

# PORT MACQUARIE STEINER SCHOOL

## 9.1 COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

<b>Drafted date:</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2018	<b>By:</b> R. Gallagher	<b>Approved by Board date:</b> 25 <sup>th</sup> March 2021
<b>Reviewed date:</b> 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2021	<b>By:</b> B Fisher	<b>Next review due date:</b> March 2022
<b>Associated policies:</b>	9.5 Staff Code of Conduct 2.2 Student Code of Conduct 6.1 Parents, Guardians and School Community Code of Conduct 9.7 Privacy Policy 9.11 Complaints and Grievance Policy 4.3 Behavior Management and Discipline Policy	
<b>Associated Laws:</b>	<i>Education Act 1990</i>	

### INTENTION

To facilitate the optimal functioning of the school and to assist students, staff, parents and guardians to work successfully together. This policy complements the regular, informal communications that usually take place between members of the school community.

### INTRODUCTION

The health of our school community is reflected in our commitment to clear, open communication and transparency of educational and organisational structures.

Communication is of great importance to the school and we value the input of our students, parents and guardians. We are committed to effective communication in all areas of the school. Teachers value parents and guardians as partners in the education of their children. They are committed to communicating any concerns about a child, promptly with the parents or guardians. They also welcome suggestions from parents and guardians about ways to support children in their wellbeing.

High levels of professional confidentiality are maintained to ensure confidence in school communications. We recognise that the manner of involvement, commitment and communication by parents or guardians and staff, have an exemplary and motivating influence on the students. We are bound by Privacy Laws which govern the way we store and communicate sensitive and personal information.

Respectful communication between all students, staff members, parents, guardians and other members of the school community is required at all times.

### POLICY

#### Communication Framework

The school's communication framework provides an overview of the policies and procedures relating to communication. Lines of communication need to be clear. These areas include:

- Student wellbeing and student code of conduct
- Behaviour management and discipline

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- Education
- Management
- Administration
- Business and Finance

### 1. Communication between the Teachers and Students

In the classroom and throughout all school activities, there is an expectation that the communication from the teacher to the student is clear, respectful and with definite and well understood boundaries. In addition, teachers are expected to be sensitive and responsive to individual and group needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

Likewise, students are expected to behave respectfully and to communicate clearly with all adults at the school.

If and when an infringement occurs, students are guided to understand the full consequences of their actions and given the opportunity to restore any harm done.

The school's Codes of Conduct and Behavior Management and Discipline Policy provide additional guidance here.

### 2. Communication between the Teachers and Parents or Guardians

#### a) Class Meetings

Teachers aim to hold a class meeting once each term. Topics may include a report on curriculum, discussion on developmental stages of children, class dynamics, excursions, festivals and other events related to the life of the class. Often classes may combine for a class meeting with a guest speaker to discuss a particular topic in depth.

Parents and guardians are given the opportunity to share experiences and support for their children through their class life together. It is an expectation that parents and guardians attend all events organised by their child's teacher, and is an enrolment condition that this commitment is made to regularly attend these very important meetings to stay connected and informed of the happenings in the classroom.

#### b) Parent or Guardian and Teacher Meetings

These meetings are an essential part of the school assessment and reporting procedure. Parent or guardian and teacher meetings are conducted throughout the school year, at least once per term or anytime, at the request of a parent or guardian. These meetings are an opportunity to exchange information about the progress and development of each student and are always undertaken with the best interests of the child as the focus.

Parents and guardians are asked to make an appointment through the Administration Officer to arrange a meeting with their child's teacher to discuss any matters or concerns. Parents and guardians should not have their children present when they are discussing

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concerns with their child's teacher unless it is deemed necessary by the teacher to have the student present.

#### **c) Written Notices of Excursions and Other Special Events**

Written notification of excursions and other special events is provided well in advance so parents and guardians are properly informed and have time to make necessary arrangements and prepare their children. Please refer to the school's Excursions Policy for more information.

#### **d) Email Communications to Teachers**

Teachers are unable to respond to emails during the school day or at night. Parents and guardians may email their child's teacher/s through the Administration Officer who will forward this on to the relevant teacher for a response outside of class time. Teachers will aim to reply to parents at their earliest ability to do so. Face to face conversations are preferred over email communication, especially when bringing a concern or for more complex issues that are not so easy to address in an email. The teacher will confirm a time to meet to discuss any questions or concerns.

### **3. Communication Relating to Daily Operations of the School**

Parent and guardians may have many questions for the school Administration Office regarding the daily operations of the school. Most of these can be answered by referring to the information on the school website, Sentral or in the newsletter which is made available to the school community regularly.

The Administration Officer is responsible for maintaining up-to-date class lists, contact details and the school database.

It is imperative that parents and guardians keep the school informed of any change to their contact details. Parents and guardians have a responsibility to read communications from the school including class notes, school newsletters, website messages and school policies and notices. It is essential for parents and guardians to read the school newsletter regularly as this is the main channel for the school to communicate information and dates for up and coming school or class events.

All information regarding the daily operations of the school can be obtained from the Administration Office. Parents and guardians can communicate with office staff via the phone, email, SMS or with a note, which their children can drop into the office.

Messages from parents and guardians given to the Administration Officer to convey to students, should only be of an urgent nature. Messages for students and teachers must be left before 2:30pm at which time they will be communicated.

Emails and SMS messages will be sent by the school office to parents to notify them of important or urgent matters.

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#### 4. Communication Relating to concerns with teaching or curriculum

If parents have a concern with their child and or their child's education in any way, they should:

- Request a meeting with their child's teacher through the Administration Officer, either in person, via a note, or by phoning or emailing the office and requesting an appointment;
- The Administration Officer will then arrange the meeting with the teacher and contact the parents or guardians.
- Parents or guardians are asked to be clear about the specific issues so sufficient time is made available. This allows for both the teacher and the parents or guardians to give prior thought to the matter;
- Be clear about the nature of the matter and its urgency. This may often be best clarified in writing prior to any meeting between the teacher and parents or guardians; and

A Teacher and Parent Meeting Record will be completed and kept on the student file, and a copy will be given to the parents if requested.

#### **A facilitated meeting**

If a parent or guardian is dissatisfied with a previous communication or the resolution of an issue, they may contact the Head of School and a facilitated meeting will be organised at an appropriate time.

The Head of School will arrange and facilitate a meeting with the parents or guardians, the teacher concerned and the Head of School (and if necessary, a Board Member who has no conflict of interest with the matter).

The parent or guardian may request to have a support person present at this meeting. The purpose of this facilitated meeting will be to ensure:

- that the concerns raised by the parent or guardian are accurately conveyed to the teacher and the teacher fully understands the concerns;
- that the teacher has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and to ensure that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by the parent;
- if applicable, the Head of School will make the parent aware of any constraints placed on the school in relation to matter, for example Privacy Laws;
- that the Head of School is assigned to support a clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps; and
- all meetings will be fully documented using the Teacher and Parent Meeting Record with records kept on the student file and a copy will be given to the parents if requested.

If this initial facilitated meeting does not result in a satisfactory outcome, the parents, guardians or teacher:

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- are asked to address the matter in a letter or email to the school Board for review;
- The school Board will then determine the most effective process to resolve the concerns.

The school Board may also decide the circumstances require handling as a grievance. Please refer to the school's Complaints and Grievances Policy for further information on this.

#### 5. Written Correspondence including letters, notices, newsletters and emails

All school correspondence written by staff members must be highly professional in nature.

The confidentiality of emails from parents and guardians that are forwarded to individual staff members from the general school email address cannot be assured as emails must be opened first in order to be forwarded to the appropriate person.

Mail or letters addressed to particular teachers or staff members are to be directed unopened to the appropriate teacher. The envelope should be marked 'confidential' in order to ensure the confidentiality of the children, parents or guardians and the teacher involved.

Email communication about school matters should be addressed to individual staff using school email addresses or to the general school email and sent by school staff using school email addresses. School staff will not respond to emails sent to their personal email address or respond to any school-related correspondence using their personal email address.

#### 6. Communication Relating to School Governance, Management, Finances and Administration

The school welcomes the communication of feedback and information on any aspect of school operations as a part of a philosophy of overall accountability, responsiveness and transparency. Feedback on matters of governance, management or administration should be provided in writing (including email) to the Head of School, School Administration Manager or Administration Officer, who will then ensure that it is addressed in the appropriate forum.

The Head of School, School Administration Manager and Administration Officer will always acknowledge communications in writing and confirm the course of action that has been followed.

##### a) Communicating with the Board of Directors

Parents, guardians or staff members may communicate in writing directly to the Board of Directors through correspondence to the President of the Board.

The President of the Board will:

- acknowledge receipt of correspondence;
- assess the urgency of the correspondence; and

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- ensure the matter is tabled at the next available meeting of the Board of Directors.

A Board member will inform the correspondent in writing of the outcome of Board discussions and actions on the matter.

#### **b) Communicating Matters Relating to Management or Administration**

Parents or guardians wishing to communicate feedback about aspects of school management should contact the Head of School or School Administration Manager. The first step is to speak directly to or write an email or letter to the:

- **Head of School** - with concerns or request for clarification about any aspect of the curriculum or educational matters, governance, attendance and enrolments, child wellbeing and safety.
- **Administration Manager**- with concerns or requests for clarification about any aspect of non-educational school management, finances or school fees, daily administration of the school, or aesthetic of the school grounds and facilities.
- **Administration Officer** - with concerns or request for clarification regarding fee statements, school activities and bookings and Sentral enquiries

Parents or guardians may book a meeting with the Head of School or School Administration Manager through the Administration Officer. Confidentiality is always an absolute priority in communications. These meetings and conversations must be carried out in a suitable meeting space.

- Parents and guardians should give advance notice about what it is they wish to discuss so that adequate preparation can be made; and
- A record will be kept by the staff member of any such meeting with parents or guardians eg using a diary note indicating the purpose of and outcome of the meeting.

If the parents, guardians are unsatisfied with the outcome of this initial meeting, they should write their concerns to the School Board stating the issue and requesting that a meeting be established to discuss the matter.

The School Board will expect that the meeting with the Head of School or School Administration Manager has already occurred according to this policy and may request the meeting notes for their information. The parent, guardian or staff member will be asked prior to the meeting if they wish to bring a support person with them to the meeting.

The purpose of this meeting with the school Board is to ensure that:

- the concerns or feedback raised by the parents or guardians are accurately communicated to the school;
- the parent will have a support person with them to ensure they are able to communicate their concerns and understand what has been said to them;
- the management team member fully understands them and that they have been witnessed by another manager or a member of the Board;
- the management team member has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of their response has been heard and understood by

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- the parents or guardians;
- the Head of School or member of the Board takes responsibility to support a clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps and that all parties agree to this plan; and
- all meetings will be fully documented including any action plans which have been agreed to with records kept in the school office.

Should this process be unsuccessful, the school will offer a mediated meeting according to the Complaints and Grievance Policy.

#### 7. External Communication

We understand parents and guardians use social media as a powerful tool for school community networking and communication. From time-to-time issues and complaints arise on this platform that are much more effectively dealt with through the school's Complaints and Grievance Policy. In choosing to raise issues through this avenue all parties will have access to procedural fairness and the opportunity for a quick resolution. In this way, the school can be sure to receive valuable feedback from the parent body and the possibility of misinformation and damage to the school is substantially reduced.

#### 8. Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality is essential for students, families and all staff members in all areas of school communications. The school is bound by strict national and state laws regarding sensitive and personal information.

Parents and guardians should not have their children present when they are discussing concerns with their child's teacher unless it is deemed necessary by the teacher to have the student present.

Parents and guardians are asked not to forward communications addressed to them from the school to other parents or guardians, staff members or members of the school community or wider community. Please refer to the school's Privacy Policy for more information.

All staff are responsible to uphold privacy and confidentiality in all their activities relating to the school and its operations.

#### RESOURCES

Teacher and Parent Meeting Record

#### REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually.