School email protocols

Electronic mail (email) is a valuable communication tool that is widely used across our society. Staff members are provided with organisational e-mail accounts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication both within the organisation and with the broader community.

Email is a useful way to communicate and share ideas. With the advent of smart technology, it has become increasingly accessible; a rise in the number of emails sent between staff has an impact on workload as well as how we communicate and develop relationships.

At its best, email is a time-saver and a useful tool for communication. At its worst, email becomes a huge distraction and burden and stops people from communicating effectively and building relationships and connections. Research suggests that it takes an average of 64 seconds to get back to work after starting to read an email.

For this reason, schools could consider adopting protocols for collective responsibility.

Schools can, if they wish, tailor or adopt the simple example below when reviewing their own policy and practice. At the end of this document there are a number of links provided to other examples of email protocols which have been developed by schools in Australia which they have published online.

Example: School email protocol for staff

Background from Principal

It became apparent to us that a significant number of emails were sent unnecessarily to all staff, and emails were being used for matters that could be resolved more easily in other ways.

Email can be a useful form of communication, but high volumes can cause new pressures for staff. It is important that staff are able to enjoy life outside of directed time, and so these guidelines aim to alleviate the pressure of perceived expectations and contribute positively to work-life balance.

As a guideline, staff are not expected to check email after 6pm, or over the weekend. For those who want to prepare for the week ahead, a Sunday evening check should be enough. It is a good idea to draw a line under your working day, to maintain a distinction between work life and school life.

These protocols aim to reduce the volume of emails sent and received within the school day, especially those sent to 'All staff'. Please note – all emails must have a descriptive heading to make it clear what the email is about. These protocols will be kept under regular review.

Outcome

As a result of the protocol the volume of emails we send has reduced and the use of centralised bulletins has gathered important general communications into one place.

Figure One: Example of email protocol

Examples of email content	Email or No Email	Action
Lost Property	No email	Send student to check in the lost property area in the student office
Issues relating to teaching and learning (deadlines, approaching, PL meetings etc.)	One email a week	Weekly teaching and learning bulletin emailed out centrally
Issues about students not being sat together	No email	Issued on weekly bulletin from briefing
Email requests for drivers needed for trips	Email	To all staff
Students out on trips	Email	To teachers of particular students
Moderation/exam details	Email	To teachers only
Sports Club and fixtures	Email	To teachers of particular students
Special Education "top tips"	Email	Email to teachers and education assistants periodically
Injured student, leaving lessons early	Email	Weekly bulletin on a Monday which includes; briefing notes, sports fixtures/clubs, students injured, students on report and events taking place in week. Emailed to all staff
Students and mentors	Email	Email to teachers

Email etiquette

There are many examples of email protocols which Australian schools have developed available online to view. Also worth considering for inclusion in an email protocol, is advice on general email etiquette such as the advice which is provided publicly online as part of Greensborough College's email protocol – see the box below.

General Email Etiquette

General principles that should be adhered to when composing an email include;

- Emails should be polite and respectful Start emails with a greeting which include the recipient's name. Refrain from using 'one liners' such as ok, yes or thanks. At the beginning of the email, you can use 'No reply necessary'
- When writing an email, it is important to consider your audience

- Written responses should be properly formatted
- Keep emails short. (to the point – use of dot points can help) Due to how different email providers and web browsers display text, sentences and paragraphs should be kept short to avoid words trailing off the screen, or the recipient having to scroll down.
- The subject of the email should be short and relate directly to the content. For time critical emails – start the subject with URGENT
- Let people know their email has been received Emails can automatically be classified as spam and get re-directed to your spam or trash folder.
- When emailing a group for eg. Parents, blind copy (bcc) should be utilised, so receivers do not know each other's email addresses
- Avoid writing in capitals in email, writing in caps can be perceived to be shouting, especially if it is bold and underlined as well.
- Irony and sarcasm should be avoided Emails do not carry vocal intonations facial expressions and hand gestures which help show one is being sarcastic, and often this meaning is lost in only written format.
- As a general guideline, email should be used only as a way to deliver information. It should not be used as a forum to discuss ideas or concerns.

Click on Email Protocol Policy - Greensborough College for further details

Tips for consideration:

Schools could consider defining what is the response expectation for staff, students and school community outside of set hours.

Schools could consider providing guidance to staff on what is appropriate information to be communicated in person versus communication via email.

Schools could consider including as part of their guidance to staff what the implications of using cc or bcc when sending an email for example, if a school leader is cc'd into the respective email schools could explicitly state whether the school leader now is required to take action or just note.

Links to other examples of email protocols developed by schools that are available publicly online

Killara Primary School, Victoria

Our Lady of the Angels' Primary School, Queensland

Radford College Secondary School, Australian Capital Territory