



Tús maith, leath na h-oibre



Policy on Parents as Partners

Introductory Statement:

This policy was collaboratively developed for the School Self Evaluation Process in 2020 by the Principal, Parents Association and the Board of Management.

Its purpose is to provide information and guidelines to parents and staff on parent/staff meetings and communication in St Sylvester's I.S. The family and home are central to the social and intellectual development of the child and the nurturing of good, moral values. The school and the family strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other, so that the child's education can be effective. All the stakeholders aim to work for the benefit of the child and their learning. When we refer to parents in this policy, it should be understood that 'parents' include guardians.

Parents are Encouraged to:

- Develop close links with the school
- Participate in meetings in a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in the school
- Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their children
- Share the responsibility of seeing that the school remains true to its ethos, values and distinctive character
- Become actively involved in the school/parent association
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them

Staff are Encouraged to:

- Establish good communication with parents of pupils in their class
- Keep parents informed of their child's progress and behaviour both positive and negative
- Listen to what parents have to say and encourage them to bring any concerns to you at an early stage to avoid situations escalating
- Be aware of the role of parents as prime educators and emphasise that all parties are working together for the child's benefit to help them reach their potential
- Value and respect the input of parents as they know their child best.

Structures in Place to Facilitate Open Communication & Consultation with Parents:

- The Staff Room is usually the place where the Parent's Association committee hold their monthly meetings. Parents are welcome to have a Tea or Coffee. However this cannot take place during 2020-21 due to the restriction of adults into the school building as a result of Covid-19 .
- Introductory meeting for parents of new Junior Infants are usually held April/May
- New Incoming Junior Infants are invited to meet their new class teacher in June
- Parent/teacher one-to-one meetings are held in January
- Meetings with parents of children who have special educational needs are held several times a year with the mainstream and Special Education Teacher
- Consultation throughout the year
- Emails are the most common form of communication. Parents/guardians have been asked to nominate one email when enrolling their child. However from 2021-22, both parents/guardians will be emailed.
- Regular Notes/termly newsletter are sent home via email.
- Parents are also asked to nominate one mobile phone number for the text-a-parent facility
- There are noticeboards in each yard which can be used by both the staff and the PA to display and convey important information. Noticeboards cannot be used for commercial purposes.
- The school's website www.stsylvestersinfantschool.com provides an excellent opportunity for the school to communicate current information & upcoming events. The website received a 'face-lift' in 2020. There is a section on the website to communicate important and relevant information.
- The PA encourages each class to have a Class Rep to communicate their own information to parents using WhatsApp. See Appendix 1 for recommendation regarding how WhatsApp should be used.
- Through the Parents' Association, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of some school policies. Decisions taken to change current policies and procedures or to introduce new ones will be made known to all parents in written format via emails/school website
- Homework diaries for 1st class are used to relay messages which are signed by parents and teachers. Parents are requested to sign diary each night to certify that homework has been completed. However, homework diaries have been withdrawn during the pandemic to prevent the spread of cross-contamination
- Parents are invited to share their expertise with their child's class in a structured way
- Parents are invited to events throughout the year e.g. Christmas concerts, Cake sale, Communion Enrolment Ceremony for 1st classes etc
- Involvement of parents in the relevant activities e.g. maths for fun, cake sales, face painting for Christmas concerts,
- Parents are invited to events throughout the year –meet the new Junior Infant parents at the September coffee morning, Christmas concerts, Sponsored Dance, Information evening for the new parents to the school etc. Unfortunately this cannot take place during 2021-22 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Parents are welcome to make an appointment to consult with a teacher after school should they have any concerns. This will take place by phone during the 2021-22 school year.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to the child and therefore may adversely affect their education.

In all matters pertaining to the wellbeing and education of pupils, only the parents/legal guardians named on the enrolment form will be consulted by staff.

Parent/Teacher Meetings:

Formal Parent/Teacher meetings will be held once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04). They may be held in November or in January, depending on the class level. They will be initiated by the school staff and details regarding time, etc will be worked out by the class teacher, in consultation with parents. Parents will be given the opportunity to select preferred times by email from the class teacher. The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned. The teachers use prepared guidelines for the meetings and collaborate in advance about the progress of individual children.

Meetings may take place in classrooms and Special Education teachers' rooms providing Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted. Otherwise, the school will await advice from the DES as to how to proceed.

Approximately ten minutes are allotted to each meeting.

The Purpose of the Parent/Teacher Meeting is to:

- Establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
- Let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- Help teachers/parents get to know the children better as individuals
- Help children realise that home and school are working together
- Meet demands for accountability
- Share all positives about the child
- Share with the parents the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
- Review with the parent the child's experience of schooling
- Learn more about the child from the parent's perspective
- Identify areas of tension and disagreement
- Identify ways in which parents can help their children
- Negotiate jointly decisions about the child's education
- Inform the parents of standardised test results according to school policy

Circular 56/2011 *Initial Steps in the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* has been adopted by the Board of Management. References to parent/school communication are:

Reporting to Parents:

Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's learning and development. Schools can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children in this way by sharing meaningful information about the progress that their children are achieving in the education system.

This information needs to draw on the different sources of evidence that staff use, such as conversations with the learner, data-collection and documented progress on objectives and milestones reached in their short and long-term planning, documented observations of the pupils engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment tasks and tests, and examples of pupils work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich staff's knowledge of their child's progress through providing further information about the child's learning at home.

Report Card Templates:

Schools should help parents to understand fully the evidence of learning that the school reports to them, especially information from any standardised tests. The NCCA has provided a range of standard report templates to assist schools in reporting information about the progress of primary pupils to parents, including information from standardised tests. The NCCA report card templates were developed through a process of consultation with schools and parents can take account of research commissioned by the NCCA. Teachers write one formal educational progress report for each child at the end of each school year. In accordance with Circular 56/11, reports are given to parents one week before the school closes for the summer holidays in order to give parents an opportunity to discuss any areas of concerns which may arise. Children transferring to other schools are also given a written report.

The Report Cards Provide for Reporting in Four Key Areas:

- The child's learning and achievement across the curriculum
- The child's learning dispositions
- The child's social and personal development
- Ways in which parents can support their child's learning

St Sylvester's I.S. uses standard report card templates for reporting to parents on pupils' progress and achievement at school.

Formal Parent/Teacher Meetings:

Formal timetabled parent/teacher meetings take place in November /January for different year groups. However, if a parent has concerns about their child's progress, they may arrange a meeting with the teacher at any stage during the year to discuss their child, (educational concerns, health, dental/hospital visit, forthcoming holidays, parental difficulties etc). Parents should email the teacher to arrange an appointment.

The school accepts that separated parents may find it difficult to attend a meeting together. However, it is important to remember that this meeting is about a child's educational, social and emotional development. The school **strongly recommends** where possible both parents attend this meeting together where information from all parties is equally shared and there can be no unintentional misunderstanding of information shared.

Requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings if the separation is an acrimonious one.

Formal School Support Plus Plan (SSPP) Meetings:

Formal SSPP meetings take place three times a year during the school day for pupils who have specific special educational needs: September/October, January and June. The Special Education Teacher(SET) along with the class teacher, SNA (if appropriate) and the Principal meet with the parents of these pupils. At this meeting, information is gathered to formulate the child's SSPP.

School Support Plan (SSP) meetings usually take place between 1.30-2.30 where a plan of work is devised for children with educational, emotional or behavioural needs.

Teachers who job-share jointly attend the formal annual parent/teacher meeting in January. These meetings are timetabled for 1pm of the day of the official January parent/teacher meeting as it is recognised that additional time is needed for parents/teacher meetings of job-sharing teachers who both have an input to the meetings.

Formal meetings also take place between SET and parents to discuss the results of formal testing for children whose test scores are low or unexpected. However, if a parent wishes to arrange a meeting at any stage during the year to discuss their child, they may do so by prior appointment.

Informal Parent/Teacher Meetings:

Although the School encourages communication between parents and teachers, Meetings with the class teacher at the classroom door to discuss concern is discouraged on a number of grounds:

- Staff cannot adequately supervise a class while at the same time speaking to a parent
- It is difficult to be discreet when so many children are standing close by
- It can be embarrassing/worrying for a child when his/her parent is talking to staff at a classroom door

Occasions occur where a parent needs to speak to a staff member urgently. Sometimes these meetings need to take place without prior notice. The Principal will aim to facilitate such meetings making every effort to ensure that the children in the class do not lose out on any of their teaching/learning time.

Complaints Procedure:

Complaints are infrequent, but the school would wish that these would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. The following is the agreed complaints procedure to be followed in primary schools.

Stage 1- Informal Stage:

- A parent who wishes to make a complaint should, firstly approach the **class teacher** with a view to resolving the complaint
 - parents should email the teacher requesting a phone call or meeting during 2021-22 Covid-19 pandemic
- Where the parent is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher, they should approach the **Principal** with a view to resolving it (procedure as above)
- If the complaint is still unresolved, the parent should raise the matter with the Chairperson of the Board of Management with a view to resolving it

Stage 2- Formal Stage:

- If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent wishes to pursue the matter further, he/she should lodge the complaint **in writing** with the Chairperson of the Board of Management stsylvesters@gmail.com
- The Chairperson will bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the staff member and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

Stage 3:

- If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Chairperson should, subject to the authorisation of the Board:
 - Supply the staff member with a copy of the written complaint and
 - Arrange a meeting with the staff member, and where applicable, the Principal with a view to resolving the complaint. Such a meeting should take place within 10 days of receipt of the written complaint.

STAGE 4:

- If the complaint is still not resolved, the Chairperson should make a formal report to the Board of Management within 10 days of the meeting

- If the Board of Management considers that the complaint is not substantiated, the staff member and the complainant should be so informed within 3 days of the Board meeting
- If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation, the following steps should be followed:
 - The staff member should be supplied with copies of any written evidence in support of the complaint
 - He/she should be requested to supply a written response to the complaint to the Board and should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation to the Board and to be accompanied by another person to that meeting
 - The Board may arrange a meeting with the complainant, who may be accompanied by another person to this meeting.

Stage 5:

Following the Boards investigations, the Chairperson shall convey the decision of the Board in writing to the staff member and the complainant within 5 days of the meeting of the Board. The decision of the Board shall be final.

Behaviour of all Stakeholders in the School:

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school and is described in more detail in our *Respect and Dignity in the Workplace Policy*, this not only extends to the children but to all of the stakeholders e.g. the staff, parents and the wider community. Anyone entering our building should feel safe to do so. While the behaviour of children in our school is of vital importance, adults in the school community also have a responsibility to ensure their own behaviour models the types of behaviour expected of children.

It is important that all stakeholders are responsible for their own behaviours in the school. Examples include:

- All stakeholders are expected to speak to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones are not acceptable. If a stakeholder displays anger or aggression to another member of the school community, they may be asked to remove themselves from the building. In certain cases, the Gardaí must be called
- All stakeholders will treat our children with the utmost respect while on the premises
- Staff should not be asked to speak about another parent's child. The staff of the school will respect your child's right to privacy so it is asked that parents respect other children's rights to privacy
- When stakeholders meet, it is important to respect that the time of meetings should be kept to a reasonable amount of time. Times of meetings should be agreed beforehand and these should be respected
- Staff are generally available to listen to a quick issue in the morning and after school. However, should a parent need to have a discussion or meeting, an appointment should be made by email at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved without affecting formal class times.

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work:

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for the BOM and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

It is recognised that school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

In this respect, all staff should be aware of **DES Circular 40/97** which deals with the procedures to follow if they feel they have been subjected to any of the above behaviours. A copy of this circular can be found in Appendix 2.

Ratification and Communication:

The BOM reserves the right to add to or amend this policy from time to time as is deemed necessary. The policy was ratified by the Board of Management on the 9th November 2020.

Date to be reviewed: 2024.



**Mr Michael McKenna,
Chairperson,
Board of Management.**



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Class WhatsApp Groups – Guidelines

WhatsApp is a super easy and efficient way for informal class communications e.g. “What page for Maths homework?”

The Parents’ Association has put together some guidelines that we feel would be useful for such WhatsApp groups.

1. Firstly, **all formal school notes/information** are sent directly from the School Office to parents/guardians by email/text a parent/notes in A5 wallet.
2. Each class has a Class Rep who organises their WhatsApp Group. The class rep does not act as a liaison person between the class group and the class teacher/school.
3. WhatsApp should only be used for class communication only. Anything that is for a specific individual should be sent to that person only as a private message.
4. WhatsApp is not a forum for political discussions or any discussions that are personal to any individual. It is not an ‘Agony Aunt’ discussion hub.
5. WhatsApp must not be used for any commercial purposes/advertising/promotion of business etc.
6. WhatsApp is a quick response communication tool and should be used for such responses e.g. I forgot what uniform days are for our class?
7. If you have a grievance with anything, your WhatsApp group is not the forum to discuss such matters. Please seek advice and use the proper channels of communication to address such issues.
8. It must be borne in mind that not everyone has, nor wants to use, WhatsApp. A Class Rep needs to confirm all parents are on WhatsApp and if not, use an alternative method to contact such parents e.g. email.
9. Some Class Reps use their WhatsApp group to organise a class night out or coffee morning. Such use is down to individual classes; however it can clog up WhatsApp with unnecessary chat. So discretion is to be used in these circumstances.
10. WhatsApp group must be inclusive to all whilst respecting the wishes of fellow parents/guardians.
11. This is a private group for your class parents/guardians only. Contact details cannot be passed on to anyone outside the group, nor can anyone outside the class be joined to the group without prior permission of the group.



Circular 40/97

**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PRIMARY BRANCH
CIRCULAR LETTER TO BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT AND PRINCIPALS OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS**

ASSAULTS ON TEACHERS/SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

The Minister for Education wishes to bring to the attention of the school authorities his concern at the increase in the incidents of assaults on staff in primary schools. Violence in the workplace is an issue of grave concern for employees and employers alike. As in other workplaces, school employees are also the victims of violence in the workplace. During the course of their work, school staff may be at risk from violence in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. This behaviour may come from pupils, parents, guardians, other staff members or intruders.

The Minister is anxious that every effort would be made to create and maintain a culture in schools where acts of violence are not tolerated and where incidents, when they do occur, are effectively and speedily dealt with.

In this context, the Department of Education wishes to draw the attention of Boards of Management to the following issues:

- the Board's duty to provide a safe place of work for employees
- measures to be taken to prevent or minimise the risk of assaults to teachers or other staff employed in schools
- measures to be taken in support of staff who have been assaulted or threatened with assault; and ensuring that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

1 Board's Duty to provide a Safe System of Work

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act became operative on 1 November 1989. It is an important piece of legislation for Boards of Management and for those who work in schools, as schools and colleges were brought under the scope of safety legislation for the first time.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989 requires employers to ensure the safety and health of their employees. It requires employers to draw up a Safety Statement:

- Identifying the hazards
- Assessing the risks to health and safety
- Putting in place appropriate safeguards

In the Education Sector violence should be considered as a potential hazard and assessed accordingly and where there is a risk to health and safety from violence appropriate safeguards must be put in place. Account should be taken of the specific circumstances that pertain in each school.

There should be consultation with those at risk concerning the measures to be taken and monitoring their effectiveness. Information should be given to staff on protection and preventative measures which are essential.

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 1993, provides that the Health and Safety Authority must be notified when an accident/ incident occurs in the workplace which requires treatment from a registered medical practitioner or treatment in hospital. An accident or incident which results in an employee being absent from work for 3 days or more must also be reported to the Authority.

2 Preventative Measures

Boards are urged to consider and implement measures which would prevent or minimise the risk of assault to the employees of the Board. The effectiveness of agreed procedures should be reviewed where necessary.

(a) External Liaison

Bearing in mind that communication between home and school should be frequent, open and positive, Boards in consultation with the principal and staff of the school should promote good practice for the conduct of communication between home and school.

In this context schools should develop and circularise to parents, policies to deal with the following matters:

- Admitting parents/visitors to the school

Parents who wish to have a consultation with a class teacher should be encouraged to make a prior appointment with the relevant teacher. In urgent cases where a pre-arranged appointment is not appropriate, parents should be encouraged to report in the first instance to the school secretary/principal. The practice of parents approaching classrooms directly during teaching time should be discouraged. Specifically, access to teachers should be on an “appointment only” basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke a confrontation.

- Parent/teacher meetings

Arrangements for the conduct of formal parent teacher meetings should be addressed in the School Plan. Parents should be given adequate notice regarding the timing of such meetings and encouraged to raise issues of concern. Where sensitive issues are the subject of discussion, arrangements should be made for conducting such interviews in privacy. Conducting interviews at the classroom door, while simultaneously supervising a class of children is not conducive to open communication. Particular care should be taken to ensure that parent/teacher consultations do not take place within the hearing of other pupils and/or parents.

- Code of Discipline

Under the terms of Circular 20/90 schools are requested to develop a Code of Behaviour and Discipline for Pupils. This Code should be developed by the principal and staff in consultation with parents and approved by the Board of Management. Once finalised, this Code should be notified to parents. Any sanction imposed on a pupil should be in accordance with the Code of Discipline. Procedures for suspending pupils should be clearly set out in the school’s Code of Discipline and should be adhered to.

- Complaints Procedure

Boards of Management should have in place a clear procedure for the processing of potential complaints. Some Managerial Associations have already negotiated such a procedure with the INTO. The terms of the complaints procedure should be notified to parents and parents should be encouraged to utilise stages of the procedure where necessary.

(b) Internal Procedures

The issues of internal school procedures should also be discussed from time to time at staff meetings. Staff should be familiar with all relevant procedures.

In circumstances of increased risk (e.g. schools for young offenders) training should be provided for staff:

- in identifying potentially violent situations, and
- in calming down potentially violent situations.

Specific examination should be given to circumstances where staff are:

- working alone on the school premises
- working in an isolated part of the school premises
- engaged in out of class activities
- working with pupils with behavioural difficulties
- engaged in home visiting.

3 Steps to be followed in the event of an assault

Boards should develop a clearly defined procedure to be implemented in the event of an assault on an employee. This policy should include a clear commitment on the Board's part to be fully supportive of staff who have been subject to violence.

It is accepted that judgement will have to be exercised in each case. However, the following elements should be included in each procedure

- (i) The incident should be immediately reported to the principal teacher/other colleague.

The details of the incident should be recorded in an Incident Book kept for this purpose in the workplace. Situations in which members have been intimidated or threatened with physical violence should also be recorded.

- (ii) Where necessary immediate medical assistance should be sought.
- (iii) The matter should be reported to the Gardaí, where appropriate. This report would normally be made by the teacher who was assaulted.
- (iv) The Board of Management should be notified of the incident and where necessary an emergency meeting of the Board should take place. The Board should notify its legal advisors of the assault. The Board's insurance company should also be notified.

- (v) Where the assault is by a pupil the matter should be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Discipline and as provided for in Rule 130(5) of the Rules for National Schools.
- (vi) Repeatedly aggressive pupils should be referred, with the consent of parents, for psychological assessment in order to assess the pupils' social and emotional needs and to determine how these can be best met.
- (vii) Where the assault is committed by a parent/guardian, the parent/guardian should be immediately instructed in writing not to make direct contact with the teacher/school pending full consideration of the matter by the Board. Subsequently the Board should correspond with the parent/ guardian stating:
- that the Board considers the assault unacceptable
 - what action the Board intends to take
 - outlining what pre-conditions should be met before access to the school is restored.
- (viii) Applications for leave of absence, in relation to a member who has been assaulted, should be forwarded to Primary Payments Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. Each application will be assessed on its merits.
- (ix) Where an employee's personal property is damaged in the course of an assault, compensation for its replacement value may be paid by the Board of Management under the extended school Protection Policy.

John Dennehy,
Assistant Secretary.

September 1997.