

DUBAI HEIGHTS ACADEMY



Policy	Communications Policy
Approved on	22 August 2022
Approved by	Principal
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POLICY STATEMENT

Dubai Heights Academy places considerable importance on effective communication both internally and externally with parents and the wider community. DHA strives to be an open, professional organisation in which all members of the community feel heard. The Communications Policy is part of the school's efforts to enhance internal and external communications at Dubai Heights Academy. All communications must be professional, respectful, adhere to the cultural nature of our international community, be timely and appropriate.

This policy applies to parents, employees, contractors, consultants, temporary staff and other workers at the school.

All communications at Dubai Heights Academy should:

- keep staff, students, parents and other stakeholders well informed
- be open, honest, ethical and professional
- use jargon-free English and be easily understood by all
- be actioned within a reasonable time
- use the method of communication most effective and appropriate to the context, method and audience
- take account of relevant school policies

1. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

1.1 Meetings

- there is a programme of meetings set out on the school internal calendars
- all formal meetings are minuted, staff invited to contribute to the agenda, notes taken, action points progressed, and feedback given to staff
- minutes of meetings are emailed to relevant staff, SLT and saved on the school shared drive, in an appropriate folder

1.2 Email

The school gives all staff their own email account to use for all school business. Email can be an efficient way of communicating with colleagues and passing on information; however, it is not to be used as a substitute for face-to-face contact and staff must consider when it is the best way to communicate in each situation. Teachers should ensure that:

- they do not engage in private / personal correspondence with a student
- under no circumstances should staff contact students, parents or conduct any school business using personal email addresses
- email addresses of members of staff, parents or students must not be passed on to third parties (marketing or salespeople, or commercial interests, for example), without explicit permission being granted
- the sending of attachments should be limited
- the sending of chain letters is not permitted
- embedding adverts is not permitted
- staff and the school must take care not to distribute email addresses inadvertently – for example mailshots to all parents or a group of parents should not make the email addresses visible to all recipients – the bcc function must be used for such mailshots
- communications by email with outside recipients, however informal, should always be in correct English – given that the school's identity is clearly identified in our email address and signature, and that any communication originating from a Dubai Heights Academy address will be regarded as a communication from the school

1.3 Staff WhatsApp group

We recognise that not all staff will have access to their emails at all times throughout the school day, therefore the staff WhatsApp Group serves as an informal and instant method of communication to the whole staff body in the case of an emergency or when there is an immediate notice to all staff which requires a prompt response. The staff WhatsApp group should not be used to communicate any personal matters and should not be used to communicate extensive amounts of information in separate messages. Upon starting employment at the school, all academic and administrative staff are invited to join the WhatsApp group and are asked to leave upon the end of their employment.



1.4 Staff handbook

This handbook contains essential information for staff. A soft copy is available on the shared drive for all staff to access.

1.5 Social Media Guidelines

Employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. Employees should exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites. Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, Internet websites and Internet forums. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. When discussing DHA, Dubai or other school-related matters on the Internet, employees must identify themselves with their name and, when relevant, their role. Employees must make clear that they are speaking for themselves and not for the school. Whenever employees state an affiliation to the school, they must also clearly indicate that "the opinions expressed are my own and not necessarily those of the school". Employees are asked to write in the first person and to refrain from using the school's email address for private communications. The conduct and behaviour of school employees on social media websites should not differ from their behaviour in general or any other communication/media tool.

1.6 Presenting and hosting at formal events

When speaking at conferences or when representing the school at external events, presentations and speeches should be checked and approved by the Principal/SLT.

1.7 Confidentiality, Compliance and UAE Law

Documentation, correspondence and company-related information, unless and until publicly available must be treated as confidential. Non-public information from or concerning suppliers, customers, employees, agents, consultants and other parties must also be protected. This policy should be read in conjunction with the schools Confidentiality Agreement Policy.

The UAE has legislation in place which prohibits certain social media activity. The UAE Cybercrime Law No.5 of 2012 contains severe punishments including fines, imprisonment and deportation. The rules should be kept in mind:

- Posting photographs: Care needs to be taken when posting pictures of others online, including via social media sites since the Cyber Crimes Law (Federal Law No. 5 of 2012) makes it an offence to use any IT means to breach someone else's privacy, including by taking pictures of others, or publishing or displaying those pictures.
- Privacy and confidentiality: Disclosing secrets relating to someone's private life, without that person's consent can attract liability. Similarly, disclosure of confidential information, such as information belonging to an employer, can also attract legal liability in the UAE.
- Defamatory statements: The Penal Code makes it an offence to publish information that exposes another person to public hatred or contempt, or to make a false accusation which dishonours or discredits another person.
- Content contrary to morality, social cohesion: It is an offence to use any IT means for activities which are inconsistent with public morals and good conduct including content that is un-Islamic, blasphemous, lewd, that encourages sinful activity, or that is aimed at corrupting minors, etc.
- Online monitoring: UAE TRA monitors online content available and prohibits content for hacking and malicious codes, Internet content providing unlicensed VoIP services and other illegal Internet content.
- Licensed service providers can also block online content if required and subsequent to complaints of abuse or defamation, authorities can take legal action against those running the sites after verifying the validity and seriousness of the complaint.

2. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

At Dubai Heights Academy we aim to have clear, effective communications with all parents and the wider community. Effective communications enable us to share our aims and values, through keeping parents well informed about school life. This reinforces the important role that parents play in supporting the school. Whilst staff will always seek to establish open and friendly relationships with parents, it is appropriate that relationships are professional.



Procedures

- Any questions about class, and/or child should go straight to the class teacher/ form tutor or subject teacher. This is the first point of contact. Informal meetings and discussions can take place after school by booking an appointment directly with the teacher or dialogue can happen via email or Zoom meeting.
- Questions and/or concerns about a year group as a whole or where a situation is more serious, go straight to the class teacher/form tutor and head of phase (Phase Leader).
- The Head of Department will be the next point of contact, following class and Phase Leader.
- Any unresolved concerns will escalate according to the Complaints and Resolutions Policy

2.1 Email/Letters

Communications are centralised through emails. It is the parents responsibility to update their contact information and report any technical issues they are experiencing relating to the schools distribution of emails from the school management software iSAMs. Parents have access to all DHA staff work email addresses.

Email is a quick, effective way of communicating information. However, it does not replace face-to-face meetings where more in depth discussion is required. Staff will acknowledge emails within 1 working day and send a full reply within 2-3 working days, a maximum of 5 if the situation requires further consultation. Emails sent should be written carefully and formally, in the same way as a formal letter. It should follow the school 'house-style'. Staff sending emails to external organisations, parents or students should cc their line manager, as appropriate. Depending on the nature of the email, copies may need to be recorded in the students file.

2.2 Telephone calls

Staff will return a phone call on the day, where necessary, and note the conversation, as they would with meetings with parents. Detailed notes from telephone calls, including the main points of discussion and action required/taken should be kept on student files or recorded on tracker or student profiles.

2.3 Meeting with parents

Any parent wishing to meet with a member of staff should contact the school in advance and request a meeting with the relevant member of staff. This request will be responded to within the usual communications protocols and in a timely manner. Parents should not come to the school to talk to a member of staff without an appointment, except in cases of significant concern or grievance. If a parent comes to the school without a prior appointment, the member of staff may still choose to meet with them, but there is no expectation to do so. Parents (like all visitors) should report to reception prior to meeting with a member of staff. If the meeting is due to take place outside office hours, separate arrangements can be made.

A member of staff may ask for their line manager to accompany them. If a meeting with a parent is taking place outside normal school hours, the member of staff should try, where possible, to ensure that another colleague is nearby. It is perfectly acceptable to call a meeting to a close in order to allow time for further investigation. Staff should call a meeting to a close in the event of the parent becoming angry or abusive. The member of staff should report such an incident to their line manager and seek further advice. The line manager should either accompany the member of staff to a further meeting with the parent or hold it without the original member of staff present. All staff should be aware of the provisions of the Dubai Heights Academy procedure.

2.4 Social networking sites/blogs

Staff will not communicate with parents or students via social networking sites or accept them as their 'friends'. The exceptions are networks or blogs set up specifically for the purpose of teaching and learning. In the case of close friendships between staff and school families, obviously this provision does not apply rigidly, but there is a duty still to be professional and not to engage in school gossip, reveal confidential information (about another student's performance, for example) or disparage the school or individuals in a public domain. Staff do need to be conscious of local laws of defamation in this regard.

The school also uses official social media accounts as a way to communicate day-to-day happenings, as well as promoting any upcoming activities and events to current and prospective parents.



2.5 Parent WhatsApp groups

General parent WhatsApp group

There is a general (main) parent WhatsApp group which any school parent can request to join and which is managed by the school's Office Manager. This WhatsApp group serves as an instant method of communication to the whole parent body in the case of an emergency, a reminder or when there is an immediate notice which requires a prompt response. The general WhatsApp group should not be used to communicate any personal matters, to name any individual (student or parent), to be used to communicate extensive amounts of information, nor to be used as a platform for parents to raise complaints.

Class WhatsApp group

Each class/form has their own WhatsApp group which any parent of students within each class can request to join. The group is managed by the school's Office Manager and a designated Parent Class Ambassador who act as representatives for their child's class and play a vital role in supporting communication between parents, the class teacher/form tutor and the school. The class WhatsApp group should not be used to communicate any personal matters, to name any individual (student or parent), to be used to communicate extensive amounts of information, nor to be used as a platform for parents to raise complaints.

Parent Class Ambassador Role

- A class parent acts as a facilitator for communications between parents and the teacher and school administration and supports the teacher with queries that arise
- The parent class ambassador will maintain positive communications with parents, the teacher and the school
- Will listen to feedback and channel ideas and suggestions to support the teacher and the school
- Distribute helpful and supportive information and reminders
- Support events and activities where possible and gather other parents for support
- Manage perceptions on any media groups to remain positive, including reporting unhelpful behaviours to management

2.6 Parent newsletter

Each Friday afternoon, a parent newsletter is emailed to all parents and aims to deliver updates for what has been occurring at school throughout the week, important notices and details about upcoming activities and events in a less formal and more enjoyable format. The newsletter is also added to the school website each week.

2.7 School prospectus

The school prospectus contains a range of specified information to give prospective parents a full picture of provision at Dubai Heights Academy. This is updated every year. A soft copy is available in downloadable form on the school website.

2.8 School website

The school website provides information about the school and an opportunity to promote the school to a wider audience. It also has a regularly updated area for information for current parents. An important function of the website is to provide information and promote a positive view of the school to prospective parents, students and staff recruits. There is a school commitment to maintain the website and update it regularly, ensuring that in terms of style and appearance it matches other local schools for quality and design.

2.9 Staff directory

At the start of each term, parents are given an updated staff directory, containing the job titles and email addresses for each staff member (academic, management and administrative) for both staff and parents to use as their point of reference to contact for various matters.

2.10 Public access documents

Curriculum information and school policies are available in downloadable form on the school website and shared on Google Classroom and Seesaw platforms.



2.11 Contact

We encourage parents to contact the school if issues arise regarding their child's progress or wellbeing. For everyday issues parents should contact their child's class teacher or form tutor first. If there are specific subject problems, parents should contact their child's subject teacher, or the subject leader. For issues that are persistent or serious then parents should first contact the phase leader before reaching out to the relevant member of the school senior leadership team. (See Complaints Policy for procedures for parents who feel their concerns are not being addressed.)

2.12 Consistency in parent communication

All communication from teachers to parents should show consistency in content, method of delivery and timing across the phases. Phase leaders are responsible for informing class teachers / form tutors when something needs to be communicated and all teachers must then be made aware of the exact information, communication channel and date and time to share. There should not be a case of certain classes within a year group receiving information before others.

2.13 Discourse

As per the school's Code of Conduct, all communication at Dubai Heights Academy will be respectful and polite. This applies to staff / pupil communication, staff / parent communication, and staff / staff communication. Whatever the provocation, there will be no tolerance of staff incivility. If confronted by a difficult situation, staff always have recourse to referring the matter to a line manager or member of the school senior leadership team to deal with.

Staff are expected to be able to work professionally with all, and to engage in effective communication with all who work at Dubai Heights Academy in order not to undermine the aims and work of the school.

3. OTHER RELATED POLICIES

3.1 Complaints and Resolution Policy

3.2 Parent School Contract

3.3 Confidentiality Agreement

3.4 Code of Conduct