



MATER DEI SCHOOL TOOWOOMBA

COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

General:

- Mater Dei Staff are responsible for students while on playground duty, school excursions and during class face to face contact hours. Communication opportunities are restricted during these times. Organising meeting times and following the staff member's preferred mode of communication is important for effective communication.
- Mater Dei will use the following modes for communication:
 - School website
 - School App – Skoolbag
 - School Administration System (SAS) for whole school emails and texts
 - Toowoomba Catholic Education personalized email accounts
 - Hard copies of letters, notices, forms and reports
 - Face to face meetings or phone calls.
- Mater Dei will issue information for interest or action via the communication modes. This will take the form of, but not exclusive to:
 - Newsletters / weekly blurbs
 - Formal letters / forms on letterhead
 - Informal notes from teachers (written or typed)
 - Formal and informal face to face meetings
 - Policy / procedures.
- Communication from P&F and School Board will also be distributed through the preferred school modes and approved by the school principal.
- Any sensitive school information or matters is not for publicising or discussing via Social Media modes eg. Facebook or twitter.
- For unresolved issues please follow the Toowoomba Catholic Education Board: Procedure for conciliation, mediation and adjudication of disputes.

Communication Mode Detail:

School Website, Skoolbag App and Texting:

- School administration officers will post information on the school web-sites and application or text information, after approval by a member of the leadership team.
- Specific notices and newsletters will be posted in the secure parent portal on the website, to protect the identity of students in our school.

Email:

- Toowoomba Catholic Education email accounts are set up for individual staff to address school related business.
- Best practice response time is within 48 hours.
- Messages are to be kept brief and to the point:
 - 100 words or less recommended, or schedule a face to face meeting

- Use dot points to be specific.
- School administration emails will be issued through the School Administration System (SAS) and will include information and reminders from teachers or administration staff for:
 - Class or year level groups
 - All parents in the school.
- The forwarding of any correspondence from staff member to external agencies or parents, must only occur after permission by the author.
- Conditions for emailing communication with staff:
 - Transcripts should be kept to a minimum number of responses
 - Banter conversations / debates / arguments are to be avoided
 - Tricky / sensitive emails from staff or parents are to be addressed face to face.

Formal letters on school letterhead:

- Official correspondence to parents from the leadership team regarding school administration will be on letterhead.
- Official correspondence to parents from class teachers or specialist teachers is to be co-signed by the Principal, Assistant Principal or the APRE.
- Official correspondence to other agencies / organisations from class teachers or specialist teachers is to be co-signed by the Principal, Assistant Principal or the APRE.

Formal Face to Face Meetings:

- Formal face to face meetings are required to discuss confidential, sensitive issues or a number of related issues.
- Meetings can be instigated by parents, teachers or administration personnel and should include:
 - A brief of what the meeting will be about
 - A mutual date, time and duration allocated (within 5 working days of initial request)
 - A course of action to follow after the meeting with timelines and review points established and adhered to.

Phone Calls:

- The school phone system is for school related communication during office hours.
- Refrain from using personal mobile phones and home phone lines for school related communication. Emergency situations and excursions / camps are exceptions.
- Special consideration for use of the school phone system for personal use is to be raised with a leadership team person.

MATER DEI NETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

(Adapted from Griffith University: Mt Gravatt, Brisbane - Netiquette Guidelines)

Email Etiquette

1. **Subject line to summarise the message.** Make the Subject Line summarise the body of the e-mail. Ask yourself, 'will the recipient(s) know what this e-mail is about?'

For example,

Subject: Meeting (instead, write) Subject: P&F Meeting 21.07.2014.

2. **Ensure the recipient knows the background.** Include enough contextual information at the beginning of the e-mail for the recipient to know what the matter is about. If in doubt, put background information in. For example, avoid, "May I have a copy of the last Weekly Blurb?" Instead write, "May I have a copy of the weekly blurb for week 2 of this term. I have had some email problems on my home line."
3. **Keep it concise.** Keep messages brief and to the point, but not so brief that it causes the problem outlined in the previous point. This includes deleting any irrelevant text when an email has been back and forth several times. If the sense of the email will be lost by deleting that text, however, leave it in.
4. **Layout message for readability.** Keep white space among the writing by using spaces and breaks between paragraphs and long sentences. Also use dot points where possible to make it easier for the reader.
5. **Reply within 48 hours.** Try to reply within 48 hours, less if possible. Get in the habit of acknowledging the message as soon as practical and setting up a timeline for action if needed. It is the polite thing to do and the recipient will appreciate a prompt reply. It also makes you look efficient. The longer you leave it to reply, the more likely you will forget or have too big a log-jam of unanswered email.
6. **Allow time for a reply.** E-mail messages are not usually *required* to be answered immediately, though it is good practice if you do. Before sending a reminder, allow some time for a response, sometimes even a few days. Not everyone is online 24 hours a day.
7. **Use the BCC field when sending bulk email.** If you're sending email to a whole list of people, put their email addresses in the BCC field. The privacy of the recipient is respected, and spammers cannot harvest the email addresses for their alternate purposes.
8. **Text can imply shouting at people or threatening them.** Refrain from using capital letters, (UPPERCASE), or oversized fonts. The reader will likely feel they are being shouted at, or even threatened. Use it very sparingly and only to emphasise a particularly important point.
9. **Avoid angry outbursts.** Send or replying to emails when you are angry, tired or have been drinking alcohol is bad practice. Compose the email then let it sit for the day or night before re-reading and sending. Angry or intemperate emails escalate on each response.

10. **Use correct punctuation, grammar and spelling.** Email is formal written communication.
 - I. Use punctuation in a normal manner. One exclamation point! Is just as effective as five!!!!
 - II. Check your spelling, if you don't know how to spell something, look it up.
 - III. Avoid abbreviated texting language.
11. **Only “Reply All” when necessary.** Think twice about sending a reply to everyone. Perhaps only selected people need to see this email. Sending it to everyone may simply be contributing to an already cluttered In-Tray.
12. **Remember attachments.** If the reason for sending an email is to send a file, remember to include it. It is easy to forget. One strategy is to attach the file before writing the email.
13. **“Not Suitable For Work” warning.** Some workplaces are tolerant of non-work related email, though not too many. Sending inappropriate material is in breach of the Toowoomba Catholic Education Internet User Policy and the Code of Conduct.
14. **Monitor “over-familiarity” with the recipient.** Addressing the recipient by a nickname or abbreviated name when only friends and family do is inappropriate. Use Hi, Hello, Dear or Thank You to preface the recipients title or preferred name.
15. **Email is not confidential.** Inappropriate messages are flagged in organisations and can lead to disciplinary action. Toowoomba Catholic Education has every user sign an 'acceptable user' contract as a condition of their having an email account. Emails can always end up in the wrong hands intentionally or unintentionally, so it is best to write nothing that can be misunderstood.

Social Media Etiquette

1. **Seek permission to use images of others.** Schools are governed by the Privacy Act and can only use staff, student and parent images for specific purposes. Some families are protective of their family's images. It is important to check with individual families before child or adult images are posted on social media sites.
2. **Seek permission to use information of others.** Schools are governed by the Privacy Act and can only use staff, student and parent information for specific purposes. Some families are protective of their family's information. It is important to check with individual families before any information is posted on social media sites.
3. **Exclude slandering, bullying and negative postings:** Mater Dei is grounded on values and beliefs that encourage respectful and sensitive dealings with each other. Comment on social media about the school setting and people in the school community, is highly inappropriate.
4. **Sensitive and personal information:** Other people's news or information from the school setting is their own information and will be conveyed through their choice of communication method. Posting other people's sensitive school news or information is inappropriate.

