





Communication Guidelines

	Ratified by Council	Reviewed by Principal	Next Review
Date	17 March 2021	17 March 2021	March 2024
Name	Justin Coombs	Jenny Dougan	Review Cycle
Signature			3 years

West Coast Steiner School is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation, taking a preventative and participatory stance on child protection issues and promoting a child safe environment

VERSION MANAGEMENT		
Date	Changes Made	Author
March 2021	Communication Guidelines created	L Lane

Background

West Coast Steiner School understands that effective communication is essential to create strong school-home partnerships and to increase parental involvement. We recognise that respectful, open and timely communication is vital to building a community where students, parents/guardians and staff feel valued, connected and well-informed. The School encourages all community members to communicate in a courteous and respectful manner, to listen actively and to seek clarification, when necessary, to better understand the other's point of view. All communication will be underpinned by considerations of appropriate privacy and confidentiality principles. Where necessary, records of communication will be kept by the School in accordance with its *Records Management and Retention Policy*.

Miscommunication unfortunately often leads to conflict. In the majority of situations, a brief conversation in person or by phone, with the Class Teacher or person most involved can resolve most matters. Try to avoid 'going over someone's head' until you have spoken to them and refrain from unnecessarily involving other people. If an issue is not resolved directly with the teacher, please follow the procedures set out in the *Concerns and Complaints Management Policy*.

Staff and parents/guardians should also refer to the relevant *Codes of Conduct* as they set out general expectations of the standards of behaviour required by all members of the West Coast Steiner School community. The School owes a duty to its staff to protect them from intimidating or bullying behaviour whether in verbal or written form. Staff members are instructed to terminate such contact forthwith and to advise the School Principal.

The School acts in the best interests of the whole community, particularly when concerned with public health and safety, or other possibly contentious issues. Parents/guardians are asked to be supportive of the often difficult decisions the School Council and Principal are required to make, even though they may seem at odds with an individual's own point of view. Supporting the School does not always mean agreeing with it but using appropriate communication channels and following the guidelines set out below will help us build a cohesive and strong community.

Purpose

The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide the West Coast Steiner School community with clear expectations around how to communicate effectively and respectfully with one another.

Methods of Communication

The School uses a variety of communication methods, including print and electronic, to facilitate and promote effective communication, so that parents/guardians are knowledgeable about their child's learning and progress, as well as School programs, policies, procedures and events.

The School website contains general information about the School, including policies.

The School Gazette provides information about Steiner education, professional learning, feature

articles and community news. It is published once each term and distributed to families by email.

The School Newsletter is published fortnightly and emailed to families. The School Newsletter will contain news from the Principal, diary dates, sharing of class learning, Steiner education and any communication from the West Coast Steiner School Community Association (WCCSCA).

Emails from the School Reception are used to deliver important information from the School outside of the newsletter.

Class Meetings are held once a term in the afternoon or evening and are a source of valuable information.

Parent-Teacher Meetings are formal meetings held in Semester 1 and again in Semester 2, and are available by appointment if parents/guardians would like to discuss their child.

Primary and Kindergarten Parent Handbooks are provided to new families at the time of enrolment. Current versions of the Parent Handbooks are available from School Reception.

Curriculum Journeys are conducted annually to provide parents/guardians with a more complete understanding of the Steiner journey.

Class Communication Books are held, at the discretion of individual teachers, on the verandah outside classrooms, and are used to leave short messages for the teacher regarding your child.

Class Carer/Representative Emails or Group Social Media Communication Platforms (e.g. What's App) are sent out on behalf of the Class Carer/Representative, or WCCSCA and provide general information or reminders.

School Reports are issued from Kindy to Class 6 twice yearly at the end of Term 2 and Term 4.

Text Messaging Service is used to send out emergency information e.g. in the event of a fire evacuation or school shut down. It is vital that parents/guardians keep the School updated with current contact details. Parents/guardians will also receive a text message if their child is absent and the School has not been notified.

School Forms are a necessary and important part of School communication. They often require a response by a given time or request information to be completed by parents. This information may be vital to the well-being and safety of your child or needed for compliance or legal reasons. A timely and full response is required to enable the School to best provide for your child.

Direct Communication and Email – please read and follow the guidelines below.

FOR IMPORTANT OR URGENT MESSAGE PLEASE CONTACT SCHOOL RECEPTION.

Guidelines for Direct Communication

Direct communication, either face-to-face or by phone, is generally the most effective and efficient form of communication. At times, parents/guardians may have a query regarding their child's academic progress, social relationships, or a general classroom matter. These should be discussed directly with the child's Class Teacher in the first instance or the staff member most closely related to the matter.

However, teachers have many duties which extend beyond the normal school day. During the School day they are expected to be principally engaged in teaching duties. Prior to the commencement of the school day, teachers will be engaged in lesson preparation and meeting and greeting students. Parent meetings should be scheduled taking into account the many other demands the School places on the time of the staff.

Expectations of Parents/Guardians

When a parent/guardian wishes to contact a member of staff to discuss matters relating to their child, the procedure is to contact the teacher involved, giving a brief outline of the issue. Contact should be made using one of the following approaches:

- Contact School Reception, either by phone or coming in personally, and ask to arrange for the teacher to contact you to arrange a suitable meeting time.
- Contact the appropriate teacher in writing or via email, asking them to organise a suitable meeting time.

Communication with Class Teachers is important and encouraged. Please respect the teacher's time in the morning when they are setting up the class or preparing lessons. Speak briefly with appropriate teacher, either after school hours (not at a time when they are teaching or on yard duty), and ask them to arrange a suitable meeting time.

Parents/guardians need to keep their child's teacher informed about any significant incidents or changes that are likely to affect the student at School, their attendance or their completion of work.

Avoid discussing issues or people 'in the public arena' – gossip is usually inaccurate and rarely resolves anything.

Refrain from speaking on behalf of others – delegations and speaking for others often ends up with the 'others' not backing you up. If you have a concern, please raise it with the most appropriate person.

Parents should not try to sort out a problem between their child and another at School by approaching a child or his/her parent – speak to your Class Teacher. No parent has the right to approach a child from another family about a school incident. Please refer to *Code of Conduct-Parents/Guardians*.

Where conversations involve conflict, other families or dissatisfaction with any aspect of the School, members of the school leadership team (Principal or Deputy Principal) must be involved. Either a staff member or a parent/guardian may request the involvement of the school leadership team at any time.

Expectations of Staff

Every communication exchange, regardless of format, should reflect a thoughtful, planned approach and should be viewed as an opportunity for teachers to promote parent partnerships and, ultimately, to support student learning.

Class and Specialist Teachers will speak directly to the parent/guardian, either in person or by phone, to discuss important, sensitive or confidential matters. Communication of this nature will be documented and records retained in accordance with the School's *Records Management and Retention Policy*.

The School Reception staff will contact parents/guardians directly if a child is involved in an incident, or is seriously injured at School, complains of illness or needs to go home for any reason. The School will not contact parents/guardians if the child is able to be treated and well enough to stay in class.

Guidelines for Email

Email is often a convenient and helpful way to communicate short, non-urgent and positive information with your child's teacher. Electronic communication is not appropriate for more complex or emotional situations. In these cases, a face-to-face meeting should be arranged so that your issues can be given the time and attention that they deserve. If in doubt, schedule a meeting.

Parents/guardians can email the teacher directly at name.surname@wcss.wa.edu.au, providing the content of the email is respectful and it is understood that teachers are not available for immediate response via email. Email communication must meet the protocols set out below.

Expectations of Parents/Guardians

Send only non-vital messages by email. For example, do not use email to inform a teacher that your child's pick up arrangements have changed for that afternoon, as the teacher may not see the message in time. Please do not seek to discuss in detail your child's academic progress, learning expectations, or behavioural issues via email. These are best addressed in person or over the phone. Email can be used to contact the appropriate teacher or School Reception to organise a suitable meeting time.

Please do not expect an instant reply to an email or a response outside normal working hours or during school holidays. Teachers will be teaching and have many other responsibilities during their day. They read their emails at different times during the day and in the case of part time staff, may not see messages on the day they were sent. An acceptable response time for emails is within 3 working days.

Ensure School Reception and Class Teacher are kept up-to-date with your current email address.

To fulfil the School's legal obligations, all correspondence regarding absences must be sent to reception@wcss.wa.ed.au.

Expectations of Staff

Email is to be used for sending out general information around class activities, curriculum, projects and special events, reminders and updates, and for responding to general school-related queries. Email should not be used to discuss matters that require a lengthy reply or sensitive issues. If a staff member believes that a topic is too sensitive for an email reply, the following response, or similar, is recommended:

Thank you for your email. I would prefer to speak in person regarding this matter and will call you on (state date and time).

Do not respond to offensive or abusive emails - forward them to the Principal.

Use only the School-system provided email account for communication – not your personal email.

Check your emails daily on school days (or each day that you work, if part-time) and reply within 3 working days. When an email is received that requires some time to gather information and reply properly, the staff member will acknowledge that the email has been received and indicate when an informed response will be sent. The following response, or similar, is recommended:

Thank you for your email. Please allow me time to follow up your request/concern and give it my full attention. I will contact you by email/phone within the next few days (or insert date).

Staff may choose to send or respond to work-related emails at a time of their own choosing, but there is no expectation to respond to emails after 5.00pm, or on weekends or school holidays.

Activate the 'Out of Office' tool with an appropriate response when taking a planned absence such as professional development, long service leave, school holidays or a leave of absence.

Expectations of Both Staff and Parents/Guardians

Emails should be consistent with professional practices for other correspondence, including grammar, format and salutation. Avoid writing in capitals.

Emails are at their best when they are brief, provide relevant information and avoid assumptions. Confidential information, or matters requiring a level of detailed discussion, should be dealt with in person or over the phone.

The tone or intent of emails can easily be misunderstood, especially where humour or sarcasm is involved. Be conscious of this and pick up the phone rather than send an email in this instance.

Emails should always be respectful and constructive. Do not initiate an email or respond to one if you are feeling emotional or 'triggered'. Email is not to be used to vent.

Never write about or seek personal information regarding third parties (staff, students or parents). Likewise, emails containing personal or sensitive information should not be passed on to a third party without permission of the sender.

Do not forward someone else's email unless you have their permission.

Group emails have the potential to waste the time of many, so avoid sending emails to anyone for whom it is not directly relevant. It is also courteous to avoid time wasting emails, including jokes, chain letters and commercial solicitations.

Use the CC field when emailing a group when all recipients need to be aware of who has received the correspondence. Use the BC field, so that the email addresses of others are not disclosed without permission.

If an action or response is required, then it is the responsibility of the person(s) addressed in the 'to' field, to act or respond – people listed in CC or BC are generally not expected to respond.

The School reserves the right to block or filter email messages to staff that are not directly related to School business or to the School's educational mission. All emails that reside on the School server may not be confidential. This means that email messages may be requested by the public under Freedom of Information laws and may, unless they are exempt under the law, be open to public inspection.

Guidelines for Social Media Communication Platforms

Social media communication platforms, such as WhatsApp, are a very useful and efficient way of communicating to a group. When used within the School context, class groups may be established by parents wishing to send messages to the entire group, which are relevant to school. The messages come from parents/guardians in their personal capacity or are sent on behalf of the Class Carer/Representative, who is the administrator of the group. The School neither sends nor monitors messages on these social media communication platforms. Important school documentation will be sent to families through recognised official School communication channels, such as the School Newsletter.

Expectations of Parents/Guardians

If you choose to accept a request to join a social media communication group, such as a WhatsApp group, you agree to abide by the following:

- The group should never be used as a platform to air views/grievances regarding a staff member, child or parent in the class or school.
- The group is not a political platform for airing opinions on current affairs.
- The group should not be used for private conversations with anyone else using the group or to express personal opinions or gossip.
- Any opinions expressed are the opinions of individual members and may not be representative of the whole group.
- If your message is not relevant to the majority of group members, please consider if it is more appropriate to reply by way of a personal message. In the event of too many messages being posted that are only relevant to a few of the group members, the group administrator may request the conversation be continued outside the group.
- The group is intended as a convenient way to distribute reminders of school information to parents quickly and efficiently and for parents to communicate easily with one another regarding class matters e.g. festival details, parent information sessions.
- The group may also be used to arrange a whole group 'out of school activity' e.g. picnic at local park etc. Note that Duty of Care for these types of gatherings always remains with the parents.
- It is not necessary to respond to every post unless it is requested.
- Please consider the time you post – early in the morning or late at night is discouraged.
- By accepting the request to join, you are sharing your phone number with other parents within your child's class. Once you join, you always have the option to leave the group.
- The Class Carer/Representative is the administrator. The administrator is not responsible for any comments posted by individual members of the group.
- For any individual queries regarding your child, please raise these directly with the teacher, or where necessary the School Principal.
- Should you have a more pressing concern, please follow the School's *Concerns and Complaints Management Policy – Parents, Guardians, Community and Staff*.