



STEP Academy Trust

Communications Policy

Date of Policy: Spring 2016

Review: Autumn 2017

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

STEP Academy Trust is committed to the promotion of effective communication between pupils, members of staff, parents/carers, stakeholders, governors, Trustees and all members of STEP Trust community and beyond.

Our objectives are to:

- Have a clear and professional communication strategy in place which will help STEP to keep parents/carers well-informed about their child's educational progress and any other matters related to their child's overall well-being.
- Make our written communications as accessible and inclusive as possible. We seek to avoid bias, stereotyping or any form of discrimination.
- Be open, honest, ethical and professional using jargon-free, plain English which can be easily understood by everyone.
- Ensure that there is a robust process in place for consultation between the academies, parents, staff members and pupils on key areas.
- Ensure that the systems in place are fully aligned to the Trust's Mission and Vision.
- Recognise that monitoring and evaluation of communication issues through regular meetings and discussion with pupils, staff, parents, Trustees and governors is an on-going consideration. In the context of a growing organisation it is particularly important to review systems and facilitate the best possible communication at all stages of the Trust's development.

Efficient and effective communication is essential at all levels of the organisation:

- Between STEP Academies and their whole school community.
- Between staff.
- Between children.
- Between Trustees.
- Between the Board of Trustees and STEP Academy Strategic Governing Bodies.
- Between STEP Academies with one another.
- Between all STEP Academy Trust stakeholders.
- Beyond STEP Academy Trust.

2. RESPONSIBILITIES

Academy responsibilities

- To publish key policies, documents and procedures on the Academy website and in other areas that maximise their accessibility and usefulness to the entire school community.
- To publish on the Academy website key information about the composition and remit of the Strategic Governing Body, including a list of members, their record of attendance at meetings during the previous 12 months, and a register of their business interests.
- To inform parents/carers of all school events within appropriate timelines.
- To keep parents/carers informed of the progress of their child at regular intervals throughout the school year.
- To consult with and work in partnership with parents/carers on the well-being and education of their children.
- To seek the views of the parents and children on their education and learning environment and ensure that their ideas and feedback are always treated with respect and built into planning and development. (Eg regular circulation of Parent and Pupil questionnaires).
- To seek creative ways of making key messages relevant to the communities served by each Academy.
- To remind staff of the STEP Compass, particularly STEP First and the STEP Way, and its relevance to the Academy.

Staff members' responsibilities

- To ensure that the principles and procedures of this policy are followed.
- To communicate proactively with parents/cares about pupil progress and to support parents/carers to help their children's learning.

Parent/carer's responsibilities

- To read key communications circulated by the Academy (eg homework tasks, website information, newsletters)
- To respond/act on communications from the school (eg sign consent forms, attend meetings).
- To keep the Academy office up to date with any changes to contact details (address, phone numbers, email addresses).
- To inform the school of any medical conditions along with medical documentation.
- To inform the school of any child protection matters, legal issues or relevant duties with appropriate documentation.
- To raise any issues or concerns with the class teacher in the first instance.

3. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE ACADEMIES

3.1 Communication with members of staff

- A timetable is made available to staff, which outlines weekly activities across the Academy. In addition, daily updates are given through morning briefings, noticeboards, online alerts etc.
- The Staff Handbook contains details of all procedures and policies.

- Staff members' personal details will not be shared with other members of staff without their consent.
- STEP Bulletin produced by the Executive Team on a half termly basis and circulated to all staff (and Trustees and governors) to keep all members of the STEP community fully informed of current events and developments.

3.2 Email Communication for members of staff

- All members of staff have their own STEP email account and must ensure they use the official STEP signature strip on all internal and external emails.
- Staff must consider the best way to communicate according to each situation, recognising that in school, email should not be used as a substitute for face-to-face communication.
- Staff must be mindful of the tone and propriety of their email communications and ensure that their written correspondence is always appropriate and professional.
- As STEP encourages staff to have an appropriate work/life balance, staff are not expected to write and respond to emails outside of schools hours. It is expected though that emails are responded to within two school working days.
- To ensure effective management of emails, please be mindful of who is "cc'ed" into an email. It is helpful to use the cc function if the information will be directly useful to your colleague.
- It would be inappropriate to discuss issues of a sensitive nature by email. Although not exhaustive, sensitive issues may include addressing staff performance or pupil performance and behaviour. Issues of this nature should be conducted in a face-to-face manner, with Minutes taken as necessary.
- Communicating with parents and staff members must be carried out via the school email address and not via a personal email address.
- Engaging in personal correspondence with pupils is not allowed.
- Sending of chain emails is not allowed.
- Embedding of adverts is not allowed.

3.3 Social Networking Sites/Blogs etc for members of staff

- Staff will not communicate with pupils or parents via social networking sites/personal accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.
- Staff will not accept personal 'friend' requests from pupils or parents.
- School/class blogs may be set up specifically for the purpose of teaching and learning and will be carefully managed and monitored. Only official designated users may use social media on behalf of the academy.
- Employees should not use their personal devices to access social media at any time on school premises.
- When using social media outside school for personal use, all employees must remember that they are personally responsible. Employees must take care to ensure that they always act responsibly and follow the law and STEP's policies and standards of conduct outside school as well as in school.

3.4 Communication with Pupils/Accessing 'the pupil voice'

- Pupils' views are sought via lessons, discussion, pupil questionnaires.
- Each Academy has a developed School Council or Pupil Parliament

4. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN TRUSTEES AND GOVERNORS

4.1 To ensure efficient and effective communication between Trustees and between governors, there are key expectations of members of the Board of Trustees and members of the Strategic Governing Bodies as follows:

- To regularly attend Board of Trustee meetings/ Strategic Governing Body meetings.
- To prepare well for meetings by reading all communications and papers in advance and making any requests for printing of papers (not including policies) to the Clerk no later than two days in advance of a meeting.
- To ensure that any planned absences for any length of time are communicated to fellow colleagues/STEP staff.
- To respond in a timely manner to email correspondence from fellow Trustees or fellow governors (within two working days).
- To access relevant Trust information on the designated IT systems.
- To immediately advise the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Trustees of any issue which might affect the interests of STEP Academy Trust.

4.2 Email communication for Trustees and governors

The same expectations apply to Trustees and governors for use of email as those for staff (as detailed under 3.2)

4.3 Social Networking Sites/Blogs etc for Trustees and governors

The same expectations apply to Trustees and governors for use of Social media as those for staff (as detailed under 3.3).

4.4 Communication between the STEP Governance team, Headteachers, Key officers, Governors

- A detailed set of expectations for the process and timescale for setting of agendas, writing of minutes and approval of draft minutes has been produced and is set out in appendix 1.
- On confirmation of the appointment of new governors, Clerks or Chairs will ensure that the whole SGB is informed.

5. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND STRATEGIC GOVERNING BODIES

Sub-committees of the Board of Trustees, Strategic Governing Bodies (SGBs), are delegated responsibility for two individual STEP Academies. Effective communication between the Board of Trustees and the Strategic Governing Bodies is vital so that:

- The Board of Trustees has an accurate, up-to-date picture of provision across the Trust and is able to take this into account in its strategic decision-making.
- The views of member Academies, through their SGBs, are appropriately represented at Board of Trustee level.
- SGBs are able to implement policies and decisions agreed by the Board of Trustees.

In order to facilitate communication the following systems are in place:

- A standard item is included on each SGB termly agenda to receive feedback from the Board of Trustees.
- All SGBs have a direct link with the Board of Trustees via the Chief Executive Officer or Deputy Chief Executive Officer who, through their roles as Executive Principals, each attend SGB meetings.
- Part A minutes of the Board of Trustee meetings are circulated to all governors.
- All SGB minutes are circulated to all Trustees.

On occasions it is necessary for the Chair of Trustees or the Chair of the SGB to take a Chair's Action outside the meeting cycle. In these circumstances it is important to ensure that Chair's Actions are reported and ratified at the next available meeting.

Clerks are therefore to be copied into any email correspondence around such issues, to enable the addition of ratification of any chair's action to the next agenda.

6. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN STEP ACADEMIES

Close collaboration between STEP Academies is an expectation of the Trust and STEP Academy Headteachers work closely with the Executive Team (the Chief Executive Officer, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, the Head of Teaching and Learning, the Chief Finance & Operations Officer), to ensure that expertise is effectively shared across the Trust.

STEP Academies are also encouraged to celebrate the successes of other Trust members, publicising "good news" stories from across the Trust, is positive and cohesive. Methods of communication include:

- Email
- Academy newsletters
- Academy Websites
- STEP newsletters and bulletins
- The STEP Trust Website
- Authorised Academy Social media e.g. Twitter

7. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The Trust communicates with parents/carers through:

- Letters home
- Text messages
- The Academy Websites
- The STEP Trust Website
- Regular Academy newsletters
- Parent/Carer meetings
- Informal communications between teachers and parents/carers

Communication of STEP's moral purpose is achieved through:

- Ensuring the STEP Compass, particularly STEP First, is constantly referenced
- Maintaining a frequently updated Trust website
- Producing a bi-annual STEP Academy Trust Newsletter which is circulated to all stakeholders
- Featuring in regular local and national press articles.
- Speaking at national conferences and seminars.
- Networking and facilitating visits to STEP Academies

Communication with the Media and Wider Public

- When press coverage takes place, all parties who may be interested such as parents, staff, Trustees, governors and the community will be informed via email, social media, the newsletter and the Academy /Trust website.
- All publications and press releases which include pictures of pupils will be checked before release/ publication to ensure that they do not include any children whose parents have informed the Academy that they do not wish their child to be photographed.
- All publications and prospectuses will be mindful of the equal opportunities policy, reflecting and celebrating the diversity of our STEP community.
- Headteachers are authorised to provide press releases to the local press on 'Good news' items relating to their academy. The Executive Principal and Chair of the SGB would expect to be informed of any press contact on good news events.
- Any other contact with the Press, local or national, relating to the academy or STEP more generally, should always be made via Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Trustees. No one else (Headteachers, members of staff) are authorised to speak to the press without first having agreed this with the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Trustees.

Communication of Recruitment Opportunities

- A proactive approach to recruitment of high quality teachers
- Attendance at key recruitment fairs.
- Internal vacancies are advertised solely on the STEP website and the onus for checking this is on individual members of staff.

APPENDIX 1
GOVERNANCE TEAM PROTOCOLS AND TIMELINES

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
Board of Trustees	1 To Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Company Secretary	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	1 To Chief Finance & Operations Officer (Finance items), Company Secretary (Governance & policy items) Head of Teaching & Learning (Performance items)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days
	2 To CEO	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	2 To CEO	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days
	3 To Chair of the Board for final approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	3 To Chair of the Board for final approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days
	4 To Trustees	At least seven days before meeting	4 To Trustees	Within fourteen working days of meeting
	5 Copy of agenda only to Head Teachers and SGB Chairs for information	At least seven days before the meeting		

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
STEP Operations & Audit Committee	1 To Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Company Secretary	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	1 To Chief Finance Officer (Copy to CEO & Deputy CEO for information)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days.
	2 To Committee Chair for final Approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	2 To Committee Chair	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days
	3 To Committee Members	At least seven days before meeting	3 To Committee members	Within fourteen working days of meeting

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
STEP Standards Committee	1 To Head of Teaching & Learning (Copy to CEO & Deputy CEO for information)	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	1 To Head of Teaching & Learning (Copy to CEO & Deputy CEO for information)	Within seven days of meeting Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days
	2 To Committee Chair	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	2 To Committee Chair	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days.
	3 To Committee members	At least seven days before meeting	3 To Committee members	Within fourteen working days of meeting

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
Strategic Governing Body	1 To Head Teacher (copy to Company Secretary for information) 2 To SGB Chair 3 To governors	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days At Least seven days before meeting	1 To Head Teacher (for correction of any factual inaccuracies) and Business Manager for financial items) 2 To SGB Chair for final comment and approval 3 To governors	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comment. Chase if no response after three days. Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days Within fourteen days of meeting

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
SGB Resources Committee	1 To School Business Manager	Three weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	1 To School Business Manager and Head Teacher (for correction of factual inaccuracies)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days.
	2 To Head Teacher	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	2 To Committee Chair for final comment and approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days.
	3 To Committee Chair for final comment and approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	3 To Committee Members	Within fourteen days of meeting
	4 To Committee Members	At least seven days before meeting		

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
SGB Standards Committee	1 To Head Teacher	Two weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	1 To Head Teacher (for correction of factual inaccuracies)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days.
	2 To Committee Chair	Three clear working days	2 To Committee Chair for final comment and approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days.
	3 To Committee Members	At least seven days before meeting	3 To Committee Members	Within fourteen days of meeting
SGB Children, Families and Community Committee	1 To Head Teacher	Two weeks before meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments	1 To Head Teacher (for correction of factual inaccuracies)	Within seven days of meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments. Chase if no response after three days
	2 To Committee Chair	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	2 To Committee Chair for final comment and approval	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days
	3 To Committee Members	At least seven days before meeting	3 To Committee Members	Within fourteen days of meeting

Meeting	Agenda Setting	Timescale for Receipt of Comments	Agreement of Minutes	Timescale For Receipt of Comments
Senior Leadership Team Meetings	1 To Chief Finance & Operations Officer & Company Secretary	Two weeks before meeting. Allow Three clear working Days for comments. Chase if no response after three days	1 To Chief Finance & Operations Officer and Company Secretary	Within seven days of the meeting. Allow three clear working days for comments
	2 To CEO & Deputy CEO	Three clear working days. Chase if no response after three days	2 To CEO & Deputy CEO	Three clear working days
	3 To SLT Members	At least seven days before meeting	3 To SLT Members	Within fourteen working days of meeting