

Contact with parents and students by phone (landline and cellphone)

- 1 If your school has a policy on contact with parents or students by phone then ensure you comply with that policy.
- 2 In general contact with parents and students by phone is best left to those who are trained or have the responsibility to do this eg deans, attendance officer, senior management team.
- 3 If your school requires you to make telephone contact with parents or students note the following:
 - Ask that the school provide you with information and/or training about the approach they wish you to take. For example, see Appendix One.
 - In general, try to ring from school, not from your home or from your personal cellphone. The person you are calling may have caller ID on their landline, and cellphones do have caller ID. If you must ring from home or from your personal cellphone consider withholding your number by dialling 0197 then the number you are calling.
 - Be aware that you can never be absolutely certain who it is you are talking to by phone.
 - Log your call, including such details as date, time, number called and write down what was said during the call. This may be particularly useful if there is a subsequent complaint or dispute involving the call.
 - If you anticipate problems when calling parents or students, consider having someone else in the room who can verify what you said or did not say during the call. Alternatively record your end of the conversation on a tape-recorder or on your laptop.
- 4 Texting and phone contact with parents or students should be restricted to approved school activities. If you are texting a parent or student, bear in mind that the brevity of the message and the absence of context may invite misinterpretation. In general, only text parents with brief reminders or about a suitable time to call. More complex issues require a phone call, letter or meeting.
- 5 Remember that if you txt someone they will then have your cellphone number.
- 6 If you receive a txt message from a parent or student it is not necessary to respond immediately, or at all. If the txt is a complaint you should consult your HOD or a senior manager before responding.
- 7 Remember that you cannot guarantee the identity of any txt senders/recipients. Texts should be treated as public documents (or postcards).
- 8 If you receive unsolicited and offensive texts, inform your line manager immediately and contact your field officer for advice.

Supporting teachers with phone calls to families

Schools may wish to develop a template or outline for staff making courtesy calls to families at the beginning of the school year.

For example,

Hello, this is [teacher name] from [school name]. I am [child's name]'s form teacher. I just wanted to introduce myself and let you know that [child's name] seems to be settling into the school year well. Also, if you have any questions I would be happy to hear these.

I also wanted to check whether you have received the school newsletter, and to let you know about the orientation evening on [date].

The point of this type of call is to give the teacher and parent a chance to establish a working relationship and to have a call that is neutral/positive. Later, should there be problems and a further call is needed, hopefully some positive rapport has already been established.

If in the course of one of these calls the parent becomes agitated, or has questions that are beyond the form teacher's jurisdiction (as in, it is not a reasonable expectation that they should try to answer/deal with this), it is also useful to have guidelines for ending the conversation appropriately. For example,

Thank you for raising these points. I think that it is important for these to be answered – but I will need to take these to the [dean/DP/HOD/principal]. I just want to check back with you that I have correctly understood your questions/concerns... I will take these to [name the person] tomorrow and they will make contact with you after that. Would you prefer that contact to be by phone or email? [Get details]

If further contact is to be by phone, try to establish a time and a number that best suits the parent, and pass that onto the relevant person.

At this point it should be possible to finish the conversation on good terms. Eg,
Thanks again for raising those points and for taking the time to talk with me. Hopefully I will see you at the [orientation evening]...

It is IMPERATIVE that the relevant staff member then makes the follow-up contact as agreed with the parent. It is the form teachers' job to check back with the staff member (not the parent!) to ensure that happens within the next day or two.

Good practice

It is also good practice for the dean or mentor teacher to sit with a new teacher to the school and model an appropriate conversation or two while they listen.

After that, the dean/mentor should remain with the new staff member while they make some calls, to listen and offer feedback and/or answer questions afterwards – and to be supportive and ensure that the staff member feels ok about continuing with this task.

The purpose of establishing these types of phoning routines is to improve relationships between home and school, so that the teacher's job becomes easier. If the phone calls do not yield this overall result, they should not take place.