



COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS POLICY

1. Rationale

Good communication is essential to the smooth running of an efficient school. In recognition of this fact, Beech Hill College has in place a policy on communication between the various individuals, groups and organisations connected with the school. The policy reflects the spirit of the school, and is based on trust, respect, clarity and openness. This spirit can best be encouraged where there is a high level of co-operation between staff, students and parents. Likewise, all communication should be undertaken in a respectful manner, recognising the important role of all members of the school community.

2. Ethos

Beech Hill College is an all-inclusive, co-educational, democratically administered second level College under Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB).

We provide a quality learning environment within which our students can achieve their full potential as competent citizens in today's modern society.

Our students participate in comprehensive courses of study incorporating both formal and informal curricular activities in a safe and caring environment.

We are committed to a partnership role with our parents/guardians and our wider community involving a mutual exchange of resources and expertise.

Our students are challenged and engaged to stimulate and promote their intellectual, moral, emotional, spiritual, social and physical development. In Beech Hill College we encourage every student to "Be the best you can be"

The underlying philosophy is one of concern and caring for students.

3. Scope of Policy

The policy applies to the whole community of Beech Hill College.

Parents and guardians

For ease of reading, throughout this document, the words 'parent' and 'parents' will be used to mean 'parent and/or guardian' and 'parents and/or guardians' respectively. 'Parent' has the same meaning as in the Education Act 1998 and includes a foster parent and a guardian appointed under the Guardianship of Children Acts, 1964 to 1997.

4. Aims

Beech Hill College works to promote and support good communication structures between staff, students, parents and the wider school community (for example, Board of Management and Parents Association) and staff, parents/guardians.

All members of the school community are expected to familiarise themselves with this Policy. It is considered that everyone has a responsibility to make him/herself aware of where and how to seek information and updates as the need arises and should seek to keep themselves informed.

5. Communication between Parents and the School

- An information and introduction session is held for all new parents in the school before students begin their time in Beech Hill College. The Principal will provide a wide range of information about the school (see the School Booklet and the school website). Parents are also introduced to a range of school policies, and are provided with our Code of Behaviour. All new students and their parents must sign-up to this Code on enrolment.
- There is regular contact with parents as individuals both informally and formally.
- Parents may request a meeting with the Principal at a mutually agreeable time either in person or through the school office.
- Teachers also communicate frequently with individual parents on matters of concern. On occasion, teachers will write to parent/s giving information or seeking an appointment for a formal meeting. Alternatively, teachers may text, using the school text app, or phone a parent for the same purposes.
- All parties have a responsibility to ensure that communication with teachers does not interfere with the work of the students and their teacher. Thus, parents/guardians wishing to speak to a teacher should make an appointment to do so at a mutually agreeable time either in person or through the school office.
- A School Report on each student's progress is sent to each parent once a year.
- A formal Teacher-Parent meeting takes place once every school year. It is extremely important that all parents attend these meetings. Parents/guardians who wish to meet with the Principal or a member of Staff are asked to make an appointment so as to minimise disruption for everyone concerned.
- When a student is absent parents are requested to inform the school either in writing or by leaving a message on the school answering service.
- Regular and unbroken attendance has a direct bearing on a student's progress in school. In view of this we actively discourage taking extended holidays during the academic year. Should an extended absence be planned, parents/guardians are expected to inform the school in writing beforehand.
 - Please note: If a child misses 15 days in a school year, the school will write to the parent [s] of the child expressing its concern. In this communication, the school will also notify the parent of the schools obligation to inform the Education Welfare Service [EWS] should the child's level of absence reach 20 days.

6. Parents' Contact Details

Parents' contact details, including emergency contact details, must be provided to the school. These contact details are used only for the purpose of communicating with parents on issues relating to their child(ren) and the school generally, and will not be shared with any third party.

It is vital that the school is aware of any changes to methods of communication with families. The responsibility for informing the school of a change of address, phone numbers or email rests principally with parents/guardians.

During the first term of each school year, parents will be asked to update their contact details as held by the school.
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7. School Information

Beech Hill College school App

Our school app was introduced in 2021. It is now the main form of instant communication with parents. It enables fast and effective communication across the entire school community. Notifications are sent via the App regarding a variety of items such as:

- Planned and unplanned school closures (holidays and snow days)
- Whole-school events such as Open evenings
- Information evenings
- Extra-curricular announcements and successes
- Health and safety measures e.g.; Covid-19 guidelines
- Parent-teacher meetings
- School related forms such as 'Return to school' forms
- School tour information
- School Calendar
- Newsletters and pictures from extra-curricular activities and school trips, etc
- School Policies

This is maintained by a designated member of staff, who holds a post of responsibility in relation to this.

Text-a-parent

Of the range of ways used by the school to communicate with parents, the text-a-parent system is the one currently seen as most effective. This system is used to inform parents of important upcoming events in the school calendar, including

- Planned and unplanned school closures (holidays and snow days)
- Whole-school events (e.g. Winter Concert)

School Website

Information and updates about a variety of topics is available on the school website, beechhillcollege.ie This is maintained by a designated member of staff, who holds a post of responsibility in relation to this. Information on the website includes:

- School Calendar
- News and pictures from classroom activities and school trips
- School Policies
- School Handbook
- Booklists

School Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Social Media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are used by the school to update students, parents and the community on school news and events. Social media accounts are authorised by the Principal and are maintained by designated authorised staff.

School Newsletters

Beech Hill college communicates with parents regularly via our school newsletter. Information on the Newsletter includes various school events and activities, student achievements and extra-curricular activities. These important school areas are celebrated and acknowledged in our weekly/fortnightly newsletter. This is maintained by a designated member of staff, who holds a post of responsibility in relation to this.

8. Communication with Separated Parents

In cases where a student's parents are going through or have been through separation, Beech Hill College strives to deal with all parties in a sensitive and compassionate manner, with the primary focus being the welfare and development of the student concerned. The school asks parents experiencing separation to speak confidentially with the Principal and/or Year Head. The school will follow the procedures below, with the aim of supporting students whose parents are going through separation. These require active co-operation between the parents affected and the school:

- The Principal and staff of Beech Hill College will endeavour at all times to deal sensitively and caringly with students experiencing parental separation and with both parents.
- Parents of a student are asked to inform the school if they are separated. The school needs to know what the student's living arrangements are – i.e. with which parent they normally reside, or what shared arrangements are in place.

- Contact details (including emergency contact details) should be provided by both parents. The school must be kept informed of collection arrangements, and changes to these must be communicated in writing.
- Parents should inform the school of any difficulties their child may be experiencing as a consequence of separation (e.g. emotional upset).
- In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the assumption will be that both parents continue to be involved in and committed to their child's education, and so are equally entitled to be made aware of all important details and events relating to this.
- The school cannot be asked to withhold a child from either parent in the absence of official documentation outlining the formal custody arrangement in place. The same applies to significant information relating to the child.
- If a separation /custody order is in place which limits contact by either parent with the school, the school should be informed in writing to this effect. This can be done by either a letter from a solicitor or by providing the Principal with a copy of the relevant part of the order. **The school commits to ensuring that such information will be held in the strictest confidence and will be used on a "need to know" basis only.**
- The school will assume, unless otherwise instructed, that consent for school trips, routine medical examinations or vaccinations can be given by the parent with whom the child principally resides.
- It is school policy to offer separate parent/teacher meetings to both parents, if so desired.
- Standard school communications which are normally transmitted via student journals or letters in school bags will be expected to be communicated by the parent with whom the child principally resides to the other parent.
- Communication in regard to academic reports, significant disciplinary issues and health and safety issues will be communicated by the school to both parents separately, unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. Such reasons must be given in writing to the school.

9. Communication with Students over 18 years of Age

Once the student attains 18 years, not only is the school required under the Education Act 1998 to communicate the educational progress directly with the student, but the school no longer has a legal basis to communicate directly with the parents about that student. If it did so thereafter, it would constitute a breach of the student's data protection rights. Therefore, it would be a breach of data protection to post or email school reports to the parents of an 18-year-old or to invite parents to a parent/teacher meeting for an 18 year old student. However, a student over 18 years, in consultation with their family, may request that the school continues to communicate with their parent/s regarding their education. The school will write to parents and students over 18 years to let them know of this change in the school's responsibility and will also inform them of the possibility for their son or daughter to request of the school to continue to correspond with the parent(s), if the adult student wishes to. A request form will be provided for this purpose.

10. Parents Association [PA]

Beech Hill College Parents Association has had an enormous influence on school life and makes an exceptional contribution. There is regular contact, both formal and informal, between the school, the Board of Management and the PA.

- The PA produces and distributes its own newsletter to parents, keeping them fully informed of the many events being organised by the PA.
- The officers of the PA meet the Principal before each of their meetings to give an opportunity for all relevant information to be communicated to the PA committee.
- The two parent nominees on the Board of Management attend a number of PA meetings during the school year. Their role is to represent information and decisions of the BOM to the PA. Parent nominees should attend a minimum of two PA meetings during each school term.
- The PTA makes a financial contribution to the school's through their fund-raising activities for staff. This is greatly appreciated by the school staff.
- The Principal will receive feedback from the meetings of the PA about issues of relevance. This feedback takes the form of the officers of the PA sitting with the Principal in the days after a PA meeting. This also provides an opportunity for the Principal to convey BOM decisions to the parent body.
- All Parents are encourage to attend PA meetings and become involved in PA activities.

11. Communication by Email

- Emails are used to communicate between the principal and staff and between staff members.
- Emails will be used to communicate a large percentage of school/ organisational issues and events. This reflects our green school ethos of cutting down on the unnecessary use of paper.
- Should parents/guardians wish to communicate with the school by email, they must use the main school email address info@bhc.ie. This will be opened by the school secretary and forwarded to the appropriate recipient.
- Emails may be used to communicate between teachers and parents/guardians if the teacher has decided that it is appropriate. These emails may not specifically mention any one child, or any individual parent/teacher issue.
- Emails may be used by teachers to communicate with class groups of parents if they so choose, however it will be done using the 'Blind Carbon Copy' (BCC) facility to ensure individual email addresses are not shared.
- Students will be issued with a school email address. This is for school work and not be used for unrelated emails. Staff will not communicate with individual students via personal email addresses. Parents must not use the student's school email address to communicate with the school or individual teachers.
- Class-group emails may not be used for personal communications.
- No parent may 'cc' any other person, when communicating with a teacher. The communication should remain strictly one-to-one.
- No child shall have access to this teacher/parent/guardian email group.

- Emails should be written in the tone of respect, that we expect of all communication within the school community.
- Group emails set up by the PA may not be used for advertising, complaints or for school matters concerning any child, parent or staff member. They shall only be used for general organisational and social purposes.
- No co-ordinated campaign (protest or complaint) is acceptable.
- Parents must expect a reasonable period for response, as normal working hours are to be respected.

Changes in parent communication due to Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing guidelines.

12. Online communication for Parent Teacher meetings

Due to recent Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing guidelines, Beech Hill College conducts online Parent Teacher meetings via the 'Parents-booking' online system. (parents-booking.co.uk) Parents are informed about this system and how to use it via email and the School App. If parents have any queries on how to log on to the system, queries are directed to the school office where the steps and procedures are outlined and assistance is provided. This is maintained by a designated member of staff, who holds a post of responsibility in relation to this.

13. Online communication for meetings using the MS Teams platform.

School meetings with parents take place via MS Teams during Covid-19 restrictions. Meetings included Parent information evenings, Open evenings, Career Guidance information meetings and First Year information evenings, etc. This is maintained by a designated member of staff, who holds a post of responsibility in relation to this.

14. Procedure for dealing with complaints by parents against teachers

The Education and Training Boards and Unions representing staff reached agreement in 2011 on a procedure for dealing with complaints made by parents against teachers. The Procedure for Processing Complaints made by Parents/Guardians of Students Or Adult Learner(s) Currently Enrolled in an ETB School/Centre against a Staff Member/s employed by an Education and Training Board (ETB) was reviewed and updated in 2018.

The purpose of this procedure is to facilitate the resolution of difficulties where they may arise in an agreed and fair manner. The agreement lays out stages of the process to be followed in progressing a complaint and the specific time scale to be followed at each stage.

Where a complaint arises, the parties concerned (complainant, staff member/s and school management) are encouraged to strive to understand the other party's position and should seek, as far as possible, a mutually acceptable solution through informal means.

Only those complaints about staff which are written and signed by parents/guardians of students may be investigated **formally** by the Cavan and Monaghan ETB, having progressed through the informal stages.

Parents wishing to make a complaint are encouraged to contact the school Principal, in the first instance, to discuss their concerns with a view to resolving the issue in the interest of the student's educational wellbeing.

15. Availability of Policy

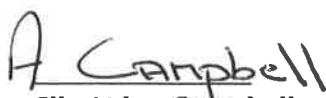
This policy is available to staff, students and their parents/guardians, via the school website or from the Principal. New staff will be informed of the policy when they take up employment in the school.

16. Review of Policy

- This policy will be monitored and reviewed annually on behalf of the Board of Management, by the Principal. The practical application of the policy during the preceding year and its efficacy in relation to communication with parents/guardians, will form part of the review process.
- The policy may be reviewed periodically, in light of emerging legislation and circulated Guidelines from the Department of Education.


This policy was adopted by the *Beech Hill College* Board of Management on 31/01/2022.

SIGNED:


Cllr. Aidan Campbell
Chairperson

Date: 31st January 2022

SIGNED:


Mr. Patrick Mc Ardle
Principal/Secretary to B.O.M

Date: 31st January 2022