



The
Westminster
School



Staff Remote Working Policy 2019/2020

Safe Happy and Learning Together

Building foundations and providing opportunities to create confident, aspirational and independent members of our community.

Approved by Governing Body on: 11/05/2020

Signed by Chair of Governors:

Head Teacher:

O M Flowers

Lead Personnel:

A Gibson/L Goodby

Date of Review:

22/04/2021

Introduction

It is recognised that due to the nature of work in schools, remote working will only take place in exceptional circumstances where it cannot be reasonably expected for staff to be working on site due to school closure or health and safety considerations or other exceptional circumstances agreed by the Headteacher.

This policy has been introduced in response to the global outbreak of COVID-19 in Spring 2020 which has resulted in the School operating virtually with high numbers of staff working from home due to self-isolation or social distancing.

This policy is closely linked to the support staff code of conduct, the seven principles of public life and the teacher standards and should be read in conjunction with each of these documents. It is imperative that staff adhere to the same standards of conduct when working remotely as they do when in school.

The rationale is to ensure each member of staff understands the necessary protocols and expectations for virtual or remote meetings and interactions and to effectively safeguard staff with regard to workload and potential risks inherent with remote working, social media and online communication.

This policy sets out how The Westminster School will enable staff to attend meetings remotely on the occasions this is required, allowing them to have the ability to take part in meeting discussions and decisions.

Staff Wellbeing

This policy will ensure no member of staff is disadvantaged due to their disability, work or caring duties.

Where additional needs or adaptations for staff are identified - the school will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that staff are able to access meetings and be able to participate in them.

The school recognises that some staff may be working from home for the first time and recognises that this a very different experience for staff and this may be challenging. Even for those accustomed to it, working from home can feel unstructured and isolating.

The school's priority is staff health and wellbeing. Managers will be asked to maintain regular and clear communication with their staff over any prolonged period of school closure, encouraging team-working, ensuring staff health and wellbeing, and generally supporting staff as best they can.

The school recognises there are particular challenges for many staff, particularly with the closure of schools and other services. Many staff will have caring responsibilities for children or other dependents. For many parents it will be a matter of splitting work time and care duties every day. For those with sole responsibility for children or other dependents the school recognises there is particular difficulty. The school seeks to support staff as fully as possible and should staff face challenges with balancing care and work responsibilities, they should make their line manager aware as soon as possible.

The school community is one that has proved to be strong. By working together, and helping each other, we can make things easier for everyone in these exceptional times.

Health and Safety

There will be some practical matters to consider as people get set up to work from home. School recommends that staff try to establish an ad hoc, bespoke space exclusively for work in your home setting, and that this is risk assessed by the individual to ensure that this is as hazard-free as reasonably practicable.

Staff should look after their health and wellbeing, and that of others. This includes the small things like checking your posture when working on laptops/computers, but also taking regular breaks away from those screens.

Establishing some structure to the working day, including marking out breaks, can be helpful.

- **Managing and Recording of Sickness Absences**
 - It is important that any sickness absences are recorded accurately during any period of working from home to ensure that appropriate advice and support can be provided to staff. Staff must report all sicknesses following the normal procedure.
 - Information about coronavirus symptoms and guidance are provided on the NHS website (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>) and what action to take if these symptoms are exhibited.
 - A Medical Certificate will still be required for any period of sickness absence over seven days, however it is recognised that this may not be available immediately. It should still be obtained as soon as reasonably practicable.
- **Coronavirus Related Absence**
 - If staff live with others, who have coronavirus symptoms, but are well and do not have any symptoms and can still work from home, they should continue to self-isolate in accordance with the guidance provided on the NHS website. If staff do subsequently become unwell, they will need to report sick on the first day of illness as normal.
 - If staff are classed as one of the vulnerable groups as identified on <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/advice-for-people-at-high-risk/> and working from home, they should continue to self isolate in accordance with the guidance provided on the NHS website or as directed in the letter which the Government has sent to individuals who are required to shield for 12 weeks. If staff do subsequently become unwell, they will need to report sick on the first day of illness as normal.

Virtual Meetings

The school will ensure there will be provision of a secure method of virtual presence as required at meetings of various sub groups for example SLT, Curriculum Pathway staff etc.

The school will calendar and communicate to all relevant staff the and times of meetings with as much notice as possible, although it is highly likely due to the rapidly changing situation regarding COVID-19 that shorter notice for meetings will be necessary. For this reason, staff should check their email regularly for notices regarding meetings.

Staff Etiquette for Virtual Meetings

- Remote attendees must be aware of their surroundings. Confidentiality and sensitivity of information must be considered, and conversations must not be conducted in a place

where they will be overheard, for example in an open public space. Staff members should ensure that they are in a different room to family members when engaging in virtual meetings from home wherever possible. Confirmation of confidentiality should be declared at each meeting.

- Staff in virtual attendance at any meeting must not, under any circumstances, make any form of electronic recording of any part of the meeting, without the express advance permission from those in attendance at the meeting. If advance permission is given, this should be recorded in the minutes.
- Those in virtual attendance must ensure they give full attention to the matters being discussed and avoid undertaking other tasks that may cause distraction for example.
- Virtual attendees must agree to undertake full participation in the whole meeting.
- Staff should be mindful to ensure their language is moderate and appropriate for a professional dialogue in the same way as one would in a face to face meeting.
- Staff should be aware of their own presentation and that facial expressions and gestures can/could be misinterpreted by those viewing.
- Chairs of virtual meetings should ensure the duration of any meeting should be commensurate with the number of staff involved and with awareness of guidance regarding screen time.
- Where possible, agendas, particularly where staff are expected to report on specific items, should be distributed via email prior to the meeting.
- Where attendance at a virtual meeting is problematic, staff should ensure that they communicate this to the meeting's chair in advance of the meeting.
- Where 'WhatsApp' or other social media platforms are used, staff should be mindful to maintain appropriate boundaries and expectations in terms of language in the same way as they would in a face to face meeting.

Email

- Staff should consider that daily log in and reading of emails is a significant and vital part of remote working. Best practice would see at least two checks and where necessary, responses on any given working day.
- The working day in terms of telephone contact availability is defined will be the individual's normal contracted working hours. It is not expected that staff respond to emails outside these hours, however they may do so.
- Staff should ensure that any email communication with pupils abides by the existing expectations as defined in the school's 'Staff Code of Conduct' policy - with regard to maintaining professional boundaries and distance in communication with pupils.
- Further, in any email to a pupil, staff should ensure they cc a colleague for their own security and safety and that of the pupil. In most cases this should be a member of a class team or one of the school's Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) would be an appropriate co-recipient.

Telephone calls

- Staff should consider that daily telephone calls can be a significant and vital part of remote working and should ensure that the school has up to date contact numbers for them on record. It is the individual's responsibility to notify the school of any changes to their contact details.
- The working day in terms of telephone contact availability is defined will be the individual's normal contracted working hours. It is not expected that staff respond to calls outside these hours, however they may choose to do so.
- Should staff have to make any phone calls to parents/carers, staff members should ensure that their personal number is withheld and never shared with parents/carers. If a pupil or parent gets hold of the telephone number of a staff member, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report this to a DSL immediately. A DSL will then provide advice on how to ensure this is resolved in a way that protects all parties.
- Staff should ensure that records of telephone contact are recorded and shared with a DSL.

WhatsApp and Other Media Platforms:

- Staff should be mindful of their own conduct, language and content in WhatsApp group discussions or similar.
- Care should be taken to ensure that communications around pupil or staffing issues in particular are not communicated through these channels typically but are confined to the school's secure email system
- Staff should be conscious that the sending of videos, pictures or other content primarily for entertainment may not always be appropriate within an email group largely dealing with work issues
- Staff should be mindful that multiple 'conversations' may exist within their WhatsApp logs and that they should be careful to ensure the correct group is used for work issues

Creating Online Learning Content and Communication Guidance

- If recording videos for the school's social media channels or taking photographs of learning activities as part of the home learning curriculum, they must be filmed or shot in a neutral area where nothing personal or inappropriate can be seen or heard in the background.
- If it is necessary to communicate with pupils online, this should be limited at this time to the use of school email. No other form of social media or online communication is permitted to ensure the safety of staff and pupils.
- If it is appropriate to communicate with a child on an individual basis - for example, to give feedback on a piece of work - use parents' or carers' email addresses or phone numbers, when it is safe to do so.

- Make sure any phone calls are made from a blocked or withheld number so teachers' personal contact details are not visible.
- Schools should check that everyone is able to contact a DSL if they have any concerns about a child. The DSL should keep a note of any contact numbers they may need while the school is closed.