Dear Parents/Carers,

What an exciting time for you, your child and your family as you join your child’s school community.

Parents and carers are integral members of our Catholic school communities and you are about to enter into a very important and powerful partnership with your child’s school in the education of your child.

The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities is the active voice for families with children in South Australian Catholic schools and a strong advocate for parent engagement in children’s learning and in the life of our school communities.

The Federation’s ‘Welcome Package for Families Joining a Catholic School Community’ aims to provide you with a range of ideas, resources and links to resources to support and encourage you in your role as your child’s first, foremost and continuing educator.

There are many ways to be involved in the life of your child’s school community but it is important to remember that supporting your child’s learning at home matters. Providing opportunities for your child to learn new things, reading and supporting their interests makes a big difference. You don’t need to be an expert; supporting and encouraging learning is more than enough. A healthy diet, adequate rest, a place to study, support with homework, high expectations and positive messages about school and the importance of education all have a positive impact.

Parents and carers play a very important role in contributing to the smooth running of a school and, thereby, maximising every child’s learning experiences. You can help to achieve this by ensuring your child arrives to school on time, supporting the school policies and expectations and supporting your child to do the same, reading newsletters and returning forms and surveys promptly. This contributes to a productive and positive partnership between families and schools.

The Federation exists to support you in your crucial role as your child’s first, foremost and continuing educator and so we invite you to do one or all of the following:

- Visit our website at www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au
- Register your contact details with us so we can directly communicate, connect and consult with you by going to: www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au/the-parent-voice/have-your-say
- ‘Like’ and ‘follow’ our Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/pages/Federation-of-Catholic-School-Parent-Communities/153137151493359
Why?

Because by following us on Facebook or subscribing to our data base you will:

- Connect directly with the work of the Federation;
- Receive information about current and relevant issues in education;
- Participate in any surveys or online forums so your voice can be heard;
- Have access to a wealth of resources and information to support you to support your child’s learning.

The ‘Welcome Package for Families Joining a Catholic School Community’ includes:

- The Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA
- Information about Learning Conversations
- A Guide to Parent Teacher Communication
- A Grievance Process for Parents

The Federation wishes you and your family well as you head into this new and exciting stage in your child’s learning journey.

Yours in Partnership,

The Federation Team
Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA

As integral members of a Catholic school community, parents*:

- Value and respect the Catholic identity of the school, its relationship to the parish community and the expression of its Catholic ethos through rituals, traditions, symbols and the teaching of Catholic beliefs
- Actively support their children’s participation, and commit to a personal participation, in the school’s Catholic rituals, traditions and outreach programs
- Share the responsibility for their children’s faith, moral, social and emotional development
- Model Christian values in word and deed with all members of the school community
- Value and respect the diversity of faiths and cultures within the school community
- Contribute to a welcoming and inclusive community

As partners in the education of their children, parents:

- Support their children’s learning at school and home
- Contribute to the life of the school in ways that reflect their interests, skills, experience and capacity to do so
- Respect and support school policies and regulations
- Contribute to consultation and decision making processes
- Work collaboratively with teachers and staff
- Respect the skills, knowledge and experience of school leaders and teachers
- Work toward resolving grievances appropriately and with respect
- Access information and resources provided by the school to support them in their role as the primary educators of their children
- Support their children’s consistent and punctual attendance at school
- Fulfil their obligation to pay all fees and levies in a timely manner, however if they experience genuine financial difficulty, negotiate with the principal to make appropriate arrangements
- Contribute to a culture where privacy and confidentiality are assured
- Act as positive advocates for their children
- Contribute to the development of a safe school environment for students, staff and the wider school community
- Contribute to the development of a health promoting environment for students, staff and the wider school community
- Acknowledge and support the work of the school’s governing body and associated committees
- Promote and encourage a collective responsibility to support the Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA

In holding positions of responsibility within Catholic school communities, parent leaders:

- Act as role models within their school communities by reflecting the values and ethos of the school
- Work constructively with the principal, the staff and the wider school community
- Build and nurture a sense of community

*In this Charter, the term ‘parent’ includes carers and legal guardians

This Charter was developed in consultation with parents, principals and the Catholic Education Offices by The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA)
Learning Conversations in Primary School

An Essential Conversation

“As partners in the education of their children, parents work collaboratively with teachers and staff”

Charter for Parents in Catholic School SA

Parent-teacher interviews are an opportunity for you to meet and get to know your child’s teacher and build a strong relationship between your home and your child’s school. They are an opportunity to share information about your child’s progress, interests and needs. They also help the teacher understand more about your child. By asking questions and finding out more about the information on your child’s report you have an opportunity to become further involved in your child’s learning and give support where needed.

Before the Interview

- Clarify if your child is expected to attend and what role s/he will play in the interview.
- Reflect on what you know about your child as a learner. Your insights are invaluable in parent/teacher conversations.
- Are there any particular areas of learning (e.g. reading, maths, social skills) that you would like to discuss?
- Are there any family/home issues (e.g. change in living or working arrangements, unexpected loss/grief, illness) that your child’s the teacher may need to aware of to be of support to your child?
- Talk with your child before the interview and ask him/her if there is anything in particular he/she would like raised at the interview.
- Plan and write down your specific questions/comments before the interview.
- Know where and at what time the interview will be held.

Parent/Teacher Interview Checklist

You may wish to prepare questions and/or comments about some of the following areas:

Child’s progress, strengths and challenges

- Academically, socially, emotionally.

Child’s attitude to school and in class

- Attention and task completion
- Punctuality
- Independence
- Initiative.

Child’s commitment to school’s expectations

- In class
- In the playground
- School routines.

Child’s relationship with peers

- Friendships
- Team work/collaboration.

How to help at home

- Homework routine
- Time management/organisation
- Hints or strategies to support their learning.

Curriculum and school/class activities

- Program for the term/year
- Topics being covered.
- School and class activities/traditions/celebrations
- How parents can help out in the school/classroom.
Four key questions to ask
1. What have you observed about my child as a learner?
2. Is there anything about my child’s learning or social needs that I should know?
3. What can I share with you about my child’s learning style, strengths and challenges that would support you?
4. What can I do as a parent to help my child progress in school this year?

Other questions you may like to ask:
- What opportunities are there for me to learn about what you are covering in class?
- What opportunities are there to see examples of my child’s work?
- How does my child participate in class discussions/classroom activities, seek support?
- What activities does my child seem to enjoy the most at school?
- How would you describe my child’s ability to work collaboratively?
- How would you describe my child’s social skills both in the class and in the playground?
- How would you describe my child’s ability to cooperate, work independently, follow directions and follow the rules and routines during class time?
- What home resources would support what is going on at school right now?
- How is my child progressing in comparison to others in his/her year level?
- Can you tell me the best time and way to contact you if I have a query or concern?
- What are some ways I can help out in the classroom or in the school community?

During the Interview
- Approach the interview with a positive and relaxed attitude.
- See it as an opportunity for a two-way discussion where you will be informed as well as actively contribute.

- Set the scene for a positive and constructive meeting by using open and positive body language.

Communication
- Respect the teacher’s professional skills and expertise.
- Be respectfully assertive.
- Be constructive.
- Discuss issues without getting personal.
- Express your needs and concerns calmly.
- Remember you both want what’s best for your child.

Listen
- The best communicators are keen listeners.
- Clarify points you don’t understand.
- If you don’t understand the ‘jargon’ ask for it to be described another way.

After the Interview
Discuss the meeting with your child
- Talk about his/her strengths and celebrate these.
- Talk about the ideas you discussed to continue to support his/her learning.
- Decide together on some age appropriate goals.

Follow up agreed action as soon as possible
Did the teacher:-
- Recommend resources or strategies?
- Offer ideas that support your child’s homework routine?
- Propose accessing additional support?

Remember:
- Formal parent/teacher interviews are only one form of communication between you and your child’s teacher.
- Keep connected using mutually agreed forms of school/home communication such as email, your child’s diary, communication book, SMS or phone.
- An important part of the parent’s role begins after the interview.
Learning Conversations in Secondary School

An Essential Conversation

“As partners in the education of their children, parents work collaboratively with teachers and staff”

Charter for Parents in Catholic School SA

Parent-teacher interviews are an opportunity for you to meet and get to know your child’s teacher and build a strong relationship between your home and your child’s school. They are an opportunity to share information about your child’s progress, interests and needs. They also help the teacher understand more about your child. By asking questions and finding out more about the information on your child’s report you have an opportunity to become further involved in your child’s learning and give support where needed.

Before the Interview

- Your child may try to dissuade you from meeting with his/her teachers/s! Don’t be swayed. It’s your responsibility to keep connected in this way.
- Know the names and subject areas of your child’s teachers.
- Clarify if your child is expected to attend and their role in the interview.
- Discuss the upcoming interviews with your child. Ask “What am I likely to hear about your strengths and challenges in this subject”?
- Reflect on what you know about your child as a learner. Your insights are invaluable in parent/teacher conversations.
- Are there any issues in relation to your child’s study/work habits that you’d like to discuss (e.g. attitude, application, punctuality, attendance, work completion, amount of homework)?
- Are there family/home issues (e.g. change in living or working arrangements, loss of grief, illness) that the teacher may need to be aware of to be of support for your child?
- Plan and write down your specific questions/comments before the interview.
- Know when and where the interview will be held.

Child’s progress, strengths and challenges
- Academically, socially, emotionally.

Child’s attitude to school and in class
- Attention and task completion
- Punctuality
- Independence and self-directed learning
- Initiative.

Child’s commitment to school’s expectations
- In class
- School rules and routines.

Child’s relationship with peers
- Friendships
- Team work/collaboration.

How to help at home
- Homework routine
- Time management/organisation
- Hints or strategies to support their learning.

Curriculum and school/class activities
- Program for the term/semester/year
- Topics being covered
- School and class activities/traditions/celebrations
- How parents can contribute to the life of the school community.

Parent/Teacher Interview Checklist
You may wish to prepare questions and/or comments about some of the following areas:
Four key questions to ask:

1. What have you observed about my child as a learner?
2. Is there anything about my child’s learning or social needs that I should know?
3. What can I share with you about my child’s learning style, strengths and challenges that would support you?
4. What can I do as a parent to help my child progress in school this year?

Other questions you may like to ask:

- What opportunities are there for me to learn about what is covered in this subject?
- What opportunities are there to see examples of my child’s work?
- What are the assessments and assignments for this subject?
- How does my child participate in class discussions/class room activities, seek support?
- What amount of time might we expect our child to commit to homework for this subject?
- How would you describe my child’s ability to work collaboratively, independently, follow directions and follow the rules and routines during class time?
- What extra resources could we access to support what is covered in this subject?
- How is my child progressing in comparison to others in his/her year level?
- Can you tell me the best time and way to contact you if I have a query or concern?

Communication

- Respect the teacher’s professional skills and expertise.
- Be respectfully assertive.
- Be constructive.
- Discuss issues without getting personal.
- Express your needs and concerns calmly.
- Remember you both want what’s best for your child.

Listen

- The best communicators are keen listeners.
- Clarify points you don’t understand.
- If you don’t understand the ‘jargon’ ask for it to be described another way.

After the Interview

Discuss the meeting with your child

- Talk about his/her strengths and celebrate these.
- Talk about the ideas you discussed to continue to support his/her learning.
- Negotiate goals with your child that encourages them to take increased responsibility for their learning.

Follow up agreed action as soon as possible

Did the teacher:
- Recommend resources or strategies?
- Offer ideas that support your child’s study routine?
- Propose accessing additional support?

Remember:
- Formal parent/teacher interviews are only one form of communication between you and your child’s teacher.
- Keep connected using mutually agreed forms of school/home communication such as email, your child’s diary, communication book, wiki’s, blogs, SMS or phone.
- An important part of your role begins after the formal conversation.
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.

(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.

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**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
- 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
- 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 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
- 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
- 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
- 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.
- This allows the teacher to gather the information necessary before the meeting in order to best address your questions or concerns.

Acknowledgment: This resource was adapted with permission from the resource “Parent Teacher Communication’ developed by Christ the King School, SA
A SUGGESTED GRIEVANCE PROCESS FOR PARENTS/CARERS

When raising an issue or concern with your child’s teacher or school principal.

As partners in the education of their children, parents...
work toward resolving grievances appropriately and with respect
(Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA)

- Keep an open mind. You may not have all the facts. The first task is to seek clarification.

- Take your concern directly to the appropriate person. If the issue relates to the class program, routines or a situation that occurred in class, speak directly with the teacher. If it relates to a whole of school policy or practice, make a time to speak with the principal. Going over a person’s head will make it difficult to maintain a trusting partnership.

- Make an appointment, or at least think carefully about the best time to make contact. Avoid times when the teacher or Principal is supervising the class or yard.

- Be aware of the impact of your emotions. Reflect, plan and rehearse what you need to say before approaching the teacher or Principal. It may help to jot down a few points before the meeting. Attempt to keep your emotions in check. This will minimise the possibility of acting or speaking inappropriately.

- Approach the teacher or Principal in a polite, objective manner that shows a commitment to resolving the issue together. Try an opening statement such as “There is a misunderstanding that we need to clear up” or “There is a problem we need to solve together”.

- Begin by expressing an overall appreciation of the work of the school and teacher or at least an understanding of the challenges facing leaders and teachers in their work. Something like “I appreciate the work you do in leading the school in what must be a very challenging role, however, there is an issue I need to raise with you.” or “I value the work you do in the classroom and understand that it can be quite challenging and demanding, however, there is an issue I need to raise with you”.

- Remember that you both have one thing in common and that is a commitment to the learning and wellbeing of your child.

- You may consider writing a note of appreciation to the teacher or school once the issue has been dealt with and resolved. This strengthens the partnership between home and school.

- For further information refer to Catholic Education SA’s Procedures for Resolving Complaints.

“As partners in the education of their children, parents...
act as positive advocates for their children.”
(Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA)

(This resource was adapted from an article by Barry Dwyer).