



Communication
POLICY

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DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

MSSA: Milkwood Steiner School Association

Communication

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PURPOSE

The strength of the Milkwood Steiner School community is dependent on a commitment by all members to clear, open communication. A healthy community is dependent on the cultivation of social responsibility, based on individual insight and sound observation and listening skills. This policy and guidelines describes the approach to messaging and communication at the school, including the means and the manner in which communications will be made.

SCOPE

This document applies to all areas of the school, including the Milkwood Steiner School Association Board (the Board), staff, students, parents and caregivers, volunteers and visitors to the school.

POLICY STATEMENT

- Respectful communication, with the child's needs at the centre, will be the focus between all members of the school community
- We will maintain high levels of professional confidentiality to ensure confidence in school communications
- Staff at MSS will make every effort to communicate openly and effectively all relevant (except confidential) matters to the school community
- Feedback and information on any aspect of school operations is welcomed as a part of a philosophy of overall accountability, responsiveness and transparency
- Matters of governance, management or administration should be provided in writing to the Principal who will ensure it is addressed in the appropriate forum
- The Principal will acknowledge communications in writing within two weeks of receipt and confirm the appropriate course of action
- Concerns by staff and parents/caregivers may be directed to The Board in writing only if other procedural options have failed
- Personal information, including contact details, will not be given out to others unless the parent concerned has given their consent
- The enrolment process will include an agreed Code of Conduct for parents / caregivers.

GUIDELINES

1. Section

1. General Communication

Parents/Caregivers have a responsibility to read communications from the school, e.g. class notes, school newsletter, website messages and school policies. All information regarding the daily operations of the school can be obtained from the office.

- The office is open from 8.00am to 3.00 pm
- Parents/Caregivers can communicate with office staff via the phone, email or with a note

- It is essential for parents to read the weekly newsletter
Reception and Admin staff do not have a role to receive or deal with complaints.
- Parents/Caregivers have a responsibility to advise office staff of current contact details.

1.1. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is paramount in all areas of school communications. All MSSA members (staff, parents, caregivers, students and board members) are responsible to uphold confidentiality according to the Codes of Conduct (Appendix 1 & 2).

Parents/caregivers should not have their children present when discussing concerns with the class teacher, unless it is deemed necessary and mutually agreed to by the teacher and parent / caregiver.

1.2. School Newsletters

The School Newsletter is the primary means of communication between the school and families. It is published weekly on the Milkwood Steiner School website and distributed via email to subscribers. Each edition features the following sections:

- From the Principal – a summary of school events and news
- From the Office – news from the Business Manager relating to financial matters and any other information of interest coming from the office
- Messages from class teachers about current class activities or events
- Other groups and community announcements – details about regular groups such as the Craft Group and Walks with Nature, plus other events and activities of interest
- The School Board provides a report of decisions monthly
- Other school community members may submit announcements for publishing to the office, for consideration by the Principal and / or COT.

Past issues of the School Newsletter are available on the MSS website. You can subscribe to the Newsletter via the webpage.

1.3. The Milkwood Steiner School Website

The MSS website features information about the school for parents, prospective families and the greater community. It includes general information about the school, curriculum, policies, Newsletters, a calendar of school festivals and significant events and links to related sites including Steiner Education Australia.

1.4. Written Correspondence

Hand-written letters are preferred to ensure sealed correspondence is delivered appropriately. Correspondence addressed to a particular teacher or staff member will be directed unopened to the relevant person where it has been marked as ‘confidential’. Correspondence will be acknowledged in writing within two-weeks of receipt.

The following email addresses are available for communication with the school:

info@milkwood.nt.edu.au	General office enquiries and information
accounts@milkwood.nt.edu.au	Accounts and school fees

admin@milkwood.nt.edu.au	Enrolments and communication management
principal@milkwood.nt.edu.au	Matters of governance, management or that are confidential
board@milkwood.nt.edu.au	Matters of school governance

2. Communication between the Teachers and Students

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 able to act upon individual and group needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

Students, likewise, are expected to behave respectfully and to communicate clearly with adults at the school. If a breach occurs, students are guided to understand the consequences of their actions and given the opportunity to redress any harm done. If inappropriate behaviour continues, or where otherwise necessary, further action will be taken according to other relevant MSSA policies, such as the Discipline policy.

Teachers exercise authority in the classroom in different ways as the children journey through the school. The three approaches to authority (imitation, guidance and respect for expertise) provide a context for communication in the classroom or school context.

3. Communication between Teachers and Parents / Caregivers

3.1. Parent / Teacher Class Meetings

Teachers will hold a parent / teacher class meeting one evening each semester-. Meetings will be advertised in week one, indicating the date, time and agenda. Topics may include the curriculum, discussion about developmental stages of children, class dynamics and/or events in the life of the class. The meeting also provides an opportunity for parents/caregivers to share experiences and support their children through their class life together. Teachers will provide information on class activities via the School Newsletter.

3.2. Parent / Teacher Interviews

Once per semester, parent / teacher interviews will be held to allow exchange of information about each child's progress, with a focus on the interests and qualities of the child. Interviews are an essential part of student assessment and reporting and as such are conducted professionally and feedback given on each child's development in the class. Individual meetings are arranged at mutually convenient times with the acknowledgement that both parents / caregivers and teachers lead busy lives.

3.3. Issues of Immediate Concern

From time to time a teacher may need to contact parents / caregivers with information as a matter of urgency. The teacher may use a variety of communication means to convey the nature of the situation or incident as appropriate.

3.4. Communicating a Concern with a Class Teacher

If a parent or caregiver has a concern about their child or their education, the first step is to speak directly with their class teacher.

If necessary, a meeting to discuss concerns can be arranged at a mutually convenient time. It may be necessary to allow sufficient time for both the teacher and the parent/caregiver to give prior thought to the matter.

Parents / caregivers may request a meeting with the teacher either in person, via a note, or by contacting the school office.

Aggressive or disrespectful language is not acceptable in any communication between a parent / caregiver and teacher. An interview may be terminated and re-scheduled for another time if required.

Parents / caregivers are to communicate clearly about the nature of the matter and its urgency. This may often be best clarified in writing prior to requesting a meeting with the teacher. This enables the teacher to prioritise and be prepared for a meeting.

If a parent / caregiver is dissatisfied with a previous communication, they should:

- i. Write their concerns to the Principal, stating the issue and requesting a facilitated meeting with the teacher within two weeks
- ii. Either party may request to have a support person present at the meeting, however the other party must agree with the choice. Any staff member who does not have a conflict of interest may be called as a party to the meeting
- iii. In some cases, an outside facilitator may be brought in to manage the meeting.

The purpose of this facilitated meeting is to ensure:

- i. That the concerns raised by the parent are accurately conveyed to the teacher
- ii. That the teacher fully understands them and that they have been witnessed and recorded by another staff member
- iii. 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 / caregiver
- iv. That a staff member is assigned to support a clearly articulated action plan for taking next steps (where applicable)
- v. Records from the meeting will be fully documented on the student file.

If the facilitated meeting does not result in an outcome to the satisfaction of all parties, the concerns should be addressed in a letter to the Principal, who will review the matter and ensure correct process has been followed. If correct process has been followed and the outcome is still unsatisfactory, the Grievance procedure should be commenced.

4. Communication between Parents / Caregivers and School Management

4.1. Communicating with Management on Administration Matters

Parents / Caregivers wishing to give feedback or raise concerns about aspects of school management should communicate directly with the relevant staff member, or if uncertain who has that responsibility, with the Principal.

Parents/Caregivers may request a meeting to discuss concerns. Advance notice should be given so that adequate preparation can be made.

A record must be kept of the meeting, for example a diary note indicating the purpose and outcome.

Confidentially is always an absolute priority in communications related to school fees or school finances. These meetings and conversations must be carried out in a suitable meeting space.

If the parents/caregivers or staff member are unsatisfied with the outcomes of this initial meeting/communication, they should write their concerns to the Principal, stating the issue and requesting that a facilitated meeting be established, at which at least one other management team member will be present.

The purpose of this facilitated meeting is to ensure:

- i. That the concerns or feedback raised by the parent/caregiver are accurately conveyed to the school
- ii. That the staff member/manager fully understands them and that another staff member has witnessed them
- iii. That the staff member/manager has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by the parent/caregiver
- iv. That the staff member/manager takes responsibility to support a clearly articulated action plan for taking any next steps
- v. All meetings will be fully documented with records kept in the Principal's office or on a relevant staff member file
- vi. Should this process be unsuccessful the school will offer a mediated meeting according to the Grievance Procedures – Section 6.

4.2. Communicating with The Board

The Board encourages communication from parents on school matters. There are different points of contact depending on the matter. As a general guide:

- Matters related to students be directed to the relevant teacher.
- Matters relating to school operations be directed to the Principal.
- Matters related to governance to be directed to the Board in writing.
- Staff to initially contact their line manager: administration staff to contact Business Manager; teaching staff to contact Principal.

Parents or staff may communicate directly with the MSSA Board through the Board Secretary by email board@milkwood.nt.edu.au. In relation to concerns, staff and parents may contact the Board only when other procedural options have failed.

If a matter is communicated to the Principal that relates to school governance, they may recommend that it be addressed to the MSSA Board.

The Board Secretary will acknowledge receipt of correspondence within two weeks; and keep the sender informed as the matter progresses.

5. Communication between School Management, Teachers and support staff

Meetings and general communication should be held in an appropriate space and at times that are mutually agreed. Minutes should be taken at all meetings, including agreed actions and outcomes, and communicated to third parties as required.

5.1. Communication between Management and Staff

Staff commit to respect, value and look after their colleagues.

The Principal is responsible for organising staff meetings and will provide a schedule of meetings each term, with the understanding that some meetings may require short notice. The Principal will advise which meetings are mandatory and will ensure communication processes are followed respectfully.

Teachers must attend all mandatory meetings.

Administration staff will meet at least twice a term.

The Principal will make available planning and policy documents to staff.

Class teachers will communicate relevant information regarding particular classes, children or school activities.

Staff will direct Human Resource Management matters, including matters related to employment conditions, to the Business Manager.

Staff are requested to take any issues they have with a student, a class, or parent/caregiver directly to the class teacher in the first instance; then to the Principal if the issue is not resolved.

The Principal will ensure that all matters relating to a particular child and/or class are communicated with the Class Teacher.

Where a staff member acts contrary to this or any school policy, the Principal will communicate the concern to the staff member and keep records of the meeting related to the matter on the staff member file. If a staff member requests a third person be present at a meeting, this request must be met.

5.2. Issues between staff members

If a communication problem occurs between staff members, in the first instance there should be an attempt to resolve the issue by communicating directly in a space and at a time that allows for respectful exploration of the concern.

If a staff member is dissatisfied with a previous communication, they should:

- i. clearly outline the concern with the Principal, who will take steps to resolve the issue
- ii. dependant on that outcome, the Principal may request that the concern be raised in writing, stating the issue and requesting a facilitated meeting within two weeks
- iii. Either party may request to have a support person present at this meeting, however the other party must agree with the choice of support person. Any person who does not have a conflict of interest may be called a as party to the meeting
- iv. In some cases an outside facilitator may be brought in to manage the meeting.

The purpose of this facilitated meeting is to ensure:

- i. that the concerns raised are accurately conveyed
- ii. that each of the staff and the Principal fully understand the concerns

- iii. that the teacher or staff member has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and that the nature of the response has been heard and understood
- iv. that the Principal forms a clearly articulated action plan for future steps
- v. all meetings will be fully documented with records kept on each staff members' file

If the facilitated meeting does not result in an outcome to the satisfaction of all parties, the concerns should be addressed in a letter to the Principal, who will review the matter and ensure correct process has been followed. If correct process has been followed and the outcome is still unsatisfactory, the Grievance procedure should be commenced.

If the problem concerns the Principal, then concerns should be directed to Board in writing.

