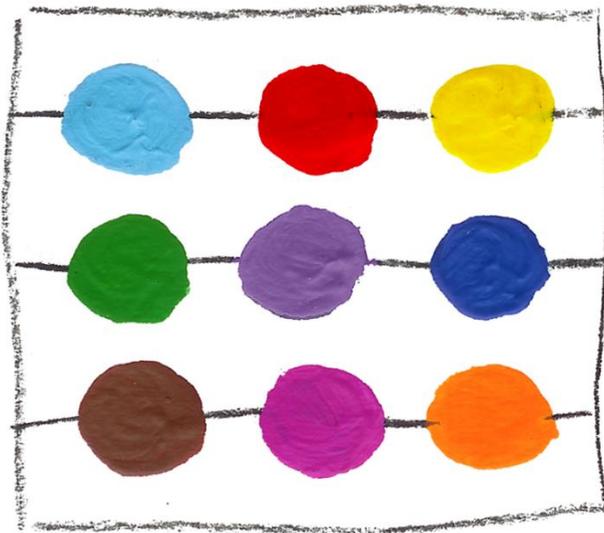


Communications and Confidentiality Policy



Carrigaline Educate Together N.S.

This document is intended to provide details of the main policies of Carrigaline Educate Together National School (CETNS). It is intended to help the school community to understand the environment and approach of the school. This document is regularly reviewed. All feedback is encouraged and welcome.

Version	Description	Authors
November 2016	First version of policy	Board of Management
October 2018	Reviewed	Policy Committee
November 2018	Reviewed	Policy Committee

School Contact Details

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Communications and Confidentiality Policy

Introductory Statement

The policy was formulated having been identified as an area that required clarification. It was devised by members of policy committee and proposed to the Board of Management for approval and ratification. This policy has been set out in accordance with the provisions of the *Education Act 1998* and provides for equality of access and participation in the school for all children in our society whatever their social, religious, cultural and racial background and whether or not they have a disability or special educational needs.

Rationale

Carrigaline Educate Together N.S. is committed to providing information and guidelines to all members of the school community. Good communication and confidentiality are essential to maintaining a positive working and learning environment. Creating an atmosphere of mutual respect in a happy, caring and supportive environment means that people feel included, consulted and informed. This requires that we use a variety of channels of communication so as to ensure the relevant people receive the necessary information.

Vision

Carrigaline Educate Together N.S. strives to provide a well ordered, caring, secure atmosphere for its pupils and staff. This is achieved through promoting the individual and collective personal and professional development of staff through regular structured staff meetings and information about and access to Board of Management-supported Continuous Professional Development activities.

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 in relation to communication and confidentiality, to improve all children's educational experience. This policy is based on the principles that all the stakeholders aim to work together for the benefit of the child and their learning.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the School

The Communications and Confidentiality Policy reflects the overall ethos of the school which states:

Carrigaline Educate Together N.S. is one of a number of equality-based schools throughout the country. The representative organisation for these schools is 'Educate Together'.

Educate Together aims to meet a growing need in Irish society for schools that recognise the developing diversity of Irish life and the modern need for democratic management structures. In particular, Educate Together guarantees children and parents of all faiths and none equal respect in the operation and governing of education.

The schools operated by the member associations of Educate Together are fully recognised by the Irish

Department of Education and Skills and work under the same regulations and funding structures as other national schools. However, they have a distinct ethos or governing spirit. This has been defined in the following terms:

- **Equality-based** i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected
- **Co-educational** and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities
- **Child centred** in their approach to education
- **Democratically run** with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers (*Source: Educate Together Charter*)

Whilst the concepts of child-centeredness and co-educationalism are now widely accepted in Irish primary education, what distinguishes the Educate Together schools is their hard work in developing a culturally inclusive and democratic ethos. This has pioneered unique approaches to inclusion of minority opinions and faiths in the Irish context.

The schools have developed education programmes which open the eyes of children to the naturally positive contribution that social, religious and cultural diversity and difference of viewpoint and opinion make to society.

The other characteristic feature of these schools is that they are democratically organised and governed. This maximises the potential for building a genuine partnership between the professional, objective role of the teacher and the necessarily personal involvement of the parent in contributing to their children's education.

Information taken from the Educate Together website www.educatetogether.ie

Carrigaline Educate Together N.S. makes the distinction between denominational education and moral/religious education. The ethical curriculum followed by the school is called the Learn Together Curriculum. It is comprised of four strands: Morality & Spirituality, Equality & Justice, Belief systems, Ethics & the environment.

Denominational instruction is facilitated by the school insofar as groups are permitted to use the school premises. This is organised by parents outside of school hours.

The Communications and Confidentiality Policy recognises and endeavours to adopt the values that are set out in the ethos of the school for those at work in the school. It attempts to support and sustain a harmonious environment in which the potential of all staff is nurtured through the co-operation between staff, pupils, parents, board members and all other relevant parties.

Aims

The Communications and Confidentiality Policy aims to:

- facilitate good communications between staff within the school
- facilitate good communications between staff, parents and the whole school community
- outline procedures for communications between staff and parents
- outline the school's regard for the integrity of pupils' welfare regarding confidentiality

- offer guidelines and protection for visitors, volunteers, student teachers and others who engage in work/work experience in the school
- provide assurance and confidence to parents in general and other staff members that those who engage in work/work experience in the school are unambiguously bound by strict guidelines and have due respect for your child's privacy

Communications

Behaviour in the School of All Members of the School Community

Positive and respectful communications is of high importance to our school. This not only extends to the children but to all of the school community e.g. the staff, parents, visitors, psychologists, therapists etc. Everyone entering the school grounds should feel safe to do so. While the behaviour of children in the 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 members of the school community are responsible for their own behaviours in the school. Examples include:

- All members of the school community 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 school building and grounds. In exceptional circumstances, in the interest of safety and/or of the wider school community in the school it may be deemed necessary to call the Gardaí
- All members of the school community must treat our children with the utmost respect
- 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 at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved. Classes begin at 8:50a.m. and finish at 1:30p.m. for Junior and Senior Infants and at 2.30p.m. for all other classes. This time should not be interrupted
- When members of the school community have a formal meeting, 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

In-School

The following tools of communications are in place in Carrigaline Educate Together N.S.:

- Oral communication between staff
- Oral notices to teachers by the Principal
- Staff meetings
- Staff emails
- Regular classroom visits by the Principal
- Announcements/discussion in Staff Room at break times
- Staff Room notice board & screen
- Text messages
- School-related events
- Assembly

Procedures for staff meetings

- A whole-school staff meeting is held termly, or as the need arises

- This is a collaborative exercise with each staff member having the opportunity to nominate items/issues for inclusion on the agenda. Staff are asked to submit any items for the agenda to the principal prior to the meeting. Some additional items are decided upon at the monthly middle-management meetings or at meetings of the Board of Management (BOM) or by the principal. An agenda is drawn up by the principal beforehand and distributed to each staff member at the meeting
- Minutes are taken by the Deputy Principal, or another member of the middle-management team in the absence of the Deputy Principal. The minutes of the meeting are recorded with a clear statement of the decisions made, actions to be undertaken and the delegation of responsibilities. The minutes are emailed to the teachers for their records following the meeting. The principal keeps a hard copy record of all staff meetings including the date, details of the meeting and the meeting's duration
- Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and other ancillary staff are required to attend staff meetings if issues relating to their work/responsibilities are included on the agenda. These issues usually have a * next to them on the agenda so that when they have been discussed and decisions taken, SNAs and other ancillary staff can leave and be assigned to other pre-agreed arrangements

Home-School

As per *Circular 56/2011* 'Initial Steps in the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy',

"Parents play a critical role in supporting their children's learning. Schools can strengthen the capacity of parents to support their children in this way by sharing meaningful information with parents about the progress that 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, examination of students' own self-assessment data, documented observations of the learner's engagement with tasks, outcomes of other assessment tasks and tests, and examples of students' work. In turn, parents will often be able to enrich staffs knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information about the students' learning at home."

Parents/guardians

Parents/guardians 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 Parent Association (PA)
- Participate in policy- and decision-making processes affecting them

For greater detail on these, please refer to the Parental Involvement Policy.

School

The school endeavours to ensure clear communications and cooperation between school and home using the following:

- Phone calls to school landline or mobiles. It is not appropriate for parents to have a phone number of a member of staff (unless they are known to them outside of the school context)
- Text messages
- Emails
 - The ‘School Communication’ email is issued on a Thursday. These may include messages from the BOM, PA, in-school committees, teachers or other relevant external agencies
 - The school may email parents incidentally about special events throughout the year via the school principal or secretary
 - Parents may email the school with general questions about school activities. The school principal or secretary will respond to these queries by email. Email enquires should only be sent to the following email addresses: info@cetns.org, secretary@cetns.org or principal@cetns.org
 - Any specific incident or questions relating to a child’s progress should be made directly to the child’s class teacher, either by a written note or a phone call. Any email question about a particular incident or a child’s progress will be passed to the child’s teacher. The teacher may discuss the matter informally with the parent before or after school, make a phone call or arrange a formal meeting on these issues.
- School website – www.carrigalineeducatetogether.ie
- School events e.g. the school musical
- Parent Association Facebook page
- School Instagram account
- Class blogs, including homework listings (Paper copies can be arranged if a parent encounters difficulty accessing the blog)
- Notes to/from home in the homework folder (Infant Classes) - a teacher or a parent should communicate that a note has been placed here as children at infant level may not be able to communicate the presence of a note
- Homework notebook (from 1st Class) – each week has a section for notes. Parents or teachers may write in this
- Home-school copies – In individual cases, it may be deemed useful for parents and teachers to communicate to one another regularly. In this instance, a home-school copy. Comments in this should be accurate, concise and factual by both teachers and parents
- Formal Parent/Teacher meetings will be held once a year for all classes (Circular 14/04). Parent-Teacher meetings in January/February for Junior Infant parents and November for Senior Infants to 6th. 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. The school will attempt to co-ordinate times where siblings are concerned and being cognisant of individual home-life situations. Meetings may take place in classrooms, support rooms and other rooms if necessary. The class teachers prepare for the meetings and collaborate in advance with other teachers working with

a child about the progress. A short, written record of the meeting is usually maintained by each individual teacher. In the case of parents who are separated, requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher. The purpose of the Parent/Teacher meeting is:

- To establish and maintain good communications between the school and parents
 - To let parents know how a child is progressing in school
 - To provide parents with an opportunity to let the teacher know how a child is coping with their school work from their perspective
 - To help teachers/parents get to know the children better as individuals
 - To help children realise that home and school are working together
 - To share with the parent the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
 - To review with the parent the child's experience of schooling
 - To learn more about the child from the parent's perspective
 - To learn more about parental opinions on what the school is doing
 - To identify areas of tension and disagreement
 - To identify ways in which teachers or parents can help a child
 - To negotiate jointly decisions about the child's education
 - To meet demands for accountability
- Pre-arranged face-to-face meetings between teachers, parents and/or other relevant agencies (by appointment). If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she can contact the school secretary to arrange a suitable time or briefly and informally request a time at the beginning/end of a school day. Parents with questions or issues about school policy or practice will be referred to the class teacher or the principal
 - IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings with a Special Education Teacher for parents of children with special educational needs take place in September and again in December/January. Parents will be invited to attend a meeting with the child's resource teacher. It is not possible/practical for class teachers to attend these also, but the resource teacher will liaise with them for their input before and their feedback after the IEP meeting. Special Needs Assistant may also attend this meeting if deemed absolutely necessary. Any other relevant professionals may also be invited to attend (Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapist, Educational Psychologist, etc.). 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. For further information, please see the school's Special Educational Needs Policy
 - Open night meeting for parents of prospective Junior Infants (usually in the October/November preceding a child starting in the school)
 - Open Day for in-coming Junior Infants (June preceding a child starting in the school)
 - Class parent information nights for parents of current Junior Infants (September). This school year, all classes held these information nights. This will be reviewed and a decision made as to whether or not to continue with them
 - School reports are given out at least one week before the end of the summer term to ensure that any follow-up meetings can be facilitated if necessary. The school uses a standard NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) report card template. As all reports are completed on Aladdin (the school's online administration system) teachers use the translate option to print a duplicate copy of the report in the

parent's first language if necessary. In the case of parents who are separated, requests can be made for the issue of two report cards. The report cards provide report on 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

It is vital that the school is immediately informed of any change in family events/situations that may cause anxiety to a 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 address or contact designated on file (i.e. on Aladdin Schools) will be consulted by staff.

Informal Parent-Teacher/SNA Meetings

The school encourages communications between parents and staff. Meetings between parents and staff in the morning at the class door to discuss a child's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds:

- Staff cannot adequately supervise their class/child 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 unsettling or embarrassing for a child when their parent is talking to staff at a classroom door

However, occasions occur where a parent needs to speak to a teacher urgently. Sometimes these meetings need to take place without prior notice. The principal will aim to facilitate such meetings, while making every effort to ensure that children do not lose out on any teaching/learning time.

Furthermore, regarding any changes in collection arrangements of children from school - it is requested that the school (either the hall supervision team or the class teacher on arrival in the hall) be informed verbally between 8.40a.m.-8.50a.m.

If parents need to drop in forgotten lunch boxes, sports gear etc., this can be done through the secretary's office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

Complaints Procedure

The school endeavours to deal with all complaints fairly and without delay. Complaints tend to be infrequent, and are initially best dealt with informally. This usually serves to minimise distress for all involved. The complaints procedure should follow these steps:

- Parents should always go to the class teacher first. In most cases, things can be resolved at this level. The teacher will inform the principal of any serious complaints
- At this stage, if a parent feels that the issue has not been resolved, they are welcome to make an appointment with the principal to discuss the matter further
- If parents still feel unhappy with the outcome, they can then bring their concerns to the Board of Management of the school. In order to do this, the concerns must be put in writing and addressed to the Chairperson of the Board of Management

Separation in the home

The staff of CETNS encourages parents experiencing separation to come to speak confidentially to the class teacher and/or Principal. It is our aim to handle such matters with sensitivity and compassion, and ultimately, our primary concern is for the well-being and overall development of the child. The following are the key procedures that should be in place in the school with regard to parents who are separated:

- The parent/guardian of each child has full responsibility for informing the school in writing of any change in circumstances at home e.g. custody arrangement, protection orders etc.
- When a child spends time in two homes, it is requested that the school be provided with both sets of emergency/contact numbers and that it is made clear if there are particular cases under which a respective parent should be called e.g. dad should be called on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and mum on Monday and Wednesday
- It is assumed that when the school communicates with parents regarding their child, the parent who is contacted (i.e. the parent with whom the child principally resides) will inform the other parent of meetings, arrangements etc. Special requests for separate communication can be accommodated
- Regarding the collection of child/ren from school - it is requested that the school be informed of any significant changes to routine in collection arrangements in writing
- It is the school policy to offer the option of separate parent/teacher meetings, if so desired. However, for the child's sake we recommend that both parents attend together. Each parent has a right to attend such meetings and receive school reports unless there is a court order to the contrary
- Regarding notes, school communication via schoolbags etc., it is assumed that the parent with whom the child principally resides will keep the other parent informed. The school can provide such information to both parties but only if requested to do so

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 Boards of Managements 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 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 on the Department of Education and Skills website at https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/40_97.doc

For more information, refer to the Anti-bullying Policy and the Dignity at Work Policy. It is imperative that all communication in CETNS should be appropriate and dignified.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality pertaining to all school matters is of paramount importance to all those who work or visit our school, and especially those who are in contact with staff and students. For staff, this is explicitly stated in their contracts of employment as well as the school's Child Protection Policy. This is also imperative in the case of visitors (e.g. guest speakers, parent volunteers, coaches etc.) who have direct contact with pupils.

Confidentiality when dealing with the children in school

- Some pupils may be experiencing difficulty or have varying learning styles. This is a sensitive area, requiring all involved to have due regard for the child's right to privacy and confidentiality
- Discussion about any child's behaviour, needs or progress should only occur amongst the parties directly involved with the child i.e. the child's parents/guardians, teachers, SNAs, principal and/or relevant external agencies. Discussion beyond this remit will not be tolerated
- Staff should not be asked to speak about another parent's child to a parent. 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
- Information received about particular children and observations made in classrooms need to be handled sensitively and carefully and often are only to be shared with particular members of staff or individual parents.
- Individual teachers/SNAs may be closer to some parents as they may themselves be from the immediate community and/or may/might have been parents of pupils in the school themselves. Some parents may therefore consider them more approachable than other staff members. It is very important therefore, that all teachers/SNA recognise the rules of confidentiality which govern their role as a member of the school staff. No discussion of any child, teacher, class or event pertaining to school should take place without consultation and agreement with the principal and the relevant parties

Declaration of Confidentiality

A 'Declaration of Confidentiality' (Appendix 1) must be completed and signed by all those who volunteer/work within the school, indicating that they clearly understand and are willing to abide by the guidelines governing this policy. This includes teachers, SNAs, external coaches, student teachers, parent volunteers, guest speakers. This is not an exhaustive list.

Copies of these declarations are available inside the reception window and are given out accordingly.

The principal and/or the secretary are responsible for ensuring that the Declaration of Confidentiality is signed by the relevant individuals and stored appropriately.

Success Criteria

Our Communications & Confidentiality Policy will be seen to be working well when;

- we receive positive feedback from members of the school community
- there is good communications between staff within the school
- there is good communications between staff, parents and the whole school community
- staff and parents have access to these clear communications procedures
- all members of the school community have regard for the integrity of pupils' welfare regarding confidentiality
- visitors, volunteers, student teachers and others who engage in work/work experience in the school are aware of their role in ensuring confidentiality for the school community
- parents in general and other staff members feel assured and confident that those who engage in work/work experience in the school are unambiguously bound by strict guidelines and have due respect for your child's privacy

Roles and Responsibility

All members of the school community, under the positive and supportive leadership of the Board of Management and Principal, have both a role and a responsibility in successfully implementing this policy.

The policy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by the policy committee through feedback from members of the school community.

Implementation Date

This policy was implemented November 2016. Amendments will be implemented immediately.

Timetable for Review

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year 2019/2020.

Ratification and Communication

The amended policy will be communicated to members of the Board of Management prior to the meeting of the BOM on 27th November 2018. Parents will be made aware in the next school communication that the policy is available for viewing on the school website.

Date of ratification: _____

Signed: _____
CHAIRPERSON OF BOM

Date: _____

Appendix 1

Declaration of Confidentiality

I, _____ do hereby agree to keep **confidential** all matters arising during my time within Carrigaline Educate Together N.S.

Signed: _____

Date: _____