

Communication Policy 2021 – LVS Oxford

This document is a policy statement for the development of communication at LVS Oxford. It identifies our rationale and the approaches used to promote and support the development of communication with pupils, parents and staff.

This policy encompasses:

1. How we communicate with students
2. How we support the development of students' communication skills
3. How we communicate information to parents/carers
4. How staff communicate with each other.

1. How we communicate with students

It is important that staff adapt their communication style to suit the needs of the student, for example, if a student is displaying signs of stress, verbal communication may need to be reduced/ceased in order to support them as too much language may increase their anxiety and stress levels. Staff should also have awareness- through training and information sheets provided by SALT- of the benefits of different communication styles.

Individual strategies to facilitate communication needs are detailed in students' individual Positive Support Plans, which staff should refer to and update regularly.

Staff will be provided with an information sheet of the communication needs of new students.

In line with our GDPR and safeguarding policies, staff must not use personal devices to communicate with students, take photographs of students or record/store any personal information related to students. Staff may email students regarding school-based matters but this must only be via the school email system to students' school email accounts. Staff must not share personal information with students (e.g. phone numbers, personal email addresses, social media accounts) and should not communicate with students through any of these means.

Following the government guidance with the outbreak of COVID-19, all staff and students are now wearing face masks in communal spaces. Staff should be aware of the impact this has on students with hearing impairments as they can no longer supplement their listening with lip reading. To counteract this, staff should ensure the environment is quiet and they have the full attention of the student prior to speaking. If possible, staff (specifically the therapy team) should have the option of clear plastic masks to allow for lip reading.

Students who are being educated via online learning due to self-isolation, COVID symptoms or a clinically vulnerable household member should have contact from their tutor twice daily via teams and tutors should telephone home weekly. Subject tutors should contact the student via teams with appropriate work.

2. How we support the development of students' communication skills

Supporting development of communication skills

Communication is a fundamental human right and central to life and learning.

Through communication, we build social relationships and knowledge, make our needs and feelings known, and share ideas with others. Communication involves listening, understanding and responding, while also supporting the developing of literacy skills.

Communication is at the core of our work with pupils at LVS Oxford. We recognise the importance of communication in empowering pupils and ensuring their access to the curriculum. All those involved in a child's education should possess the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to ensure that effective communication is achievable for all.

Our goals are:

- To help students develop functional and social communication skills
- To help students develop positive relationships with others
- To help students maximise their opportunities to take part in daily life and access the wider community
- To help students develop strategies to regulate their emotions to be able to access learning and interact with peers.

Communication is holistic and it is more than the words we say. We need to provide students support on all aspects of their communication- including body language, facial expression, tone of voice and personal space.

Supporting communication in the classroom

All staff at LVS Oxford are responsible for promoting a 'communication friendly' environment for learners. The role of the communicative partner is crucial in developing successful communication skills. It is important therefore for adult support to create as many opportunities as possible for interaction and for the student to have opportunities to develop their social communication.

Staff should ensure the following:

- Language is adapted to enable learners to access the school environment.
- Learners are provided with good models of social communication throughout the school day. Staff should support learners' social communication difficulties by providing alternative responses and reflecting on social scenarios as they occur.
- Visual support is utilised to support access to the curriculum (vocabulary maps, task sheets, visual reminders of support available)
- Staff allow students time to process verbal information. When asking a question, staff should allow 15 seconds before using any further verbal information such as repeating the question using the same wording and checking understanding.

- Progress regarding communication skills is shared with the Speech and Language Therapist to monitor achievements.
- Advice is sought regarding speech, language or social communication needs in a timely manner.

Staff should do this by:

- Adopting a total communication approach throughout school, where pupils have access to their own means of communication throughout the day.
- Developing means of communication appropriate to each child's individual needs.
- Creating opportunities for communication throughout the curriculum to enable each child to communicate to the best of their ability.
- Be aware of any communication impairment and other specific difficulties diagnosed
- With the support of therapy team, observe and assess regularly to understand the individual student's strengths and weaknesses, sensory preferences and preferred learning style
- Share knowledge of the student with parents, carers and other practitioners
- Share knowledge with other staff in the school in students' individual Positive Support Plans
- Continually develop knowledge of communication development, impairment and teaching approaches
- Clear understanding of social communication disorders present in autistic spectrum disorders
- Awareness of own use of language and the importance of being clear and explicit, and not overloading students with verbal information- especially in times of anxiety.
- Committed to collaborative working

3. How we communicate information to parents/carers

In our school, we aim to have clear and effective communication with all parents/carers. Effective communication enable us to share our aims and values by keeping parents well informed. This reinforces the important role that parents play in supporting the school and their child's learning.

Parents are always welcome to see their child's tutor to discuss their child's progress by pre-arranged appointment. Parents who come to the school must sign-in at reception on arrival. If required, an appointment can be made to see a member of the Senior Management Team if there are any unresolved issues.

Good communication between the school and the home is essential, and children achieve more when schools and parents/carers work together. The school encourages parents to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity.

Staff should continue to communicate with parents during the COVID 19 outbreak via telephone, e-mail and video call. All meetings involving parents or external agencies must be done using video call and not take place on site.

Telephone

Parents are welcome to telephone the school with urgent messages that need to be delivered immediately to staff. Urgent calls may be put through to the most appropriate or available person. The admin team will ensure that a message is taken and delivered for contact to be made within a reasonable time. Non-urgent calls/messages to academic staff should be kept to a minimum at times of the day where teaching and learning may be disrupted.

E-mail

If a parent wishes to raise a query, they are encouraged to contact their child's tutor in the first instance. If you require information about staff email addresses, please contact the admin team (admin@lvs-oxford.org.uk). We endeavour to acknowledge emails within 48 hours wherever possible, please note that during weekends staff are not expected to return emails and any query will be dealt with on Monday morning.

Staff Team

As a team, LVS Oxford work closely to ensure that students' needs are dealt with holistically- combining our knowledge of the student, previous experience and knowledge of practice and research.

Concerns or requests for information may be referred to the most appropriate individual or team within the school such as the School Nurse, pastoral team, mental health team and therapy team.

During a student's transition to LVS, the school's Parent Liaison Officer, who is experienced in providing support and guidance to the students and their families, will be the first point of contact for parents/caregivers. Following this transition period of 6 weeks, the student's form tutor will then become the first point of contact. However, the Parent Liaison Officer can still be contacted with any concerns. The Parent Liaison Officer can bridge the communication between staff members and parents/caregivers and sign post where necessary. The Parent Liaison Officer may also link to external professionals and support services where appropriate.

School Website and Gateway

The school website (www.lvs-oxford.org.uk) has information for parents regarding relevant policies and key documents. Parents also have access to LVS Oxford Gateway which is a tailored parent portal that has a secure login. Gateway allows parents to access information such as the school calendar, school group emails, student timetables, key vocabulary lists etc.

For more information regarding accessing Gateway and setting up an account please refer to the parent Gateway guide or visit the LVS Oxford Gateway page on the school website.

Newsletters

The school newsletter is sent to parents termly via Gateway. It contains general details of school events and activities. We send other letters of a general nature when necessary.

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Review Meetings

All pupils have an annual review of their EHCP to evaluate progress against outcomes and develop an action plan regarding all aspects of the child's life and update the EHCP as appropriate. Michelle Norgrove (EHCP co-ordinator) will contact parents/carers directly to arrange annual EHCP meetings. Michelle will also liaise with local authority and any relevant professionals working with the family to attend and participate in this review of progress.

Relevant school staff working with your child such as the therapy team and academic staff will contribute reports and written feedback in order to measure progress against outcomes stated in the EHCP.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, all EHCP review meetings will be held via video call.

Parents Evenings

In addition to annual EHCP review meetings, parents/carers are invited to meet subject specialist staff and tutors 3 times per year (December, April and July). These are evening meetings to explain areas of our curriculum and discuss progress. Reports will be provided prior to parent evening appointments. During the COVID-19 outbreak, parents will have video call meetings with the child's tutor. The tutor will feedback subject specific feedback and a full written report will be sent home.

Absences

If a child is going to be absent from school, parents/carers should telephone the school office before 9.30am to advise that the child will not be attending school that day and the reason for this absence. If the school does not receive notification and therefore have no indication of the reason for a child being absent from school, the school receptionist will contact a parent/carer (by telephone, if possible) to find out the reason for the absence. Please see the Attendance Policy for further information regarding pupil absence procedures.

If the reason for absence is COVID-19 related (e.g. showing symptoms, awaiting test results, self-isolating), reception staff must be informed as soon as possible.

Complaints Procedure

The School endeavours to provide the best education possible for all of its learners in an open and transparent environment. We welcome any feedback that we receive from learners, parents and other stakeholders, and expect that not all of this will be positive. Where concerns or complaints are raised, the School intends for these to be dealt with fairly, openly, promptly and without prejudice. The school differentiates between complaints and concerns.

More information regarding our complaints procedure can be accessed via the school website www.lvs-oxford.org.uk under policies.

4. How staff communicate with each other

Effective communication is critical to a well-functioning organisation. The school utilises many different methods of communicating information to staff either digitally or face to face. Engagement with staff is important to the organisation of the school and to the welfare of staff and pupils.

It is vital that staff use open channels of two-way communication to keep line managers and colleagues informed.

Face-to-face communication

Communicating in person with colleagues is considered to be the most beneficial method of ensuring information and knowledge are shared. The conversational nature allows for greater understanding of the context of the message and encourages reflection, questioning and feedback. Staff should wear a face mask when communicating with other staff and try to maintain a 2 metre distance in line with COVID-19 government guidance.

Staff are encouraged as often as possible to meet with colleagues to discuss issues verbally, rather than relying on email. Whilst it is important to manage the amount of time spent in meetings, well-managed meetings or discussions are an effective and efficient way of sharing knowledge, solving problems and ensuring common understanding and appreciation of issues. Meetings must now be conducted on video calls in line with COVID-19 guidelines

Research suggests that face-to-face communication engenders greater trust and understanding than any other communication method. It is important therefore, that staff have opportunities for one-to-one and group meetings with colleagues and their line managers on a regular basis and that dialogue in those meetings is two-way and respectful.

The therapy team have an open door policy for both staff and students to discuss concerns and issues. The therapy team has a maximum capacity of 4 people during COVID-19 outbreak, however the open door policy will remain for support.

Email

The appropriate use of the email system, the internet and network within the charity is essential, as it facilitates effective communication and improves efficiency. All staff are required to sign an acceptable use policy regarding appropriate use of the email system, the internet and network.

All staff are issued with an email account to use for school business. Staff should check their email account regularly as this will be how the majority of general school information is communicated.

Staff Meetings

Meetings should be held in a confidential environment and any action points raised should be followed up in writing.

The school holds twice weekly morning meetings, which all permanent teaching staff (and agency staff where appropriate) are expected to attend. The purpose of this meeting is to share key, urgent information regarding students that all staff need to be aware of in order to support students effectively throughout the school day. Staff will also be updated on COVID-19 guidelines.

All permanent teaching staff are also required to attend 'case conferencing' meetings when required to crisis manage students. The purpose of this meeting is for staff to focus on particular students and review current interventions and support in place. Staff will then establish whether any additional support is required for that student to make progress in school (this may include additional therapeutic support, input from the mental health team or behaviour strategies).

Additionally, subject leaders attend regular meetings in order to discuss academic progress and plans for the term as well as regularly leading their own departmental meetings.

The Senior Management Team have a weekly meeting to discuss the management and running of the school.

The Mental Health Team have a fortnightly meeting to discuss any concerns regarding student's behaviour, progress, attendance or home life. This will be conducted via video call during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Admissions Team will meet weekly to discuss new applicants to the school, students who have been interviewed and students who have been on site for assessments. This meeting will be conducted via video call during the COVID-19 outbreak. Students will be able to attend the site for their assessment days but interviews with students and parents will be conducted via video call during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The therapy team and year 7 form tutor meet weekly for the first term of the new year 7 cohorts year to ensure a successful transition.

Induction & Staff Handbook

An induction process is carried out for all new staff covering health and safety and safeguarding training delivered by the Deputy Head Teacher. All staff can access a copy of the staff handbook giving information to staff on many aspects of their role as well as rules and procedures that operate within the school and wider organisation.

Senior Management Support

Senior Management are available to provide support and advice to all staff. Unless the need is of an urgent nature, an appointment should be made via the office manager. The school's behaviour lead is available to discuss any behaviour concerns and the appropriate referral route for support is detailed in the school Behaviour Policy.

This policy will be regularly monitored, and will be reviewed annually by the Senior Management Team.

Written by: Jodie Kenvin (Speech and Language Therapist).

To be reviewed by: January 2021(SMT to review)