

Communicating with Parents via Email

Your best practice guide for effective communication between schools and parents



Benefits of communicating with parents via email

While there are many ways to foster meaningful parental engagement, email is one of the most powerful and practical tools at your disposal.

Offering you a cost-effective way to directly contact specific groups of parents, a well-thought out email strategy should be at the heart of any parental engagement plan.

Some of the top reasons why email can be so effective are:

- It's personalised
- It's instantaneous
- It's reliable
- It's private
- It's two-way

While email can be a hugely effective channel, there are many things to consider when it comes to delivering a successful email strategy...



Data protection and maintenance

Creating and maintaining an accurate database of email addresses takes time and resource, but it's essential for an impactful and secure strategy.

Conduct an audit of all your existing parent email addresses, keep on top of automatic replies and email bounces (you'll be notified when you are unable to send to an outdated address), and reach out to any parents who you've identified as having invalid emails.

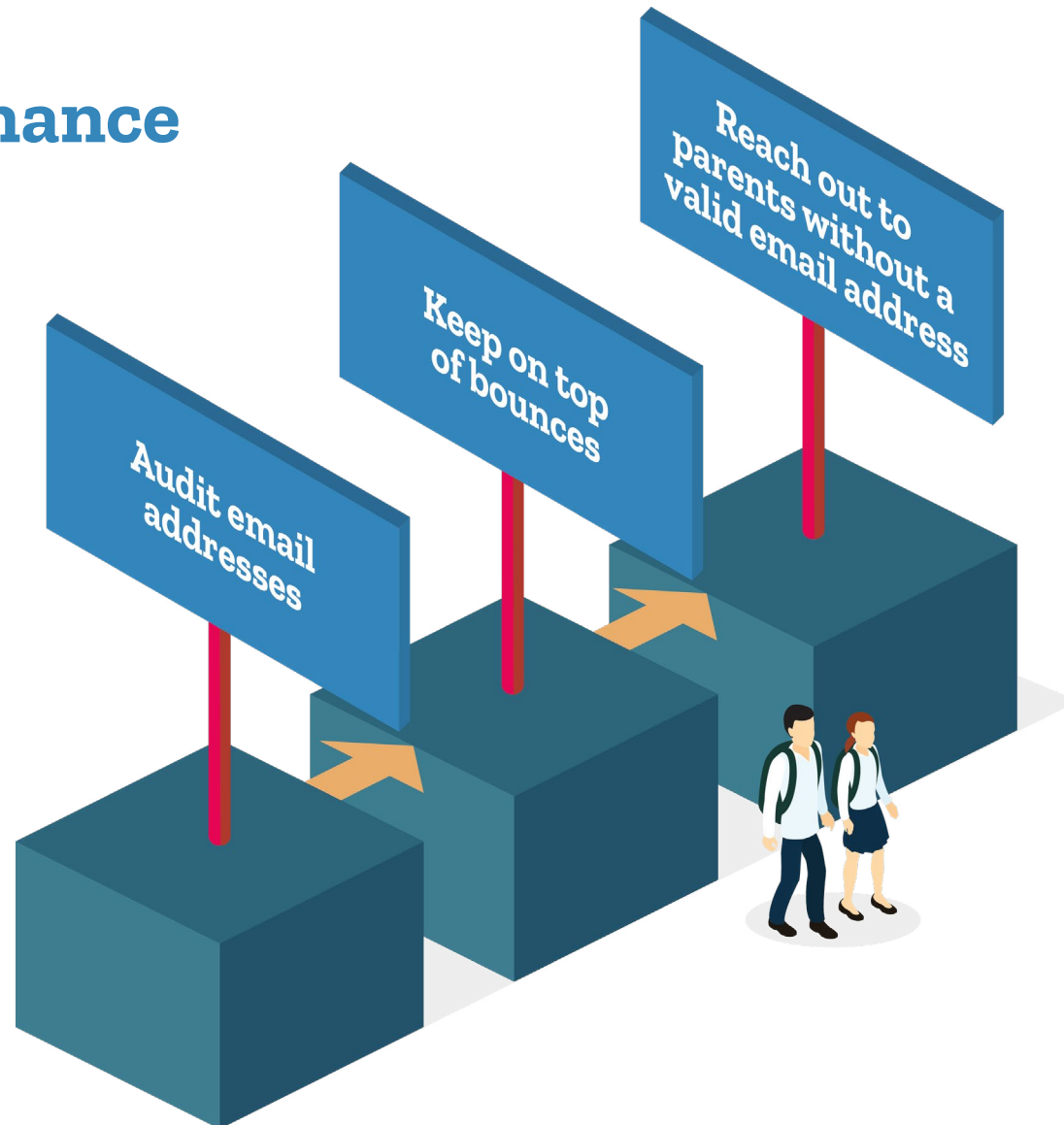
When reaching out to parents without a valid address, try giving them a call and let them know that you need a correct email address for them. Email is only a valid channel if you have reliable email details for parents.

Tip:

Set up a mailbox rule to forward bounces* into a folder. You can then go through these when you have time and update your database.

This will ensure responses and important messages don't get lost amongst the noise.

**bounces are automatic emails stating that an email address is invalid.*



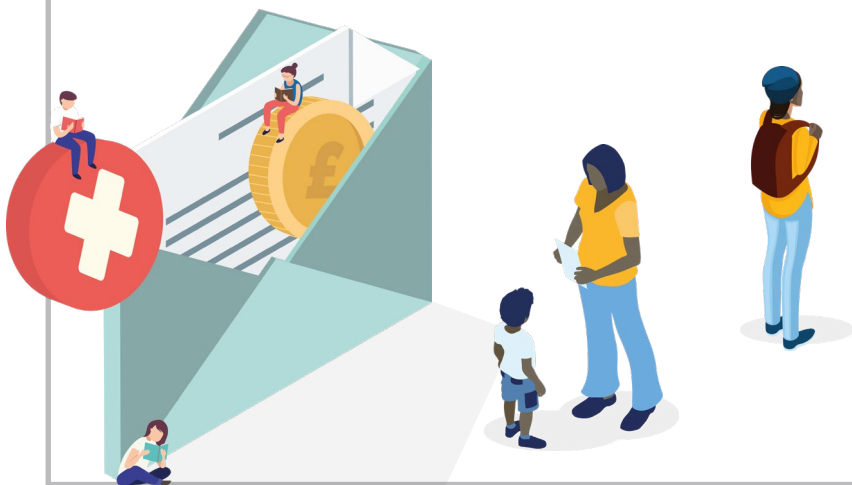
Key sections of an email

To your recipients, you're already a trusted sender. But there are still some key things you can do to improve your open rates and drive engagement.

Section 1: the 'from' name and address

Consider the email address and name you are sending your emails from; you may wish choose to use your school name, for example. However, where relevant, there can be value in sending emails from an individual member of staff or teacher.

You could even advise parents to mark the school's email address as a favourite to help keep your emails out of their junk folder.



Section 2: the subject line

The subject line is your chance to catch the reader's attention and tell them what your email is about. Ultimately, it can determine whether or not parents will open the email.

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

So, how do you create an engaging subject line?

- **Make it relevant:** The purpose of the subject line is to catch your reader's attention but also set the tone for your message.
- **Make it personal:** Include personalisation. Include the recipient's name to make a huge difference to engagement.
- **Make it concise:** Some inboxes will cut off the last few words of a longer subject line, so keep it short and concise.



Section 3: preview text

The preview text is almost as important as the subject line. Preview text is the snippet of text that appears underneath the subject lines in inboxes.

If you don't pre-set your own preview text, most email providers will pull through the first line of your email, so make sure to set it yourself so you can control what parents see.

Including preview text has also been seen to improve open rates. Use it to add additional context and entice your parents to open your emails.

It's available, so why not utilise it? It may improve your engagement rates.

Preview text ➡ **Summarises content** ➡ **Improves open rates**

Section 4: the content

While your subject line is key to getting your email opened, the content in your email will determine if your message is read, understood, and actioned.

Some things to consider are...

Tone of voice

It's best to be formal but not authoritative.

Try communicating with parents in a way that's warm, friendly and, most importantly, human.

An authoritative tone can be divisive and may alienate parents. So, it's best to avoid it for email and other communication channels.

You could even develop your tone of voice as part of your communication strategy to ensure that it's consistent across channels.

Length

The ideal length of an email really depends on the type of email and content. Make it as long as it needs to be without rambling.

If you have a lot to say, link off to a website or document with further information rather than including it all in the email.

But try not to make it too short either. A very short email is at risk of triggering spam filters.

Formatting

Formatting is very important. Anything that you can do to maximise readability will improve how people engage with it.

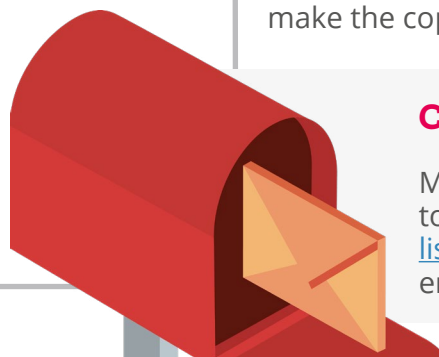
Consider highlighting keywords by making them bold or underlined. Use bullet points and keep paragraphs short to make the copy easier to digest.

Avoid using:

- Authoritative tone
- Complex language
- Industry jargon
- Acronyms

Consider using Mail Merge

Mail merge is a feature within Word which allows you to [send personalised emails to mass large mailing lists](#). Personalised emails often get significantly more engagement, so utilising mail merge will be worth it.



Section 5: images

It's a good idea to use images, but only where appropriate, as this can affect the deliverability of an email if the image to text ratio is too high.

Remember, some email providers block images automatically. With this in mind, be sure to include important information in the copy of your email, not just the images.

In short, while images can improve engagement and are a nice addition from a design perspective, use them to supplement your email copy, not replace it.

Remember: If you're planning on including images of school staff, students or parents, you need to gather consent first.



Section 6: call to action

Include a call to action in your email – what do you want the parents to do? Reply? Fill out a form? Make a payment?

A call to action (CTA) is an essential addition to any email.

It tells the reader what you want them to do next. Whatever that is, be sure to make it clear.

Regardless of what the call to action is, a clear and eye-catching CTA usually works best. It should only take your reader a second or two to identify what you want them to do next.

And make it stand out visually. It should also be easy to click. A button or a text link are two of the most popular choices.

For example, your CTAs could be something like...

Make a payment

Book a club

Donate now

Read the policy



Email send dates and times

When is the best time to send your email?

The day and time that you send emails can be very important.

Determining the best day and time is often trial and error. It's good to test AM & PM sends and see which works best for your audience.

For example, you may choose to always send your important updates at the beginning of the week and then send your engagement emails, such as newsletters, at the end of the week.

But where possible, try to avoid sending multiple emails on the same day.

Also, try to limit the number of emails you're sending to parents per week. If you're overwhelming them with emails, they may become frustrated and stop engaging.

And remember to analyse the results of your tests, tweaking your send dates and times accordingly.

Tip - A/B testing:

An A/B test is a split test to statistically prove which email campaign brings you the most success.

You could try A/B testing by sending 50% in the morning and 50% in the afternoon to find out which works best. Keep the content and subject line the same, only changing the time of each send to discover your optimal sending times.



Planning, scheduling, and templates

Try and plan to communicate with parents early and often. Think about sending updates well in advance to give parents ample notice.

Consistent communications with a variety of different messages will also help to build trust and parental engagement. Being able to share good news stories is just as valuable as sending important updates.

And sending regular communications needn't be a chore. When you're planning your email communications, try to plan far in advance. You can then map your communications against your school calendar for the year.

To save time, you can create email templates for communications and save them as templates. This will make sending regular communications a lot simpler.

Tools like [Shcoolcomms](https://www.schoolcomms.com) are perfectly placed to assist you with your email strategy. With a range of functionality including scheduling and templates. Schoolcomms is built to maximise efficiency with parental engagement at its core.



Responding to emails and data protection

It's important to have a plan in place for replying to any emails.

It may be worth working towards developing a process for managing replies. Checking your inboxes regularly, particularly right after a send, and getting the right people involved to respond accurately is a good start.

It's good to acknowledge all feedback and responses, even the negative ones. Parents will feel their opinion is valued; if they begin to feel their feedback isn't valued, they will be less likely to give any in future.

Data protection considerations

There are a number of data protection considerations when mass sending emails. Where possible, utilise the blind CC (Bcc) option, or [use mail merge](#), to protect recipient anonymity.

Email addresses are considered personal information and sharing them without permission is considered a breach of GDPR.

Create mailing lists to organise your sends and make sure you email the right contacts. You may have two mailing lists, for example:

1. An important updates/service list – parents have to receive these and can't unsubscribe.
2. A marketing/engagement list – this is the list that you send non-essential comms to. You may include an unsubscribe link in these emails.

If you have any specific questions, the Department for Education has published a [data protection toolkit](#) for schools that includes information on emailing parents.



If you need support communicating with
parents, Schoolcomms can help, visit:
parentpay.com/schoolcomms/request-more-information

