



STEP Academy Trust

Communication Policy

Date of Policy: Summer 2017

Review: Spring 2021

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

STEP Academy Trust is committed to the promotion of effective communication between pupils, members of staff, parents/carers, stakeholders, governors, Trustees and all members of the STEP community and beyond in order to build positive relationships.

Our objectives are to:

- Have a clear and professional communication strategy in place which will help STEP to keep parents/carers well-informed about their child's educational progress and any other matters related to their child's overall well-being.
- Keep staff, pupils, parents, governors, trustees and other stakeholders well informed of events and developments pertinent to them.
- Make our written communication as accessible and inclusive as possible.
- Use the methods of communication most effective and appropriate to the context, message and audience.
- Be open, honest, ethical and professional.
- Ensure that there is a robust process in place for consultation between the academies, parents, staff members and pupils on key areas.
- Ensure that the systems in place are fully aligned to the Trust's Mission, Vision and Values.
- Recognise that monitoring and evaluation of communication issues through regular meetings and discussion with pupils, staff, parents, trustees and governors is an on-going consideration. In the context of a growing organisation it is particularly important to review systems and facilitate the best possible communication at all stages of the Trust's development.

Efficient and effective communication is essential at all levels of the organisation:

- Between STEP Academies and their whole Academy community.
- Between staff.
- Between children.
- Between Trustees.
- Between the Board of Trustees and STEP Strategic Governing Bodies.
- Between STEP Academies with one another.
- Between all STEP Academy Trust stakeholders.
- Beyond STEP Academy Trust.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

Academy responsibilities

- To publish key policies, documents and procedures on the Academy website and in other areas that maximise their accessibility and usefulness to the entire Academy community.
- To publish on the Academy website key information about the composition and remit of the Strategic Governing Body.
- To inform parents/carers and governors of all Academy events within appropriate timelines.
- To keep parents/carers informed of the progress of their child at regular intervals throughout the Academy year.
- To consult with and work in partnership with parents/carers on the well-being and education of their children.
- To seek creative ways of making key messages relevant to the communities served by each Academy.
- To remind staff of the STEP Compass, particularly STEP First and the STEP Way, and its relevance to the Academy.

Staff members' responsibilities

- To ensure that the principles and procedures of this policy are followed.
- To communicate proactively with parents/cares about pupil progress and to support parents/carers to help their children's learning.

Parent/carer's responsibilities

- To read key communication circulated by the Academy (eg homework tasks, website information, newsletters).
- To respond/act on communication from the Academy (eg sign consent forms, attend meetings).
- To keep the Academy office up to date with any changes to contact details (address, phone numbers, email addresses).
- To inform the Academy of any medical conditions along with medical documentation.
- To inform the Academy of any child protection matters, legal issues or relevant duties with appropriate documentation.
- To inform the Academy of any other information pertaining to their child which would be relevant to their wellbeing or educational needs.
- To raise any issues or concerns with the class teacher in the first instance in line with the Complaints Policy.

All staff have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. They should not have to endure abusive, disrespectful or threatening behaviour whilst at work.

Parents/carers are usually courteous and respectful. In a minority of cases, where this is not the case and a member of staff considers that a parent is being abusive, disrespectful or threatening, the parent/carer will be asked to stop. If the behaviour does not stop, the discussion will be terminated.

The Academy may continue to communicate with the parent but will use another form, such as a letter.

Strategic Governing Body Responsibilities

- Using a variety of communication methods to promote & explain the work of the governors.
- To ensure the posting of minutes of meetings in appropriate places.

3. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE ACADEMIES

3.1 Communication with members of staff

- A timetable is made available to staff, which outlines weekly activities across the Academy. In addition, daily updates are given through morning briefings, noticeboards, online alerts etc.
- The Staff Handbook contains details of all procedures and policies.
- Staff members' personal details will not be shared with other members of staff without their consent.
- STEP Bulletin produced by the Executive Management Team on a half termly basis and circulated to all staff (and Trustees and governors) to keep all members of the STEP community fully informed of current events and developments.

3.2 Email Communication for members of staff

- All members of staff have their own STEP email account and must ensure they use the official STEP signature strip on all internal and external emails.
- Staff must consider the best way to communicate according to each situation, recognising that in school, emails should not be used as a substitute for face-to-face communication.
- Staff must be mindful of the tone and propriety of their email communication and ensure that their written correspondence is always appropriate and professional.
- As STEP encourages staff to have an appropriate work/life balance, staff are not expected to write and respond to emails outside of school hours. It is expected though that emails are responded to within two school working days.
- To ensure effective management of emails, please be mindful of who is "cc'ed" into an email. It is helpful to use the cc function if the information will be directly useful to your colleague.
- It would be inappropriate to discuss issues of a sensitive nature by email. Although not exhaustive, sensitive issues may include addressing staff performance or pupil performance and behaviour. Issues of this nature should be conducted in a face-to-face manner, with Minutes taken as necessary.
- Communicating with parents and staff members must be carried out via the Academy email address and not via a personal email address.
- Engaging in personal correspondence with pupils is not allowed.
- Sending of chain emails is not allowed.
- Embedding of adverts is not allowed.

3.3 Social Networking Sites/Blogs etc for members of staff and the Strategic Governing Body

- Staff will not communicate with pupils or parents via social networking sites/personal accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.
- Staff will not accept personal 'friend' requests from pupils or parents.
- Academy/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.
- Employees should not use their personal devices to access social media at any time on Academy premises.
- When using social media outside of school for personal use, all employees must remember that they are personally responsible. Employees must take care to ensure that they always act responsibly and follow the law and STEP's policies and standards of conduct outside school as well as in school. Staff must not post comments about the Academy, pupils, parents or colleagues including members of the Strategic Governing Body.
- Staff should not identify STEP as their employer on social media, other than to maintain a presence on professional sites such as Linked In.
- Staff are not authorised to engage in conversations involving STEP on social media and should refrain from doing so.

3.4 Communication with Pupils/Accessing 'the Pupil Voice'

- Pupils' views are sought via lessons, discussion, pupil questionnaires.
- Each Academy has a developed School Council or Pupil Parliament.

4. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TRUSTEES AND GOVERNORS

4.1 To ensure efficient and effective communication between Trustees and between governors, there are key expectations of members of the Board of Trustees and members of the Strategic Governing Bodies as follows:

- To regularly attend Board of Trustee meetings/ Strategic Governing Body meetings.
- To prepare well for meetings by reading all communication and papers in advance and making any requests for printing of papers (not including policies) to the Clerk no later than two days in advance of a meeting.
- To ensure that any planned absences for any length of time are communicated to fellow colleagues/STEP staff.
- To respond in a timely manner to email correspondence from fellow Trustees or fellow governors (within two working days).
- To access relevant Trust information on the designated ICT systems.
- To immediately advise the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Trustees of any issue which might affect the interests of STEP Academy Trust.

4.2 Email communication for Trustees and governors

The same expectations apply to Trustees and governors for use of email as those for staff (as detailed under 3.2)

4.3 Social Networking Sites/Blogs etc for Trustees and governors

The same expectations apply to Trustees and governors for use of Social media as those for staff (as detailed under 3.3).

4.4 Communication between the STEP Governance team, Headteachers, Key officers, Governors

- A detailed set of expectations for the process and timescale for setting of agendas, writing of minutes and approval of draft minutes has been produced and is set out in Appendix 1.
- On confirmation of the appointment of new governors, Clerks or Chairs will ensure that the whole SGB is informed.

5. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND STRATEGIC GOVERNING BODIES

Sub-committees of the Board of Trustees, Strategic Governing Bodies (SGBs), are delegated responsibility for pairs of or individual STEP Academies. Effective communication between the Board of Trustees and the Strategic Governing Bodies is vital so that:

- The Board of Trustees has an accurate, up-to-date picture of provision across the Trust and is able to take this into account in its strategic decision-making.
- The views of member Academies, through their SGBs, are appropriately represented at Board of Trustee level.
- SGBs are able to implement policies and decisions agreed by the Board of Trustees.

In order to facilitate communication, the following systems are in place:

- A standard item is included on each SGB termly agenda to receive feedback from the Board of Trustees.
- All SGBs have a direct link with the Board of Trustees via the Chief Executive Officer or member of the Executive Management Team who each attend SGB meetings.
- Part A Minutes of the Board of Trustee meetings are circulated to all governors.
- All SGB minutes are circulated to all Trustees.

Occasionally, it is necessary for the Chair of Trustees or the Chair of the SGB to take a Chair's Action outside the meeting cycle. In these circumstances it is important to ensure that Chair's Actions are reported and ratified at the next available meeting.

Clerks are therefore to be copied into any email correspondence around such issues, to enable the addition of ratification of any Chair's Action to the next agenda.

6. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STEP ACADEMIES

Close collaboration between STEP Academies is an expectation of the Trust and STEP Academy Headteachers work closely with the Executive Management Team (Chief Executive Officer, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Head of Standards, Head of Teaching and Learning, Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Executive Headteacher, New Addington Cluster), to ensure that expertise is effectively shared across the Trust.

STEP Academies are also encouraged to celebrate the successes of other Trust members, publicising “good news” stories from across the Trust, is positive and cohesive. Methods of communication include:

- Email.
- Academy Newsletters.
- Academy Websites.
- STEP Newsletters and Bulletins.
- STEP Academy Trust Website.
- Authorised Academy Social media e.g. Twitter.

7. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The Trust communicates with parents/carers through:

- Letters home - to inform parents/carers of particular events, meetings or trips. They will also be used to communicate Academy news that affects them.
- Emails – as an alternative to paper correspondence as well as to communicate information quickly, as well as to remind parents/carers of any Academy events or activities.
- Text messages - again to communicate information quickly, as well as to remind parents/carers of any Academy events or activities.
- The Academy Websites - to provide information about our curriculum, term dates and calendar events. Policies, codes of conduct and information about uniform etc can also be found on the website, as well as any previous letters/newsletters.
- The STEP Academy Trust Website – to share information about the Trust including news, governance and performance.
- Regular Academy newsletters – to keep parents/carers up to date with academy events and general information.
- Parent/Carer meetings- formal consultations will take place twice a year, in the Autumn and Spring terms. The purpose of these are for the class teachers to communicate with parent/carers about their child’s educational progress, behaviour for learning and generally how they are getting on at school. In the summer term a formal report will be given to parents, with an opportunity to come and discuss this with the relevant teacher.
- Informal communication between teachers and parents/carers – to discuss specific issues pertaining to individual children.
- The Complaints Process - to provide parents/carers with an avenue to escalate issues which remain unresolved after speaking to their child’s teacher.
- Local and national media- to allow Headteachers to share ‘good news’ stories with the local press.
- Workshops and Working Parties - there may be times where it is appropriate to pull together a parent/carer working party to problem-solve/discuss an issue that impacts on the whole Academy community. These working parties will provide a conduit for parents/carers to express their viewpoints and thoughts.
- Open events - when the Academy will invite parents/carers in to see how their children are learning. These will focus on particular strategies the Academy uses that parents/ carers may not be familiar with.

- Social media - the Academy will operate a Twitter feed to share information. This will be regularly updated. Parents/carers should not use social media to raise issues or concerns either with the Academy, or with other parents/carers. The Academy is always willing to engage in conversation with parents/carers who have a concern and would therefore ask that they speak to their child's teacher and follow the complaints procedure.

Communication of STEP's moral purpose is achieved through:

- Ensuring the STEP Compass, particularly STEP First, is constantly referenced.
- Maintaining a frequently updated Trust website.
- Producing a bi-annual STEP Academy Trust Newsletter which is circulated to all stakeholders.
- Featuring in regular local and national press articles.
- Speaking at national conferences and seminars.
- Networking and facilitating visits to STEP Academies.

Communication with the Media and Wider Public

- When press coverage takes place, all parties who may be interested such as parents, staff, Trustees, governors and the community will be informed via email, social media, the Newsletter and the Academy /Trust website.
- All publications and press releases which include pictures of pupils will be checked before release/publication to ensure that they do not include any children whose parents have informed the Academy that they do not wish their child to be photographed.
- All publications and prospectuses will be mindful of the equal opportunities policy, reflecting and celebrating the diversity of our STEP community.
- Headteachers are authorised to provide press releases to the local press on 'Good news' items relating to their academy. The CEO/Deputy CEO, Head of Communication and Chair of the SGB would expect to be informed of any press contact on good news events.
- Any other contact with the Press, local or national, relating to the Academy or STEP more generally, should always be made via the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Trustees. No one else (Headteachers, members of staff) are authorised to speak to the press without first having agreed this with the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Trustees.

Communication of Recruitment Opportunities

- A proactive approach to recruitment of high quality teachers.
- Attendance at key recruitment fairs.
- Internal vacancies are advertised solely on the STEP website and the onus for checking this is on individual members of staff.

APPENDIX 1

GOVERNANCE TEAM PROTOCOLS AND TIMELINES

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
Board of Trustees	<p>To Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Company Secretary/Senior Governance Clerk</p> <p>To CEO</p> <p>To Chair of the Board for final approval</p> <p>To Trustees</p> <p>Copy of agenda only to Head Teachers and SGB Chairs for information</p>	<p>Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>At least seven days before meeting along with all papers</p> <p>At least seven days before the meeting</p>	<p>To Chief Finance & Operations Officer (Finance items), Company Secretary/ Senior Governance Clerk (Governance & policy items) Head of Teaching & Learning (Performance items)</p> <p>To CEO</p> <p>To Chair of the Board for final approval</p> <p>To Trustees</p>	<p>Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Within fourteen working days of meeting</p>

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
STEP Operations & Audit Committee	To Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Company Secretary/Senior Governance Clerk	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	To Chief Finance Officer (Copy to CEO & Deputy CEO for information)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days.
	To Committee Chair for final Approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	To Committee Chair	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days
	To Committee Members	At least seven days before meeting along with all papers	To Committee members	Within fourteen working days of meeting

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
STEP Standards Committee	<p>To Head of Teaching & Learning (Copy to CEO & Deputy CEO for information)</p> <p>To Committee Chair</p> <p>To Committee members</p>	<p>Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>At least seven days before meeting along with all papers</p>	<p>To Head of Teaching & Learning (Copy to CEO & Deputy CEO for information)</p> <p>To Committee Chair</p> <p>To Committee members</p>	<p>Within seven days of meeting Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days</p> <p>Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days.</p> <p>Within fourteen working days of meeting</p>

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
Strategic Governing Body	To Head Teacher (copy to Company Secretary for information)	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	To Head Teacher (for correction of any factual inaccuracies) and Business Manager for financial items)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comment. Chase if no response after three days.
	To SGB Chair	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	To SGB Chair for final comment and approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days
	To governors	At Least seven days before meeting along with all papers	To governors	Within fourteen days of meeting

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
Senior Leadership Team Meetings	To Chief Finance & Operations Officer & Company Secretary/Senior Governance Clerk	Two weeks before meeting. Allow Three clear working Days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	To Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Company Secretary	Within seven days of the meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments
	To CEO & Deputy CEO	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	To CEO & Deputy CEO	Three clear working days
	To SLT Members	At least seven days before meeting along with all papers	To SLT Members	Within fourteen working days of meeting