Castle School
Together We Learn

Parent and Carer Communication Procedure

September 2026

Be Confident | Be Kind | Be Creative

Cambridgeshire County Council

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1. Purpose, scope and legal relationship

Castle School's motto, Together We Learn, relies on respectful, accessible and timely communication with families of children and young people aged 2–19. This policy establishes practical expectations for both school and parents/carers, including ordinary enquiries, urgent welfare communication, meetings, digital messages, excessive repeated contact and protective arrangements when communication becomes unreasonable.

This policy applies to school-linked contact in person, by telephone, email, letter, home–school record, school-approved electronic system, social media and external correspondence that materially affects schoolwork or safety. It supports but never replaces the statutory Complaints Policy, safeguarding procedures, SEND/EHCP statutory routes, attendance and medical reporting, employment or information-rights duties. Where a formal complaint is open, its published timetable takes precedence.

2. Two-way communication agreement

Castle commits to:

- ✓ Treat families with dignity and respect.
- ✓ Recognise the knowledge parents have about their children and young people.
- ✓ Provide clear information about significant educational, medical, behavioural or welfare matters, using the appropriate urgent route where needed.
- ✓ Acknowledge or respond to routine enquiries within the published target and explain any material delay.
- ✓ Identify a lead contact and help families navigate the correct process without unnecessary repetition.
- ✓ Make reasonable adjustments for disability, literacy, languages, communication differences, AAC and family circumstances.
- ✓ Listen carefully to genuine criticism, admit where practice could be improved and follow through on agreed actions.
- ✓ Maintain professional boundaries and avoid unnecessarily escalating disputes.

Families are asked to:

- ✓ Contact the most relevant person using approved school channels and include the learner's name, brief issue and what action is required.
- ✓ Notify the school promptly of absence, changes in welfare, medication or other material information through the designated route.
- ✓ Share accurate, factual information to the best of their knowledge and check AI-generated material before sending it.
- ✓ Allow staff reasonable investigation and response time and avoid imposing arbitrary deadlines.
- ✓ Avoid sending the same routine concern simultaneously to multiple staff or governors once a lead has been identified.
- ✓ Treat staff and other families with courtesy.
- ✓ Avoid harassment, threats, discriminatory language, intimidation and publication of confidential information.
- ✓ Tell the school if a response has not reached them or an agreed action has not happened, and seek adjustments when helpful.

A family's strong feelings repeated legitimate advocacy or disagreement with the school are not automatically unreasonable. Staff are expected to recognise that parents of learners with complex needs may need detailed or frequent welfare communication.

3. Contact routes: the right person and channel

Reason for contact	Where and how
Routine class, learning, home-school information	Class teacher or agreed home–school system, pathway leader for issues requiring oversight.
Appointments, administration and attendance	Office: 01223 442400 / office@castle.cambs.sch.uk, attendance using the published same-day absence arrangements.
Significant unresolved school concern	Relevant pathway or senior leader; Headteacher where serious or inappropriate for the class team.
Formal school complaint	Use the Complaints Policy. Send as Private and Confidential – Formal Complaint to the appropriate decision-maker.
Complaint about Headteacher or governors	Confidential Chair/Clerk channel, obtained from the office, the subject of complaint should not process it.
Urgent safety, medical, safeguarding concern	Telephone the school or use designated safeguarding emergency contacts immediately; for immediate danger call 999. Ordinary inboxes and apps are not emergency services.
EHCP decisions, appeals, pupil information, FOI/SAR	Use the legally appropriate statutory process, school will signpost and retain related school-service complaints as appropriate.

Parents should not contact staff through personal phones, private social-media profiles or personal email unless school has authorised a specific arrangement. A single named contact may coordinate multi-staff enquiries, this does not prevent appropriate direct emergency contact.

4. Response times, school days and urgency

Type of contact	Response and expectation
Routine email or written enquiry	School will normally acknowledge or answer within 3 school days. If more work is required, the acknowledgement names a lead and a realistic date for the substantive response.
Complex issue not yet a formal complaint	Acknowledge within 3 school days, agree investigation and update date based on complexity. Does not promise that the issue will be resolved within 3 days.
Formal complaints	Complaints Policy applies: preliminary informal resolution, then Stage 1 acknowledgement within 5 school working days and written decision normally within 15. Stage 2 panel requested within 10 days, acknowledged within 5, convened within 20 and decided within 5 school working days of meeting.
Urgent safeguarding or medical welfare	Immediate triage through telephone/safeguarding route, prioritised by risk; emergency response not delayed to the routine three-day service target.
Request for meeting	Normally confirm receipt within 3 school days; arrange a date reasonably compatible with staffing, access needs and issue priority.
Out of hours or school holidays	Routine replies are not expected. Messages ordinarily received outside school days are actioned from next school day. Any published safeguarding out-of-hours arrangements still apply.

For routine enquiries this policy uses "school days" as days the school is open to pupils for teaching; formal complaint deadlines instead use "school working days" as defined in the Complaints Policy, including relevant INSET/staff working days. An acknowledgement means receipt and next steps, not completion of an investigation. If an urgent issue arises while waiting for a routine reply, families should telephone rather than rely on repeated emails. Where a date cannot be met, the named lead will explain and give a revised date.

5. Routine home–school communication

Class teams will provide a suitable and proportionate exchange of information about learning, care, attendance, wellbeing and relevant events, tailored to each learner's needs. Arbor is a communication aid, not a continuous live messaging service. Families should specify whether a message is for information, a question or an action request.

Significant pupil-specific matters may justify more immediate contact than the usual routine standard. Staff will use professional judgement and individual plans for communicating about health events, injury, safeguarding, restrictive intervention, medication or other matters with statutory or specific school reporting duties. Those duties cannot be weakened by a communication restriction.

Where parents request daily detailed narratives or multiple updates that are not clinically or educationally necessary, leaders will discuss a sustainable communication approach and consider reasonable adjustments, rather than unilaterally stopping information parents are entitled to receive.

6. Complaints, disagreement and confidential escalation

Routine disagreement should begin with the relevant class or pathway lead where safe and appropriate. Families who remain dissatisfied may use the Complaints Policy at any time that a formal complaint is appropriate. Staff must not withhold access to that process or require the person to agree with the school's view first.

A Stage 1 formal complaint is acknowledged within 5 school working days under the CCC-aligned Castle procedure, with a written outcome normally within 15 school working days.

A final Stage 2 governors' panel may be requested within 10 school working days of that outcome. Copies sent to multiple governors will be redirected to the appropriate Chair/Clerk route to preserve potential panel independence; this is not an attempt to prevent a complaint being raised.

7. AI-assisted, lengthy and repeated correspondence

Parents and carers may use AI, translation or writing aids to express their concerns, Castle does not prohibit or automatically reject such contact. Senders are responsible for verifying factual assertions, naming real incidents and outcomes sought, and protecting confidential personal data. Families should not upload identifiable pupil information, medical documents or staff correspondence to public AI services without considering privacy and appropriate safeguards.

Where correspondence is excessively long, includes numerous speculative allegations or repeated legal quotations, the school may provide a concise numbered statement of the factual questions it will address and invite corrections. Castle will respond to the substance collectively rather than rebutting every repeated claim, hypothetical or generic legal argument. The CCC complaints model expects a concise narrative of normally no more than two sides of A4, with relevant evidence attached separately. The school may request such a summary and notify a proportionate timetable adjustment where genuinely necessary, but will assess safeguarding, new material concerns and reasonable-adjustment needs promptly. Support will be offered to those who need it.

Where an issue has already received a substantive response, further duplicate non-urgent emails may receive a reference to that response or be consolidated into a periodic update. Once all formal complaint stages conclude, the separate subject-closure criteria in the Complaints Policy may apply. New facts or concerns always require screening.

8. High-volume, group and campaign communication

Castle may coordinate its response where several families raise the same school-wide matter, including through petitions, copied emails, template letters or social-media groups. The school will not treat group action as automatically vexatious. The school may send a common factual update, appoint one lead investigator and separately answer confidential learner-specific aspects where necessary.

Where a public campaign includes many materially identical messages from people unconnected to Castle, the school may issue a standard reply or publish an appropriately anonymised statement under the published Complaints Policy. Senders should still identify genuinely new information or individual concerns; the school will not publish pupil or private employment information.

If a group nominates a representative, school will confirm the representative's authority before sharing any individual information. A school-wide response does not replace specific safeguarding action, individual provision, pupil-specific welfare communication or the right of an eligible complainant to complete the applicable formal stages.

9. Separated parents, parental responsibility and adult learners

Where parents live separately, have different views or are in dispute, the school will consider the law on parental responsibility, any relevant court order, the nature of the information, and the learner's rights and welfare. A parent's request to exclude another adult from information or meetings is not automatically followed without a lawful basis. Court orders and restrictions should be supplied to the school and kept up to date; the school may seek LA/legal advice where necessary.

Routine communication arrangements may include separate copies of general reports, individual appointments or a single agreed communication channel for practical purposes, but the arrangements must not arbitrarily override another person's lawful rights. Staff do not mediate private family disputes and will not circulate allegations about one parent to the other without appropriate justification.

For learners aged 18 and over, the learner's wishes, capacity and own statutory and data rights are considered. Communication with family or advocates follows valid authorisation or another lawful basis, with Mental Capacity Act 2005 safeguards where relevant; parents do not gain automatic access to an adult learner's information merely through family status.

10. Meetings, calls, recordings and school premises

Meetings should normally be arranged in advance with an agreed purpose, suitable attendees, anticipated duration and adjustments needed. For substantial concerns, the school will make a proportionate written note of decisions and action owners, shared where appropriate. If a meeting becomes abusive or unsafe, the chair may pause or end it, record what happened and arrange a safer alternative. Telephone calls may be ended following a clear warning if threats or abuse continue, except where immediate safeguarding action is required.

Audio/video recording of meetings should be discussed beforehand. Requests based on disability, access, accurate records or vulnerability will be assessed fairly with due regard to data protection and third-party confidentiality. Covert recordings are discouraged, but any material presented is assessed case by case and is not dismissed automatically. No one should photograph or publish identifiable pupils without appropriate permissions and safeguards.

Unannounced visits are not a replacement for arranged discussion. The school may direct adults to reception and require advance appointments. Any separate restriction on premises access for safety will follow a proportionate procedure, with reasonable opportunity to make representations and for independent review; it is not an automatic consequence of complaining.

11. Social media, online groups and publicity

Families are entitled to discuss school issues, seek support, criticise decisions and engage with elected representatives or regulatory bodies. Castle asks families to distinguish genuine public-interest discussion from personal harassment, threats, discriminatory abuse, publication of private pupil or staff information and attempts to intimidate witnesses or undermine an active investigation.

Staff are not expected to reply to complaints in parent WhatsApp groups or private social-media threads. Concerns that need a school response should be sent through official contact routes. Where school becomes aware of online harassment, a safeguarding risk or unlawful disclosure, leaders may preserve evidence, seek removal or platform action, contact safeguarding agencies or police and provide staff support. Measures must be proportionate; legitimate criticism alone is not grounds for restricting school access.

12. Identifying unreasonable or persistent communication

The school considers frequency, content, duration, actual operational impact, context, the substance of concerns and its own previous responses. It will not simply count messages or classify a person by their identity, disability, use of AI, legal assistance, previous complaints or willingness to advocate strongly.

Large numbers of essentially identical emails, calls or simultaneous messages sent to multiple staff after a clear response, with significant evidenced staff time impact.

Repeated insistence on arbitrary deadlines, immediate non-urgent answers or responses outside staff working hours, after expectations have been explained.

Sustained requests for separate responses to recycled assertions, irrelevant legal commentary or hypothetical scenarios after the substance has been addressed.

Deliberately bypassing a proportionate individual contact arrangement without reasonable cause.

Threats, abuse, discriminatory language, intimidation, harassment, persistent personalised attacks or knowingly false serious allegations; genuine safeguarding content still requires assessment.

Examples are triggers for assessment, not an automatic finding. The school will consider whether communication failures, delayed replies, unmet needs or particular learner risks contributed to the pattern and correct its own failures.

13. Graduated management of unreasonable contact

Step 1: clarify and problem-solve. A named leader contacts the family, confirms the real outstanding matters and any reasonable adjustments, explains current replies and agrees an appropriate contact route.

Step 2: written expectations. If serious and evidenced disruption persists, the Headteacher or delegated senior leader identifies dated examples, the operational impact, the requested changes, a fair improvement period and the possibility of a time-limited plan. Threatening conduct may require immediate protective action.

Step 3: individual communication plan. Where lesser steps have not worked, set out a named school contact, routine channel, realistic frequency, when a digest may be sent, treatment of duplicates, reply targets, protected routes, start date and first review (normally 6–8 weeks). Record family views and adjustments; the plan need not be agreed to be proportionate, but the family must know and understand it.

Step 4: reasoned restriction or concluded-subject notice. Only where justified by evidence and proportionality, specify a narrower permitted channel, planned routine contact window or other limitation; document reasons, duration, emergency exceptions and a reconsideration route through an uninvolved governor. Review ongoing restrictions at least every six months.

No stage imposes a blanket ban on communication or prevents completion of an active complaint. Staff must screen all incoming messages, including from a restricted contact, for a new complaint, material information, medical change, attendance, safeguarding and statutory information requests.

14. Formal decision notices, review and protected contact

The usual decision-maker is the Headteacher, the Chair of Governors or another uninvolved governor makes decisions when the Headteacher is a subject of complaint. A notice must state what happened (with dated examples), what support or warnings were given, why the measure is necessary and proportionate, precisely which contact is affected, what remains permitted, the effective date, the first review date and how to seek reconsideration.

The family may request reconsideration within 10 school days of receiving the notice, or later where there is good reason. An uninvolved governor will aim to provide a written decision within 10 school days of the request, or communicate a revised date. Review should check whether the restrictions remain necessary, whether adjustments are effective and whether the school has upheld its own responsibilities. The decision may be varied or withdrawn at any time if circumstances change.

The following remain protected at all times: urgent safeguarding and medical welfare, reporting learner absence, genuinely new concerns and material evidence, complaint-stage rights, statutory SEND and other consultations, information rights, contact with appropriate regulators, police, the LA, DfE and MPs, and seeking legal or advocacy support. Families will be given a practical, published route to reach school urgently even when routine channels are limited.

15. Threats, abuse and direct staff protection

Staff should not be left to handle abusive or intimidating correspondence alone. They should preserve relevant factual evidence, end unsafe conversations where appropriate, report concerns promptly to a senior leader and record serious incidents under the relevant school arrangements. Leaders will assess immediate safety, safeguarding and crime risks and decide whether to remove an individual member of staff from direct contact or introduce a single senior contact.

Castle will offer proportionate wellbeing, HR and trade-union support, debrief and welfare follow-up, and where required seek advice from the employer/LA, governors, safeguarding partners or police. Serious violence or harassment may require immediate safety measures distinct from ordinary complaint management. Staff must still treat families courteously and avoid punitive or retaliatory conduct.

16. Implementation, records, training and governance

Class staff must route genuine concerns promptly, maintain proportionate contact records and identify urgent pupil matters. Senior leaders coordinate realistic answers, assess whether school delay contributed and screen repetitive contact carefully. The Headteacher approves ordinary plans, except when conflicted. The Clerk and uninvolved governors oversee independence for complaint-related restrictions and reconsideration.

A secure log will record significant contact patterns, the actual impact, adjustments, warnings, plans, decisions, protected exceptions, family submissions and review outcomes. Governors receive anonymised oversight of response timeliness, complaints volumes, material restrictions, equality considerations and staff wellbeing. All staff handling contact plans will be briefed on what must still be escalated. The policy will be published, communicated to families and reviewed annually, with earlier review if the law, guidance or school experience changes.

Appendix 1 – individual communication plan template

Parent / authorised correspondent and learner (if appropriate):

_____

Decision-maker and named school contact:

_____

Nature of the outstanding concern and school responses to date:

_____

Specific dated examples and evidenced impact:

_____

Family views, accessibility and SEND adjustments considered:

_____

Permitted routine method and recipient:

_____

Ordinary correspondence frequency and response times:

_____

How duplicates will be acknowledged or consolidated:

_____

Urgent medical, safeguarding and attendance routes preserved:

_____

Formal complaint / new issue / information-rights routes preserved:

_____

Start date, first review, ongoing review and plan end date:

_____

Independent reconsideration contact / decision recorded:

_____

Appendix 2 – initial written expectations letter

Dear [name], We want to work with you constructively in support of [learner]. Your outstanding concern is understood to be [brief issue], which we have addressed through [steps/date], and we recognise [any remaining point]. We are concerned that [dated behaviour] has resulted in [clear operational impact]. We ask that routine contact about this matter is sent to [named person/route], with [realistic timeframe] for a consolidated response. We will continue to respond appropriately to urgent welfare or safeguarding matters, genuinely new concerns and statutory requests. Please tell us by [date] if accessibility or communication adjustments would help. If these difficulties continue, a time-limited communication plan may be considered in accordance with our published policy.

Yours sincerely, [appropriate leader].

Appendix 2 – formal communication arrangement notice

Dear [name],

Following the concerns explained to you on [date] and consideration of your response and any relevant reasonable adjustments, the school has decided to introduce the following limited communication arrangement from [date] to [review date]: [specific method, named person, frequency, response expectations]. This is because [specific dated facts, impact and why a lesser step has not been sufficient]. The arrangement does not restrict [list of urgent welfare, safeguarding, absence, new complaint, statutory and information-rights channels]. You may request reconsideration within 10 school days through [independent governor/Clerk route], and can explain any impact on access or learner welfare. A review will take place by [date] or sooner if circumstances change.

Yours sincerely, [decision-maker].

Appendix 4 – request for reconsideration (optional)

Your name / contact preferences:

_____

Date of school's communication decision:

_____

What part of the arrangement is difficult or unfair and why?:

_____

Any new facts, welfare concerns or adjustment needs:

_____

What change would be reasonable?:

_____

Date and signature / other confirmation:

_____

Appendix 5 – staff triage and handling guide

Type of message	Staff must do
Immediate welfare / safeguarding / medication change	Telephone or safeguarding channel now; log and escalate; never delay to scheduled routine response.
Routine class enquiry	Class team; acknowledge or answer within 3 school days.
Complex non-complaint issue	Acknowledge within 3 school days; assign lead and specific reply date.
Formal complaint or request for escalation	Apply Complaints Policy stages and times; check confidential route.
Long AI or template communication	Identify true factual issues; offer concise schedule; do not reject solely for AI use.
Several families on same topic	Coordinate common investigation, safeguard individual information and use published campaign procedure.
Repeat contact about closed issue	Check for new facts, learner impact and safeguarding; refer to final response if closure criteria met.
Contact under restriction	Apply plan only to non-urgent routine contact; separately screen protected exceptions.
Threat / harassment	Prioritise safety, record evidence, notify SLT, provide staff support and consider police/LA advice.

Appendix 6 – family guide: how to get a useful answer quickly

- ✓ Tell us your child or young person's name
- ✓ Tell us what happened or what you need
- ✓ Tell us when it happened
- ✓ Tell us whether it is urgent
- ✓ Tell us what answer or action you are seeking
- ✓ Tell us the best way to contact you
- ✓ Keep routine emails focused and send supporting documents separately.

If our acknowledgement does not arrive within 3 school days, contact the office once to check receipt.

For immediate safeguarding, health or welfare concerns, telephone: do not wait for an email reply.

For a formal complaint, use the published Complaints Policy. you do not have to give up your right to complain or avoid lawful advocacy.