



Communication

Parents & Teachers

Communication acts as a bridge to engagement and, ultimately, strong parent partnerships. Once parents and teachers communicate with each other, they can work together to help students reach their academic potential.

Communication is Collaboration

The Importance of Parent-Teacher Communication

It is important to have an agreed way for parents and teachers to arrange to talk about any concerns. Good communication between home and school is essential. Legislative and policy initiatives embrace both the value and the importance of collaboration and the crucial contribution of parents to their children's education and parent-school relationships. Each school should develop and utilise a policy for communication with parents, which is available for all parents, and reviewed regularly.

Research in Ireland has shown that most participants were positive about the level and extent of communication and contact they received from their child's primary school teachers. Similarly, high levels of satisfaction were acknowledged in research conducted for the NCSE in relation to the way schools kept parents informed. A survey was conducted by Down Syndrome Ireland recently with both primary age and post- primary age members to highlight issues relating to communication with teachers and parents. Responses from both surveys were subsequently analysed by three school settings:

- Children attending mainstream school
- Children attending a special class or unit in a mainstream school
- Children attending a special school

Findings from the primary age survey indicated that 61% of parents were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the communication they received from teachers and schools in relation to their child. Similarly, 60% of parents in the post-primary age survey were of the same opinion. While these percentages are positive, it is a concern that between 39% and

40% of parents were dissatisfied with the communication received. Parents should have regular communication with their child's teacher(s).

Building parent partnerships with communication should be more than just optional and it is a key responsibility for schools and teachers to develop in the operation of any school, at any stage of education. The best way to do this is to prioritise two-way communication. Two-way communication is correspondence that goes back and forth between the sender and receiver. Both listen to each other and share their thoughts or questions. Teachers should engage with parents in genuine two-way communication.

Forms of Communication

○ In-Person Communication/ One-to-One Communication

This is one of the most effective ways to communicate with either parents or teachers. Whenever we engage with face-to-face communication, we are using in-person communication. This is not usually necessary on a weekly basis, but for a student with Down syndrome this should happen **every month or six weeks**, at a minimum. The timing of such meetings must be decided, ideally at the start of the school year, by both teachers and parents

○ Technology Based Communication

Technology-based communication is a reasonably “new frontier” in many ways because it's constantly changing and encompasses so many outlets. Whether using the telephone or updating one of the many parent-teacher communication apps available, you are using technology based communication. You can also utilize tech through emails, texts and video calls or meetings. Any technology based communication should be **used on a weekly basis** at a minimum, and at additional times as the need arises.

○ Written Communication

Compared to technology based communication, written communication may feel a little “old school.” But a note for parents can help them feel in-the-know. It adds a personal touch for communication and often provides families with a physical reminder for upcoming events. **A written daily log is ideal for this.**

○ **Written Daily Log / Communication Journal**

- Research on parental attitudes to inclusive schooling suggests that a communication book facilitates exchanges of information between home and school settings. A home-school log can be a useful form of communication. Using a communication book is an ideal way to give the parents a way to keep track of their child's progress. It also provides opportunities for parents to discuss the school day with their child, and to pre-teach vocabulary or prepare their child at home for any upcoming learning or activities. In the same way, teachers can be made aware of the child's activities at home, prompting discussion with the child during the school day.
- Many teachers, SNAs and parents use a communication book to great advantage. Used effectively, it allows for understanding and continuity—especially if the student finds verbal communication difficult. It also provides opportunities for forms of pre-teaching and experiential learning to support what is learned in the classroom, with vital information being passed between the various important people in the child's life. The use of a communication journal / log is preferable to a conversation at the school gate. If the child hears that conversation, then they have no need to communicate what happened. The school gate is not an appropriate place for any conversations. To be effective, the communication log should be completed daily, be concise, and be focused on supporting the child's communication across environments.
- The communication book should not be used solely for negative comments. It is important to have positive statements included. Issues with a communication book have been identified in research where the use of a communication book was causing a child to obsess about the contents of the book on any given day. When writing a negative comment, stop and think whether this would be something you would write home about if it related to a typical student.
- Students can become very focused on the negative comments so there should always be positive entries in the book. Looking out for positive behaviour to communicate about can also be a good behavioural strategy, as it shifts teacher focus and makes it more likely that attention will be given to positive as well as negative behaviours.

Sadly, more than a quarter of parents of primary school aged children in our recent survey said that home-school communication only happens when there is a problem. This is demoralising for parents and students, and there were examples of it happening across all school settings. (23% in special schools, 27% in inclusive mainstream, 36% in special class in mainstream)

Establishing Procedures for Communication

The next step is finding the right approach. There are a variety of communication strategies available to teachers and parents. With time and persistence, communication can grow into strong parent-teacher relationships. Discuss contact methods with each parent at the beginning of the school year. Discovering the best methods of communication and formulating messaging plans early in the year is important, as is maintaining consistent communication throughout the year. The best way to avoid misunderstandings with parents is to have ongoing, clear lines of communication from the beginning. Here are some ground rules for effective communication with parents and teachers.

Ground Rules for Effective Communication with Parents and Teachers

- Teachers should explain how and when they keep in touch with parents. Let parents know that their questions and concerns are valued. Teachers should explain that in order to give parents some undivided attention, specific times have been set aside to communicate with them. It is important to decide when the teacher will take and return phone calls and emails or when they are available for one-to-one meetings. These times should be communicated clearly to parents at the start of each year and both parents and teachers must adhere to these arrangements. Deciding on times in advance and sticking to them eliminates the need for parents expecting to talk to the teacher in the school car park or monopolising the teacher's attention outside their classroom door before or after school, or vice versa. This will also give a clear message

to parents that they should not or cannot show up unannounced with no appointment and expect the teacher to drop everything and speak with them. Daily calls to the classroom by parents are completely unnecessary and parents must stick to the agreed procedures for communication with the teacher. Similarly, phone-calls to parents without any prior arrangement, can cause difficulties for parents who may be working.

- If an emergency situation arises outside of the agreed times, parents should contact the school office or principal and request an appointment as soon as convenient for all concerned. An appointment is needed in many walks of life and the same approach must be taken with schools, teachers and parents. Similarly, details for a pre-arranged contact person should be provided for the school if an emergency arises.
- While it may be appropriate for the SNA to convey information to parents in relation to, for example, upcoming school events or activities, it is completely inappropriate for the SNA to discuss any issues with parents, or vice versa, in relation to work being done in school, the child's progress or behavioural issues. Such information must always be from or to the teacher.
- Teachers or parents should never feel pressured to make an important decision, evaluation, or assessment during a one-to-one meeting or conversation. Instead, be prepared to take some time to think and get back to the teacher or parent. Then make it a point to tell the teacher or parent exactly when he or she can expect a response: This allows for time to consider the issue, develop possible solutions, and consult with colleagues, administrators, or other professionals, if necessary.
- Both parents and teachers need to know that they can trust each other. Be discreet! Avoid discussing students with other parents or engaging in any negative talk with other teachers. Everyone has bad days! Any 'once-off' negative or challenging behaviour on the part of a student in the class, for example, should remain in the classroom and confidential, unless the teacher decides that the parents need to be notified.
- Parents need assurance that teachers will inform them about any concerns they might have with regard to their child. Parents can become justifiably upset when the first

sign of trouble comes in the form of an end of year report or at an end of year parent teacher meeting. Even small concerns should be shared early, rather than waiting and then dropping a bombshell. In the same way, parents should arrange to meet with teachers and discuss issues in a timely way. It is also important to remember that when presenting any concerns, both parents and teachers must be ready to explain what strategies they have already used to address the issue and what new strategies they are considering.

- Parents must be clear, with particular emphasis on post-primary school, both mainstream and special classes, on who their key contact person is. Ideally, this will be the Class Tutor. They must also be given alternatives. There will be at least two different teachers rotating in the base classroom or different teachers for different subjects, if the student is accessing mainstream

Teachers should not be afraid to be persistent in establishing relationships with parents, and vice versa. Solid home-school relationships are based on effective two-way communication, while much of the existing literature on 'successful schools' indicate the significance of schools encouraging regular and ongoing communication with parents.

Summary

Communication	Method of Communication	Purpose	Timeframe
One-to-One <u>or</u> In-Person	Meeting (Can be held online if necessary)	<i>Based on goals in IEP</i> Update on progress made Update on plan for the next time period	Every month or six weeks (at a minimum)
Technology Based	email	Update on progress & achievements in the past week Plan / suggestions for the following week Any other issues that have arisen over the week	Weekly
Written	Communication Book /Log	Brief comments from teacher & parents Reminders about any upcoming requirements or other issues	Daily

Acknowledgments

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