

4.04 Communications Plan

a) The following general principles will be followed by the School in all communications in an emergency:

- Information will be verified, accurate and reliable, not elaborated, enhanced, inferred, suggested, assumed, based on hearsay or second hand.
- Information will be true. False information can be misleading, cause distress and be subject of accusations/litigation at a later date.
- Information will be consistent with what has been previously released by the school and the LA.

b) Means of Communication

- The school will consider which methods of communication are appropriate for the particular emergency situation. Telephone is likely to be the principal means of communication in an emergency, but the following is a list of other possible means of communication:
 - Local Radio – see section g below
 - Television – contact via the BFC Communications Team
 - Newspapers – contact via the BFC Communications Team
 - E-Mail
 - Fax
 - Telephone
 - Mobile Phone
 - Letter By Post
 - Letter By Pupil
 - Handouts
 - Posters
 - Notice Boards
 - Leaflets Door To Door
 - Text Messages
 - Ansaphone/Voicemail
 - Call Centre/Help Line
 - Conference Call
 - Video Conference
 - Restricted Meetings
 - Open Meetings
 - School Web Site
 - Council's Web Site - contact via the BFC Communications Team

c) Contact the LA if any additional staffing/resources are required to help with communications.

d) Communicating with the LA

- The LA will be contacted in the event of an emergency incident in accordance with the Initial Response procedures above.

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS		
DURING OFFICE HOURS Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm	TIME SQUARE	01344 354183
OUTSIDE OFFICE HOURS	FORESTCARE	01344 786500

- Bracknell Forest LA maintains a out of hours Emergency Duty Officer (EDO) rota, so that there is always a senior Education manager available to support schools in an emergency situation.
- The EDO will assist the school in evaluating the information gathered, assessing the response level and in implementing the initial response.
- Most of the emergency situations that occur are minor in nature and are dealt with by schools with little or no support from the EDO. However in more serious situations the EDO will also provide the liaison between the school and the other departments of the LA, e.g. the LA Communications Team, relieving the school from the task of communicating and organising, freeing up the school to concentrate on its internal situation.
- Where the situation demands, the Director of Children Young People & Learning will form an LA Emergency Management Team comprising the EDO and other senior managers within the department, to support the School in dealing with the emergency.
- Where Schools require emergency support in the form of additional staffing resources the LA can mobilise its staff from their other departmental duties to work in support of the school either on site or from the Council's offices. All LA staff are subject of CRB checks.
- The LA can also assist the school to locate additional teaching staff to be made available from supply contacts or from other schools where this is required.
- Where the emergency involves the wider community e.g. a major fire, or incident involving evacuation of large areas, the LA has its own Emergency Plan. If this happens the LA will provide the link between the Council's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and the school, relaying the requirements of the Borough's emergency response to the school and keeping the EOC apprised of the school's situation and progress.
- It is essential that there will be good liaison between the school and the LA if the above arrangements are to work properly.

e) Communicating with Parents/Carers

- In an emergency situation the school will need to communicate effectively and efficiently with parents/carers in order to allay fears and minimise panic or disruption.

- The school will understand and appreciate the feelings of parents/carers for the safety and well being of their children in an emergency situation.
- The school will remain person-focused rather than purely process focused.
- The school will be sensitive, honest and caring.
- Communication with parents/carers will be drafted and delivered in an informative and re-assuring manner
- The school will not seek to down-play serious issues – give them the facts.
- The school will treat parents/carers of pupils involved in an incident as individuals, not members of a group.
- Parents/carers will hear important facts from the school directly, and before they are released through the media.
- Parents/carers needs for communication should be managed so as to ensure they do not distract emergency services and school staff from doing their jobs.
- The media can move very fast so the school will react quickly to events as they unfold.
 - A telephone cascade system may be an appropriate way of circulating urgent information as it prevents one person having to make many phone calls. Each family who is called can phone one or two others. Telephone cascades are only as reliable as the weakest link so the cascade will include feedback to the school from each chain of the cascade so that the school will know that the message has got through. Cascades will not be used to communicate sensitive information e.g. concerning casualties as this information will come direct to parents/carers from the school.
 - Where appropriate, letters will be sent to parents/carers as soon as possible after the outset of the incident to inform them of what has happened and to reduce the number of subsequent incoming enquiries:
 - Explaining what has happened
 - Reassure them that the school and LA have emergency planning procedures in place to deal with incidents
 - Indicating how long it could last
 - Explaining where/how they can obtain further information
- The school will pre-draft letter templates that could be immediately available to be used in the event of having to activate the School Evacuation, Migration or Closure Plans.
- Some elements of the press and media may be unscrupulous and unethical in their methods, including trespassing and posing as parents/carers or others to

obtain information. Identities will be verified before any authorised information is given out by the school.

- The school will provide a means for parents/carers and members of the public to contact them outside normal hours by including reference to the LA's Forestcare emergency call centre number (see above) on their answerphone, by posting this on the external school notice boards and on the schools website.
- Parent contact details are maintained and kept up to date by *school secretaries* and copies are kept in *file in main office*.
- Further Guidance: Department for Education article [Communicating with parents: Steps for communicating with parents in an emergency](#)

f) Communication From Parents/Carers

- The school will also consider how parents/carers will communicate with the school:
 - Telephones manned by people are preferable to recorded messages on ansaphones or voicemail, as this will just make anxious parents/carers go elsewhere for information.
 - Additional staff may be required to staff telephones.
 - Separate telephone lines/mobile numbers may be required to handle incoming calls so as to free up other lines for the school to make outgoing calls to manage the emergency.
 - Additional telephone lines/mobile numbers may be required at short notice.
 - Where mobile phones are used, arrangements will be made for recharging batteries.
 - In a serious situation a separate help line could be established by the LA Customer Services to deal with incoming calls. This would also take some of the pressure off the school, but the school will keep the help line updated with accurate information.

g) Communicating with the Media

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ALL PRESS AND MEDIA ENQUIRIES WILL BE REFERRED TO THE LA COMMUNICATIONS TEAM, WHO WILL DEAL WITH THE PRESS AND MEDIA ON BEHALF OF THE SCHOOL. |
|--|

- The school will liaise closely with the LA Communications Team, who will assist the school to deal with the media in the event of an incident, including drafting press releases and statements, organising press conferences and dealing public requests for information.
- The school will prepare general prospectus-type information about the school in advance of any emergency. Having this information ready to give to the media

could take the pressure off the school when they are in an emergency situation. This includes the following information:

- Name of School:
 - Address:
 - Telephone number:
 - Fax number:
 - Headteacher
 - Chair of Governors
 - Site and brief history of the school
 - Has the school had to deal with any crises (e.g. arson, health matters) in the past that may be of interest to reporters seeking background information about the school? Please give details and dates.
 - Number of pupils on roll:
 - Age range of pupils:
 - Total number of staff:
 - Number of teachers:
 - Date of most recent Ofsted inspection:
-
- The school will aim to create and maintain a positive relationship with the media, because in some emergency situations the media can help the school by giving out important information messages.
 - Local radio stations already provide assistance in communicating details of school closures, but they, and the other media (television, newspapers etc) may also have a role to play in ongoing communication in an incident, e.g. in helping to get messages across to parents/carers, neighbours and other stakeholders.
 - The school will therefore consider taking a pro-active approach, scheduling press conferences etc as required. This may also reduce the ad hoc demands from the press and media for information.
 - The school will not release photographs to the press without first obtaining written permission of parents/carers, pupils and adults who may appear in the photos. All photography will be in accordance with the schools own policy and LA Guidelines.
 - The school will appoint a dedicated Media Spokesperson. This will be *Lee Parsons - Headteacher*
 - The Spokesperson's role will include:
 - Speaking for the school to give information and reassurance.
 - Liaising with the LA Communications Team on behalf of the school
 - Approving press releases and statements on behalf of the school
 - Giving short media briefings/interviews organised by the LA Communications Team
 - Dealing with internal communication issues within the school.
 - Other staff will not deal with communications/media as they may not be in possession of all of the current facts or may have information that has changed. This could lead to unnecessary concern or anxiety amongst staff, parents/carers and the public.

- The school Spokesperson will be given coaching/briefing by the LA Communications Team on how to communicate with the media, but the following points will be considered:
 - Follow the General Principles laid down at the beginning of this section
 - Select an appropriate location to speak to the media with adequate lighting, quite with a suitable background.
 - Ensure that furniture is appropriate, e.g. tables and chairs, lectern etc. If the media are standing then stand, if they are sitting then sit but try to keep any cameras etc from looking down on you.
 - The updated Initial Contact – Information Gathering section may be an appropriate format for providing information about the incident
 - If information is lacking, explain that more details will be made available as soon as possible.
 - Prepare your one or two key messages – your ‘must points’.
 - Try to have a smart appearance
 - Set a calm tone from the beginning.
 - Speak calmly and slowly
 - Keep eye contact.
 - Always start with expression of condolences or concerns for any victims and their families.
 - Do not be afraid to show emotion but try not to break down
 - Do not speculate about the cause of any incident
 - Do not place blame for the incident.
 - “That question will have to be referred to the Police/Fire Service/Health & Safety Executive”.
 - The spokesperson will not confirm numbers of any injured/dead – this will be a matter for the emergency services.
 - State that appropriate follow-up services are being provided for children & young people, staff and parents/carers by internal and external resources (if true).
 - Show that you are in control of the situation and doing everything you possibly can to minimise the consequences (if true).
 - Counter or deny dangerous rumours if you know they are untrue.
 - Use the three P’s if this is appropriate: Pity, Praise and Promise, e.g. “this has been a terrible incident which has had a profound affect on

everyone in the school...our thoughts are with”

“...there has been a tremendous response from staff in the school who are working with ... to ..., and I would like to thank the emergency services...”

“...the school will be co-operating fully with ... to find out what happened, and to ensure that this will not happen again...”

- Remember, be sure of your facts before releasing any details – once a ‘fact’ is in the public domain, there is no going back.
- The school will keep a record of what the Spokesperson says publicly, so that this is available in the event of a subsequent inquiry.
- Local radio stations may have a role to play e.g. publicising details of school closures, and/or late openings. Once a decision is taken to close, you should contact the 3 local radio stations; see School Closure Procedures (section 4.03a); with information for broadcasters about school closure or partial closure on each day of closure, there is no need to call them to announce re-opening on subsequent days.
- You should provide them with the following information:
 - Relevant password for each radio station (Up to date contact details and passwords can be obtained from the LA Emergency Duty Officer who can be contacted via Forestcare or Caroline Moore at caroline.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.)
 - The name of your school
 - The area in which your school is based
 - The degree of closure – which years are affected etc
 - Give an indication as to how long the school will be closed
 - If it is open but there are significant restrictions, please give details e.g. no meals, no heating, warm clothing required etc
- Further Information: Department for Education article on [Media Handling](#).

h) Communication with Pupils

- The school will ensure pupils are kept up to date with the emergency as it unfolds
- Communication with pupils will be in an appropriate manner so as not to cause distress or upset
- Face to face verbal communication will be used by staff who are known and trusted by the children (make reference here to who will do this and how it will be achieved, this is best done by their regular teachers)

i) Communicating With Staff and Governors

- Staff and Governors will be kept up to date with the emergency as it unfolds
- Line management in the school is the most appropriate method of communication in most instances.
- All communication with school governors will be channelled through the Chair who will approve all information before it is sent out.

- A telephone cascade system will be used to circulating urgent information as it prevents one person having to make many phone calls. Each member of staff who is called can phone one or two others. Telephone cascades are only as reliable as the weakest link so the cascade will include feedback to the school from each chain of the cascade so that the school will know that the message has got through. This could be a way of assembling a group of responders much more quickly. (make reference here to any cascade system in use, who will keep it updated, how and when it will be tested and include the cascade information as a supplementary APPENDIX. if a cascade system is not in place then give details of who will be responsible for keeping staff in the picture, and how this will be achieved)
- Staff will be instructed not make statements or give information to the press or media unless authorised to do so by the Headteacher. This is because they may not be in possession of all of the current facts or may have information that has changed. This could lead to unnecessary concern or even panic amongst staff, parents/carers and the public.
- Individual staff at school or outside school may be approached by the press or media and put under direct pressure to answer questions. However all staff will be made aware not to answer questions and not let themselves be tricked or pressurised into giving out information.
- Staff and Governor contact details are maintained and kept up to date by *Clerk to Governors*.

j) Translation and Interpretation

- Where an emergency situation requires support for translation or interpretation e.g. an emergency with an offsite visit in another country or involving a deaf person, the school will make use of the following support services which are available via the Council:
 - The Translation and Interpretation Guide, can be obtained from the LA Emergency Duty Officer who can be contacted via Forestcare or Caroline Moore at caroline.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.
 - The National Interpreting Service, which provides a 24 hour service for an interpreter over the telephone to facilitate a 3 way conversation in any language can be obtained from the LA Emergency Duty Officer who can be contacted via Forestcare or Caroline Moore at caroline.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

k) Contact Details

- Parents/Carers: A list of contact details for parents/carers should be maintained by the school. It is suggested that this list should include:
 - Child's Name, Class, Date of Birth,
 - Parent/ Guardian 1 Name, address, telephone, e-mail
 - Parent/ Guardian 2 Name, address, telephone, e-mail
 - Other persons who are authorised to collect the child from school
 - Name, address, telephone, e-mail

- School Governors: A list of contact details for the school governors should be maintained by the school. It is suggested that this list should include:
 - Name
 - Role
 - Committees
 - Address, telephone, e-mail
 - Relevant skills/expertise that may be of use to the School in an emergency e.g. language skills

- Staff: A list of contact details for the staff should be maintained by the school. It is suggested that this list should include:
 - Name
 - Post held
 - Address, telephone, e-mail
 - Relevant skills/expertise that may be of use to the School in an emergency e.g. counsellor, special needs

- LA Contact Details

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS		
DURING OFFICE HOURS Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm	TIME SQUARE	01344 354183
OUTSIDE OFFICE HOURS	FORESTCARE	01344 786500

LA contact details, can be obtained from the LA Emergency Duty Officer who can be contacted via Forestcare or Caroline Moore at caroline.moore@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.