Communications Policy

Responsibility of: **Principal/Vice Principal**

Reviewed: **Autumn 2015**

Approved by Governors: **Autumn 2015**

Next Review: **Autumn 2016**

CONTENTS

Section 1 – Rationale

1.1 Melior Community Academy recognises the importance of clear and effective communications with all stakeholders (students and parents/carers, EAB members, SPTA, outside agencies, national bodies, etc), and is committed to being open and accessible for all who have an interest in the Academy. The key stakeholders for the Academy are parents and students and this policy addresses the main ways in which the Academy ensures effective two-way communication between home and Academy.

1.2 Communications can take a variety of forms: verbal (through meetings or by telephone), written (through letters, notes in planners, text or email). Occasionally a communication may be received second hand or through an intermediary.

1.3 Effective telephone communication can sometimes be a problem in a school, where teachers may be teaching full time and running clubs or otherwise working with students at lunchtime or after school. Parents may be exasperated if they feel that a message elicits no immediate reply, when in fact there has been no available opportunity for the member of staff to reach a telephone to return a call.

1.4 For this reason the Academy has been particularly proactive in encouraging use of modern communications methods, with all parents/carers being encouraged to give an email address for prompt and effective communication.

1.5 However, this does not mean that the Academy always gets things right and this policy aims to clarify the parameters within which we operate to ensure that communication is carried out with all stakeholders and interested parties effectively and clearly.

Section2: Aims

2.1 To support Melior Community Academy as a thriving and successful organisation we must communicate effectively with each other, with our students, with their parents and with other members of the wider Academy community. We need to ensure that communications between all members of the Academy community are clear, professional, timely and appropriate. Therefore we pledge:

- To improve the quality of service given to students at Melior Community Academy by ensuring that effective communication and consultation takes place between the Academy, parents, students and other stakeholders.
- To improve the quality of service by ensuring robust processes for consultation between the Academy, parents and students on key service areas.

Section 3: Objectives

3.1 All communications at Melior Community Academy should:

- keep staff, students, parents, EAB members, SPTA and other stakeholders well informed

- be open, honest, ethical and professional
- use jargon free, plain 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, message and audience
- take account of relevant Academy policies in particular Equal Opportunities & E-Safety
- be compatible with our core values as reflected in our Mission Statement and Academy Development Plan

Section 4: Communication

4.1 Good communication is much more than the exchange of information. It involves the management of relationships and the need to involve people. Communication is as much about attitude and behaviour as it is about message. We should also remember the importance of listening.

4.2 Every member of staff has a responsibility to support effective communications and needs to recognise that the quality of their communications reflects on the Academy's reputation.

4.3 For the purposes of this policy communication includes not only the message but also how that message is communicated; not only the responsibility for communication but also how effectively that responsibility is carried out.

4.4 Communication between the Academy and parents operates in the following ways:

- Prospective parents are invited to an Open Evening in the September preceding the year of entry to the Academy. All prospective parents receive information about the Academy including recent performance statistics
- Prospective parents are invited, along with students, to an induction evening in July where the main channels of communication are outlined and information about the Academy is presented
- Parents are invited to a Year 7 Parental Communication Evening (PCE) in the Autumn Term of Year 7 to meet the student's form tutor and review how the student has settled into the Academy
- Parents of each year group are invited into the Academy to an appropriately themed Parental Communication Evening (PCE), to cover issues relating to the relevant year group of their child (e.g. Parental Engagement Event for Y11, options for
- Y9, Presentation Evening for Y12)
- The Student Planner is used as a key vehicle for communication between parents and the Academy and this planner is fully explained at the induction evening for new parents in July and to all students as they start at the Academy. The planner is monitored on a weekly basis by both parents and the student's form tutor.
- Communication about student progress takes place formally each term for each student through a Progress Report (which reflects "snapshot" progress

towards targets, effort, behaviour, etc). This will be communicated wherever possible via email.

- Details about events at the Academy are published on the website
- The weekly updates to the website are a key vehicle for communicating in a variety of ways: alerting parents and students to forthcoming issues; celebrating the life of the Academy; petitioning for parental views; publishing the results of consultations, etc
- The Academy has all newsletters, events and key information on an up to date website
- Queries about events at the Academy may be made by phone (01724 868666) to the Academy or by email (adminstaff@melior.org.uk)
- The Academy has published the following service standards to ensure a prompt response for communication requests by parents. These standards are reviewed on an annual basis by the Principal.

Section 5: Melior Community Academy's Service Standards

5.1 Responding to parents.
5.1a Any requests for information, any concerns, requests for references or progress are dealt with in a timely fashion (term time only)

5.2 Complaints Procedure

- Initially, concerns should be addressed to the appropriate Form Tutor, Phase Leader, or Progress Leader in the first instance.
- Concerns may be raised either via the Planner, or by letter, email or phone call
- Notes in your child's Planner will be addressed within 3 working days providing your child ensures the note is shown to the appropriate member of staff
- Letters will receive both a verbal (usually by phone) response on the same day of receipt and a written response where appropriate within 3 working days. Verbal responses will generate a brief written note of the discussion and its outcome, to be held in the child's file for future reference
- Concerns raised by phone will be addressed on the same day of the call wherever possible and within 3 days where further investigation or information is required. An initial phone call should be made within 24 hours of receipt of an enquiry.
- Emails will receive an email response on the same day wherever possible and within 3 days where further investigation or information is required. An initial phone call/email should be made within 24 hours of receipt of an enquiry. Those sent at weekends may not be dealt with until the following working week, and emails sent in holidays may elicit no reply until term-time

5.3 Consultation

Consultation between the Academy, parents and pupils operates in the following ways:

- Questionnaires are issued to parents/carers on a range of issues and through a variety of means (hard copy, through electronic surveys, email). They may be distributed at specific parental events (e.g. Parents Consultation
- Evenings, Parents Information Evenings,) or via student post.
- The consultation process via questionnaires addresses key service areas such as the Academy curriculum, changes to the timing of the Academy day, uniform, the framework for parental consultation evenings, homework, the Academy's reporting system, primary school transition, the quality and accessibility of the Academy's materials, etc.
- Comment slips are available in the reception area at the Academy along with a confidential comment box so that parents/carers and visitors to the Academy may make suggestions for improving the service
- The Academy Student Council is consulted on a range of key issues relating to the
- Academy. Meetings take place at least every half term, with additional meetings for specific issues.
- Members of the Senior Leadership Team undertake Learning Walks regularly and discuss learning with students as part of this exercise.
- As part of the Academy's system of Self Review, students are involved in Student Voice feedback to review the teaching and learning within subjects and contribute their own thoughts on subject strengths and areas for development.
- Students are encouraged to be constructive about how the Academy can improve provision and are actively engaged in such projects as annual visits, reciprocated visits to other schools to compare culture, ethos and organisation, etc
- The Teaching and Learning Group meets at least once per term to share best practice in improving standards of Teaching and Learning
- The Special Educational Needs team works closely with individual students, parents/carers and external experts and meetings are held frequently to discuss best practice and provision for individuals and groups.

Section 6: Internal Methods of Communication

6.1 Meetings
6.1a There is an integrated programme of meetings to facilitate involvement of staff both formal and informal. The Academy Quality Assurance calendar stipulates the frequency of these.

6.1b All formal meetings should be structured and minuted and members invited to contribute to the agenda. It is important that time is put aside for structured opportunities for staff to engage in team working and to contribute to subject and/or the whole Academy's reflection on priorities, activities and future plans. For all other meetings notes should be taken, action points progressed and feedback given to staff.

6.2 Email

6.2a Information and notification of initiatives are communicated through the use of email where appropriate. Email is a quick, effective way of communicating information however it does not replace face to face meetings where some discussion is required. To ensure that each member of staff is using email effectively, the following actions should be taken:

- Consider a quick telephone call
- Do not copy in more individuals than required
- Delete mail regularly
- Appropriate language is important in the use of email; emails should be proof read in order to check tone and appropriateness.
- Subject Headings should be used in order to allow emails to be found and filed easily
- Email time should be blocked into your day if possible rather than allowing the received mail trigger to organise your day
- Do not use email to avoid face to face contact
- Emails should be checked each day

6.2b The Academy has a separate policy (E-Safety) for dealing with internet usage; you are advised to make yourself conversant with this.

6.3 Written Communications
6.3a These are placed in pigeon holes and faculty trays within the Main, which staff should check regularly throughout the day.

6.4 Staff Briefings
6.4a Staff Briefings take place on Tuesday evenings in the Humanities Lecture Theatre at 3.10pm. The diary for the week is discussed and information shared. Briefing notes are issued within the staff circular via email after the briefing has taken place to ensure everyone has the same message and missing colleagues are informed. The main points are also printed in the weekly Bulletin that is emailed to all staff on a daily basis.

6.5 Bulletins
6.5a Academy Bulletins are published on a daily basis and emailed to all staff. The bulletin will promote the Academy's successes and will incorporate news relevant to the Academy. Members of staff are encouraged to contribute appropriate items to the newsletter which should be emailed to Mr Boulton by the given deadline.

6.6 Staff Committee Meetings
6.6a This committee provides a forum for exchange of information and a platform to inform staff representatives of proposed developments impacting on the Academy and to seek their views. Minutes are emailed to all staff.

6.7 Social Gatherings

6.7a The Academy looks favourably on opportunities to develop professional working relationships and encourages informal gatherings within and outside the organisation in order to build on relationships, develop strong teams and encourage communication. The Academy will organise at least two social events throughout the year to which all members of staff are invited.

Section 7: External Methods of Communication

7.1 The Academy has many lines of communication to maintain: with parents and carers, the SPTA, other schools, the community and with outside agencies. Good communication between the Academy and the home is essential, and children achieve more when the Academy and parents work together. Parents can naturally help more if they know what the Academy is trying to achieve and vice versa.

7.2 In our Academy we aim to have clear and effective communications with all parents/carers and with the wider community. Effective communications enable us to share our aims and values through keeping parents well informed about the life of the Academy. This reinforces the important role that parents play in supporting the Academy.

7.3 Whilst staff will always seek to establish open and friendly relationships with parents, they will also ensure that the relationships are professional. To this end parents will always be addressed in a formal manner (i.e. Mr/Mrs …..) and staff will avoid developing close friendships with parents.

7.4 We try to make our written communications as accessible and inclusive as possible. We seek to avoid bias, stereotyping or any form of racial discrimination. We wish to recognise and celebrate the contributions made to our society by all the cultural groups represented in our Academy.

7.5 Communications with Parents/Carers
7.5a Letters - Staff will reply to parents' letters on the day on which they are received wherever possible. Any letter of complaint should be referred to the Principal or Vice Principal for advice. Letters to parents must be approved by the Principal before posting. Copies of all correspondence with parents will be placed on student files.

7.5b Email - Parents are increasingly using email as a method of communicating with staff. Staff will respond on the day of receipt wherever possible after proof reading to check tone and appropriateness of their email. The Principal or Vice Principal should be copied into any response to a parent's email having first gained approval for a draft copy of your reply. Staff may forward emails from parents to a member of the SLT to deal with if preferred and should always do so if the content is a complaint. In this instance the Principal must be cc'd into that forwarded email. A hard copy of any email sent to a parent or received by you from a parent should be filed on the student's file. The same applies to all internal email transmissions concerning student matters.

7.5c Telephone calls - Staff will check their emails for any phone messages received during the day and respond to parents' phone messages on the same day wherever possible. A record should be added to SIMS to record the details of the conversation.

Office staff should not put calls straight through to staff but should first ask if the person is available to answer the call.

7.5d Social Networking Sites/Blogs etc - Staff should not communicate with parents/carers or students via social networking sites (such as Facebook) or accept them as their "friends". The exception to this rule is networks or blogs used in the safety of Academy portals for the purpose of teaching and learning.

7.5e Progress Reports - Progress Reports will be issued at the end of each half term. Reports include grades for effort and progress. Reports can be discussed if required by parents by contacting the Academy.

In addition, parents meet their child's teachers at least once during the year for a private consultation at Parents' Evening. This gives them the opportunity to celebrate their child's successes, and to support their child in areas where there is a particular need for improvement. We encourage parents/carers to contact the Academy if any issues arise regarding their child's progress or well-being.

When children have special educational needs, or if they are making less than the expected progress, we will meet with parents more regularly.

We welcome the presence of any other adult the parent wishes to invite to an Academy meeting to act as interpreter or professional support. We will also make any reasonable adjustments to our arrangements if this will enable a parent/carer with a disability to participate fully in a meeting at our Academy, or to receive and understand a communication.

7.5f Academy Prospectus - The Academy prospectus contains a range of specified information to give parents a general picture of provision at our Academy. This is available as an electronic document on the Academy website.

7.5g Public access documents - Documents relating to the provision of teaching and learning are available upon request. Academy Policies are available to parents/carers on the Academy website.

7.5h Academy Website - The Academy website provides information about the Academy and an opportunity to promote the Academy to a wider audience.

7.5i Home-Academy communication - A calendar of Academy events is placed on the website at the start of each year/term to provide parents with a glance of what is happening within the Academy during the Academic Year.

The Academy Newsletter is emailed to parents when produced. It contains general details of school events and activities. Parents/carers expect the newsletter, and

appreciate the regularity of the contact. We send other letters of a general nature when necessary and store copies on the Academy's website.

Students in all classes have a student planner. This enables parents/carers to record a wide range of information that they wish to share regularly with the teachers. Teachers/students use the planner to record homework assignments, and as a regular channel for communication with parents/carers. Homework set is also available via the Academy website.

The Academy strongly encourages parents/carers to share any issues about their child at the earliest opportunity. Teachers arrange to see parents as soon as possible.

We arrange various meetings for parents/carers throughout the year. Meetings are held prior to any residential trip to inform parents of planning, content and arrangements.

A meeting for new parents is organised each July. Additional meetings include Y5/6 Secondary transition meetings, Y8 and 9 Options Evenings, Y10 pre-GCSE Information Evening, Y11 Parental Engagement Evening and Y12 Presentation Evening.

If a child is absent from the Academy, and we have had no indication of the reason, the parent/carer will be contacted by telephone to find out the reason for the absence.

7.5j Communication with other schools and outside agencies

Prior to students joining Y7, they are visited in their current schools to gain further information about them to help and support their transition to Melior Community Academy.

We recognise that children have diverse needs, and we are supported by various agencies and groups of professionals who keep us informed on better ways to meet these needs, so that children may participate more fully. Support comes from medical services (such as speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy), from Educational Psychologists, from health professionals and specialists. It also comes from various welfare-focused services, such as Social Services and Child Protection Units.

We recognise that children have a fundamental right to be protected from harm, that their protection is a shared responsibility, and that our Academy should provide a safe and secure environment. We are the people most in contact with our children, and we are therefore in a unique position to identify and help abused children. So when any member of staff has concerns about a child, these will be passed on to the Designated Senior Person for Child Protection within the Academy, who may share this information with the Social Services.

We hold information on students in our Academy, and from time to time we are required to pass some of this information to others for educational purposes. Details have been sent to parents/carers about the types of data we hold, why we hold that data, and who we may pass it on to. This is a requirement under the Data Protection Act 1998. Parents have a right to view the information we hold, and we have contact details of the agencies to which our information is passed.

Section 8: Communication – Supporting Academy Staff

8.1 This policy considers a student to be anyone who is currently on the Academy roll.

8.2 Communication between children and adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. With this in mind, below are the instructions for all staff at Melior Community Academy:

- Keep personal details private. You must never divulge your personal contact details: address, phone number, mobile number, personal email address etc to a student. Advice: If you must contact a parent in an extreme circumstance outside of school hours, always dial 141 first.
- You must never 'friend' a student on personal social networking services. Advice: Do not 'friend' students who have left the school.
- You must never divulge your private email address to a student. Personal and private email addresses must be separate. Advice: Any communication about learning should be through the VLE or professional email addresses.

Section 9: Responsibilities

9.1 This section details the responsibilities of all staff, and of particular groups, in communicating effectively within the Academy:

9.2 Senior Leadership

- To ensure information is made available to all staff in a timely manner and via appropriate channels, five days' notice will be given for any information requested from staff or, in exceptional circumstances, changes made to meeting times, etc wherever possible
- To ensure Middle Leaders have the relevant information available to communicate with their staff effectively
- To maintain open channels of two-way communication and to listen to feedback and comment from all staff

9.3 Middle Leadership

- To communicate regularly with their teams, preferably face to face, to ensure information is available and understood within the context of the Curriculum Area and working environment
- To ensure they and their staff are maintaining good communication practice in accordance with this Policy
- To maintain open channels of two-way communication, to listen to feedback and comment and to keep Senior Leaders informed

9.4 All staff

- To ensure they are informed and have access to information in order to be as effective as possible in their role and to support the strategic direction of the Academy
- To ensure they are maintaining good communication practice in accordance with this Policy
- To use open channels of two-way communication to keep line managers and colleagues informed
- To communicate with colleagues across the Academy where necessary

Section 10: Communication with the Admin Office/Student Services

10.1 Standard office hours at Melior Community Academy are:

- Term Time 8.00am until 4.30pm

10.2 Incoming Telephone Calls
10.2a All calls should be answered within 6 rings wherever possible

10.2b When answering calls, staff should respond with 'Good morning/afternoon, Melior Community Academy' followed by their name.

10.2c When messages are taken they should be passed on electronically via email and include the caller's name, telephone number, organisation and a brief message.

Section 11: Outside Communication

11.1 Press, Radio and Television

The Principal will deal with these matters in the first instance and will delegate where appropriate to other staff. It is recognised that staff will be involved in activities that involve the press, taking care not to be quoted is important in sensitive areas. All press cuttings must be filed in the Admin Office. The publishing of articles require the approval of the Principal and should not be assumed.

11.2 Elected Members or Local MPs

The Principal will deal with all communications with elected members and local MPs. Only when she gives specific permission will the matter be delegated.

11.3 DfE, other Government Departments and Agencies and Units, including Ofsted, SEU, NCSL, QCA, etc. The Principal will deal with all communications with any of the above. Only when she gives specific permission will the matter be delegated.

Section 12: Review Date

12.1 This policy will be reviewed by the Principal annually. Where appropriate, she will report on progress in these areas to the Education Advisory Body.

Section 13: Education Advisory Body Role

13.1 This Policy will be noted by the Education Advisory Body, in accordance with the SPTA Governance Handbook and approved at the next available meeting.

Section 14: Workload Impact Statement

This policy has been workload impact assessed and it is in line with the following statements:

- STPCD 2013 – working times – all activities within this policy should be carried out within directed time allocated to teachers and therefore not increase the time required to carry out statutory duties within STPCD 2013
- The final policy will be implemented following consultation with the Trade Unions
- This policy has been updated/amended following feedback from Trade Union representation.
- This policy does not duplicate any other existing Academy policy. .
- This current policy will be reviewed on an annual basis for the purposes of workload impact and ensure no extra burdens are added over time.
- Leadership time, non-teaching directed time (not PPA) and, if required, Curriculum Assistant support has been allocated to support the implementation of this policy
- All staff have full access to the resources required to undertake any activity mentioned within this policy
- All meetings associated with this policy have been calendared on the Academy calendar