



Brontë Academy Trust
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Bronte Academy Trust

Media Relations Policy

Reviewed By	Approved By	Date of Approval	Version Approved	Next Review Date
Trustees	Trust Board	28 Jan 25		28 Jan 27

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STATEMENT OF INTENT

Bronte Academy Trust is passionate about maintaining its reputation as a place where pupils can have a high-quality educational experience, staff can be supported throughout their personal and professional development, and the school community can preserve a safe, nurturing and positive environment.

In order to retain a positive reputation that matches the positive environment of our Trust, the Trust aims to foster close and mutually respectful relationships with the local and regional media, to ensure our successes can be celebrated and to protect us from negative and libellous reports in the press.

This policy sets out our strategies for liaising with the media and our procedures for press engagement, coverage and comment, as well as the conduct all staff are expected to adhere to with regard to speaking to the press.

1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'
- DfE (2023) 'Keeping children safe in education 2023'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following Trust policies:

- Data Protection Policy
- Freedom of Information Policy
- Marketing and Communications Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Records Management Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct Policy
- Pupil Code of Conduct Policy
- Gifts, Hospitality and Anti-bribery Policy

2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The trust board is responsible for:

- Maintaining strategic oversight of the Trust's media engagement and marketing endeavours.
- Drafting, monitoring and reviewing this policy.
- Ensuring proactivity in managing the Trust's reputation.
- Collaborating with the CEO in developing strategies for responding to negative, sensitive, libellous, defamatory and malicious coverage.

The CEO is responsible for:

- Overseeing the day-to-day implementation of this policy.
- Ensuring the Trust's media conduct is in line with the trust board's strategy for media engagement and marketing.
- Reviewing and approving media correspondence, e.g. press releases, drafted by the communications trustee.
- Promoting the Trust in a positive way.
- Developing strategies for engaging with the media and handling media coverage of all kinds.
- Liaising with the media, including scheduling and handling appointments with media representatives and managing the relationships between the Trust and media outlets.
- Drafting media correspondence, e.g. press releases, on all important and/or successful school activities to ensure positive exposure, or delegating this responsibility to other staff where relevant and appropriate.
- Reviewing and approving any press releases drafted by other staff.
- Ensuring that all staff know what to do when contacted by the press, in line with this policy.
- Ensuring that any resulting press coverage (positive or not) is monitored, collated and shared with all stakeholders.

All staff are responsible for:

- Adhering to this policy in its entirety.

- Acting in such a way that supports and promotes the Trust's good reputation, and avoiding acting in such a way that could bring the Trust into disrepute.
- Undertaking media training as required.

3 MAINTAINING THE TRUST'S REPUTATION

Staff and governors have a responsibility to safeguard the Trust's reputation and, where possible, promote a positive image of the Trust. The Trust recognises the significant role that media coverage can play in the community's perceptions of the Trust, and, thus, will ensure that all staff and governors are well-prepared to handle the media in line with the Media Training section of this policy.

The Trust will adopt a proactive approach to media management, ensuring that the local media is always aware of positive news about the Trust and that any negative news is immediately handled to mitigate the risk of damage to reputation.

The Trust and its staff will not at any time attempt to mislead the media, either through a direct statement or deliberate omission of information.

4 COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA

All direct communication with the media will be conducted through the CEO, unless expressly delegated. The Trust will endeavour to maintain a close relationship with local media outlets, and will supply them with regular content to use for stories.

The CEO will be responsible for managing relationships with local media outlets. The Trust aims to develop a close, professional relationship with such outlets, in which the CEO has a point of contact in each of the local and regional media outlets, where possible. The CEO will be proactive in engaging the media with regard to positive news, events and information about the Trust, and will encourage media representatives to feel like a member of the Trust community.

The Trust and its staff will not make any detailed comment on events in the instance of, and during such a time, that any internal or external investigations are taking place, other than to acknowledge investigations are ongoing.

The Trust and its staff will adhere to the relevant confidentially considerations appropriate at the time of communication (which may change if communication is ongoing around an issue or event).

Press releases and coverage

Where possible, the CEO will ensure that Trust activities and successes are actively publicised. The CEO will draft press releases, which will be approved by the Trustees before submission. Where press release drafting is delegated by the CEO to another member of staff, e.g. the headteacher, the CEO will review and approve the press release prior to submission. Approval from both the CEO and the Trustees will not be necessary, unless in particularly sensitive circumstances.

No press releases will include photographs of pupils or other identifying information, e.g. names, unless express, written permission from parents exists for each individual pupil in the relevant photographs. The CEO will liaise with the DPO on matters of consent and data protection, in line with the Data Protection and Record Keeping section of this policy and the Data Protection Policy.

No staff member or member of the Trust community will release a press release on behalf of, or regarding, the Trust without prior approval from the CEO. Failure to follow this process will be dealt with in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Where press coverage takes place, all parties who may have an interest, e.g. parents, staff, governors and pupils, will be informed as soon as is practicable.

All press releases and press coverage will be reported to the trust board in advance.

Formal requests for comment

Where the Trust receives a request from the media for a quote or a comment on a story, the query will be handled by the CEO. Where possible, the CEO will avoid giving immediate, impromptu quotations; generally, the CEO will be expected to run the proposed story past the Trust board before commenting, while still responding to the request as quickly as possible. All comments given will be succinct and professional.

The CEO will liaise with the Trust board before giving comment on any stories which, for example:

- Are particularly contentious.
- Are particularly sensitive.
- Have the potential to be damaging to the Trust's reputation.
- Relate to confidential information about the Trust, a member of staff, pupil, parent, or another member of the Trust community.

The CEO will weigh the pros and cons of responding to requests for comment with the Trust board before deciding whether to respond, in the knowledge that the story will likely be published regardless.

If the CEO is approached for a comment urgently and it's felt we really should respond due to the nature of the story, the CEO should try to reach all Trustees but if there is no response before the media deadline, the CEO's comment should go to press.

Media access to the Trust

The headteacher will be responsible for arranging appointments with representatives of the media for the promotion of individual school activities, attainment and progress. The CEO will be responsible for liaising with media representatives who reach out to the Trust for an appointment.

The Trust will not permit individuals representing the media to enter Trust premises without prior appointment. Any media representatives attempting to enter Trust premises without authorisation will be barred from the grounds; where they refuse to exit, the police will be called.

Where representatives of the media are permitted to enter Trust grounds to attend a previously agreed appointment, e.g. to conduct an interview with a member of staff or photograph a group of pupils, they will be supervised at all times, in line with the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. Representatives of the media will not be permitted to enter Trust grounds during break- and lunchtimes when pupils are outside, where possible.

Media representatives will not be permitted to film or take photographs inside Trust premises indiscriminately. Where a media representative requires pictures of pupils, the headteacher, will ensure no pupil for whom consent has not been obtained is photographed or filmed, and that, where possible, filming of Trust grounds is done where pupils are not present.

Pupils and the media

Representatives of the media will not be left unsupervised around pupils and will not be permitted to photograph or talk to pupils under the age of 16 without prior, written permission from their parent. Pupils

over the age of 16 will be required to provide written consent to being photographed prior to being photographed by the media. The Trust will take all reasonable steps to prevent pupils being approached or photographed by media outlets where express consent has not been granted.

Where a current or past pupil, by virtue of the fame, notoriety, actions or position of themselves or a member of their family, becomes the subject of media attention, the Trust will avoid engaging in any discussion about that pupil with a member of the media without express permission from the parent of the pupil concerned, or the pupil themselves where they are over the age of 16. Where permission is given for the Trust to respond to media attention, it will keep communications brief, avoid passing any kind of judgement, and discourage press from approaching the pupil or the Trust again for comment.

Staff and the media

No member of staff will communicate with the media without express permission of the CEO. Where members of staff are asked questions about the Trust, but have not been cleared by the CEO to speak to the media, they will avoid giving comment. Where a member of staff has news, they would like to share with the media, they will discuss this with the CEO, who will engage the media with input from the member of staff as appropriate.

Where a member of staff is cleared to speak to the media alone, this will be done on a case-by-case basis, meaning that this permission does not automatically extend to other circumstances. Staff must seek permission each time they wish to speak to the media. Before being permitted to speak on behalf of the Trust, staff will be given training in line with the Media Training section of this policy.

Where a member of staff speaks to the media without authorisation, they will be required to inform the CEO immediately, who will take a record of the incident, including:

- The name of the staff member who spoke to the media.
- The approximate date and time the staff member spoke to the media.
- The name of the media representative spoken to, if known, and/or the name of the media platform or outlet they represent.
- Details of exactly what was said to the media.
- Any follow-up actions needed for damage control.

Incidents of staff speaking to the media without authorisation will be handled by the CEO, who will assess whether this was done maliciously. If the CEO concludes that the staff member's discussion with the media was a one-time mistake that was not intentionally malicious, they may recommend that the staff member undergo media training in how to deflect media questioning. Where the staff member has made the same mistake multiple times, their comments were particularly damaging, whether deliberately or not, or the CEO believes they have spoken to the media with the malicious intent of damaging the Trust's reputation, the case will be handled in line with the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

Where a staff member is approached to speak to the media in a personal capacity that is unrelated to the Trust, they are free to do so, provided that they do not make any comments about the Trust. Where the Trust is discussed with the media during conversation, the member of staff will contact the CEO to inform them of what was said.

Where the Trust is approached with regard to the fame, notoriety, actions or position of a member of staff or their family, it will decline to comment in most circumstances, and always where permission has not been sought and obtained from the member of staff. Where permission is given for the Trust to respond to media attention, it will only respond where it is relevant and appropriate for the staff member's workplace to do so, contingent on the issue at hand. All communications with the media on such issues will be brief, avoid passing any kind of judgement, and discourage press from approaching the Trust again for comment.

5 HANDLING UNWANTED MEDIA INTEREST AND NEGATIVE PRESS

The Trust will aim to ensure that all unwanted media interest and negative press is handled in the most positive way possible. Any unwanted media interest levelled at any member of the Trust community will be reported to the CEO as soon as possible. Where the CEO receives a report of unwanted media interest, they will contact the media outlet responsible to provide their email address and inform them that all queries related to the Trust, its staff and its pupils should be directed to them.

The Trust will always aim to put forward the most considered and prepared statements in response to negative press or unwanted media interest, but it will not exercise undue delay in responding due to the adverse impact on the Trust's reputation this could have.

Allegations and investigations

Where media interest concerns an ongoing investigation, whether internal or external, e.g. a police investigation, all staff and governors will be informed to avoid speaking to the media in all circumstances. The Trust will not discuss an investigation of any kind publicly, at least until the case has closed. Staff will be instructed to inform the media that they are "unable to comment on an ongoing investigation" if approached for comment.

The Trust will ensure that, in the case of an investigation or perceived scandal, the identities of any individuals involved are not released to the media. No pupil under the age of 16 will be named by the Trust to the media under any circumstances. In all but exceptional circumstances, the Trust will not name any pupil, member of staff, governor, parent, or any other stakeholder when approached by media to do so. What constitutes exceptional circumstances will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the CEO, and any decision made will remain fully compliant with the Trust's Data Protection Policy and Staff Code of Conduct Policy.

Where an allegation is made about a member of staff, the Trust will observe its duty of care to staff by taking all reasonable steps to avoid revealing identifiable information about that member of staff, in line with the Allegations of Abuse Against Staff Policy.

The private and personal lives of staff or governors

Where the private and personal lives of members of staff, trustees, members or governors become the subject of media interest, the Trust will not comment. Where appropriate, the Trust may advise the member of staff, trustee, member or governor to seek legal advice, or to complain to the Independent Press Standards Organisation through its online form.

Where a staff member's employment is terminated amidst media interest, the Trust will only comment to confirm the termination of their employment, and will refrain from discussing the information in any further detail.

Negative media coverage

The Trust will maintain a proactive approach to tackling negative coverage. Where negative press is expected, the CEO will, following a discussion surrounding the best way to handle the specific situation with the trust board, reach out to staff, parents and other stakeholders via letter to reassure them of how the Trust will deal with the issue in question as soon as possible, and preferably before they have a chance to read or see it in the media.

Any unexpected negative media coverage will be reported to the CEO as soon as it is discovered. No member of staff, trustee, member or governor will respond directly to negative press, including the CEO.

Instances of negative press will first be discussed between the CEO and trust board, who will decide whether the risk of damage to the Trust's reputation is significant.

No Trust representative will engage directly and publicly with the source of the negative press, i.e. beginning a public argument. Where a response is necessary, this will be done in the form of a statement published on the Trust website rather than as a direct response to the initial press.

Statements in response to negative press will always use simple and clear Standard English, avoiding complex and nuanced undertones to avoid confusing audiences. Statements will refrain from apologising, admitting wrongdoing or making promises for future action, unless legal advice has been sought to this effect.

Following negative coverage, the communications officer will reach out to the press after a period of time to refocus their attention on positive Trust practices.

Handling sensitive issues or crises

In sensitive circumstances, such as a death on Trust premises, a death or injury during a school trip, or another type of emergency, no member of the Trust community will offer any comment until the CEO has delivered an official statement. The CEO will liaise with the press office of any third party involved in the issue, e.g. the local police, to ensure a consistent response.

Regardless of the severity of an incident, the Trust will communicate first with staff to inform them of what has happened and what to say if asked about it by the media, and to ensure the Trust can maintain a united front against controversy. The CEO will then write to parents, giving a considered statement on the incident, including all the facts that can be given, and setting out the Trust's planned actions.

The CEO will handle all wider media attention following a crisis management meeting with the trust board, where applicable.

6 DATA PROTECTION AND RECORD KEEPING

The Trust will ensure that no comments are made that violate the rights to confidentiality and/or anonymity of any member of the Trust community. To this effect, the Trust will avoid naming, or publicising identifiable information about, any individuals in the press unless consent has been explicitly sought and provided.

Where the Trust believes a media, organisation has not complied with data protection legislation, it will lodge a complaint with the ICO through its online form.

The CEO will ensure that records are kept of all direct contact with the media, including that which has been inadvertent or otherwise unauthorised. These records will be maintained in line with the Records Management Policy, and will be made available for review by the trust board where necessary.

7 BRIBERY AND BLACKMAIL

While the Trust aims to maintain a close, professional relationship with members of the media, it will be careful to avoid inadvertently engaging in behaviour that aligns with bribery or corruption.

The relationship between the Trust and the press will never include the exchange of favours or gifts, e.g. money or material gifts in return for positive coverage, nor will the Trust accept these from the press. Any

incidences of bribery, attempted bribery or actions that may be incorrectly perceived as bribery will be managed in line with the Gifts, Hospitality and Anti-bribery Policy.

In the unlikely event that a member of the media attempts to leverage action from a member of staff or the trust board under the threat of negative personal coverage, the individual in question will report this to the CEO immediately without responding to the media representative. The CEO will support the individual to file a complaint regarding the media representative's conduct with Independent Press Standards Organisation, and report the incident to the police where appropriate.

Under no circumstances will a member of staff or governor commit the actions that are being leveraged without speaking to the CEO first.

To ensure transparency in operations, the CEO will make a note of all conversations they or other staff have had with the media in their capacity as a member of Trust staff.

8 LIBELLOUS, DEFAMATORY OR MALICIOUS COVERAGE

Where seriously damaging coverage is levelled at the Trust, the Trust will not normally pursue legal action and will instead handle this according to the following procedure:

- Where the media releases malicious, libellous or defamatory content about the Trust in general, the CEO, and the trust board will discuss the appropriate response, e.g. what a published statement will say and whether the Trust will request a retraction. Following this discussion, the CEO will draft a statement which:
 - Corrects any incorrect information, providing facts to support this.
 - Explains the Trust's actions or words.
 - Refutes any untrue allegations, providing facts to support this.
 - Maintains a professional tone – statements will not involve name-calling, threats to take legal action, or libellous, defamatory or malicious words.
 - Will be posted on the Trust website and sent to local and regional media outlets.
- Where the media releases malicious, libellous or defamatory content about an individual member of the Trust, e.g. a member of staff or governor, the individual will be informed that the Trust will remain neutral in the case, including not making any public comment or publicly taking the side of the individual. The individual will be informed that they are free to personally pursue legal action if the coverage is particularly damaging to their personal or professional reputation.
- Where media coverage is critically damaging to the Trust's reputation and is libellous, defamatory or malicious, the Trust will pursue legal advice, with approval from the trust board, with due consideration of the fact that this could potentially have a detrimental impact on the Trust's reputation.

9 MEDIA TRAINING

As part of their induction, all staff will receive training that informs them to avoid engaging with the press on behalf of the Trust and the potential consequences of unauthorised responses.

Before being authorised to talk to the media in any circumstance, relevant staff and governors will be trained to engage effectively with the media.

Media training will ensure that, when engaging with the media, staff and governors will:

- Talk positively about the Trust

- Understand strategies that media representatives will often use to elicit comment, approval or denial from them, and how to avoid inadvertently bringing the school into disrepute or revealing information when not authorised to do so.
- Avoid saying anything to, or in the presence of, a media representative that they would not want to be included in coverage of the Trust
- Know how to prepare information for media interviews and how to avoid going off-topic.
- Understand what they can and cannot reveal or say to avoid bringing the Trust into disrepute.

10 MONITORING AND REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed bi-annually by the Trustees.

Declaration of Responsibility

This Media Relations Policy was reviewed and formally adopted by Bronte Academy Trust on

.....28 Jan 2025..... Date



..... Signed Chair of Trustees



.....Signed Chief Executive Officer