

Schoolcomms

**BEST PRACTICE GUIDE:
Communicating with Parents
via Email**



BEST PRACTICE GUIDE:

Using Email for Effective Communication with Parents in Schools

There are a huge number of benefits for communicating with parents via email.

According to [12 Tips for Teachers Communicating with Parents via Email](#) these include:

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





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

Data Collection & Maintenance

Audit email addresses



Keep on top of bounces



Reach out to parents without a valid email address

Give 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 your 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 in amongst the bounces/automatic replies.

***bounces are automatic emails stating 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 email address

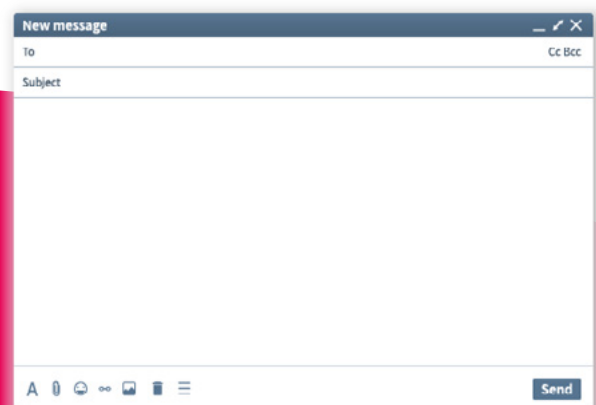
Consider the email address and name you are sending the emails from. You may choose to use your school name. However, where relevant, there's value in sending emails from an individual member of staff or teacher.

You should advise parents to mark the school's email address as a favourite to help keep your emails out of the 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 the parents 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 simple**
Ensure it's to the point. Don't worry about making it quirky, this isn't required for emailing parents
- ✓ **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. This can make a huge difference in engagement
- ✓ **Make it concise**
Some inboxes will cut off the last few words of a longer subject line. So keep it short

Section 3: Preview text

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

Including preview text has been seen to improve open rates.

Use it to add additional context and prompt your audience to open the email.

**Preview text → summarises content
→ improves open rates**

If you don't add preview text, many email providers will pull through the first line of text in your email.

We recommend setting the preview text before send yourself.

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

Things to consider:

Tone of voice

You should 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 all other communication channels.

You should develop your tone of voice as part of your communication strategy and ensure that it's consistent across channels.

AVOID:

- **Authoritative tone**
- **Complex language**
- **Industry jargon**
- **Acronyms**



Length

What is the ideal length?

It really is dependent on the email type 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.

Try not to make it too short. A very short email can trigger spam filters.

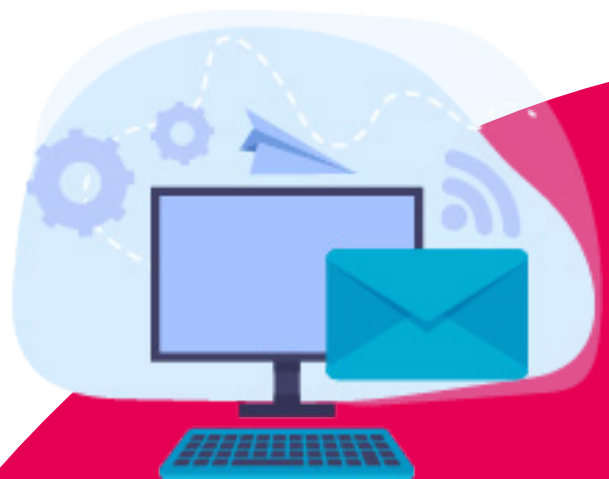
Formatting

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 it easier to digest.



Consider using Mail Merge.

Personalised emails get significantly more engagement than non-personalised.

Section 5: Images

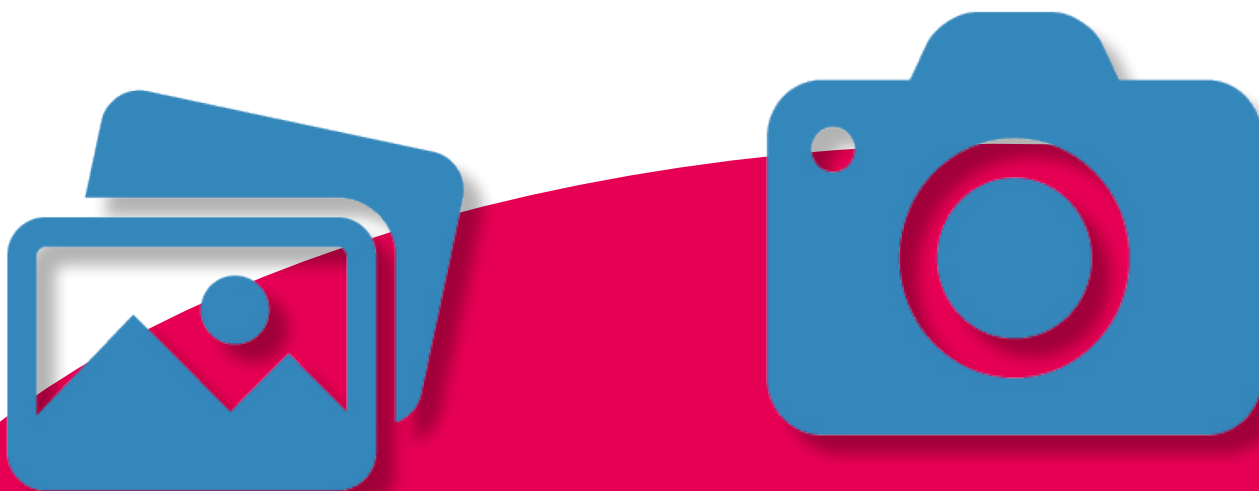
Images should be used where appropriate.

They can affect the deliverability of the email if the image to text ratio is 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 the images.

In short, while images can improve engagement and are a nice addition from a design perspective, they should be used to supplement your email copy, not replace.

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

Your email should include a call to action – what do you want the parents to do? Reply? Fill out a form? Make a payment?

A call to action is an essential addition to any email.

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

Regardless of what the call to action is, do whatever you can to make it clear and eye-catching to readers. It should only take them a second or two to identify what you want them to do next.

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.

Example call to actions (CTAs)

Pay for Club

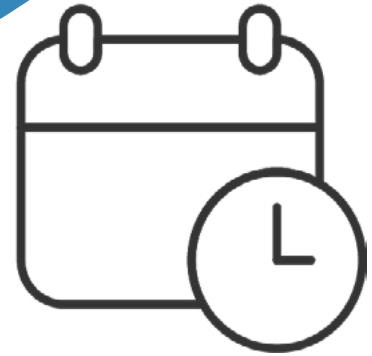
Buy Tickets

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 is 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.

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.

Remember to analyse the results, tweaking your send dates and times accordingly.

TIP:
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

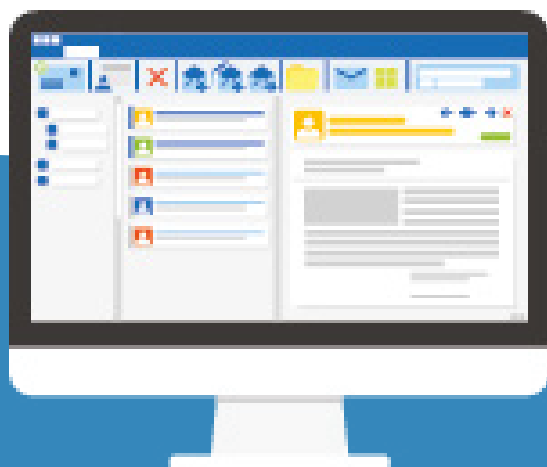
You should plan to communicate with parents early and often.

Send updates well in advance, you can always send a follow-up or reminder again closer to the time. Parents will appreciate being brought into the loop early and don't have to worry about receiving information at the last minute.

Consistent communications will help to build trust and parent engagement. Avoid only communicating bad news and updates. Sending positive information, is just as valuable.

Sending regular communications needn't be a chore. When you're planning your email communications, you should do so far in advance. You can then map them 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.



Responding to Emails

It's important to have a plan in place for this

Get a system in place for responding to parents' emails and feedback. It is important to acknowledge and respond to parents' emails.

You should try to acknowledge all feedback and responses – even the negative ones. It is important to tell parents that their opinion is valued. If they don't feel their feedback is valued, then they won't give any.

Data Protection Considerations

There are a number of data protection considerations when mass sending emails. Where possible, BCC recipients, utilise Mail Merge and avoid CCing parents to protect recipient anonymity.

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

Create mailing lists. You may have two mailing lists:

- 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.

Find out more