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1.1	2019	Approved version
1.2	2021	Significant re-write of Policy and Guideline

## Communication

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	- 3 -
PURPOSE.....	- 3 -
SCOPE .....	- 3 -
POLICY STATEMENT.....	- 3 -
Communication with Children.....	- 4 -
Communication between Teachers and Parents / Caregivers .....	- 4 -
Feedback and Issues of Concern .....	- 5 -
Unresolved Concerns / Grievances.....	- 5 -
Meeting conventions.....	- 5 -
Communicating with The Board .....	- 6 -
Communication between Staff.....	- 6 -
GUIDELINES.....	- 6 -
School Newsletter.....	- 6 -
MSSA Website .....	- 7 -
Written Correspondence .....	- 7 -
College of Teachers (CoT) .....	- 7 -

# DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**MSSA:** Milkwood Steiner School Association

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Communication policy is to guide practice for enacting healthy communication at MSSA, based on respect, deep listening, transparency and fairness. The Communications Policy holds that all voices are valued, and recognises and celebrates the diversity of means and manners that communication is performed. The guiding principles of the Communication Policy include welcoming feedback, maintaining accountability, integrity of responsiveness and transparency, a recognition of the diverse communication capacities and needs of members of the MSSA community, and respect for confidentiality.

## SCOPE

This document applies to all areas of the school, including the Milkwood Steiner School Association Board (the Board), staff, students, Playgroup, After School Care, families, carers and friends of Milkwood Steiner School, volunteers and visitors to the school.

This policy applies in all interactions while in school or off site, including school related functions such as excursions, camps, social events or conferences.

## POLICY STATEMENT

Approaches to Communication at MSSA reflect the values determined through community and student consultation, in the MSSA Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is a living document therefore this policy values ongoing reflection on the characteristics and impact of communication strategies used at the school, in order to maintain a culture of inclusion, respect, care and responsibility and reflect the values of the Strategic Plan.

Communication is open, kind, mindful and respectful.

Feedback is encouraged.

Professional confidentiality is maintained at all times.

Personal information is only distributed with consent and in accordance with the law.

Written communication supports accountability, provides documentation of a communication process, and when written literacy skills are adequate, increases clarity. However, when literacy or other barriers prevent for inclusion, MSSA encourages communication through other means. This includes but is not limited to verbal communication face-to-face or remotely using technology, using consultation or mediation practices, translator services and other support services.

**Conflict:** In a safe environment, conflict is healthy and necessary for change and growth. When conflicts emerge, conflicted parties first attempt to resolve the conflict directly with the people involved or affected. Support may be sought from the parties' supervisors or the Principal.

Conflict resolution is approached with the following assumptions

- We are going to learn more about ourselves

- We are striving to maintain/restore a strong relationship
- Resolution is in the best interest of our children and community

Written correspondence addressed to a particular staff member or volunteer will be directed unopened to the relevant person where it has been marked as 'confidential'.

Communication contact is acknowledged within two weeks of receipt and a course of action is proposed.

When a complaint or comment is made, the receiver is responsible for directing it to the right person according to the MSSA Communication Policy. This is carried out quickly with kindness, respect and professionalism.

With respect for confidentiality, privacy and dignity, sharing information about the school's practice and vision is embraced. MSSA seek to share responsibility and increase understanding of its work with its members and broader community, when possible. MSSA members have a responsibility to read communications from the school, including the newsletter, website, school policies, class notes, letters and emails.

## **Communication with Children**

The voice of the child is valued and respected at MSSA.

Respectful, clear and kind communication is modelled to children by MSSA adults.

Staff are sensitive to children's diverse communication needs, bringing awareness to the developmental, cultural and individual differences in communication styles.

Forgiveness, unconditional positive regard and strong boundaries are modelled.

Students communicate respectfully with adults and other children at the school, in accordance with the Code of Conduct. If a Code of Conduct breach occurs, students are guided to understand the consequences of their actions and given the opportunity to redress any harm done. If inappropriate behaviour continues or where otherwise necessary, further action will be taken according to other relevant MSSA policies.

## **Communication between Teachers and Parents / Caregivers**

Parent Information Sessions are held by each class teacher in Term 1 and 3. Invitations are distributed in week one. Topics include Child Development, Curriculum, artistic classroom experiences (eg guided painting, clay work, etc) or Class events and dynamics requiring group discussion. The meetings seek to build community, connection and belonging for each class' families. They seek to increase parent involvement in class life and a sense of belonging and contribution, and provide an experience of Adult Education.

Parent Teacher Interviews are held in Term 2 and Term 4, and as required. Interviews involve an exchange of information about the child, are an opportunity for parents and the teacher to provide feedback or ask questions. Educational Adjustment Plans may be developed or reviewed.

Teachers are responsible for communication to families in their class, including communicating about excursions, festivals, events, and concerns.

Information about individual children or families is only disclosed to other families with consent.

Parents and Teachers contact each other directly, as required. Teachers use their school email account and may prefer to use a school phone or block their phone number ID in settings if making calls on personal devices. Face-to-face meetings are preferred when approaching sensitive topics.

Confidential information about a student may only be disclosed by a staff member, to people listed on the child's enrolment file Emergency Contacts and *Consent to Collect* list, or as required according to the *Child Protection Policy*.

## Feedback and Issues of Concern

A meeting request may be made in person, via letter or email or by contacting the school office. Table 1 provides an overview for points of contact, when seeking a response from the school regarding feedback or questions.

**Table 1: Communication points of contact**

I want to discuss...	Who do I contact?	Not resolved?
School operations Human Resources Child safety / urgent matters My employment	Principal	Board
School Fees Invoice Maintenance, cleaning and working bees Wages and reimbursements	Finance Manager	Principal
Work Health and Safety	WHS Officer	Principal
Enrolment I have a question but I'm not sure who to direct it to.	Enrolment and Admin Officer	Principal
My child Something happening in class / playground Steiner Education Educational Adjustment Plan Specialist subjects	Child's teacher	College of Teachers or Principal
Governance Unresolved concerns / Grievances	Board	

## Unresolved Concerns / Grievances

If someone is dissatisfied with a previous communication or an unresolved conflict, they may bring their concerns to the Principal, stating the issue and requesting a facilitated meeting with the person.

In some cases, an independent facilitator may be sourced.

The purpose of this facilitated meeting is to ensure:

- That the concerns raised are accurately conveyed, received and documented
- That a third party has witnessed and documented the concern
- That each party has an opportunity to respond directly to the concerns and to ensure that the nature of the response has been heard and understood by others involved
- That an Action Plan is documented for taking next steps, and that all parties hold responsibility and ownership of the Plan.

If this process is followed and either party remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they may bring their concern to the MSSA Board.

## Meeting conventions

Meetings and conversations are carried out in a suitable meeting space, with consideration for privacy, dignity and accessibility.

Violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, self-directed, interpersonal, collective, systemic and any other form of violence is not tolerated. A meeting may be terminated or re-scheduled until a safety plan is agreed upon, if required.

Either party may request to have a support person present at the meeting. Both parties must agree on who the nominated person will be. If agreement cannot be made, the decision will be made by the Principal or the Board.

Meeting discussion points are documented, including agreed actions and outcomes, and communicated to third parties as required.

## **Communicating with The Board**

When receiving concerns, the Board will verify whether the Policy's procedural recommendations for communicating concerns have been attempted (see Table 1), or document why these options were not considered appropriate.

The Board Chair will acknowledge receipt of correspondence within 48 hours; and inform the sender as the matter progresses until resolved.

## **Communication between Staff**

The Principal is responsible for organising staff meetings, College of Teacher meetings, Business meetings and others as required. The Principal advises which meetings are mandatory.

Email is used for day-to-day updates. Email accounts are checked by staff at least once per work-day.

Staff are requested to have their mobile phones accessible for emergencies, while on site.

Communication via mobile phone/text messages during class time is used for urgent contact only.

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## **GUIDELINES**

### **School Newsletter**

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

#### Weekly

- Principal
- Class Teachers

#### Fortnightly

- Library
- Farm/Garden

#### Termly

- After School Care
- Playgroup
- Board

#### As Required

- Administrative updates
- Community announcements

Identifiable photos and text about children are only published with consent.

Other school community members may submit announcements for publishing to the office, for consideration by the Principal, as per the Newsletter Publication Guidelines.

Past issues of the School Newsletter are available on the MSS website.

## **MSSA Website**

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

## **Written Correspondence**

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

admin@milwood.nt.edu.au	Administration and Enrolment enquiries, general enquiries. Enquiries about playgroup and After School Care and emails for teacher assistants, music tutors and specialist teachers may be sent to this address, forwarded to the relevant staff member.
finance@milwood.nt.edu.au	Finance, accounts and school fees
principal@milwood.nt.edu.au	Matters of governance, HR, management or matters that are confidential.
board@milwood.nt.edu.au	Matters of school governance
kindergarten@milwood.nt.edu.au	Kindergarten communication Matters concerning children in Kindergarten
Class teachers: firstname.surname@milwood.nt.edu.au	Class Teacher communication Matters concerning children in Class

## **College of Teachers (CoT)**

CoT is a leadership group made up of Milkwood educators. Milkwood teachers are members of the College of Teachers. Other educators, including Teacher Assistants, Specialist teachers, Music tutors, Playgroup leader, After School Care Coordinator may volunteer to become members of the CoT and membership is considered at the discretion of employer.

Staff who are members of the CoT commit to participating in weekly meetings and working with the CoT to grow the cultural, pedagogical and spiritual life of the school, with the best interest of children at the heart of decision making.

The College of Teachers engage in work which values personal and professional growth from an Anthroposophical framework, adapted to this time and place. Meetings incorporate spiritual and meditative practice, collegial support, and deep studies including anthroposophical study, child and class studies, readings.

The College of Teachers makes recommendations to the Principal.

The CoT values qualities of trust, growth, personal development and child-focused practice. Meetings provide a space for exchanging knowledge and skills, supporting each other's practice and sharing responsibility for the life of the school.

CoT place the needs and rights of the child at the centre of decision making.

Conflicted opinions and other tensions in decision making are celebrated for the transformation and depth of wisdom they elicit.

Confidentiality is maintained.

### CoT Agenda Template

3:15 Verse

Artistic activity – rotation of members lead

Arrivals/check ins - brief reports from any members.

3:30 Rolling agenda – brief report on any actions from previous meetings.

3:40 Agenda items: Sent to the meeting Chair, as “proposals”, “tensions”, or “needs” (or a combination of them). With the exception of urgent matters, decisions are not made on the day a proposal is made. Tensions are matters for discussion, which may result in proposals. Needs are requests made by CoT members to the group. When needs are expressed, the role of the group is to find a way to meet the need raised. The role of the chair is to that the culture of the group allows and celebrates diverse voices for the wisdom they prompt through deeper explorations.

In order to use College meeting times effectively, agenda items are reviewed through the following prompts:

- Should this be discussed by Staff or CoT?
- Questions: who is mandated to answer this question? Can this question be answered by the Principal or Administration?
- Support need: where is this best addressed? CoT, mentoring, Principal?
- On weeks when the agenda is full – what would happen if this agenda item were deferred for a week? Assessing the implications of deferring an agenda item.

4:15 Study (child/class study or other)

4:55 Song

5:00 Closing verse.

### CoT Meeting roles

**Chair:** Sets and distributes agenda, maintains the order and conventions of the meeting, ensures the safety, fairness and equality of voices in the meeting

**Minute taker:** Documents the discussions, decisions, actions of the meeting, distributes and files meeting minutes.