



## 4.15 Home / School Partnership Policy

### **Introductory statement**

This Policy was developed by the staff of Ábalta Special School in consultation with the Board of Management and the Parents Association Committee. Its purpose is to provide information and guidance to parents and staff on the invaluable Home/School Partnership Approach that benefits the education of all pupils in the school. In particular, it outlines procedures for effective Parent/Teacher Communication, including Parent/Teacher Meetings. School personnel and family members strive to be mutually supportive and respectful of each other and this approach is central to the ethos of Ábalta Special School. The partnership is envisaged as a positive working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to listen and learn in the best interests of pupils' development and progress.

### **Strategies/Procedures to Support the Home/School Partnership Approach in Ábalta Special School**

- Formal IEP meetings held in in the first term (see IEP policy for further information)
- School Reports are posted to the parent(s)/guardian(s) of each pupil at the end of each school year
- As appropriate, additional meetings between Parent(s) and Teacher(s) concerning pupil's needs and/or to discuss pupil progress, behaviour, parent education etc.
- Daily written communication between the pupil's SNA and parents via the communication diary. The class teachers will inform parents of the class roster for their child at the beginning of the school year and of any changes to that roster during the year.
- Ongoing communication throughout the school year by means of letters from the school, letters from class teachers, website notification, homework journals, newsletters.
- Homework Journals are used to describe any homework given. Homework is given Monday to Thursday with English on Monday, Maths on Tuesday SESE on Wednesday and individualised goals on Thursday.
- Through the Parents Association and BoM, parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the drafting and review of all school policies
- The school values and welcomes the participation of parents/guardians in school events e.g. school concerts, graduation etc.

### **IEP meetings**

The aims of IEP meetings are:

- To facilitate an exchange of information among staff members, consultants and parents
- To let parents know how their children are progressing in school
- To let teachers know how children are getting along outside school
- To establish an ongoing relationship and communication with parents

### **Informal parent/teacher communication:**

- Communication between parents and teachers is encouraged: The school office is open to take calls from 8.00 AM to 2.40 PM each day and the administrator can answer any messages or administrative enquiries. Messages left on the answering machine will always be checked and dealt with by the relevant staff

member. Parents can also email the school at any time on the school emails address which is [office@abaltaschool.ie](mailto:office@abaltaschool.ie). Parents can email their class teacher / behaviour support and learning specialist / principal, email addresses can be sourced from the school's website.

- *Parents are asked to please make an appointment (by phone call, by visit to the administrator's Office or by note in the communication diary) to meet with the child's class teacher if/when needed.* Pre-arranged appointments facilitate better quality communication between the parent and teacher, rather than the more rushed and distracted type that takes place when the teacher has to supervise the pupils in the class from the classroom door while at the same time communicating with a parent. Pre-arranged meetings allow for more discreet communication and avoid potential embarrassment for a child when his/her parent is talking to the teacher at the classroom door
- It is understood that from time-to-time certain 'sensitive/urgent' situations (e.g. serious illness of family member, family crisis, etc) will arise which will require a parent to arrive at the school without appointment and such situations will of course continue to be facilitated. Outside of such situations parents should not arrive at the classroom door unannounced/without appointment to seek a consultation with a staff member.
- If parents wish to drop in lunch boxes, PECS books etc., this can be done through the administrator's Office as it is important to keep class interruptions to a minimum.

### **Formal parent/teacher communication**

Formal timetabled IEP Meetings take place each year. These Meetings are an important opportunity for parents and teachers to exchange information regarding the child's progress and *every effort should be made by parents to attend the meeting.*

- Appointment slips are issued to parents during the week prior to the meeting. If unable to attend, parents should notify the school accordingly so that an alternative appointment may be made
- In the case of married but separated parents, requests may be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings
- In the case of unmarried separated parents, requests may be made by both parents to meet their child's teacher(s) individually for parent/teacher meetings, subject to the natural father having established his 'guardianship, custody and access rights' through the court and/or by means of statutory declaration made by the natural mother.

### **End-of-year school reports**

- An end-of-year school report is issued by post to parents at the end of the school year.
- All communication from the school will be sent home in the student's school bag or posted to the child's home address as given on the enrolment form, unless otherwise requested/notified by parents
- In the case of married but separated parents, requests may be made by both parents to have a copy of the end-of-year report posted to their address

In the case of unmarried separated parents, requests may be made by both parents to have a copy of the end-of-year report posted to their address subject to the natural father having established his 'guardianship, custody and access rights' through the court and/or by means of statutory declaration made by the natural mother. Where either/both parents is/are involved in new relationships, it should be noted that communications from the school to new partners will be limited to that which is expressly agreed between the parents and notified to the school or that which has been provided for by a court order.

### **Other parent/teacher communications**

- Parents are encouraged to check the communication diary on a nightly basis (Monday to Friday) as notes/comments will be included by the child's teacher/SNA. Similarly,

parents are encouraged to use the communication diary to communicate with teachers/SNAs.

- Parents are required to send a note notifying the class teacher of their child's absence including date(s) and reason for absence(s).
- Parent meetings in school involving discussion and advice on problem / needs arising for the student at home. Parents can visit the school and work on generalizing communication and / or other social / independence skills outside of school through community trips with their child (e.g. visiting barber for haircut: library; shopping etc.) with support from school staff during the school day. Parents can meet with the Behaviour support and learning specialist on an appointment basis. Parents can also schedule meetings with the Speech and language therapist and the occupational therapist during their consultancy days.
- Parents to receive video footage of their child in the classroom, in order to become familiar with the strategies used to facilitate learning and to practice these strategies with their child at home.
- **Integration:** If parents need to make contact with an SNA who accompanies their child on an integration program, they should contact the school. Parents are requested not to contact SNAs directly in this situation. If parents have any concerns regarding integration programs, they should contact the class teacher.

### **Parents are encouraged to**

- Develop and maintain close links with the school
- Collaborate with the school in developing the full potential of their child(ren)
- Equip pupils with all the appropriate school materials required during the school day, and full uniform/tracksuit
- Become actively involved in the Parents Association
- Participate in policy and decision-making processes when the opportunity arises
- Notify the school at the earliest opportunity if family events/situations occur that cause anxiety to your child and therefore may adversely affect his/her education
- Provide a note of explanation when a pupil is late arriving to school, absent from school or not in correct/full uniform/tracksuit
- Speak positively about the school and its staff members: if there is a concern, please address it directly with the class teacher or principal
- Show care and respect for school property and encourage child(ren) to do likewise
- Facilitate the child(ren) reaching their full potential and gaining maximum benefit from their time in school by ensuring that pupils attend regularly and punctually throughout the school year. The practice of taking pupils out of school at any time during the school year in order to facilitate family holidays and/or taking pupils out of school early during the school day (unless it is absolutely necessary for attendance at medical appointments etc) should be avoided. Whenever possible, parents should request from other professionals that appointments be arranged for after-school times

### **Staff members seek to**

- Promote partnership and collaboration with parents in the interests of the child(ren)'s learning and holistic development on a 'whole school' basis
- Maximise the active participation of parents in their child(ren)'s education
- Raise awareness in parents of their own capacities to enhance their child(ren)'s educational progress
- Promote active co-operation between home, school and relevant community and statutory agencies in promoting the educational interests of pupils.

### **Communication during school closures:**

Emergency closures etc. will be communicated to staff and parents by web text by the principal. If there is a red weather warning staff will be informed the night before by web text with a confirmation the following morning to let them know if the school is open or not. Parents will be

informed the night before if there is a red weather warning in place as school buses will not run. A confirmation web text will follow to inform families whether the school is to open or not.

The staff representative is responsible for communicating notice of bereavements etc. of members of families of either staff or students to other staff members during school closures. Person of concern will be informed before the staff representative communicates the information to others.

### **Health and Safety Issues:**

Abalta Special School prides itself on being an open, welcoming place for all members of the school community. However, in order to provide a safe and supportive environment for all who work and learn in the school the following procedures are in place:

- Main access/exit door is controlled by an access control system. All visitors (including parents/guardians) to the school must report to the administrator's office to gain admission to the school.
- Parents who drop off and/or collect their children directly from the school are requested to wait in the reception area until their child is collected by a staff member. **As the BOM is responsible for the Health and Safety of all members of the school community, parents are requested not to go directly to the student's classroom in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of other students.**
- If students sustain any injury in school, parents will be contacted by phone by the class teacher immediately after the incident has occurred. Parents who drop off and /or collect their children directly will be given a verbal explanation about the incident by the class teacher or by the principal in the absence of the class teacher. Written incident reports will be sent home if requested to parents the day after the incident as per code of behavior policy.
- All visitors to the school must sign in and sign out the visitors' book located adjacent to the administrator's office.
- BoMs are responsible for ensuring the health, safety, wellbeing and educational progress of students. They also have a duty under Section 8 of the *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* to ensure; so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of employees. The Department of Education and Skills has acknowledged that occasionally there may be incidents of assaults on school employees. The BoM of Ábalta Special School is cognisant of its duty to provide a safe place of work for its employees. The BoM is concerned to protect school employees from the risk of violence of any kind, be that in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. The BoM has adopted the Guidelines outlined in **Appendix 1** to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to:
  - a) Prevent or minimize the risk of assault on employees and
  - b) To support all staff who have been assaulted or threatened with assault and
  - c) To ensure that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

### **Procedures for addressing complaints**

It is acknowledged that disagreements and/or complaints may arise from time-to-time. The primary thrust of the Home/School Partnership outlined above is seen as supporting a preventative rather than a curative response to the difficulties that may occasionally develop.

It is envisaged that all disputes/challenges should be addressed initially at a more informal level, usually involving contact and communication between parent(s) and teacher(s). Experience has shown that where a mutually respectful willingness among parent(s) and teacher(s) exists to discuss difficulties and to engage in a solution-driven approach to addressing such disputes/challenges, then the majority of such matters are resolved speedily and to the satisfaction of all involved.

Where a satisfactory resolution of the issues is not achieved at the more informal level, then parent(s) and/or teacher(s) may wish to pursue the matter further and involve themselves in a more formal approach to seek resolution of the matter.

*(See **Appendix 2** which summarises the Complaints Procedure agreed by the INTO and CPSMA in 1993 and adopted by the Board of Management of Abalta Special School.*

**Roles & Responsibilities**

All staff members, parents, pupils and BoM members share responsibility for supporting the implementation of the Home/School Partnership Policy.

**Success criteria**

The school evaluates the success of this Policy through:

- Positive and supportive engagement and participation of parents, staff, BoM members and pupils in the education process
- The extent to which there exists a mutually-beneficial, supportive and positive atmosphere and relationship among all members of the school community
- Feedback, as appropriate, from all members of the school community
- Indications that the smooth and efficient running and organisation of the school is enhanced through the implementation of this policy
- The indications that the facilitation and implementation of the Home/School Partnership Policy are enhancing the learning opportunities of the pupils of the school.

**Ratification and communication**

This policy was reviewed by the Parents Association Committee at a meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 and subsequently approved on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2014

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson of the parent’s association

The policy was subsequently reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2014. Its implementation was deemed effective from that date.

A copy of this policy was made available to all parents and to all members of staff. This policy is also included on the Ábalta Special School website at abaltaschool.ie.

**Timetable for Review:**

A Review of this Policy will be conducted as deemed appropriate, based on the success criteria outlined above.

Signed: .....  
Chairperson of the BOM

Date: .....

## **APPENDIX 1: ASSAULTS ON SCHOOL EMPLOYEES: Guidelines**

### **Introductory Statement**

Boards of Management are responsible for ensuring the health, safety, wellbeing and educational progress of students. They also have a duty under *Section 8 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* to ensure; so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of employees. The Department of Education and Skills has acknowledged that on very rare occasions there may be incidents of assaults on school employees. The BoM of Ábalta Special School is cognisant of its duty to provide a safe place of work for its employees. The BoM is concerned to protect school employees from the risk of violence of any kind, be that in the form of verbal abuse, threats, assaults or other forms of intimidation. The BoM is anxious to ensure that every effort would be made to create and maintain a culture in Ábalta Special School where acts of violence are not tolerated and where incidents, when they do occur, are effectively and speedily dealt with. The BoM has adopted the guidelines outlined below to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to:

- a) Provide a safe place of work for employees
- b) Prevent or minimize the risk of assault on employees and
- c) To support staff members who have been assaulted or threatened with assault and to ensure that appropriate action is taken to safeguard against a recurrence.

### **1. The Board of Management's Duty to provide a safe place/system of work**

The *Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* is an important piece of legislation for BoMs and for those who work in schools. *The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005* requires employers to ensure the safety and health of their employees. It requires employers to draw up a Safety Statement:

- Identifying the hazards
- Assessing the risks to health and safety
- Putting in place appropriate safeguards

In Ábalta Special School violence is considered to be a potential hazard and is assessed accordingly. Following consultation with employees, the Preventative Measures and General Procedures outlined below have been developed and implemented with a view to fulfilling the Board of Management's duty to provide a Safe System/Place of Work for all school staff. Ábalta Special School's health and safety policy outlines the procedures to be followed with regard to notification of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) in the event of a significant accident or incident which necessitates treatment from a medical practitioner or treatment in hospital. An

accident or incident which results in an employee being absent from work for 3 days or more must also be reported to the HSA.

## **2. Preventative Measures**

Ábalta's Board of Management has considered and implemented the following measures which seek to prevent or minimise the risk of assault to the employees of the Board. The effectiveness of agreed procedures shall be reviewed where necessary.

### **(a) External Liaison**

Bearing in mind that communication between home and school should be frequent, open and positive; the BOM - in consultation with the principal and staff of the school - promotes good practice for the conduct of communication between home and school as outlined in the Home/School Partnership Policy. In this context schools staff members and parents have been advised of the following:

- **Admitting parents/visitors to the school**

The main school access/exit doors are controlled by an Access Control System. All visitors to the school must report to the Secretary's Office to gain admission to the school. All visitors to the school must sign the Visitors' Book located adjacent to the Administrator's office.

As outlined in the Home/School Partnership Policy above, parents/visitors who wish to have a consultation with a teacher/staff member are requested to make a prior appointment. In urgent cases where a prearranged appointment is not appropriate, parents are required to report in the first instance to the School Administrator/Principal. The practice of parents approaching classrooms directly during teaching time is strongly discouraged. Specifically, access to staff members is on an 'appointment only' basis where the circumstances of a meeting are likely to provoke a confrontation.

- **Parent/Teacher Meetings**

The Home/School Partnership Policy above outlines the arrangements to be adhered to with regard to the conduct of formal parent teacher meetings. Parents are given adequate notice regarding the timing of such meetings and are encouraged to raise issues of concern. Where sensitive issues are the subject of discussion, arrangements are made for conducting such discussions in privacy. As outlined in the Home/School Partnership Policy, conducting discussions at the classroom door, while simultaneously supervising a class of children, is not conducive to good quality communication. Particular care is taken to ensure that parent/teacher consultations do not take place within the hearing of other pupils and/or parents.

- **Code of Behaviour**

The Board of Management has fulfilled its obligations under the terms of the Education Act (1998) and the Education Welfare Act (2000) schools to develop a Code of Behaviour. The code was developed by the staff in consultation with parent representatives on the board of management, approved and ratified by the Board of Management and notified to parents in accordance with the National Educational Welfare Board's publication 'Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools' (March 2008). The school's code of behavior policy is accessible on the school website.

- **Complaints Procedure**

As outlined in the Home/School Partnership Policy above, Ábalta Special School BoM has adopted the complaints procedure agreed between the management bodies and the INTO (see Appendix 2). The terms of the complaints procedure will be notified to parents and parents are encouraged to utilise the stages of the procedure if/when necessary.

### **(b) Internal Procedures**

The issue of internal school procedures is discussed from time-to-time at staff and BoM meetings. Staff are familiar with all relevant procedures. In circumstances of increased risk (e.g. working with a child with challenging behaviour) MAPA training is provided for staff in identifying potentially violent situations, and in calming down potentially violent situations. Behavioural support back up is provided by the behavioural support and learning specialist as well as collegiate support.

Specific consideration has been given to circumstances where staff are:

- Working alone on the school premises
- Working in an isolated part of the school premises
- Engaged in out of class activities
- Working with pupils with behavioural difficulties

### **3. Steps to be followed in the event of an assault:**

In the event of an assault on an employee, the BoM commits itself to be fully supportive of the staff member who has been subjected to violence of any kind. It is accepted that judgment will have to be exercised in each individual case. However, the following elements are included in each procedure:

(i) The incident should be immediately reported to the Principal teacher/other colleague. The details of the incident are recorded

(ii) Where necessary immediate medical assistance shall be sought

(iii) The matter shall be reported to the Gardaí, where appropriate. This report would normally be made by the staff member who was assaulted.

(iv) The BoM shall be notified of the incident and where necessary an emergency meeting of the Board shall take place. The Board may decide to notify its legal advisors of the assault. The Board's Insurance Company would also be notified

(v) Where the assault is by a pupil, the matter shall be dealt with in accordance with the school's Code of Behaviour and the Behavior Support policies.

(vi) Pupils who display aggressive behavior will have regular data reviews to identify patterns and appropriate amendments to their Behaviour Support Plans.

(vii) Where the assault is committed by a parent/guardian, the parent/guardian shall be immediately instructed in writing not to make direct contact with the staff member/school pending full consideration of the matter by the BoM.

Subsequently the Board shall correspond with the parent/guardian stating:

- That the Board considers the assault unacceptable
- What action the Board intends to take
- What pre-conditions should be met before access to the school is restored.

(viii) Applications for leave of absence, in relation to a member who has been assaulted, shall be forwarded to Primary Payments Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath where the DES will assess each application on its merits.

(ix) Where an employee's personal property is damaged in the course of an assault, compensation for its replacement value may be paid by the BoM under the extended School Protection Policy.

**Reference: Circular 40/97 from the Department of Education and Science: 'Assaults on Teachers/School Employees (Sept. 1997)**



## **APPENDIX 2: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

**(Adopted & Ratified by the Board of Management of Abalta Special School)**

### **INTO/MANAGEMENT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the Primary School Management representatives reached agreement on a procedure for dealing with complaints by parents against teachers. The purpose of the procedure is to facilitate the resolution of difficulties where they may arise in an agreed and fair manner. The agreement lays out in five stages the process to be followed in progressing a complaint and the specific timescale to be followed at each stage.

#### **Important note**

Revised procedures for processing complaints by parents will be prescribed for all schools under Section 28 of the Education Act 1998. When available, the revised procedures will be sent to each school and will replace the procedures printed here.

#### **Introduction**

Only those complaints about teachers which are written and signed by parents/guardians of pupils may be investigated formally by the BoM, except where those complaints are deemed by the Board to be:

- (i) On matters of professional competence and which are to be referred to the Department of Education
- (ii) Frivolous or vexatious complaints and complaints which do not impinge on the work of a teacher in a school or
- (iii) Complaints in which either party has recourse to law or to another existing procedure.

Unwritten complaints not in the above categories may be processed informally as set out in Stage 1 of this procedure.

#### **Stage 1**

1.1 A parent/guardian who wishes to make a complaint should, unless there are local arrangements to the contrary, approach the class teacher with a view to resolving the complaint

1.2 Where the parent/guardian is unable to resolve the complaint with the class teacher she/he should approach the Principal with a view to resolving it

1.3 If the complaint is still unresolved the parent/guardian should raise the matter with the Chairperson of the BoM with a view to resolving it.

## **Stage 2**

2.1 If the complaint is still unresolved and the parent/guardian wishes to pursue the matter further she/he should lodge the complaint in writing with the Chairperson of the BoM

2.2 The Chairperson should bring the precise nature of the written complaint to the notice of the teacher and seek to resolve the matter between the parties within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint.

## **Stage 3**

3.1 If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Chairperson should, subject to the general authorisation of the Board and except in those cases where the Chairperson deems the particular authorisation of the Board to be required:

- (a) Supply the teacher with a copy of the written complaint and
- (b) Arrange a meeting with the teacher and, where applicable, the Principal Teacher with a view to resolving the complaint. Such a meeting should take place within 10 days of receipt of the written complaint.

## **Stage 4**

4.1 If the complaint is still not resolved the Chairperson should make a formal report to the Board within 10 days of the meeting referred to in 3.1(b)

4.2 If the Board considers that the complaint is not substantiated the teacher and the complainant should be so informed within three days of the Board meeting

4.3 If the Board considers that the complaint is substantiated or that it warrants further investigation it proceeds as follows

- (a) The teacher should be informed that the investigation is proceeding to the next stage
- (b) The teacher should be supplied with a copy of any written evidence in support of the complaint
- (c) The teacher should be requested to supply a written statement to the Board in response to the complaint
- (d) The teacher should be afforded an opportunity to make a presentation of case to the Board. The teacher would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting
- (e) The board may arrange a meeting with the complainant if it considers such to be required. The complainant would be entitled to be accompanied and assisted by a friend at any such meeting and
- (f) The meeting of the BoM referred to in (d) and (e) will take place within 10 days of the meeting referred to in 3.1(b).

## **Stage 5**

5.1 When the Board has completed its investigation, the Chairperson should convey the decision of the Board in writing to the teacher and the complainant within five days of the meeting of the Board

5.2 The decision of the Board shall be final

5.3 This Complaints Procedure shall be reviewed after three years

5.4 Management Bodies or the INTO may withdraw from this agreement having given the other party three months' notice of intention to do so

\*In this agreement 'days' means schools days.