
GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF EMAIL

Email is a vital tool for effective communication and one which facilitates good management of the complex and fast moving environment of Tonbridge School. However, there are limitations to its usefulness and dangers associated with thoughtless or inappropriate use of email. Further, the sheer volume of email traffic and the associated expectations of an immediate response can lead to it becoming a significant burden for members of the School community, drawing them away from important pastoral or academic responsibilities. One aim of producing this guidance is to reduce unnecessary email traffic, thus freeing staff to carry out their primary functions. **This document gives guidance for staff, pupils and parents.**

Necessity. Is an email the most appropriate mode of communication? Would a meeting or phone call lead to a quicker resolution? Remember also that your email may be one of many being read by the recipient; are they going to have time to give it full consideration?

Replying. Email accounts should be checked regularly but bear in mind that people are busy; do not expect an immediate reply (if an immediate reply is needed, email is not the correct mode of communication). On receipt of an email that requires a considered response or the collation of others' views etc, send a holding email acknowledging receipt and giving your intended timeframe for a full reply. This could reasonably be a number of days, depending on the circumstances. Activate the 'out of office' function to inform senders if you are unable to reply.

Content. Avoid sending frivolous emails, particularly to multiple recipients. Never include derogatory or defamatory comments and consider how someone other than the recipient might interpret your email. Emails provide a written record: you have no control over who prints, forwards or stores them or for how long they are stored. Remember that the laws which relate to written communication apply equally to emails. These include laws relating to defamation, copyright, obscenity, fraudulent misrepresentation, data protection, freedom of information and discrimination.

Style. Always include an informative subject line. Be concise and avoid branching out into a number of different issues. Be conscious of the appropriate level of formality and ensure good standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar; text speak is not appropriate. Make clear any action that is requested or required of the recipient. Include a signature which describes your role and gives appropriate contact details when emailing someone for the first time.

Tone. Email should not be used when you are trying to convey complex feelings or to explore emotive issues. Emails are easy to misinterpret and may cause offence where none was intended. Consider saving an email written when tired, frustrated or annoyed and reviewing it the next day. Do not use email to reprimand or chastise, nor to convey bad news of a serious nature to an individual unless there is absolutely no alternative.

Confidentiality. Be wary of including sensitive or confidential information in an email. Consider the content of an email carefully before forwarding to others or Cc'ing additional recipients in a reply. Be aware that some staff allow administrative staff to access their email accounts. Recipients should only be included on a 'need to know' basis. Use the Cc box judiciously and do not expect a reply from anyone who has been Cc'd. Staff must always use the Bcc field when emailing a group of parents.

Courtesy. Respect everyone's right to time away from work. Just because email is theoretically accessible at any time, do not assume that recipients will read your email late at night nor expect that they will reply. Remember that people have different working patterns; do not feel pressured to reply if you receive an email at odd hours.