



PARENT COMMUNICATION POLICY

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1. Objective

At Covenant Christian School we seek at all times to provide an open, safe and welcoming community with high quality education, pastoral services and co-curricular activities. The objective of this policy and its procedures is to provide parents, guardians, and visitors with clear guidelines based on consultation, co-operation and discussion consistent with Biblical principles and practice.

This policy and procedures contribute to a harmonious environment that reflects and builds on the School's core beliefs and values.

At all times the School has a duty of care towards all staff.

2. Scope of this Policy

The manner in which grievances are handled can mean the difference between harmony and tension within the school community. This policy and its procedures provide parents, guardians and visitors with a framework on communicating and resolving grievances with teachers, which is consistent with Scripture.

All steps must be taken in a true spirit of reconciliation. Grievances should be dealt with promptly and not be allowed to fester.

If a grievance contains an allegation of abuse or any inappropriate behaviour towards children by a staff member, or a 'reportable allegation', the matter must be reported directly to the Principal. Such allegations will be dealt with in accordance with the School's Child Protection Policy.

This policy and its procedures has been developed to assist in resolving parent grievances only.

The process for resolving staff grievances can be found in the School's Staff Grievance Policy.

3. Biblical Principles

There is room in the school community for differences: we do not all see things in exactly the same way (*Rom. 14:1 - 15:6*).

While able to cause tensions, differences need not be threatening, they are often God's way of enriching the school. All members of the school community are subject to sin. (*1 John 2:1*)

There may be times, therefore, when there is discord. Nevertheless our mutual bond in Christ ensures that we retain a commitment to each other, especially in times of failure and disharmony (*1 Cor. 6:1-7, Phil. 4:2-3, Gal 6:10*).

We recognise, not only that staff, parents and students have shortcomings, but also that sin requires repentance and correction (*1 John 1:9*).

Where there is tension and discord between staff, every effort should be made for the parties to resolve the matter in the first instance. *(Matt 18: 15-17)*

When communicating with each other every effort should be made to undertake such conversations respectfully and courteously *(Eph. 4:29)*

Scriptures referred to within this document are included at the conclusion of this document to enable ease of reference and should be read prior to commencing any discussions and/or actions.

4. Staff/Board Members who are parents of children at the school

Due to the nature of our Christian School Community, it is acknowledged that staff members as well as Board Members have a dual relationship within the school that is, they may be parents of children who attend the school. In this regard, both staff and Board Members who are parents of children in the school must be mindful that any interactions with staff regarding their child is done so in their capacity as a parent and following procedures to ensure harmony and integrity within the school's working relationships.

Where a staff member or Board Member who is a parent of a child at the school is required to liaise with a staff member it must be undertaken respectfully and at times that are convenient to the staff member. That is, discussion about a child should not occur during school break times or at school functions, rather an agreed time to meet is scheduled between the parties.

All communication between a staff member or a Board Member who is the parent of a child at the school must be respectful and at no time degrading or threatening, even with respect to any perceived power imbalance.

Any discussions and/or concerns between the parties must remain confidential that is, not shared with other members of the school community by the Board Member. A staff member may be required to discuss the meeting outcomes with their supervisor to ensure any agreed strategies can be implemented.

5. Communication with Staff

All levels of management of the school and the Board are open to parents, carer's and visitors, however we do expect the biblical principle of first speaking to the person most immediately concerned with the issue wherever this is appropriate. (The same principle applies when one parent has a concern about another parent's children in the school.)

Parents, carer's and visitors are expected to interact respectfully with staff, students and other parents at all times. Any language, which is abusive, insulting, threatening or aggressive in nature, is not appropriate.

- **Emailing staff – use of email**

The school recognises that email is a widely used means of communication. However, though it has an element of immediacy for the sender, it is often not the best way to communicate a concern or frustration that, because of the medium, may be misunderstood by the recipient. Email is therefore not an appropriate communication tool when a parent requires an immediate response to highly sensitive or complex situations.

It should be noted that email is now being understood and treated as a significant form of communication capable of being the subject of a subpoena by the Court System. Therefore, it always needs to be used wisely.

Some helpful suggestions about using email:

- think twice before sending an email; it is easy to write and send but difficult to take back
 - be cautious because you know exactly what you want to say, but the person receiving your email will find it hard to read tone into what you have written
 - be discreet, professional and lawful in interacting with staff
 - be aware of school policies and procedures which you have agreed to follow
 - consider the time of day or night an email is sent
 - consider the length of the email and therefore whether it is the best way to communicate with staff at the school
 - if a teacher has not responded to an email in three days, please telephone the School Office and leave a message for the teacher
- **Parent meetings**

Parents are always welcome at the school to meet with staff. Unscheduled meetings before school may be problematic as teachers are preparing for the day ahead. Instead, parents should contact the School Office or contact the teacher to make a mutually convenient meeting time.

- **SMS or contacting staff at home**

Parents should not contact a staff member at home, on their personal home phone or mobile or by SMS if the matter relates to school.

- **Social Media and other Public Forums**

Social media and other Public Forums should not be used to criticise or denigrate others in the school community. The school reserves the right to request material publicly posted about students, staff, parents or the school that is inaccurate, confrontational, critical, offensive or disrespectful to be taken down. Likewise, the posting of photos of other children without consent is inappropriate.

Matters that include libel or slander may be dealt with at a higher level.

6. Helpful Communication Pathways

- **Messages to students**

If a parent needs to get a message to their child during the day, they are to telephone the School Office. The school receptionist will ensure the message is passed on. When teachers are on class they have duty of care to all students in the class and need to maintain that responsibility; parents are not to contact teachers directly for an urgent message.

- **Junior School Questions, Concerns or Suggestions regarding:**
- your child or some general classroom practice, contact the class teacher first
- policy or practice in a section of the Junior School, contact the relevant coordinator or the Deputy Principal Junior School

- the curriculum from K-6, contact the Junior School Curriculum Coordinator
 - policy or practice in the whole Junior School, contact the Deputy Principal Junior School
 - if the issue is of a highly sensitive nature contact the School Principal
- **Secondary School Questions, Concerns or Suggestions regarding:**
 - your child's general progress or welfare, contact the Home Class Teacher in the first instance
 - your child's progress in a particular subject or a question about classroom practice, contact the subject teacher concerned
 - policy, practice or pastoral care in relation to a section of the Secondary School, contact the relevant Year 7 – 12 Pastoral Care Coordinator
 - for questions about the Preliminary or HSC Courses contact the Deputy Principal Curriculum
 - for policy or practice in a subject area in general, contact the Subject Coordinator
 - for issues regarding Policy or Practice, or a group of children in the whole Secondary School contact the relevant Deputy Principal ie Curriculum or Pastoral Care
 - If the issue is of a highly sensitive nature contact the School Principal
 - **Whole of School Questions, Concerns or Suggestions can be directed to:**
 - general bus behaviour, contact the Deputy Principal Pastoral Care for Year 7 -12 or Deputy Principal, Junior School for K - 6
 - discipline across a number of areas of the school, contact the Deputy Principal Pastoral Care for Year 7 -12 or Deputy Principal, Junior School for K - 6
 - Pastoral Care Policy or enquiries about how the school prevents and manages harassment/bullying across the School, contact Deputy Principal Pastoral Care
 - for enquiries in the area of careers, contact the Careers Adviser
 - school curriculum approach and delivery, contact the Deputy Principal Curriculum for Year 7 -12 or Deputy Principal Junior School for K - 6
 - library and its resources, contact the relevant Teacher Librarian
 - enrolments and related issues, contact the Registrar
 - Parent Involvement Program, community relations or fundraising, contact the School Office
 - fees and other financial matters or maintenance of the buildings and grounds, contact the Business Manager
 - General administrative matters (e.g. bus passes, book lists, etc.), contact the School Office
 - health and safety risks should be reported to any staff member, or can be raised with the relevant Deputy Principal if the matter is delicate or complex
 - any concern or suggestion can be made using the feedback form on the school's website

If you have any continuing concern after following the above steps or any question, concern or suggestion in relation to general school policy, practice or resources, contact the Principal via the Executive Assistant.

7. Dealing with Discord

The following guidelines should be helpful. In each case, you can take a matter to someone with wider or higher responsibility if it has not been answered or resolved.

When dealing with any grievance or concern we need to consider biblical principles. Specifically, all parties need to:

- treat the matter seriously
- act fairly towards each other

- expect that they will be treated in the same way
- treat others involved in the situation with respect
- act discreetly and maintain confidentiality

At all times procedural fairness must apply to all parties in a grievance. In all our dealings with parents, carer's and visitors, we aim to cover our moral and legal responsibilities in a way that reflects our Christian understanding in this area. In grievance resolution, procedural fairness involves ensuring all facts are heard from all parties, ensuring they know how the matter will be resolved and by whom and knowing how to seek a review of a decision.

8. Procedures for Managing Grievances

Where a question, grievance, complaint, claim or dispute, which relates to a staff member the following procedures, will apply. It should be noted that a Board Member must never be the channel for grievances in the first instance unless the matter relates directly to the Principal.

The procedures below detail the principles to be followed:

Step 1. One-on-one resolution

Where it is possible a parent or carer should discuss the matter directly with the staff member concerned as detailed in Point 6. *Helpful Communication Pathways* with a view to reaching agreement regarding the matter.

During the meeting, the parent or carer should present the information in a logical manner that clearly articulates the alleged issues that are causing concern without being emotive. The parent or carer should suggest a solution to the alleged concerns.

Both the parent or carer and staff member should respectfully listen to each other's point of view, and if possible work at developing a solution to the matter.

Any meeting between the parties should be undertaken in an environment that does not cause concern and/or threaten either party. A staff member may at any time request their supervisor to attend a parent or carer meeting. Where possible, prior to the meeting the staff member should advise the parent or carer that the supervisor would be attending the meeting.

It is acknowledged that whilst it is preferable that grievances be resolved between the parties directly involved it is not always possible due to many reasons. These reasons may include, but not limited to:

- previous attempts to raise the matter by the parent or carer have not been followed up by the staff member within a reasonable time
- there is a breach of the Staff Code of Conduct being raised
- the matter involves an allegation of abuse or any inappropriate behaviour towards children (this should be raised with the Principal in the first instance)

If agreement cannot be reached, the matter should be referred to the immediate supervisor of the staff member for resolution through discussion with the party/parties concerned in accordance with *Step 2*.

Step 2. Resolution involving Supervisor Support

If it is not possible for the parent or carer to follow the one on one resolution process or the one-on-one approach has not been successful, they then approach:

If the issue is with:

A Teacher
A Coordinator
A Deputy Principal
A member of the support staff
The Business Manager
The Principal *

Approach:

Their Coordinator
The relevant Deputy Principal
The Principal
Their manager
The Principal
The Board Chair

* *limited to compliance with this Policy and the process by which the decision was made by the Principal not the decision/outcome itself.*

If the matter is to be escalated, the parent should let the person who is the subject of the grievance know that the matter will be taken further. Wherever possible, the person raising the grievance, and the subject of the grievance, should go together to the more senior person.

In circumstances where the supervisor is now being informed of the parent or carer concern for the first time they must decide if the matter is a breach of the Staff Code of Conduct, or involves inappropriate behaviour towards children, and in such cases immediately refer to the Principal. The supervisor is to advise the parent or carer of the requirement to send the information to the Principal. The grievance must be forwarded immediately and include notes taken by the supervisor during their discussion with the aggrieved person.

Where the matter is not a Staff Code of Conduct issue the supervisor, within seven (7) days is to:

- Meet with the parent or carer and ensure they have all the details pertaining to the grievance. The parent or carer must detail the grievance(s) in writing and where possible detail a suggested solution to the matter.
- Advise the parent or carer that in the spirit of procedural fairness any party subject to a grievance must be advised of the information pertaining to the grievance and the right to respond to the information. This would include knowing the evidence and person raising the grievance. ***(In circumstances involving Staff Code of Conduct and/or Child Protection matters the School may not be able to disclose who raised the allegation due to legislative requirements)***
- Make a time to meet with the relevant staff member to discuss the matter
- Whilst at this time all discussions are seeking to resolve the matter in a conciliatory manner, the staff member who is the subject of the grievance has the right to request a support person attend any meeting. The role of the support person is detailed in the definitions section.
- Depending upon the response from the person who is the subject of the grievance, the Supervisor at their discretion may consider it appropriate make a time to meet with the parent to outline the responses received during the interview and seek further clarification
- Make a time to meet with both parties to outline the outcomes of the interviews
- Where the matter is considered resolved by the parties, the supervisor should forward notes and documentation to the Principal's Executive Assistant who will file them
- Where the matter is considered not resolved by either party the matter should be escalated in the first instance to the appropriate person

Step 3. Principal Intervention

a. Grievances not involving Code of Conduct and/or Child Protection matters

In circumstances where a matter is unresolved following its escalation through Steps 1 and 2, it can be referred to the Principal.

The Principal will endeavour to resolve the dispute to the satisfaction of the parties involved in a reasonable timeframe, within seven (7) days of it being referred being ideal.

The Principal will review the information and documentation provided by the parties or may arrange to meet with the parties. Upon review of this information and subsequent meetings, the Principal may:

- Consider the matter has been dealt with appropriately and advise the parties accordingly
- Meet with the parties involved in the grievance to work towards obtaining outcomes and solutions to the matter
- Refer the matter to an external provider for further follow up and resolution (e.g. Peacewise). A decision by the Principal is final. Where a parent or carer is unhappy with the process by which the matter was dealt with or the application of this Policy by the Principal, they may bring the matter to the attention of the Board. Board intervention is limited to compliance with this Policy and the process by which the decision was made by the Principal not the decision/outcome itself.

b. Grievances involving Staff Code of Conduct breaches and/or Child Protection matters

Upon receipt of a grievance, that alleges behaviour and/or action that breaches the Staff Code of Conduct and/or Child Protection matters the Principal will meet with the aggrieved parent or carer to discuss and gather further information regarding matter. In such matters the Principal will remind the aggrieved parent or carer of the requirement for confidentiality.

Following discussion with the aggrieved parent, the Principal may:

- Investigate the matter by interviewing staff directly involved or other staff who can provide information on the matter
- Refer the grievance to a nominated delegate, such as a Deputy Principal or manager requesting the matter be investigated
- Refer the matter to an external provider for investigation
- The above steps do not absolve the Principal's requirement to notify relevant agencies (FACS, Police, Ombudsman, and NESAs) immediately of a Staff Code of Conduct and/or Child Protection matter and taking advice on how the matter should be undertaken.

Step 4. Board Intervention

In circumstances where a matter is unresolved following its escalation through the Principal the matter may be referred to the Board only if it relates to compliance with this Policy or the process by which the decision was made by the Principal not the decision/outcome itself.

Any complaint to the Board on the limited grounds outlined above is to be in writing (with all relevant documents) and addressed to the Board Chair.

The Board will endeavour to resolve the dispute to the satisfaction of the parties involved. This may involve the creation of a sub-committee to manage the complaint and the obtaining of legal advice when appropriate.

The Board will only review those complaints that have followed the process outlined in this Policy.

The Board reserves the right (at its sole discretion) to review a complaint as part of its governance oversight of the School.

9. Confidentiality and Victimisation

The parties to a grievance are required, at all stages of this policy and procedure, to maintain confidentiality in relation to the concern or complaint. The parties must not disclose, by any form of communication, either the fact or the substance of the matter to anyone.

A person must not victimise or otherwise subject another person to detrimental action as a consequence of that person raising, providing information about, or otherwise being involved in the resolution of a grievance under these procedures.

Any breach of either the confidentiality or non-victimisation requirements will be treated seriously by the school. Likewise, during the management of grievances, if the matter is found to be vexatious that is, a grievance is groundless made with an adverse primary intent to cause distress, detriment or harassment to the subject the school, on behalf of the staff member may take action against the parent or carer who has raised the complaint. Such action for a breach of confidentiality, inappropriate conduct, victimisation or a vexatious complaint might include but not limited to:

- a temporary ban on any member of the school community from attending any co-curricular activity
- a temporary ban on any member of the school community from being on the school grounds in general
- the School may direct that any parent or carer only communicate with members of staff through a nominated school representative
- the School may see that the only option is to terminate the enrolment of the child/children of that parent or carer

10. Definitions

Grievance:

The term “grievance” in this Policy is used to encompass the concepts of a complaint and disputes as defined in *AS/NZS 10002-2014*. These terms are defined in that standard as follows:

Complaint: An expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products [or services], or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Disputes: Unresolved complaints escalated internally or externally or both.

This definition does not incorporate general negative feedback, which may not require a resolution or formal follow-up. While this type of feedback is valuable, the Policy does not apply to feedback of this nature.

Victimisation:

To single out for punishment or unfair treatment. Management will take all steps necessary to ensure that staff are not victimised for coming forward with grievances – victimisation will lead to disciplinary action.

Procedural Fairness:

Procedural fairness generally requires all of the following:

- a hearing appropriate to the circumstances
- lack of bias
- evidence to support a decision
- inquiry into matters in dispute

Senior Management:

Principal, Deputy Principals and Business Manager.

11. Biblical References

(Rom. 14:1 - 15:6)

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarrelling over disputable matters. 2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

5 One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. 6 Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7 For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. 8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister[a]? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11 It is written:

*“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,
‘every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”[b]*

12 So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. 14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. 15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but

of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.[c] We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." [a] 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(Matt 18: 15-17)

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church

(1 John 2:1)

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

(1 Cor. 6:1-7)

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? 2 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

(Phil. 4:2-3)

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

(1 John 1:9)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

(Galatians 6:10)

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

(Ephesians 4:29)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Flow Chart for Parent Communication/Grievances

