



Email is the communication medium for many.

It's quick and easy, current and persistent.

Busy people receive 50 to 100 emails a day. During the month of September 2016 the employees of the Trust received over 27,000 emails, out of an active 170 email accounts, 5 individuals received 25% of those emails.

So if you want to reach individuals you have to be clear, direct and to the point.

If the meaning is not clear, you can waste days emailing back and forth trying to sort things out.

Working in a school also means that it's likely that all communications will have an element of sensitivity, whether its talking about a pupil's performance, worries in relation to a pupil, or other data and information.

Here are some guidelines to make your email communication more effective.

- **Subject line.**
Always include a meaningful subject line.
Emails without subject lines often get ignored or deleted.
"Hi" is not a subject; neither is "KS2 Team".
"Agenda for KS2 Team Thursday Meeting" is a subject.
A missing or inappropriate subject may get trapped by spam filters.
- **Use a new email to start a new subject.**
Don't find, and reply to, an old email with an old subject line when you want to open a new thread of discourse – it's very confusing, and makes you look sloppy.
Don't use a thread that you are currently in dialogue with to begin a conversation about another, totally unrelated subject – it's best to start with a new email.
Also by not starting a new email then there could be content within the email trail that could be sensitive, that may copied in to someone else accidentally – who has no reason to view such information.
- **How many topics per email?**
Generally, it's best to have one topic per email, with a subject line that describes the topic.
That way people can read the message, act on it, and file it appropriately, and find it later.
For example, if you have an email and are talking about two pupils, think about how could you safely store that email on a pupil file, knowing that there is information about another pupil – you couldn't safely or easily.
- **Action.**
An email that is addressed to alias or group address results in uncertainty as to whether someone falls into an "action" recipient or an "information" recipient.
Always identify anyone who needs to take action, and what action they should take:
 - Please review and comment;
 - Request approval for a large purchase;
 - Answer this question;
 - Please grade the attachment.
- **Whose responsibility?**
If you send an "action" message to two people, which one will respond to it?
The answer will probably be - Neither!
Specify one person, who will own the responsibility.



- **Large attachments.**

Don't send huge attachments. They clog up the system.
Try to keep attachments under 10 megabytes.
If you need to send multiple documents, then it may be more appropriate to zip those documents.
Also be aware that there is a greater likelihood of sensitive information being held on large documents (or numerous documents), so play it safe in this instance and password protect them – if you are unsure.
- **Attachment file names.**

Give files meaningful and identifiable names, so the recipient can find them later
For example, if you send a copy of a risk assessment, don't call it "risk assessment.pdf" or "doc1.pdf".
Instead use something like "Outward_bounds_Oct2016_Risk Assessment.pdf".
- **Principle of Robustness.**

"Be conservative in what you send; be liberal in what you accept."
- **Content**

Be sensitive to data protection.
When discussing someone else and it is of a sensitive nature, a child or a member of staff, do not state their full name, i.e. Joe Bloggs.
Instead use their initials, i.e. JB.
If you are certain that the receiver will know who you are on about do not refer to the name or initials at all, instead state "the employee" or "the child", or something to that effect.
This method will mitigate the impact if a breach of data occurs, since it will be more difficult to link the content to a specific person.

However, be sensible also, an email such as "Joe Bloggs mom called and wants you to phone back" is acceptable – consider the content.

If you are sending attachments or documents that could be, or are sensitive, and you are concerned that there may be a risk that such data could be released, either maliciously or without intent, then the safest course of action would be to password protect or encrypt such documents.

If there is a significant amount of data being shared, data relating to more than 4 members of staff or children, that is potentially sensitive, then it's recommending that the data is password protected – with the password issued in a separate email or by telephone.
- **"Don't make me think"**

Include all the information even if it should be obvious or straightforward for the receiver to figure it out:

 - The more work or emails the receiver has to manage, the greater the likelihood of a mistake;
 - The work invested by the sender is saved many times over by the receivers.
- **Acknowledge**

If someone sends you a legitimate request, look to answer it right away, even if you don't plan to take action immediately.
Then they know you received it, and they won't keep trying to get your attention.
But as a sender, do not be offended if someone does not reply immediately, especially someone who is busy or you know they receive a high volume of emails.



- **Timeliness.**
Give your recipients time to receive, read, digest, and act.
Schedule meetings at least 3 days in advance – provide agendas and information in advance.
- **Face to face or telephone.**
Emails are great; both parties don't have to be present to communicate.
Information bandwidth is limited, however, the time lag between messages can be long.
If a matter is urgent, and there is a lot to discuss, it's probably better to do it in person or by phone – if necessary follow up the conversation with an email confirming actions being taken.

Remember not all communication is by email, however, written words can be a help and a hindrance. So follow these final tips:

- Basics:
 - You may never know who will read the content. E-mail is not private;
 - Do not use company time to send a personal e-mail.
- Content:
 - Use a good descriptive subject title;
 - Be clear in your writing;
 - Treat parent and student e-mails as a phone call;
 - Keep the message simple and clear;
 - Keep harassment and discrimination policies in mind;
 - Humour and sarcasm can backfire;
 - Don't use e-mail to let off steam or flame a conversation;
 - Don't e-mail or respond when angry or upset.
- Distribution:
 - Is this message appropriate to the group?
 - Does this message apply to the members of this group?
 - Copy with care;
 - Reply to all with care;
 - When forwarding be careful with attachments;
 - Be cautious sending attachments;
 - Edit your e-mail before you hit send.
- Finally:
 - Do not forward Trust or School policies, procedures, data or information to an outside body, person or organisation, without discussing it with the CEO, FBM or Headteacher first;
 - Always delete spam right away;
 - "Be conservative in what you send; be liberal in what you accept."

This protocol is not a set of rules that must be followed.

The protocol has been written with the intention of being a helpful guide and support measure in order to make the most of emails.

There are numerous rules, policies and procedures that are in place that you could easily fall foul of, such as those that surround Data Protection or appropriate use of emails, therefore following the above guidelines will support you moving forward.