

**St Columba's Primary School
Communications Policy
July 2021**

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1 Policy rationale

At St Columba's, we cherish enduring relationships among our school, our parish and our community as we live the Benedictine values.

We also believe that positive partnerships between parents¹, teachers, students and the broader school community create and support a nurturing learning and teaching environment. Efficient and effective communication is integral to these successful partnerships.

Open, honest and inclusive communication builds the trust and respect that is essential to ensuring our students reach their full potential. This policy provides the framework and guidelines for creating and maintaining effective communication among teachers, parents, students and the school administration.

1.1 Vision

Our vision for this policy is that:

- Parents are well-informed, feel 'heard' and rely on reputable sources for information and additional clarification.
- Teachers and the school administration have clear, efficient means of communicating with parents.
- The official school communication channels are perceived by all parties as the most reliable, reputable and timely sources of information.
- All parties support the communication protocols.
- A spirit of cooperation and collaboration is maintained through these protocols.

1.2 Goals

Effective communication is central to our everyday lives. The ability for our school community (students, parents, teachers and school administration) to communicate clearly in a wide range of settings is vital to the success of a collaborative, nurturing learning culture.

At St Columba's we strive to:

- create a culture of transparent, inclusive, professional and clear communication between all members of the school community
- create a culture built on collaboration and trust
- promote close communication between parents and the teachers of their children
- keep parents regularly informed about their child/children's progress and development at school
- provide opportunities for both formal and informal communication programs and channels to support effective, two-way communication.

All communication among the school, parents and students will be respectful and professional, underpinned by appropriate privacy and confidentiality principles, as well as aligned to St Columba's and Brisbane Catholic Education's related [policies](#).

All staff have a responsibility to support effective communication and need to recognise that the quality of their communications reflect on the school's reputation.

All parents and students have a responsibility to treat teachers and school administration with courtesy and respect and must recognise their part in influencing the school's reputation.

¹ For the purpose of this policy, the term *parents* refers to any adult acting in a caregiver or guardianship role.

1.3 School roles and responsibilities

For the purposes of providing clarity around the various school administration roles, and whom to address for specific issues or enquiries, the table below outlines the key school roles and the general responsibilities for each.

School role	General responsibilities
Class teacher	Class programs; class discipline; classroom, friendship and playground issues, issues outside of school that may impact learning; homework
Specialist teachers²	Specialist programs; issues/concerns related to learning in these classes
Principal	Matters to do with the overall procedures; policies and functioning of the school; issues with school fees; general matters when you are not sure who to see, or you have seen a teacher and/or Assistant Principal and there seems to be no resolution
Assistant Principal, Administration	Matters to do with the overall procedures, policies and functioning of the school; general matters when you are not sure who to see; deputising for the Principal when required
Assistant Principal, Religion	School's Religious Education Program; spiritual development of children and parents; school masses and celebrations and general curriculum enquiries
IT Coordinator	IT issues and enquiries
Guidance counsellor	Social and emotional issues; educational assessment; family tragedies
School Parish Priest	Advice on help agencies and pastoral support for students and their families; enquiries about the faith; development and pastoral care of students and families
School office	Important messages should be conveyed directly to the School office to ensure a timely response
Primary Learning Leader	All matters relating to curriculum; support the Principal and staff in ensuring high expectations for the engagement, learning progress and achievement of each student

2 Parents communicating with teachers

Finding the right balance between giving enough information and too much is a challenge for every school.

At St Columba's, school administrators and teachers strive to provide information necessary to parents within a timely manner through the channels outlined in Section 7 of this policy.

2.1 General enquiries

Our experience is that many of the answers to queries of a general nature from parents have previously been provided in formal communication material, such as the school newsletter, parent portal, St Columba's Facebook page or classroom emails.

Accordingly, we ask parents to please check school communication before contacting the relevant teacher with routine enquiries (e.g. the time a bus will be leaving for an excursion [information already provided in the permission note] or when the cross country will be held [information already provided in the school newsletter]).

² For example, HPE, Music, LOTE, Drama teachers – teachers other than the general classroom teacher.

Classroom Parent-School Liaisons (or PALS, up to two parents per class) can also be a helpful first step in confirming general information about classroom or school activities, particularly for parents and students new to the school. As part of their role, most PALS keep handy formal school communications for reference in case they are asked by fellow parents to clarify information. They may have been at the school for some time and therefore are able to communicate details regarding the general operations of the school.

Note: The PALS program is managed through the school's P&F Committee.

2.2 Student-specific enquiries

At times, parents may want to raise questions or concerns in relation to their child's academic progress or relationships within the classroom or with their peers.

The classroom teacher should be the **first point of contact** for any matters involving a student's education, classroom activities or general school experience.

Non urgent issues – via email

In the first instance, parents should raise any **non-urgent issues** directly with the child's classroom teacher via email:

- All emails should be sent to the teacher's school email address.
- Please do not assume teachers have the opportunity to read and respond to emails during school hours.
- Teachers will respond to parent emails within their next 48 working hours (2 working days). This includes teachers in job-sharing roles.
- In their email, parents should briefly outline the issue or concern they wish to raise and, if required, request a meeting with the teacher to discuss the issue in more detail.
- Teachers also may request a meeting if the issue is too complex to resolve by email.
- Emails should only be sent for school-related purposes.
- Under no circumstances should teachers/school staff use their personal email addresses to respond to parents.

Urgent issues – via telephone

If teachers or other staff need to be contacted **urgently** (e.g. sudden family situation) or as a priority (e.g. a student unexpectedly needs to be picked up early or will be suddenly absent for some time), parents must telephone the office in the first instance. Typically, the office will then advise the teacher.

When teachers do need to speak directly with a parent, the teacher will call and arrange a mutually agreeable time.

In person before or after school contact

Teachers typically use the time prior to school to prepare for the day and the time after class to finalise the day. These are not appropriate times for parents to approach teachers to attempt to raise issues or concerns.

Depending on individual teacher preferences, there may be an opportunity for a quick, minor question or to request a meeting at another time. However, the general rule is, unless otherwise specified by the teacher, all communication should be via email in the first instance.

2.3 Our expectations of parents

When communicating with teachers or other school staff, parents will:

- approach the discussion in an open, courteous and respectful manner
- listen attentively to the advice and feedback from staff, seeking clarification where necessary
- appreciate that school staff must consider the requirements of all children under their responsibility, not just individuals
- respond to teachers and other school staff in a timely manner and within specified timeframes, particularly with regards to:
 - permission slips
 - invitations to parent-teacher interviews or other school events
 - requests for feedback
- respect the confidentiality of discussions relating to school or classroom issues, particularly those of a sensitive nature (for example if involving another child or family), and not share conversations with other parents or school community members.

3 Teachers communicating with parents

Teachers and specialist staff use a range of communication methods to communicate with parents. St Columba's commitment to parents is that teachers will provide a clear outline of how, and how often, they will communicate with the class. This is established at the beginning of the school year.

Communication channels used by teachers and specialist staff to communicate with parents include:

- **Information sessions:** at the beginning of each school year, teachers host grade-specific information sessions to provide important information such as the year's curriculum, expectations of students and parents, and an outline of the annual events calendar. This is also an opportunity for parents to ask questions of the teachers.
- **Parent/teacher interviews:** formal discussions about student progress and performance held in Terms 1 and 3.
- **Individual meetings:** teachers may contact parents if required to arrange meetings to discuss their child's progress or behaviour; parents may also request this.
- **Emails:** teachers will issue regular emails outlining key student activities; this may be a regular email (such as weekly) or distributed as required.

Note: recipients of all class, grade and school-wide emails must be blind carbon copied (BCC) so that personal emails are not shared.

- **Class notes:** are inserted into the Notes Folder for students as required; this may include permission slips for excursions or other information not suitable for email communication
- **St Columba's Facebook page:** is used for reminders and extra-curricular activities as required.
- **Information sessions as required:** may be held to inform about and discuss specific topics such as NAPLAN, behavioural programs or IT requirements. These meetings are typically recorded for parents unable to attend.

Note: informal, parent-managed communication channels, such as the St Columba's Mums Facebook page should **not** be used by staff to communicate school activities.

3.1 Our expectations of teachers

When communicating with parents, teachers and staff members will:

- approach the discussion in an open, courteous and respectful manner
- listen attentively to the concerns of parents, seeking clarification where necessary
- present their own or the school's point of view in professional and objective terms if necessary
- seek support from administration or colleagues if needed
- take into consideration cultural and personal sensitivities and protocols when dealing with the school community
- make available materials and information for a parent who lives separately from the child/ren upon request and in accordance with the formal arrangements made with the school administration
- maintain confidentiality unless agreed otherwise or required by duty of care obligations.

Note: some of our teachers also have children attending the school. These teachers must be particularly sensitive to their leadership roles within the school community and, when necessary, ensure clarity regarding whether they are communicating as a parent or as a teacher, particularly in informal or face-to-face scenarios.

4 Communication between students and teachers/school staff

Two-way communication between students, teachers and other school staff is an integral aspect of school life. The school welcomes and encourages students to engage in conversations with all members of staff within the school. However, we must also ensure we uphold an environment of respect, professionalism and care.

4.1 Our expectations of students

When communicating with a teacher or staff member, students should:

- address the staff member using their formal name e.g. Mrs Smith, never referring to a staff member by their first name
- be respectful, not talk over or raise their voice, or walk away before the conversation has ended
- make eye contact and speak directly to the teachers or staff member.

4.2 Our expectations of staff

When communicating with students, teachers and school staff, a staff member should use the student's first name and full names of staff (Mr Surname and Ms/Mrs Surname) in front of pupils.

Staff must only use school email accounts when communicating with students. Personal email accounts must never be used to communicate; nor should any other personal communication channels, including but not limited to; text messages, social media etc.

5 Communication between school administration and parents

Key communication channels used by the school administration (including Leadership Team) include:

- **Emails (and formal letters):** the school administration team will issue regular emails about school-wide issues; often these will include a formal letter from the Principal or other member of the senior Leadership Team.
- **Fortnightly school newsletter:** whole-of-school school information is included in a fortnightly school newsletter, published every second Friday during school terms. A link to an electronic copy of this is emailed to all parents as well as being published on the school website and parent portal.

- **St Columba's Facebook page:** is used for reminders and promotion of extra-curricular activities as required; content is managed by the school administration team.
- **Parent portal:** is the school's repository for all relevant information including school updates, newsletters and policies, and individual student academic information; it is managed by the school administration team.
- **Text messages:** SMS text messages are sent to parents when prompt communication to the school community is required, including in the event of an emergency or school closure.
- **Information sessions as required:** may be held to inform about and discuss specific topics such as NAPLAN, behavioural programs or IT requirements. Members of the school Leadership Team typically attend these sessions.
- **Individual meetings:** the school's Leadership Team are available to meet with parents to discuss administrative matters or any concerns that cannot be discussed or resolved with classroom teachers. The Principal is available to meet with parents where they have an issue, concern or matter of interest about the general operation of the school. Where a mutually suitable time is not available for a period of days, the school will offer the parents an opportunity to discuss their concerns with the school's Assistant Principals.

5.1 Our expectations of the school administration, including the Leadership Team

The school administration team, and specifically the Leadership Team, will make every attempt to ensure school communication is consistently succinct, timely, appropriate and easy to access. 'Easy to access' means wherever possible, information will be sent directly to recipients (e.g. direct emails or links to newsletters) and information can be found easily again through:

- a standard categorisation logic for where certain types of information will be stored
- a procedure for archiving information no longer required
- a procedure for naming emails to ensure their topic is clear

In addition, the Leadership Team undertakes to:

- approach any discussion in an open, courteous and respectful manner
- listen attentively to the concerns of parents, seeking clarification where necessary
- present their own or the school's point of view in professional and objective terms if necessary
- provide a safe, open environment when resolving any contentious issues either between parents, between parents and teachers, or among other stakeholders
- take into consideration cultural and personal sensitivities and protocols when dealing with the school community
- maintain confidentiality unless agreed otherwise or required by duty of care obligations.

Parents are encouraged to provide the school with a current email address for prompt and effective communication. However, if we are unable to obtain a current email address for any parent or carer, communications will be delivered home in hard copy by their child or sent by post.

6 Communication between parents and the school community

6.1 School-wide communication

St Columba's is widely regarded and respected for its strong community spirit. We often see parents taking a leadership role in organising an event either on behalf of the school or the parent cohort.

Examples of this are the school fete, Caritas cake stalls and the annual mothers' and fathers' luncheons. Accordingly, the school's formal communication channels are used by such parents to promote participation.

6.2 Our expectations of parents communicating to the school community

When communicating with the school community, parents should:

- use encouraging, inclusive language
- understand parents may choose not to participate in activities for a range of reasons and should not be made feel guilty or left out
- do not 'spam' parents with constant communication across multiple channels
- remember that, by using formal school communication channels, you can affect the reputation of the school
- access to school communication resources should only be used for school-related purposes.

6.3 Class-wide communication

The personal contact details of parents with students in the same class are shared with other parents of students within the class, via the PALS program. This is primarily to allow parents to contact each other, often to arrange social events for their children or for practical purposes such as to organise the sharing transport of children to and from school.

These contact details should only be used for school- or student-related activities, not for business, marketing or fundraising purposes.

Please note, parents are not obliged to share their contact details via their class PALS representatives and may opt not to do so.

7 Flowchart of issues or concerns

The classroom teacher should be the **first point of contact** for any matters involving a student's education, classroom activities or general school experience.

However, there may be times, despite ongoing communication, where a teacher and parent are unable to resolve an issue or the issue may be 'larger' than the classroom.

Where a parent has approached the classroom teacher but the matter remains unresolved, the parent should make an appointment with a member of the Leadership Team to discuss the issue further.

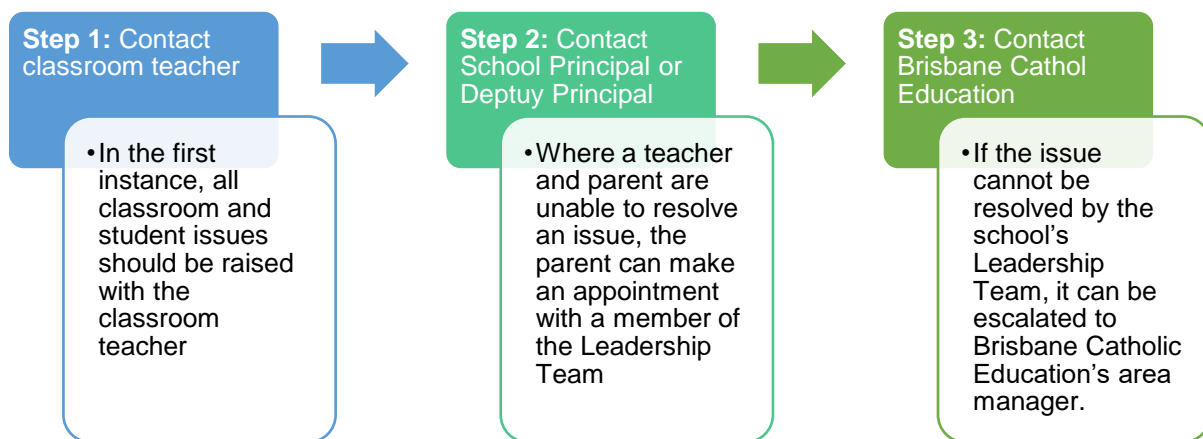
Excluding exceptional circumstances, the Principal or Assistant Principals will ensure that pertinent information is relayed to the teacher involved so that relevant information may be considered in seeking a mutually beneficial resolution.

Unless there is a serious reason for doing so (e.g. alleged breach of professional standards), a parent should not seek direct resolution from the Leadership Team in the first instance.

If the issue cannot be resolved by the school's Leadership Team, it can be escalated to Brisbane Catholic Education's area manager, as outlined in the school handbook.

Any letters of complaint should be dealt with in accordance with Brisbane Catholic Education's [Complaints Policy](#).





7.1 Matters of welfare

In the event a parent or teacher is seriously concerned about the welfare of their, or another's, child, this matter should be raised immediately and confidentially with the Principal or Assistant Principal.

7.2 Issues arising between students (and families)

Conflicts or issues between school children will arise from time to time and, in some cases, these may require formal intervention. If this is the case, a concerned parent typically should first speak with the classroom teacher. A member of the school's Leadership Team may also provide support if deemed necessary by the teacher.

If the issue is particularly sensitive (e.g. accusations of inappropriate behaviour), a member of the school's Leadership Team may be advised first.

Under no circumstances should these issues be discussed with other parents or the wider school community.

No parent should directly approach a student on behalf of their aggrieved child or to try to resolve a perceived issue without school involvement. If this occurs, the school's Leadership Team should be immediately informed and will intervene.

Parents are also cautioned against contacting another student's parents in the first instance; it is always best to initially speak with the classroom teacher or member of the Leadership Team to ascertain the best approach for resolution.

The Leadership Team and parents are responsible for maintaining respectful communications when dealing with such issues. Should such an issue remain unresolved at the local school level, it may be referred to Brisbane Catholic Education for resolution, as per the school's Grievance Policy.

8 St Columba's formal communication channels

At St Columba's, all school administrators and teachers strive to provide all information necessary to parents within a timely manner through the channels outlined below.

You will find many answers to general queries via these formal communication channels.

Communication channel	Description	Effective for	Communication direction
Face to face			
Start of year information sessions	Grade-specific information sessions for teachers to provide an overview of the curriculum, expectations of students and general 'housekeeping'; an opportunity for parents to ask general questions	Clarity and shared understanding about the curriculum and expectations for the grade, as well as key milestones for the year	Teachers ↔ parents
Topic-specific information sessions as required	Sessions for whole-of-school, whole-of-grade or specialist interest groups on key topics such as NAPLAN, IT management or behavioural/social issues	Providing a forum to inform parents about specific initiatives and to respond to parent questions and concerns	School admin / teachers / specialist staff ↔ parents
Parent/teacher interviews	Formal discussions to provide updates on student progress	Shared understanding between teachers and parents on student educational achievements and requirements	Teachers ↔ parents
Additional parent/teacher meetings	Formal discussions to address specific issues or concerns, can be teacher or parent requested	Parents and teacher sharing additional information and identifying strategies for resolving issues	Parents ↔ teachers
Electronic			
Emails	Most commonly used communication tool for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - formal communication from school administration - formal communication from teachers - updates and reminders from teachers - communication between parents and teachers - communication between parents and school administration 	Most forms of communication; should typically be used as the primary communication channel	School admin / teachers / specialist staff ↔ parents
Parent portal³			
Text messages	Priority information requiring parents' immediate attention	Urgent information such as school closures	School admin → parents
Online & social media			
Website	Used as a communication tool for internal and external stakeholders, providing an	Information about various aspects of the school as well as key links to resources such	School admin → parents / students / community

³ See category 'Online & social media' for description, as this channel falls under both categories.

	overview of the school, its priorities, policies and procedures	as the parent portal and school handbook	
Parent portal	Online source of school information, used to house important documents and information in a single portal, from policies, forms and school reports to calendar of events, announcements, academic records, absentee notifications etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student report cards - Policies & forms - Newsletters - Permission forms - Payment information - School directory 	School admin → parents
BCE Connect	Online App to easily connect to the School Parent Portal via mobile devices	Easily accessing the School's Parent Portal via mobile devices – the same information that is on the portal is accessible via the App	School admin → parents / students
St Columba's Facebook page	Public platform for promoting the school and its activities and providing news and reminders to parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Urgent announcements - Timely reminders - Promoting school-wide initiatives 	School admin → parents
Other			
Class notes	A range of material usually requiring a parental signature	Activities requiring parental permission	School admin → parents
Marketing material	Opportunities for students to participate in school-based or local extra-curricular activities	Informing parents about local extra-curricular activities	School admin → parents

The school is aware of several unofficial social media channels such as the St Columba's Mums' Facebook page. While we don't discourage these channels, they are not affiliated with the school and comments on those channels are not endorsed by the school.

9 Other communication considerations

9.1 Student absences

If a child is absent, parents are asked to contact the school as soon as possible on the morning of the absence via My BCE App, Parent Portal, or email or phone call to the school. Known absences can also be logged in advance.

For full details please refer to the [Attendance Policy](#) on the [School Policies webpage](#) of the school website and on the parent portal.

9.2 Student reports and progress

Parents receive formal academic progress reports at the end of both school semesters. Reports for the current and previous year only are accessible online through the parent portal.

In addition, parents and carers have the opportunity to formally meet their child's teacher twice a year, generally towards the end of Terms 1 and 3.

Parents are also welcome to contact their child's teacher at any time via email to raise any issues, concerns or questions about their child's progress. We do ask, however, for understanding that every

teacher is responsible for a classroom of students and must ensure they do not spend an unreasonable amount of time focused on one student at the potential expense of others.

10 Dealing with media

Only members of the school's Leadership Team should act as a spokesperson for St Columba's to media and this will be undertaken in consultation with Brisbane Catholic Education's policies and advice.

While we cannot stop parents from speaking to the media about the school or Brisbane Catholic Education, we do encourage parents to think about the impact that may have on our school community.

11 Communicating with the wider community

St Columba's recognises we are part of a wider community, both in terms of the parish and the surrounding neighbourhood.

We actively build strong relationships with local stakeholders, including community representatives, business leaders and politicians primarily through face-to-face communication as well as some electronic channels.

Unless otherwise agreed, only the school's Leadership Team should represent the school to the wider community.

12 Changes and requests

The core purpose of St Columba's Communication Policy is to promote and uphold effective communication among all our stakeholders, with a particular focus on communication between parents and school personnel. To this end, if a communication channel is found to be ineffective, we encourage feedback and suggestions.

Similarly, if parents feel a specific teacher is not meeting their obligations as per the St Columba's Communication Policy, or we are not meeting our obligations as a school, we encourage feedback in order for the matter to be addressed.

This policy will be reviewed every two years.



APPENDIX 1: Summary

Policy Rationale	
Open, honest and inclusive communication builds trust and respect. This policy provides the framework and guidelines for creating and maintaining effective communication.	
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are well-informed, feel ‘heard’ and rely on reputable sources for information and additional clarification. • Teachers and the school administration have clear, efficient means of communicating with parents. • The official school communication channels are perceived by all parties as the most reliable, reputable and timely sources of information. • All parties support the communication protocols. • A spirit of cooperation and collaboration is maintained through these protocols
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a culture of transparent, inclusive, professional and clear communication between all members of the school community • Create a culture built on collaboration and trust • Promote close communication between parents and the teachers of their children • Keep parents regularly informed about their child/children’s progress and development at school • Provide opportunities for both formal and informal communication programs and channels to support effective, two-way communication
Parents communicating with teachers	
General enquiries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check school communication first • Ask PALS
Student-specific enquiries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone school office for urgent issues • Email class teacher’s school email address for non-urgent issues – response within 48 working hours, but may not read or respond during school hours • Email is preferred over in person contact before or after school due to teachers’ duties at these times
Our expectations of parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open, courteous and respectful • Listen attentively • Appreciate teachers’ responsibility to consider all children • Respond in a timely manner • Respect confidentiality
Teachers communicating with parents	
Communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sessions • Parent / Teacher interviews • Individual meetings • Emails • Class notes • St Columba’s Facebook page • Information sessions for specific topics

Our expectations of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open, courteous and respectful • Listen attentively • Professional and objective response • Seek support from administration or colleagues • Consider cultural and personal sensitivities • Provide information to a parent who lives separately from the children in accordance with formal arrangements • Maintain confidentiality
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Communication between students and teachers / school staff	
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Our expectations of students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the staff member using their formal name e.g. Mrs Smith • Be respectful, not talk over or raise their voice, or walk away before the conversation has ended • Make eye contact and speak directly to the teachers or staff member
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Our expectations of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the student's first name • Use full names of staff • Never use personal email accounts
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Communication between school administration and parents	
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Key communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emails and formal letters • Fortnightly school newsletter • Parent Portal • Text messages • Information sessions on specific topics • Individual meetings
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Our expectations of the school administration, including the Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is consistently succinct, timely, appropriate and easy to access • A standard categorisation logic for where certain types of information will be stored • A procedure for archiving information no longer required • A procedure for naming emails to ensure their topic is clear
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The Leadership Team undertakes to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be open, courteous and respectful • Listen attentively • Professional and objective response • Provide a safe, open environment • Consider cultural and personal sensitivities • Maintain confidentiality
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Communication between parents and the school community	
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School-wide communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Columba's parents take leadership roles in organising events • School's formal communication channels are used by such parents to promote participation
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Our expectations of parents communicating to the school community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging, inclusive language • Support parents who choose not to participate
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School communication channels can affect the reputation of the school • School communication resources should only be use for school-related purposes
Class-wide communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal details of parents are shared within the class via the PALS program • Contact details must only be used for school-related activities • Parents may opt out of sharing contact details
Flowchart of issues or concerns	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher should be first point of contact • Parent may make an appointment with a member of the leadership team • Principal or Assistant Principals will ensure pertinent information is relayed to the teacher involved • Parent should not seek direct resolution from the Leadership Team in the first instance, unless there is a serious reason to do so (e.g. alleged breach of professional standards) • The issue can be escalated to the Brisbane Catholic Education Senior Leader, as outlined in the school handbook • Any letters of complaint should be dealt with in accordance with Brisbane Catholic Education’s Complaints Policy. 	

