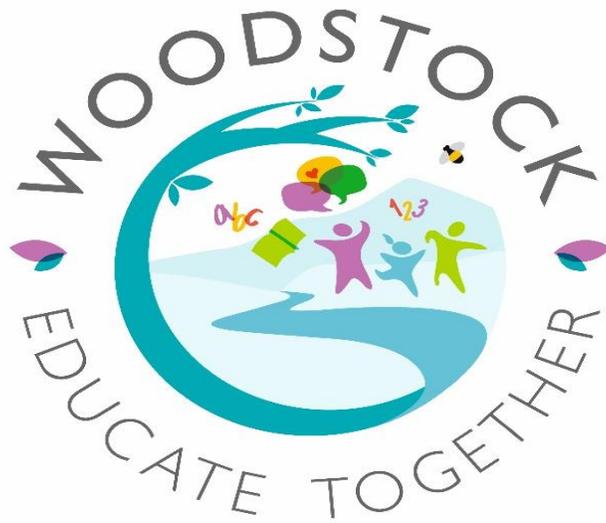


# Positive Communications & Confidentiality Policy



*Woodstock Educate Together N.S.*

This document is intended to provide details of the main policies of Woodstock Educate Together National School. 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.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Authors</b>
September 2022	First version of policy	Board of Management

## **Positive Communication 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**

Woodstock Educate Together N.S. is committed to providing information and guidelines to all members of the school community. Respective communication & 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 of a variety of channels of communication so as to ensure that the relevant people receive the necessary information.

### **Vision**

Woodstock 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: Woodstock 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](http://www.educatetogether.ie)*

Woodstock 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 communication between staff within the school
- facilitate good communication between staff, parents and the whole school community
- outline procedures for communication 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

## ***Communication***

### **Behaviour in the School of All Members of the School Community**

Positive and respectful communication 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 building. In exceptional circumstances, in the interest of safety and/or of the wider school community in the school may deem it 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 8:45a.m. and finish at 1:25 p.m. for Junior and Senior Infants and at 2.25p.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 communication are in place in Woodstock 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 bi-weekly 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 relate 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 selfassessment 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."

### *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
- Become actively involved in the Parent Association (PA)

### *School*

The school endeavours to ensure clear communication 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)
- Aladdin Connect/Emails- 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 be sent to the following email address: [woodstockents@gmail.com](mailto:woodstockents@gmail.com).
  - 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 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.woodstockents.ie](http://www.woodstockents.ie)
- Parent Association Facebook page – to be announced or Parent page on the school website. <https://woodstockents.ie/parents-info/>
- Monthly Woodstock Class Reviews – emailed and uploaded to [www.woodstockents.ie](http://www.woodstockents.ie)
- 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 Diary/Copy – In individual cases, it may be deemed useful for parents and teachers to communicate to one another regularly. In this incidence, 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 will take place November/December. They will be initiated by the school staff and details regarding time, etc. will be worked out by the secretary/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 or support 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 communication between the school and parents.
  - To let parent's 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/s the problems and difficulties the child may have in school
- To review with the parent/s 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/ concern and areas of growth.
- 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
- Student Support File (SSF)/IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings with a SET teacher for parents of children with special educational needs take place in the first term and are reviewed in term two. Parents will be invited to attend a meeting with the child's SET teacher. It is not possible/practical for class teachers to attend these also but the SET teacher will liaise with them for their input before and their feedback after the IEP/SSF 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 schools' Special Educational Needs Policy
- Open Day for in-coming Junior Infants (June preceding a child starting in the school)
- 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 report card template. As all reports are completed on Aladdin, 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 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

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 communication 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 of the teaching/learning time. Furthermore, regarding any changes in collection arrangements of children from school - it is requested that the school be informed verbally of between 8.35a.m.-8.45a.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*

While complaints are infrequent, in the event of such, the school would wish that a complaint would be dealt with informally, fairly and quickly. This usually serves to minimise distress for all involved. The complaints procedure should follow these steps:

1. 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
2. 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
3. If you still feel unhappy with the outcome, they can then bring your 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/changes/loss in the home*

The staff of Woodstock ETNS encourages parents experiencing loss or 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 wellbeing 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.
- It is assumed that when we wish to communicate 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 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 on the Department of Education and Skills website at [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/40\\_97.doc](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 Woodstock ETNS 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 & Safeguarding Policy and Statement. 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 privacy and confidentiality the child
- Discussion about any child's behaviour, needs or progress should only occur amongst the parties those 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.

### ***Staff Responsibility- Confidentiality when dealing with the children in school***

- 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. A copy 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 Communication & Confidentiality Policy will be seen to be working well when;

- we receive positive feedback from members of the school community
- there is good communication between staff within the school
- there is good communication between staff, parents and the whole school community
- staff and parents have access to these clear communication 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 October 2022. Amendments will be implemented immediately.

**Timetable for Review**

This policy is to be reviewed during the school year October/November 2023

**Ratification and Communication**

The amended policy will be communicated to members of the Board of Management prior to the meeting of the BOM on September 2022. Parents will be made aware in the next school communication that the policy is available for viewing on the school website.

*Date of ratification: \_September 29<sup>th</sup> 2022*

Signed:   
CHAIRPERSON OF BOM

*Date: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022*

*Appendix 1*

**Declaration of Confidentiality**

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

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_