

Communications and Confidentiality Policy

This policy has been formulated by Douglas Rochestown Educate Together National School (ETNS) to facilitate good communications between staff and between staff and parents. It also highlights the importance of confidentiality in all matters.

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School Details:

Name: Douglas Rochestown Educate Together National School

Address: Carr's Hill, Douglas, Cork

Telephone: 021 489 0122 / 085 2428753

Email: info@dretns.ie

Roll Number: 20413N

Principal: Dr. Alan Sheehan

The school premises consist of the area within the school boundaries/fence at Carr's Hill. School start/end times are as follows:

Start Time:	End Time:
8.30 am	1.10 pm/2.10 pm

The school doors open at 8.20am. The school provides supervision of pupils within the school grounds only from 8.20am – 1.20pm for Junior and Senior Infants and from 8.20am – 2.20 pm for all other Classes. Please note that no responsibility is accepted for anyone in the areas outside the school fencing. Please also note that no responsibility is accepted for pupils arriving before 8.20am or for supervising pupils after 1.20pm/2.20pm.

General Information:

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.

Douglas Rochestown ETNS is under the patronage of Educate Together. It is based on four key principles: Child-centered, Co-educational, Democratic and Equality-based.

The school currently caters for children from Junior Infants to Sixth Class, and will cater for Special Classes as the school grows. It is a developing school and is co-educational and multi-denominational. Douglas Rochestown ETNS is a national school and as such operates in accordance within the Rules for National Schools and is dependent on such grants and teachers' resources as are provided by the Department of Education (DE). All school policies must have regard to the resources and funding provided.

Douglas Rochestown ETNS follows the curricular programmes prescribed by the Department of Education and Science, which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998).

Rationale:

This policy's purpose is to provide information and guidelines to staff about in-school communications, and to parents and staff on parent/staff meetings and parent/staff communication in Douglas Rochestown ETNS.

Douglas Rochestown ETNS 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 Board of Management sponsored staff development programmes.

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.

Aims:

This Policy was designed in order to:

- Facilitate good communication between staff within the school, and between staff and parents
- Outline procedures for staff communicating with parents
- Outline procedures for parents communicating with staff
- Have regard for the integrity of pupils' welfare regarding confidentiality
- Offer protection for those volunteers who give their time to the school
- Provide assurance and confidence to parents in general that those who volunteer are unambiguously bound by strict guidelines and have due respect for your child's privacy.

Communication methods:

In-School

The following tools of communication are in place in Douglas Rochestown ETNS:

- Oral Communication between staff
- Staff meetings
- Staff emails
- Aladdin noticeboard
- Oral notices to teachers by the Principal
- Announcements / discussion in Staff Room at break times
- Staff Room notice board
- School-related events
- Assembly
- Regular classroom visits by the Principal
- Check-ins from the Leadership and Management Team

Procedures for staff meetings

A staff meeting is held as the need arises (at least once a month as part of the Haddington Road Agreement). The principal keeps a record of all staff meetings including the date, focus of the meeting and the meeting's duration. An agenda is drawn up beforehand and distributed to each teacher. This is a collaborative exercise with each teacher having the opportunity to nominate items/issues for inclusion on the agenda.

Special Needs Assistants and other ancillary staff may be required to attend staff meetings if issues relating to their work/responsibilities are included on the agenda. These issues are listed early 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-ordained duties. The SNA team will attend a structured monthly meeting with the principal.

The minutes of the meeting are recorded and distributed to each teacher with a clear statement of the decisions made, actions to be undertaken and the delegation of responsibilities

Home-School

Parents are encouraged to:

- Develop close links with the school
- Participate in all communications 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 Parents' Association
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes affecting them.

The following measures endeavour to ensure co-operation between school and home:

- Regular emails for Junior and Senior Infants:
 - These will be sent on Friday afternoon or Monday morning to facilitate both homework and general communication between parents and class teachers.
 - A paper copy can be arranged if a parent encounters difficulty accessing these emails.
- Notes to parents on specific issues
- Parent-Teacher meetings in February
- School Support Plus and School Support meetings for parents of children with special educational needs once a year
- End of year School reports
- Meeting parents face to face (by appointment)
- Phone calls to school number.
- Learning apps including SeeSaw and Google classroom.
- Emails
 - The school may email parents about special events throughout the year via the school principal or secretary. The Board of Management may also email parents with an agreed report after every meeting.
 - 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 may only be sent to the following email address, info@dretns.ie.
 - Parents are requested to email their child's collection arrangements (extra-curricular activities; after school care, etc.) to safe@dretns.ie at the start of each term.

- We request that any specific incident or questions relating to a child's progress 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 will either discuss the matter informally with the parent before or after school, make a phone call or arrange a formal meeting on these issues. **The class teacher does not respond to emails.**
- Emails received by the school which do not align with our communication policy will not be tolerated (i.e. a positive and respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in the school). They will be returned to the sender with the standard message 'This email was found to be in breach of our communication policy and guidelines and has been referred to the principal' or 'We acknowledge your phone call/email. Please arrange a meeting with the teacher/principal so that we can discuss this issue further'
- School App - Aladdin Connect
- Text messages
- School events
- School website - www.dretns.ie
- Meeting for parents of prospective Junior Infants (October/November preceding the child's start in school)
- Fun Day for in-coming Junior Infants (June preceding the child's start in school)
- Meeting for parents of current Junior Infants (September)
- Home School Communication Copies
 - Exceptional circumstances (language, medical, report)
 - Set up in consultation and agreement with teacher/support/SNA and parent. All parties to understand that this copy/document could be misplaced and to understand the confidentiality/data protection/sensitivity linked with it.
 - Clear intention for using this communication copy to be identified and **only** to be used for this reason.
 - Only used when there is difficulty with communication/need to convey medical needs.
 - Initials only to be used.
 - SNA can comment on Care Needs only.
 - Teacher/Support/Principal to comment on curriculum.
 - If there is anything outside the norm of the day - this is better conveyed through a phone call with the teacher.
 - Exceptional circumstances not mentioned - speak with the principal.

If a parent wishes to consult with a teacher, he/she should contact the school secretary to arrange a suitable time.

It is vital that the school is immediately informed if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her 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 (Pupil Information Form and aladdin.ie) 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 are held in February. 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. Meetings may take place in person in classrooms or support rooms. They may also take place over video call or phone call. The teachers use prepared guidelines for the meetings and collaborate in advance about the progress of individual children. A short written record of the meeting is maintained by each teacher.

The purpose of the Parent/Teacher meeting is:

- To establish and maintain good communication between the school and parents
- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To help teachers/parents get to know the children better as individuals
- To help children realise that home and school are working together.
- To meet demands for accountability
- 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 parents can help their children
- To negotiate jointly decisions about the child's education
- To inform the parents of standardised test results when administered.

Circular 56/2011 Initial Steps in the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy strategy has been adopted by the Board of Management in its policies and in the school plan. 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 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 staff's knowledge of their students' progress through providing further information about the students' 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. Our school presents parents of pupils in relevant classes (Second, Fourth and Sixth) information about standardised tests at the parent-teacher meeting. There is also an end of term report card, which is communicated to our families in June.

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

As all primary schools **must** use one of the report card templates, the Principal and staff of Douglas Rochestown ETNS have chosen the template which currently best suits the needs of the school.

Formal Meetings

Formal timetabled parent/teacher meetings take place in February. 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. Appointments can be made by contacting the secretary

- All communication sent from the school which may not be emailed will be sent to the child's home address or contact designated on file (Pupil Information Form and aladdin.ie), unless otherwise requested by parents
- In the case of separated parents, requests can be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings.

Formal Meetings-SSPs & School Support Plan Meetings

Formal timetabled parent/staff meetings on the subject of the **School Support Plus** will take place in September/October. School Support Plan meetings take place as the need arises in each class. The parents will be invited to attend a meeting with the child's class teacher and support teacher in person, over video call or over the phone. A Special Needs Assistant may also attend this meeting (if the child has been sanctioned with access by the SENO). Any other relevant professionals will 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 schools' Teaching and Learning Policy.

Informal Parent/Staff Meetings

1. The School encourages communication between parents and staff.
2. Meetings with the class staff at the class door to discuss a child's concern/progress are discouraged on a number of grounds:
 - a) Staff cannot adequately supervise his/her class while at the same time speaking to a parent
 - b) It is difficult to be discreet when so many children are standing close by
 - c) It can be embarrassing 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 the teaching/learning time.

If parents wish to drop in 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.

Parents are strongly discouraged from taking pupils out of school during term time in order to facilitate family holidays.

Special Needs Assistant communications (as per Special Needs Assistant Policy)

Information received on children, and observations made in classrooms, need to be handled sensitively and carefully and are often only to be shared with particular members of staff.

It is very important therefore, that the SNA recognises the rules of confidentiality which govern his/her role as a member of the school staff. No discussion of the child, the teacher, the class or the events of the school day should take place without consultation and agreement with the class teacher.

Parents with questions or issues about school policy or practice should be referred directly to the class teacher or the principal. This applies to direct face-to-face communication

Complaints Procedure

Complaints are infrequent but the school would wish that these would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. Please see the school's Parental Complaints Procedure for the steps involved.

Regarding a complaint, we ask that any email sent to our school is in line with this communication Policy. Emails received by the school which do not align with our communication policy will not be tolerated (i.e. respectful manner, affirming the professional role of the staff and all staff members in the school). They will be returned to the sender with the standard message 'This email was found to be in breach of our communication policy and guidelines and has been referred to the principal' or 'We acknowledge your phone call/email. Please arrange a meeting with the teacher/principal so that we can discuss this issue further'

Separation in the home

The staff of Douglas Rochestown ETNS encourage parents experiencing separation to come and 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 in place with separated parents of pupils in the school:

- When a child spends time in two homes, it is requested that the school be provided with both sets of emergency/contact numbers
- Regarding the collection of child/ren from school - it is requested that the school be informed of any changes in collection arrangements in writing
- It is the school policy to offer the option of separate parent/teacher meetings, if so desired. Each parent has a right to attend such meetings and receive school reports unless there is a court order to the contrary.
- It is assumed that when we wish to communicate with parents regarding their child, the parent who is contacted will inform the other parent of meetings, arrangements etc. Special requests for separate communication can be accommodated.
- Regarding notes, school communication via schoolbags, school reports 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 if requested to do so.
- The parent/guardian of each child has full responsibility for informing the school in writing of any change in circumstances at home e.g. separation, divorce, custody arrangements.

Behaviour of all Stakeholders in the School

Positive and respectful communication is of high importance to our school. 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 communicate to each other with respect. Shouting or other aggressive tones are not acceptable. If a stakeholder displays anger, aggression or disrespect to another member of the school community by phone or email the situation will be referred to the principal for review. If a stakeholder displays anger, aggression or disrespect to another member of the school community in person, they may be asked to remove themselves from the building. In certain cases, the Gardaí may 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 in person, by phone or by video call, 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 at a convenient time for both parties. This ensures that issues can be resolved. Classes begin at 8:30 am and finish at 1:10pm for Junior Infants and at 2.10pm for all other classes. These times should not be interrupted.

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 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 the school's Health and Safety folder.

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 Safeguarding Statement and Special Needs Assistant Policy.

This is also imperative in the case of visitors (e.g. guest speakers, parental volunteers, coaches, etc.) who have direct contact with pupils. Some pupils may be experiencing difficulty or have a variety of learning styles. This is a sensitive area, requiring all involved to have due regard for the privacy and

confidentiality of all, as any parent would wish for their child. Discussion about a child's progress with any party other than the classroom teacher or principal is not tolerated.

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.

Roles and Responsibilities:

All members of the school community have a role in the implementation of this policy.

Success Criteria:

- Communications facilitated amongst all members of school community
- Participation and delivery by all staff at staff meetings
- Co-operation and consensus
- Monitoring and assessment of procedures
- Yearly parent-teacher meetings
- Yearly report cards
- Staff 'feel good' factor
- School 'feel good' factor

Ratification and Review:

The policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 14th October 2015.

The policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 7th June 2016.

The policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 20th September 2017.


The policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 29th August 2018.

The policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 21st November 2018.

The policy was reviewed by the Board of Management on 14th September 2022.

Communication:

The policy has been made available to school personnel via the school website (www.dretns.ie). A copy of this policy will be made available to the Department of Education and Skills and the patron (Educate Together) if requested.



Maria McGrath
Chairperson of the Board of Management

Appendix 1 Declaration of Confidentiality:

Declaration of Confidentiality

I, _____ do hereby agree to keep **confidential** all matters arising during my time within Douglas Rochestown Educate Together National School.

Signed: _____

Date: _____