

## **COMMUNICATION POLICY**

*Ratified by the Management Circle, March 19, 2014  
modified September 23 2016  
This version supersedes all others*

## RATIONALE

Social harmony, health and a positive, creative living environment are the guiding motives for our school policies and rules. A healthy social life is dependent on the cultivation of social responsibility based on individual insight and sound observation and listening skills.

The health of our school community as a whole is reflected in our commitment to clear, open communication and transparency of educational and organizational structures. High levels of professional confidentiality are maintained to ensure confidence in school communications.

The school community seeks to address issues of grievance and conflict in a constructive manner. We acknowledge that the manner of involvement, commitment and communication by parents and staff, have an exemplary and motivating influence on the pupils.

These guidelines are to facilitate the smooth functioning of the school and to assist parents, students, faculty and staff members to work successfully together. The guidelines complement the regular, informal communications that already take place between members of the school community.

## 1. COMMUNICATION IN RELATION TO EDUCATION

### **Communication between the Teachers and Students**

In the classroom and throughout all school activities, there is an expectation that the communication from the teacher to the student is clear, loving and with definite and well understood boundaries. In addition, teachers are expected to be sensitive to and able to act upon individual and group needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

Students, likewise, are expected to behave respectfully and to communicate clearly to all adults at the school. If and when an infringement occurs, students are guided to understand the full consequences of their actions and given the opportunity to redress any harm done. If necessary the *Behaviour Guidance Policy and/or the Discrimination/Bullying and Harassment Policy* will be used where disrespectful communication occurs.

Teachers exercise authority in the classroom in different ways as the children journey through the school. The three approaches to authority – *imitation, guidance* and *respect* for expertise – provide a context for communication in the classroom or school context.

### **Communication between the Teachers and Parents**

Communication between parents and teachers occurs through:

- **Class Meetings**

High School Guardians, Early Year and Class Teachers will hold a class meeting at least one evening each term. These class meetings will have a clear agenda circulated in advance. Topics may include a report on curriculum, discussion on developmental stages of children, class dynamics and events in the life of the class. The class meeting should also provide an opportunity for parents to share experiences and support for their children through their class life together. Teachers may also provide regular class news bulletins throughout the term, to provide information on class activities.

- **Parent Teacher Conferences**

One per year (twice in the ECE) parent teacher interviews are conducted to exchange information about the progress and qualities of each child. These are always undertaken with the interests of the child as the focus. These interviews are an essential part of the school assessment and reporting procedures and as such are to be conducted professionally and with documented feedback on each child's development in the class.

- **Parent Directing a Question or a Complaint:**

Please note that the school differentiates between "questions" and "complaints" and accordingly handles them somewhat differently. In general:

"Questions" are those enquiries for which one seeks clarification, support or further information.

"Complaints" relate to matters about which one wishes to register dissatisfaction and/or concern. Complaints range along a continuum of seriousness from mild irritations and/or differences of opinion/outlook to serious worries. The manner of handling complaints can therefore vary accordingly. The VWS takes complaints seriously and is committed to ensure that they are comprehensively followed up. The VWS sees complaints as an opportunity for professional and organizational learning. The VWS regard complaints symptomatically, that is they see them as symptoms of underlying issue or issues. These may reflect responsibilities at any combination of the levels of:

1. The organization
2. The teacher
3. The parent/family

**Please Note: If you as a parent or guardian have a question or a complaint about another student's in school relationship or interaction with your child this must *under no circumstances* be communicated directly to the other student or be specifically discussed with the parents of the student. Such concerns must always be directed through the Class Teacher/Guardian or Subject teacher.**

#### **Questions:**

If parents have a question about their child and/or their child's education in any way, the first step is *to speak directly with the teacher*. The process for this is as follows:

1. Request the teacher arrange an individual meeting at a mutually convenient time as it is not possible to give proper and respectful consideration in the time before and after class. Please indicate the issue to be discussed as some lead time provides an opportunity for the teacher to give prior thought to the matter. Unless deemed necessary by the teacher *it is generally not appropriate for children to be present* when discussing questions with the teacher.

Parents may request a meeting with the relevant teacher either in person, via email, or by ringing the office and requesting a message be passed on to the teacher.

**For any matter pertaining to a child's safety and wellbeing (i.e., instances of continued teasing or bullying), parents are asked to copy any correspondence sent to their class teacher to the Pedagogical Manager (mnash@vws.ca) and the College Chair (collegechair@vws.ca). The College Chair will include your communications as "correspondence" so that it will be reviewed and tracked by the College of Teachers.**

2. At no times is aggressive or disrespectful language acceptable by any party in any communication between a parent and teacher. An interview may be terminated and re-scheduled for another time if required.

Please note that email communications fall under the terms of this policy. Email communication should be respectful at all times. Email is not considered the appropriate medium for conveying issues and in these cases is appropriate only for arranging meetings. Any written statements should be made only in formal and personally signed letter form.

3. If a parent is dissatisfied with a previous communication, the process is to *write* their concerns to the Pedagogical Manager, stating the issue and requesting that a *facilitated meeting* be established with the teacher.

The Pedagogical Manager is responsible to ensure that this *facilitated meeting* (see below) occurs within two weeks from the letter being received.

### Complaints:

If you wish to register a complaint please give some initial consideration to how you regard the seriousness of the matter. If you decide it is in the first place at the lower end of the continuum of seriousness it would be most appropriate for you to try to resolve it through the same process as described above for addressing questions. If however it is more serious in nature please refer to the following process.

1. Address your complaint in writing or in person to the Pedagogical Manager and identify that you wish that it be addressed. **For any matter pertaining to a child's safety and wellbeing (i.e., instances of continued teasing or bullying), please copy any correspondence sent to the Pedagogical Manager (mnash@vws.ca) to the College Chair (collegechair@vws.ca) so that it can be reviewed and tracked by the College of Teachers.**
2. The Pedagogical Manager will request permission that the written record of the information as provided is shown to the teacher/s concerned and that the complainant be identified. Except in claims of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in which case the matter falls under the *VWS Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Protocols* the Pedagogical Manager cannot process anonymous complaints.
3. The Pedagogical Manager will then appoint another senior staff member to assist in the process of response. The appointment of this staff member is at the discretion of the Pedagogical Manager however if the complaint refers to a teacher who has a mentor it is appropriate that they be considered for that role.
4. The Pedagogical Manager and the nominated senior staff member will assess the complaint. In assessing the complaint they will consider :
  - a. The grounds for the complaint
  - b. The complaint as a symptom of an underlying issue relating to responsibilities occurring, in some combination, in the three levels, organization, teacher, parent/family.
5. On that basis they may:
  - a. Address the complaint directly. This address will provide a clear description of their *assessment* of the matter, the *response* to be made and the *reasons* for that response.

- b. Share the details of the complaint with the teacher/s concerned who will, in the first instance, be asked to reply to the complainant with a *direct response to the issues* indicating *how* they will be addressed and in what *time frame*. They will provide a copy to the Pedagogical Manager who is charged with following the matter up with both the complainant and the teacher/s with the time frame.
  - c. Should there be more than one complainant or should another subsequent new complainant raise the same or similarly related issues, the Pedagogical Manager and the appointed senior staff member will initiate through the College of Teachers, a review of the program delivered by the teacher. In this case the response to the complainants will come from the Pedagogical Manager and the Chair of the College of Teachers. It will provide a *direct response to the issues* indicating *how* they will be addressed and in what *time frame*. The Pedagogical Manager is charged with following the matter up with both the complainants and the teacher/s with the time frame.
6. If after this response either of the parties are still dissatisfied they may request a *facilitated meeting* (see below).

### Facilitated Meetings

A “facilitated meeting” is one which occurs as a step in the communication process and occurs *only* if a previous communication has been unable to satisfactorily resolve an issue.

These meetings occur between the parent and the teacher and are facilitated by the Pedagogical Manager. Another member of the College of Teachers (CoT) may be called as the second teacher at this meeting. The parent may also bring a support person to this meeting.

The purpose of a facilitated meeting is to ensure that:

- (i) The parent has the opportunity to accurately convey their concerns to the teacher.
- (ii) The teacher fully understands them and that they have been witnessed and recorded by another CoT member.
- (iii) The teacher has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns
- (iv) The nature of the teacher’s response has been heard and understood by the parent.
- (v) A clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps is made and that a CoT member is assigned to support its implementation.

All meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the student files.

If the results of a facilitated meeting does not result in a satisfactory outcome,

- (i) The parent/s or teacher may address their concerns in writing to the Pedagogical Manager. In order to ensure confidentiality for the children, parents and teacher involved the envelope should be marked ‘confidential’. It is not appropriate to use email for this purpose.
- (ii) The Pedagogical Manager will then determine the most effective process to resolve the concerns. This may include another facilitated meeting or mediation where both parties agree to work towards a solution to the problem.
- (iii) If the issue is not resolved at this stage, please refer to the school's *Appeal Policy*.

*Respectful communication, with the child's needs always at the centre, is required at all levels of these processes.*

## 2. COMMUNICATION WITH THE SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

*Respectful communication between parents and those working in these management and support roles is required at all times.*

The school welcomes feedback and information on any aspect of school operations as a part of a philosophy of overall accountability and responsiveness and transparency. Feedback on matters of governance, management or administration should be provided *in writing* to the Pedagogical Manager, who will then ensure that it is addressed in the appropriate forum. The Pedagogical Manager will always acknowledge communications in writing and confirm the course of action that has been followed.

Please note that email communications fall under the terms of this policy. Email communication should be respectful at all times. Email is not considered the appropriate medium for conveying issues and in these cases is appropriate only for arranging meetings. Any written statements should be made only in formal and personally signed letter form.

### **Communicating with the Board of Trustees**

1. If the matter is related to overall school governance the Pedagogical Manager may recommend that the communication be addressed to the school Board of Trustees.
2. Parents or faculty and staff members may communicate in writing directly to the Board of Trustees through correspondence to the Chairperson. These letters can be addressed care of the school.
3. The Chair of the Board considers the communication and if he/she considers if appropriate ensures that the correspondence is included on the agenda at the next available meeting of the Board.

### **Communicating with Management on Administration matters**

1. Parents wishing to give feedback about aspects of school management should initially contact the relevant manager as follows. The first step is to speak directly or to write a note to the:
  - (i) Pedagogical Manager with general concerns and suggestions about any aspect of the school educational delivery;
  - (ii) Business Manager with concerns or clarification with fees or fee statements, school finances or school daily administration or about the safety or aesthetic of the school grounds and facilities;
  - (iii) Admissions Officer with feedback or concerns on enrolment.
2. Parents may request a meeting with the relevant manager, which would then be conducted in a professional manner. In planning this meeting parents should give advance notice about what it is you wish to discuss so that adequate preparation can be made.
3. A record must be kept of any such meeting with a parent: e.g. a diary note indicating the purpose of and outcome of the meeting.
4. Confidentiality is always an absolute priority in communications related to school fees or school finances. These meetings and conversations must be carried out in a suitable meeting space. At no times is aggressive or disrespectful language acceptable by any party in any communication between a parent and a staff member. An interview may be terminated and re-scheduled for another time if required.

5. If a parent or staff member is unsatisfied with the outcomes of this initial meeting / communication, parents should write their concerns to the Pedagogical Manager, stating the issue and requesting that a facilitated meeting be established. (See “Facilitated Meeting” above)
6. The purpose of this facilitated meeting will be to ensure:
  - (i) That the concerns or feedback raised by the parent are accurately conveyed to the school.
  - (ii) That the school’s officer fully understands them and that they have been witnessed by another member of the management team.
  - (iii) That the school’s officer has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by the parent.
  - (iv) That the Pedagogical Manager takes responsibility to support a clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps.
  - (v) All meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the Pedagogical Manager’s office.
7. Should this process be unsuccessful, please refer to the school’s *Appeal Policy*.

### **Communications with Reception**

The office staff has a huge job supporting the faculty, staff and children of the school every day and it is important that they are not regularly repeating information which is already made available to the school community in the usual communication channels.

Parents have a responsibility to read communications from the school: e.g. Class notes, school newsletter, website messages, school policies. All information regarding the daily operations of the school can be obtained from the office which is managed by the Receptionist.

1. The office is open from 8.00am to 3.30pm.
2. Parents can communicate with office staff via the phone, email or with a note which their children can drop in to the office.
3. It is essential for parents to read the school’s weekly Newsletter and RenWeb communications regularly as this is an important channel for the school to communicate information and dates for up and coming school or class events.
4. The receptionist does not have a role to deal with complaints of any kind.

At no times is aggressive or disrespectful language acceptable by any party in any communication between a parent and a school staff member. Please note that email communications fall under the terms of this policy. Email communication should be respectful at all times. Email is not considered the appropriate medium for conveying issues and in these cases is appropriate only for arranging meetings. Any written statements should be made only in formal and personally signed letter form.

### 3 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEES

*Respectful communication between all employees is required at all times.*

Regular and respectful communication between all employees occurs in several forums of the school, as well as meetings as required:

1. Teachers are to attend meetings to ensure they have up-to-date information/communication regarding school events, to provide and give feedback on educational matters, to exchange student news and to participate in pedagogical activities.
2. Specialist teachers, aides and assistants are requested to take any issues they have with a student, a class, or parent:
  - (i) Directly to the class teacher or guardian in the first instance; then
  - (ii) To the Pedagogical Manager should the above two cannot resolve the issue.
3. All teachers are to participate in a process of peer review annually.
4. Daily, weekly and term notice boards are kept up to date with school events in the faculty room.

#### **General Procedures in Employee Communications**

To ensure information is passed clearly between employees and Management, wherever possible, information or requests for tasks should be in writing and dated to ensure that responses can be followed up.

Written Correspondence: Mail / letters addressed to particular teachers / staff members are to be directed unopened to the appropriate teacher / staff member.

Confidentiality is essential for children, families and all employees in all areas of school communications. Written letters are preferred to ensure sealed correspondence is delivered appropriately. Where incoming E-mail correspondence is forwarded to relevant employees, the confidentiality of the content of the email cannot be assured as emails are opened to be forwarded.

All employees are responsible to uphold the confidentiality statement on their Position Descriptions.

#### **Should a communication problem arise between employees:**

1. The first step should always be to “go direct” to the person. That is to communicate the issue directly to the person/s concerned in a space and at a time which allows for respectful exploration of the concern. If however you have reason to feel that you would be unsafe or threatened (emotionally, physically or in terms of your employment status) in that interaction you may ask for a third person, usually a manager, to be present. If the issue relates to an issue of workplace violence or harassment please refer straight to the *Employee Bullying and Harassment Policy*. Please note that the school will not tolerate reprisals against any persons who raise legitimate concerns through either this or the *Employee Bullying and Harassment Policy* Such actions will attract professional penalty.
2. At no times is aggressive or disrespectful language acceptable by any party in any communication between employees.

3. If an employee is dissatisfied with a previous communication, the next step in the process is to clearly outline the concern in writing to the Pedagogical Manager requesting that a facilitated meeting be established.<sup>1</sup> The employee in conflict and the Pedagogical Manager will be present at this meeting, the purpose of which will be to ensure:
  - (i) That the concerns raised are accurately conveyed.
  - (ii) That each of the employees in conflict fully understand the concerns.
  - (iii) That the employee has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by the other.
  - (iv) That the Pedagogical Manager manages a clearly articulated action plan for taking any future steps.
  - (v) All such meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the Pedagogical Manager's office. At no times is aggressive or disrespectful language acceptable by any party in any communication between employees. An interview may be terminated and re-scheduled for another time if required.

If an issue is not resolved at this stage please refer to the school's *Appeal Policy*.