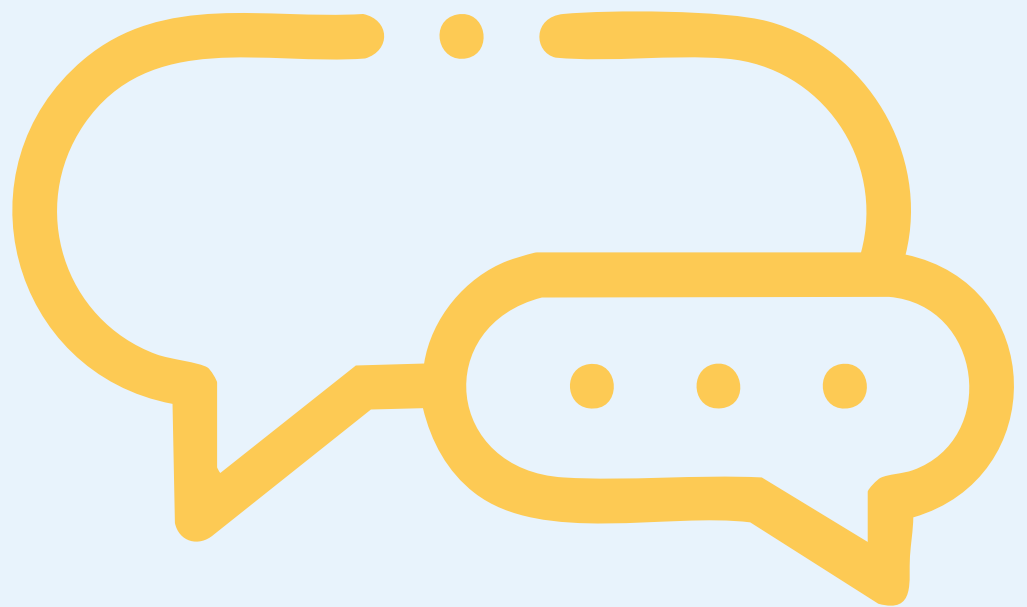


Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Trust's

Communication Guidance

For staff



**OUR LADY
OF LOURDES**

CATHOLIC MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

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Our Mission Statement

We are a partnership of 36 Catholic schools that form Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Multi-Academy Trust (OLOL CMAT).

Our aim is to provide the very best Catholic education for all in our community and so improve life chances through spiritual, academic and social development.

By placing the person and teachings of Jesus Christ at the centre of all that we do, we will:

- Follow the example of Our Lady of Lourdes by nurturing everyone in a spirit of compassion, service and healing
- Work together so that we can all achieve our full potential, deepen our faith and realise our God-given talents
- Make the world a better place, especially for the most vulnerable in our society, by doing 'little things with great love' St Thérèse of Lisieux

Principles and aims

OLOL CMAT is committed to the promotion of effective communication between all members of Trust community and beyond.

Our objectives are to:

- Have clear communications guidance which will help our Trust community keep parents/carers and staff well-informed.
- Make our written communications as accessible and inclusive as possible by being open and honest using jargon-free, plain English which can be easily understood by everyone.
- Ensure that there is a robust process in place for consultation between the schools, parents/carers, staff members and pupils on key areas.
- Ensure that the methods in place are fully aligned to the Trust's mission and vision of providing an 'Outstanding Catholic education for all.'
- Regularly monitor and evaluate communications to ensure the best possible methods are used to communicate to our Trust community.

Why do we need communications guidance?

The first step to balancing the needs of our staff with the requirements of our parents/carers for frequent, useful and relevant communication, is to introduce clear communications guidance.

As we are all part of the Trust, it is our individual responsibility to ensure that we engage in communication activity that does not seek to damage the reputation of the Trust.

Parents/carers, directors and pupils also have a part to play in reflecting their school's reputation.

Good communication is clear, professional, timely and appropriate. It should be useful and relevant to all parties, with a clear purpose as to the reason for the correspondence.

Our responsibilities

School responsibilities

It is the responsibility of our schools to:

- Ensure all key policies, documents and procedures are kept up-to-date and are accessible to the school community.
- Inform parents/carers of all school events with realistic timelines.
- Keep parents/carers informed of the progress of their child at regular intervals.
- Make reasonable adjustments to the way it communicates with staff, students, parents and carers.
- Communicate with young people following agreed procedures in the Child Protection Policy and Keeping Children Safe in Education guidelines.
- Ensure that all staff receive clear and consistent communications.
- To consult with and work in partnership with parents/carers on the wellbeing and education of their children.
- To seek the views of parents/carers and students on their education and learning environment and ensure that their ideas and feedback are always treated with respect and built into planning and development. (for example, regular circulation of parent and student questionnaires).
- To seek creative ways of making key messages relevant to the communities served by each school.
- To remind staff of OLoL CMAT policies, Code of Conduct etc. and the relevance to the school. Manage any data it collects from staff, students and parents/carers in accordance with the relevant Trust data policies.

Parent/carer responsibilities

It is the responsibility of our parents/carers to:

- Provide the school with a current email address for prompt and effective communication.
- Report child absence as soon as possible on the morning of the absence, for full details please refer to the school's attendance policy (copy under 'Policies' on the school website).
Schools will not send acknowledgements out regarding an absence communication.
- Staff who are also parents/carers must follow the same procedures as they would either contacting the school or parent.

Methods of communication

Emails, letters and other written communication

All written communication should be polite, professional, grammatically correct and spell checked.

Always include the appropriate introduction and closing. For example, *Dear Sir /Madam* where the recipient is unknown, and *Kind Regards / Yours sincerely* when you know the recipient.

Email

OLoL CMAT value the importance of work/life balance, and our staff are not expected to write and respond to emails outside of working hours.

Best practice for all

- Be aware that anything that is written in an email and then sent, can remain with the recipient indefinitely.

Do not write anything that wouldn't want to be seen for example via a Freedom of Information (FOI) or Subject Access Request (SAR).

You are advised to reference non-specific individuals using their job title rather than given name. For example, 'The Office Manager said...'

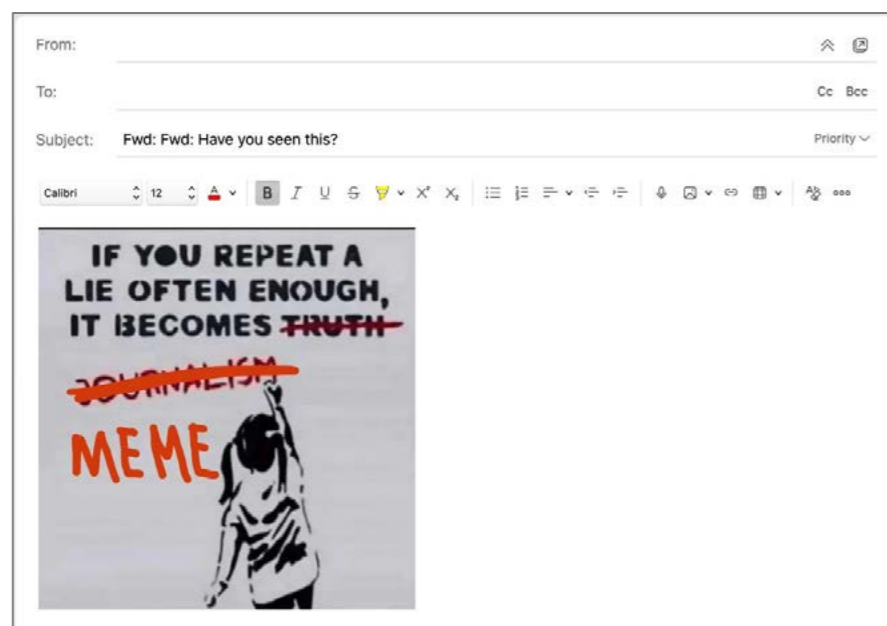
- Be mindful of the subject line of the email. If this includes an individual's name or initials it may need to be included if the individual submits a Subject Access Request. Remove all sensitive personal data from emails where possible.
- Delete irrelevant/unnecessary information from email chains before replying or forwarding. If this information is required in the future as part of a SAR, including multiple emails in the email chain will significantly increase the SAR workload, particularly if the email is sent to multiple recipients. Be mindful to include only relevant people.
- When replying to an email, make sure you are using the correct email chain (check email header). This will avoid data breaches in instances where emails have been replied to and accidentally include a confidential communication thread from another email.
- Password protect any documents that contain sensitive data. Share the password in another communication.
- Internal emails should be used as a quick, effective way of communicating necessary information.
- It is expected that all legitimate emails are acknowledged.
- Personal email addresses must NOT be used for communication between other OLoL colleagues (centrally and schools), parents/carers and external agencies when the message contains information relating to a pupil or member of staff.
- Please consider who is copied into your email. It is helpful to use the 'CC' function if the information will be directly useful to the CC'd colleague and doesn't contain personal information. However, a common data breach is using CC and not BCC when replying to external emails, for example parents/carers. This often accidentally discloses work and personal email addresses to other recipients.
- Make email subject lines clear and straightforward for the recipient.
- Emails should be short and clear and should not be used to discuss sensitive information, for example, addressing staff performance and behaviour.

- Font colour **red** and FULL CAPITAL WORDS should only be used to highlight key content and avoid using exclamation marks (!). These styles are often used to convey anger so be mindful how you use them. Capital letters can be interpreted as 'shouting' so consider how these are used.
- Colloquialisms and idioms should be avoided due to misinterpretation or unintended offence. For example:

A colloquialism is an example of a term that is only used by people from a specific area. For example, the word 'alley' can colloquially be known as a 'jitty, 'ginnel' or 'twitchel'.

An idiom is a common phrase which means something different from its literal meaning. For example, using the term, 'Biting off more than I can chew.' instead of using 'I'm trying to do something which is too difficult for me.'

- *Emails should never express opinion on sensitive, political or potentially controversial subjects. Avoid sharing topical GIFs and memes:*



- Office-based staff: Use an out-of-office reply and include dates you'll be out of the office, your return-to-work date and a contact for people who need immediate help. Remember to remove this on your return to work.

Email signature example

All staff must have their own email account and ensure they include, where appropriate, the following signature and if based in a school, your logo and Trust logo on all emails:

Kind regards
 Name
 Job title
 School or office address
 Tel: (school or office telephone number and ext.)
Please note, a reply to this email is not required during non-working hours.

Letters

For staff in schools

- Any letters received from a parent/carer that require a response, should be acknowledged by telephone, letter or email within 2 working days and then responded to within a reasonable time frame.
- All letters should be on school letter head with the Trust and school logo clearly visible.
- All letters/email responses to parents/carers should be approved by the Headteacher responsible for communication and sent out using MIS.
- Copies of correspondence with parents/carers will be placed on pupil files on MIS. Any letters of concern or complaint should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Complaints Policy (copy available in the Policy Folder in the School Team Drive or on the policy page of the school website).

For central teams

- Any letters that require a response should be acknowledged by telephone, letter or email within 2 working days and then responded to within a reasonable time frame.
- All letters should be on a Trust branded letter head with the logo clearly visible.
- Copies of correspondence may be held centrally.

Newsletters

For staff in schools

- Whole school information should be issued to all parents/carers via a termly/monthly/weekly newsletter.
- A link to an electronic copy of this should be emailed to all parents/carers as well as being published on the school website and on your school communications app (Arbor etc).
- Hard copies of newsletters should be available from the school upon request.
- Parents/carers are encouraged to provide the school with a current email address for prompt and effective communication. However, if we are unable to obtain a current email address for any parent or carer, communications will be delivered home in hard copy by their child or sent by post.

Automated texts

For staff in schools

Automated texts from school communications apps are sent to parents/carers (including in the event of an emergency closure of the school) but are not used for general communications from staff.

Any text message replies received from a parent/carer will be responded to using an alternative means of communication such as email or telephone.

Telephone calls

For staff in schools

- Telephone communication can sometimes be difficult to schedule during the school day. We need to manage parents/carers expectations so that they understand they may not get an immediate verbal response.
- In a non-emergency, a return call should be made within 2 working days, with any follow up action from the request /query/problem being dealt within a reasonable time frame.
- If calling a parent and there is no answer, staff should always try to leave a message, making it clear who the parent should then contact in school. Do not leave any personal or sensitive information in the message.
- If, at any time, a member of staff believes that the language or tone of the conversation has become unacceptable (for example, by the other person being rude or aggressive) they may issue a warning such as, 'Please can you consider your tone/language. I may have to end the phone call if this continues'.
- If the behaviour continues, they have the right to end the phone call, 'I'm sorry but, as I said previously, your tone/language isn't appropriate and so I am ending the conversation now'.
- Remind the caller of the terms of the Home School agreement available on your school website.
- Any safeguarding concerns should be recorded on the school's Child Protection Online Monitoring System (CPOMs) in line with the Safeguarding Policy and also reported to the DSL.
- Staff should only use school phones for call/messages to parent/carers. Staff must not use their own mobile phones for calls or text messages with parents/carers.

Best practice for all

- Answer calls with a positive greeting and ensure the person who answers the phone gives their name and the name of the school/ team being contacted.
- If someone must be put on hold, ask for permission first, and give them the option to leave a message. When taking them off hold, thank the caller to show that their time is respected.
- Always return phone calls if a return call has been promised. If a time frame was given, the caller must make every attempt to return the phone call as quickly as possible within that frame. Always verify the identification of the person you are speaking to, ensuring that you are talking with the correct person.
- If it is necessary to transfer a call, inform the person on the other end before doing so. It is also important to explain the need for the transfer to the colleague being transferred to as well as the caller.
- If you must leave the phone, never leave the line open. Instead, place the person on hold and check back with them frequently.
- Never say the words, "I don't know" to a caller. Where there is not a definite answer say, 'I'll check on that for you.'
- End calls with a positive closure such as 'Thank you for calling,' or 'Have a Good Day.'

Social media

For all schools

All schools are encouraged to maintain regular social media channels with a view to keeping family members and communities up to date on school developments and important news.

The most popular channels owned and used by schools in our Trust are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. On these channels we will follow relevant figures, organisations and companies who fit with our values and interests. We will not follow families or pupils (whether currently on roll or not).

In line with the advice in place for all written communication, all messages distributed on these channels should be grammatically correct and spell checked.

The primary use for social media is to share content based on curriculum, school values and to communicate messages to families and champion the work and successes of our young people. Only children whose families have given explicit consent may be used in photographs on social media and only the first name of the child will be displayed.

Staff should not use personal devices to access social media on school premises unless it is during staff breaktime away from pupils.

Staff should not communicate or accept friend requests from pupils or parents/carers on social networking sites/personal accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.

Additionally, school social media channels should not be used as a communication channel for personal messages to parents/carers.

School/class blogs may be set up specifically for the purpose of teaching and learning and will be carefully managed and monitored. Only official designated users may use social media on behalf of the academy.

When using social media outside school for personal use, all employees must take care to ensure they always act responsibly and follow the Trust policies and standards of conduct in and out of school.

Comments made by members of the public are to be carefully and frequently monitored. Any negative comments made publicly are to be referred to the Headteacher for a considered response. If any matter has the potential to bring the school and or Trust into disrepute, headteachers need to liaise with their link Director of Performance & Standards (DPS) immediately.

Media relations for schools

The trust promotes efforts to gain positive media coverage to raise awareness of school's work to the wider community. Occasionally there may be the need to react quickly to unforeseen media interest.

All media enquiries should initially be logged by the person who is approached with the details of the enquiry, their deadline and contact details.

No response must be given at the time of contact.

All enquiries should be passed to the headteacher who will then liaise with their link DPS colleague where a strategic response can be agreed.

OLoL CMAT will always act as the spokesperson for the school.

National media

For enquiries from national media, the headteacher must always liaise with their link DPS colleague at the earliest opportunity.

In the event of any media at the school gates to interview staff, these must always be declined and the headteacher informed. Any decision to proceed with media interviews or issue a comment will be agreed by the headteacher in consultation with their link DPS/DCEO/CEO.

Communications between Directors and Governors

To ensure efficient and effective communication between Directors and Governors, there are key expectations of members of the CMAT Executive Board and members of the Local Governing Bodies in line with the Director and Governor Codes of Conduct:

- To regularly attend Executive Board and Board Committee meetings/ Local Governing Body meetings.
- To ensure feedback to the Trust from LGB meetings is captured in the meeting minutes and to ensure these are responded to appropriately by the CMAT Board or CMAT Executive Team.
- To regularly attend the Chairs' & Governor Symposia (in the Chair's absence, the Chair must ensure that their LGB is represented at each event, perhaps by their Vice-Chair or by nominating other Governors to attend if required).
- To prepare well for meetings by reading all communications and papers in advance.
- To make full efforts to attend all meetings and, where we cannot attend, explain in advance why we are unable to
- To express views openly, courteously and respectfully in all our communications with Directors/Governors.
- To only use official email addresses sanctioned for use by the CMAT in line with the Code of Conduct.
- To ensure that all documents are stored securely on the CMAT approved online governor portal (The Trust Governor).
- To meet on an agreed basis (Director and Chair of Governors) in line with the Link Director remit.
- To immediately advise the CEO and/or Chair of Executive Board of any issue which might affect the interests of our Trust.

Emails, letters and other written communication

The same expectations apply to Directors and Governors for use of email as those for staff (as detailed under 1.1)

Social media

The same expectations apply to Directors and Governors for use of social media as those for staff (as detailed under 3).



OUR LADY OF LOURDES

CATHOLIC MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST

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