



PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

The Essential Conversation

Shared Goal: Shared Commitment

Within a school community, teachers and parents share a common goal – that each child is happy, safe, engaged in their learning and realising their full potential.

In our Catholic school communities, staff and families are committed to work in partnership.

Effective parent – teacher communication is one way schools and families work together toward this common goal.

It is an *essential conversation* characterised by mutual respect and understanding.

What is effective communication?

Effective communication is a two-way exchange between families and schools that involves information sharing and opportunities for schools and families to learn about each other.

Effective communication uses a range of strategies to regularly seek and share information about students' achievements and learning needs, school policies, practices and community initiatives.

(Reference: Strengthening Family and Community Engagement in Student Learning Resource: DEEWR, 2010)

Agreed processes for parent teacher communication will vary from school to school depending on each context and according to teachers' roles and responsibilities. They will also need to comply with specific industrial agreements negotiated for teachers and support staff.

Schools are called to communicate their school community's agreed processes regarding parent teacher communication and grievance resolution effectively to ensure all families are made aware of them. Equally, parents are called to familiarise themselves with these processes and follow them accordingly.



Teacher initiated communication

Teachers communicate with parents and families in many ways. Depending on the school's context, agreed processes and available resources, this can take the form of formal reports, formal parent teacher interviews, 3 way (parent, child and teacher) conferences, regular class email updates, class newsletters, communication books, class or subject blogs, parent portals, diary notes etc.

Outside these formal communications, it is anticipated that teachers will contact parents if there are any issues or concerns about their child and, just as importantly, to share a positive story of achievement, compassion or kindness.

It is an expectation within Catholic schools that teachers and staff will communicate with families professionally and with respect and integrity (refer to the [Charter for Staff in Catholic Schools SA](#)).

Parent initiated communication

Parents are encouraged to initiate contact with their child's teacher/s as and when the need arises. This may be by phone, communication diary, their child's school diary, in person or via e-mail depending on the school community's agreed methods of parent/teacher communication. Timing is also important - for example, it isn't necessarily practical to approach a teacher in the morning just before class for a one-on-one. Similarly, parents may e-mail a teacher at night but the teacher is not expected to be accessing their e-mail at that time or to respond immediately.

The reasons for parent initiated communication are many and varied but might include:

- To discuss their child's academic progress
- To discuss their child's social/emotional development and wellbeing
- To discuss the teacher/child relationship
- To ask questions regarding homework, assessment or subject content
- To alert teachers to medical needs and/or relevant family/home issues
- To explain absences
- To offer positive feedback or just to say 'thanks'

It is an expectation of our school communities that parents and families will communicate with teachers and staff in a respectful manner (refer to the [Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA](#)).

Urgent Communication

It is reasonable that class time is committed to teaching and learning for the benefit of both students and teachers. This means that teachers are not expected to take phone calls in their classrooms while teaching students, nor are they expected to check email while teaching.

Therefore, if parents need to contact a teacher urgently, it is appropriate to call the school office.



Don't forget the positives

When communication is limited to raising concerns, identifying issues and responding to criticism the partnership suffers.

The teacher/parent partnership will be strengthened by acknowledging the positives. A note in the diary to say "Have a great week"; a phone call from the teacher to let the parent know that their child showed compassion toward another child that day; a quick e-mail to say 'thanks for going the extra mile with my child this week'; a quick comment at morning drop off to acknowledge the creative homework activity set; a note in the newsletter to thank parents for ensuring children were coming to school on time ready to learn.

Such simple gestures can create a culture of mutual respect that sets a strong foundation for dealing with the more difficult conversations.

Emailing Teachers

For non-urgent communication between parents and teachers, many schools nominate e-mail as the preferred method.

In this case, it is reasonable for parents to be provided with the school issued e-mail address of their child's teacher/s. (Please note, it is not accepted practice for parents to be given a teacher's personal e-mail address nor is it acceptable for a parent to seek access to or to use a teacher's personal e-mail for such communication).

Non-urgent communication may be to request a meeting, to alert the teacher to information that s/he may need to know about the child, to clarify expectations in relation to class routines/subject requirements or to ask for information about the teaching program.

Be assured that teachers are experienced professionals who welcome questions from parents and are happy to explain teaching practices and class or subject requirements.

Be mindful that in the secondary context, teachers may teach a number of subjects across a range of year levels, therefore can be teaching hundreds of children and young people in any given week. The same can apply for subject experts in the primary setting (e.g. language or music teachers).

It may be, therefore, that parents are asked to liaise directly with their child's class teacher or care group/home room teacher as their key contact person.

To enhance email communication between parents and teachers a list of tips for emailing teachers is on the next page.

What if you don't get the response you are after?

- If you are not happy with the response from the teacher please let the teacher know what it is that you are not completely satisfied with.
- If the problem cannot be resolved between the teacher and yourself, you can book a meeting with the Principal.
- Refer to [A Grievance Process for Parents](#) for some further advice.

Remember...

**Catholic Schools value positive relationships between teachers and families.
This helps to ensure that children and young people in our school
communities are happy, safe, engaged in their learning and realising their full
potential.**

**"A positive relationship with all teachers is beneficial for our children as a
positive attitude breeds positive thoughts in children." (Shefia, parent of 4)**

Tips for Emailing Teachers

Be brief	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A brief email to update the teacher or outline an issue is best.• If the topic is complex, please request a meeting with your child's teacher.
Check the tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email can sometimes be a tricky communication medium, as what is written can easily be misinterpreted and result in damage to relationships. For example, use of capital letters has the same impact as shouting at the other person.• You are your child's most important advocate. It is understandable that, where our children's needs are concerned, emotions can sometimes run high.• It is always useful to double check your e-mail before pressing send in the heat of the moment.
Be patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not expect an immediate response to your e-mail. The teacher may be in class, planning, participating in professional learning or it is after hours. Your best time to e-mail may be late at night, but it is not reasonable to expect teachers to be available to respond to you at that time.• Most schools have guidelines in relation to timeframes for responding to parents' emails or phone messages and teachers will endeavour to respond within these guidelines (e.g. within 24-48 hours).
Include contact details and available times	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachers are encouraged not to engage in long back and forwards discussions via email and will likely suggest a phone call or meeting as the best course of action. That is reasonable.• Keep in mind that teachers often have before/after school duties and meetings but will try to contact you during the times you request.
Be realistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is unrealistic to expect a teacher to regularly read and respond to emails that are pages long or to expect a teacher to provide daily/weekly updates on progress of individual students (unless there are very exceptional circumstances).
If requesting a meeting or phone call, please include the reason or topic to be discussed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This allows the teacher to gather the information necessary before the meeting in order to best address your questions or concerns.



Preparing for formal Parent-Teacher Interviews

[In primary school](#)

[In secondary school](#)

When raising an issue of concern

[A Grievance Process for Parents](#)

Charters for Parents and Staff in Catholic Schools

[Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA](#)

[Charter for Staff in Catholic Schools SA](#)

Student Reports

[Student Reports - Information for Parents](#)

Useful websites

[Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities](#)

[Family-School Community Partnership Bureau](#)

Acknowledgment: This resource was adapted with permission from the resource "Parent Teacher Communication" developed by Christ the King School, SA