Diocese of Chelmsford
Vine Schools Trust

Internal Communications Policy

This is a model mandatory policy for all Vine Schools that has been reviewed and adapted by

HOWBRIDGE CHURCH OF ENGLAND JUNIOR SCHOOL

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Approved by Vine Schools Trust on:	Spring 2026
Adopted by this school on:	Spring 2026
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> I am the vine; you are the branches.
> If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit
>
> JOHN 15:5

"Together We Shine"

At Howbridge C of E Junior School, our whole school community of children, parents, staff and governors come together so that we can live out the words of the gospel according to Matthew, 5:16, in our everyday lives:

'Your light must shine before people so that they will see the good that you do'

Vine

Diocese of Chelmsford
Vine Schools Trust

Empowering all to flourish

Developing faith, rooted in God's love

Playing our part in community

Delivering an ambitious curriculum

Celebrating uniqueness

Vision & Values

Like branches on the vine and members of one family, we all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one.

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1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust is committed to the promotion of effective communication between pupils, members of staff, parents/carers, stakeholders, School Governance Board members, trustee's and all members of The Vine Schools Trust community and beyond.

Our objectives are to:

- Have a clear and professional communication strategy in place which will help The Vine 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 schools, parents, staff members and pupils on key areas.

- Ensure that the systems in place are fully aligned to the Trust's Values.

- Recognise that monitoring and evaluation of communication issues through regular meetings and discussion with pupils, staff, parents, Directors and SGB members 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 Vine schools and their whole school community.

- Between staff.

- Between children.

- Between Directors.

- Between the Board of Directors and Vine SGBs.

- Between Vine schools with one another.

- Between all Vine Trust stakeholders.

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2.RESPONSIBILITIES

School responsibilities

• To publish key policies (or links to key policies stored on the Vine Trust website), documents and procedures on the school website and in other areas that maximise their accessibility and usefulness to the entire school community.

• To publish on the School website key information about the composition and remit of the School Governance Boards, 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. (E.g. regular circulation of Parent and Pupil questionnaires).

• To seek creative ways of making key messages relevant to the communities served by each School.

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 school (E.g. homework tasks, website information, newsletters)

• To respond/act on communications from the school (E.g. sign consent forms, attend meetings).

• To keep the school 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.

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• To inform the school of any child protection matters, legal issues or relevant duties - with appropriate documentation.

• To raise any positive feedback, compliments, issues or concerns with the class teacher in the first instance.

3.INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE SCHOOLS

3.1 Communication with members of staff

• A timetable is made available to staff, which outlines weekly activities across the school. Additional updates may be given through morning briefings, noticeboards, online alerts etc.

• Staff members' personal details will not be shared with other members of staff without their consent.

3.2 Email Communication for members of staff

• All members of staff and members of the SGB must use their own Vine Trust email account for all School or Trust-related emails. They must also use the official Vine Trust signature strip on all internal and external emails, underneath their school logo and signature.

• 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 The Vine Trust 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, staff are mindful of who is cc'd into an email. It is helpful to use the cc function if the information will be directly useful to the colleague/s.

• Issues of a sensitive nature should where possible be discussed in a face-to-face manner, with Minutes taken as necessary, rather than by email. Although not exhaustive, sensitive issues may include addressing staff performance or pupil performance and behaviour. If email has to be used, sensitive information should be shared via a password protected document attached to the email.

• Communication between parents/carers 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, other than in relation to their learning, using approved school systems – e.g. emails via Pupil Asset, Purple Mash.

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• 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/carers via social networking sites/personal accounts such as personal email accounts, 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 school.

• Employees should not use mobile phones for personal use, or access personal social media accounts anywhere on school premises other than designated 'staff only' areas, during designated breaks.

• 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 The Vine Trust's policies and standards of conduct outside school as well as in school.

4. COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN TRUSTEE'S AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE BOARD MEMBERS

4.1 To ensure efficient and effective communication between Trustee's and between SGB members, there are key expectations of members of the Board of Trustee's and members of the SGBs as follows:

• To regularly attend Trust Board meetings/ School Governance Board 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 a week in advance of a meeting.

• To ensure that any planned absences for any length of time are communicated to fellow colleagues/Vine staff.

• To respond in a timely manner to email correspondence from fellow trustee's or fellow SGB members (within two working days).

• To immediately advise the Chief Executive Officer and Chair of Board of any issue which might affect the interests of The Vine Schools Trust.

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4.2 Email communication for Trustee's and SGB members.

The same expectations apply to trustee's and SGB members for use of email as those for staff (as detailed under 3.2)

4.3 Social Networking Sites/Blogs etc for Trustee's and SGB members.

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

4.4 Communication between the Vine central team, Headteachers, Key officers, SGB members.

- 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 SGB members, Clerks or Chairs will ensure that the whole SGB is informed.

5. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE BOARD OF TRUSTEE'S AND SCHOOL GOVERNANCE BOARDS

Sub-committees of the Board of Trustee's, School Governance Boards (SGBs), are delegated responsibility for regional groups of Vine schools. Effective communication between the Board of Trustee's and the School Governance Boards is vital so that:

- The Board of trustee's 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 schools, 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 Vine Trust Board.

- Minutes of the Trust Board meetings are circulated to all SGB chairs.

- All SGB minutes are circulated to the full board via GovernorHub. On occasions it is necessary for the Chair of trustee's 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

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any email correspondence around such issues, to enable the addition of ratification of any chair's action to the next agenda.

6. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND TRUST

Close collaboration between Vine schools is an expectation of the Trust and Vine Headteachers work closely with the Executive Team (the Chief Executive Officer, The Chief Finance and Operations Officer, Director of HR) to ensure that expertise is effectively shared across the Trust. Vine schools 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
- Vine newsletters
- Vine school websites
- The Vine Trust Website
- Authorised school Social media e.g. Twitter, Facebook

Measurement & Evaluation

The above communication channels will be monitored against set KPIs for communication effectiveness (e.g. open rates, website traffic and social media engagement).

Staff Training

Head of Communications to organise frequent training on websites, social media and crisis communications.

7. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The Trust communicates with parents/carers through:

- Letters home
- The School Websites
- The Vine Trust Website
- Regular School newsletters
- Parent/Carer meetings
- Informal communications between teachers and parents/carers

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Communication of The Vine's moral purpose is achieved through:

- Maintaining a frequently updated Trust website
- Featuring in regular local and national press articles.
- Speaking at local and national conferences and seminars where possible.
- Networking and facilitating visits to Vine schools.

Communication with the Media and Wider Public

- When press coverage takes place, all parties who may be interested such as parents, staff, trustees, SGB members and the community will be informed via email, social media, the newsletter and the school /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 school that they do not wish their child to be photographed.
- All publications and prospectuses will be mindful of equal opportunities, reflecting and celebrating the diversity of our Vine Trust community.
- Headteachers are authorised to provide press releases to the local press on 'Good news' items relating to their school. They should always seek the guidance of the Head of Communications (Ellie Turnbull) when making these press releases. The CEO and Chair of the SGB would expect to be informed of any press contact on good news events.
- The Trust does not define any kind of instant messaging as acceptable for official communication with the wider public (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram direct messages).
- Any other contact with the Press, local or national, relating to the school or Vine Trust more generally, should always be made via Chief Executive Officer and Head of Communications. No one else (Headteachers, members of staff) are authorised to speak to the press without first having agreed this with the Chief Executive Officer, Head of Communications and Chair of Board.

Crisis & Incident Communication

- A crisis or incident should be rapidly escalated to Chief Executive Officer, Head of Communications and any other relevant parties (e.g. Head of Safeguarding).
- The Head of Communications will define the media handling during this time, will be the single point of contact for the press and will be responsible for drafting holding and press statements.

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