



**Policy Title:** Communication Policy (DRAFT)

**Year of Publication:** 2014

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**Related Policies:**

- ETD – *Parents/Carers as Partners in Schooling Policy*, September 2001

**Legislation:**

*Education Act 2004*

*Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Act 2011*

*Children and Young People Act 2008*

## 1. Policy Statement

This policy is based upon research findings and the combined opinions expressed by the parents, carers, students and teachers of Maribyrnong Primary School. The communication policy of Maribyrnong Primary School is a guide to school staff, parents and carers, students and other key stakeholders regarding the flow of information to and from school, acknowledging the rights and responsibilities of all members of the community and is summed up in the statement that ‘communication is everyone’s responsibility’. This policy establishes positive lines of communication between home and school so that students receive continuity of education, care, support and management within the home and school settings.

## 2. Purpose

This policy will ensure that communication from the school is consistent, coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse needs of our community members and stakeholders. This approach will help us to provide timely, accurate, and high-quality information about our policies, programs, services and initiatives. The Communications Policy will ensure that we are visible, accessible and accountable to the school community. Our communication initiatives will include a variety of ways and means to communicate and will engage members and stakeholders in meaningful two-way communication. This policy gives priority to face to face communications and features written communications, both ‘hard copy’ and electronic, which are accessible and inclusive.

## 3. Rationale

Five key beliefs underpin communication at Maribyrnong Primary School:

- We are committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive environment which promotes open communication, respect, fairness and positive relationships.
- We believe that the relationship between home and school is a very important part of ensuring that children are happy, secure and open to learning.
- We believe learning is a shared responsibility between home and school and each stakeholder plays an important part within this as we work together to meet the various needs of our school community.
- Communication has a critical role in the reputation of a school and some of the day-to-day issues schools face with parents and communities.
- Effective communication is central to the success of any business, program, project, initiative, service or change process.

## 4. Definitions

- Child/Student - Any student enrolled at Maribyrnong Primary School.

- Parent/Carer – A child’s parent or carer is a person with parental responsibility for the child.
- Communication – The imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium.

## 5. Procedures

At Maribyrnong Primary School we aim to ensure:

- That effective communication between all school community members takes place.
- That processes are in place which allow for open and honest communication amongst all school community members.
- That confidential information is managed in a manner consistent with community expectations, professional standards and legal obligations.
- That clear, positive and fair processes and guidelines are provided which allow issues or concerns to be aired and resolved in a timely, effective and respectful manner.
- That a positive, productive and harmonious school environment is maintained.

Procedure for contacting a classroom or specialist teacher:

When a parent or carer wishes to contact a member of staff to discuss matters relating to their child, the procedure is to contact the teacher involved, giving a brief outline of the issue. Contact should be made using one of the following approaches:

1. Contact the school, either by phone or coming to the office personally, and ask a school administration officer to arrange for the teacher to contact you to arrange a suitable meeting time. Teachers are not usually available to answer phone calls or come to the office during teaching time or whilst on playground duty.
2. Contact the appropriate teacher in writing or via email, asking them to organise a suitable meeting time. As teachers are in classrooms teaching face to face with students, email responses will not be immediate. For emergencies parents and carers are asked to contact the front office.
3. Speak briefly with the appropriate teacher, either before or after school hours (not at a time when they are teaching or on playground duty), and ask them to arrange a suitable meeting time.

Procedure for contacting other school personnel:

When a parent or carer has a concern or wishes to discuss an issue regarding a situation which they consider affects the whole school, their child’s wellbeing or relates to a school policy or matter, the procedure is to:

- Contact the Principal, Deputy Principal or School Executive Officer, using one of the three approaches outlined above.

When parents and carers have a concern or wish to discuss an issue relating to a member of staff or of a sensitive nature, they should make an appointment with the Principal by contacting the school office, either by phone or coming to the office personally, and asking the Business Manager or an administration officer to arrange a suitable meeting time.

In all cases if the matter is urgent and / or relates to the possible risk or harm to a student, a member of staff or another member of the school community, the Principal should be informed immediately and the urgency of the matter conveyed. The Principal will determine who is the most appropriate person to deal with the issue and the process to work towards a resolution, as well as ensuring that contact is made as soon as possible.

Maribyrnong Primary School will deal with all complaints and issues sensitively, promptly and confidentially. Matters will be investigated and dealt with in a timely manner. In working through any issues a resolution which treats all parties with dignity and respect will be sought. Issues and matters which have been raised will be kept in the strictest of confidence and not discussed with any other persons, excepting those directly involved. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted or acted upon.



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Resolving matters of concern are best achieved through face-to-face contact with the appropriate person. Emails and letters should be brief, alerting the person to the issue; they should not be used as a forum for in-depth discussion. Formal meetings will be minuted and all persons involved will receive a copy of the minutes. Any correspondence received by the school will be kept in a secure file. Complaints can be made from parents and carers directly to the Education and Training Directorate as outlined on the website:

[http://www.det.act.gov.au/childrens\\_policy\\_and\\_regulation/complaints-and-concerns](http://www.det.act.gov.au/childrens_policy_and_regulation/complaints-and-concerns)

Issues arising between students and families:

No parent or carer should approach or handle (verbally or physically) the children of other families or their parents with a school related or non-school related issue on the school grounds including classrooms. Such matters must be addressed to the Principal or Deputy Principal and not discussed with other persons.

Other key points:

1. All parents and carers are to report directly to the front office if they arrive late to school or wish to collect their child from the school between 9.00am and 3.00pm.
2. The school website and Face Book page are used to provide information to families, they are not a portal for feedback from the community. All feedback can be provided through a personal appointment, phone call or email to the school executive.
3. Any concerns, incidents, accidents or referrals to the school psychologist will be communicated directly with the key parent and carers of each child. If a student is placed on a plan, a slip detailing the incident is sent home with the child and requires parent/carers signature acknowledging receipt of the information.

Mechanisms for School Communication:

<b>STAFF COMMUNICATION</b>			
<b>MECHANISM</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
School Improvement Process	To review current school practice and performance and set goals for strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey of teachers, parents and students</li> <li>Preparation of issues paper and development of School Strategic Plan and Annual Operational Plans</li> </ul>	<p>Four year review cycle</p> <p>Parent, student and staff satisfaction surveys annually</p>
Operational Plan	To articulate the actions to be taken towards the 4 year priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Executive and staff to formulate plan at the beginning of each year</li> <li>Operational plan reviewed at end of each year</li> </ul>	Annually
Professional Pathways and Performance Management Process (Annual Professional Discussions)	<p>To implement whole school goals and provide professional support and dialogue for staff</p> <p>Career path planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Executive staff member supports team through formal and informal meetings to plan/support and evaluate the pathways process.</li> <li>Staff prepare documentation prior to formal meeting times Principal advises the Directorate when the processes are completed</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing throughout the year</p> <p>Formal meetings at the Planning Stage, Mid Cycle Review and Summative end of year</p>
Executive Meetings	To ensure whole school cohesion, strategic planning and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal, Deputy Principal and Executive teachers raise issues, share information and plan at whole school level</li> </ul>	Weekly
Staff meetings	To provide information, raise issues, plan and discuss school management, activities and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole staff meetings held each week</li> </ul>	Weekly
Teaching and Learning Leadership Teams	To review and develop school based curriculum, school programs and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Committees elect a coordinator and meet as required to plan for student learning and school program delivery (all staff are members of a leadership team)</li> <li>Committees report to the Principal and share progress with whole staff</li> </ul>	Fortnightly
Professional Learning Team Meetings (PLTs)	To share information, raise issues, plan and discuss team and class management, activities and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preschool, kindergarten, year 1/2, Year 3/4 and Year 5/6 PLTs meet</li> <li>All staff are members of a teaching team</li> </ul>	Weekly
Staff email on staff network	To share information and documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open to all staff</li> </ul>	Ongoing
Recess notices	To share day to day information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open to all staff</li> <li>Information put on whiteboard and announced at recess</li> </ul>	Ongoing
The Blab in Staffroom	To provide daily information, timetable changes and staff absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open to all staff for input and notices are entered before 9.00am</li> </ul>	Daily



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Term Calendar	To provide an overview of school events, excursions and professional development	Upcoming events are written on the calendar	Ongoing/updated throughout the year
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## COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

MECHANISM	PURPOSE	ACTION	FREQUENCY
Handbook	To introduce and provide information to new families and staff about the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commercially printed and handed to all new families and staff members</li> </ul>	Once
School Board Meetings	To participate in school based management decision making and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meetings are advised in the school newsletter</li> </ul>	A minimum of 4 meetings a year
P & C Meetings	To provide ongoing opportunities for parents/carers to be involved in and informed of school activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting times and articles are published in the school newsletter</li> </ul>	Meetings are held at least twice a term
Newsletter	To communicate key events, policies, ideas and achievements to the School Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admin staff to co-ordinate items</li> <li>Teachers and students contribute items</li> </ul>	Newsletter is distributed each Thursday in digital form Newsletter in hard copy to those families who request it
Parent Information Sessions and Forums	To inform and consult with parents about school initiatives and programs e.g. School Improvement, Report Formats, School and Parent Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hosted by teachers, Executive, Deputy Principal or Principal as required to provide opportunities for consultation with parents</li> <li>All forums and sessions are advertised in the school newsletter</li> </ul>	Scheduled as required
Parent/Carer Workshops	To provide parents with information and strategies to be able to support their children at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepared and provided by classroom teachers and Literacy and Numeracy Coordinators</li> </ul>	Scheduled as required
Student contact details	To ensure all student information, health issues and contact details are up to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Printout of student information held on Maze sent home with each student for review by parents to ensure contact details are accurate</li> </ul>	Early in term 1
School Website	To provide information about the school, and its programs and achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The website is updated and includes the weekly newsletter</li> </ul>	Ongoing updates

Dates to Remember Calendar	To keep parents/ carers informed of school activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School calendar is kept up to date</li> <li>Relevant dates and activities are included in the Dates to Remember Calendar and sent home</li> </ul>	Every term
Term Overviews to Parent/Carers	To inform parents/carers of class organisation, activities planned for the term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class teachers write the overview with their Professional Teaching Team and distribute it to all students</li> <li>Overviews posted on school website</li> </ul>	Week 3 of each term
School Correspondence including excursion notes	To provide parents/carers with details of school programs and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sent home with students as required</li> <li>Notes posted on school website</li> </ul>	As required
School Psychologist	To enable parents/carers to discuss any social, behavioural and academic concerns they may have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By referral from Executive or class teacher and with parent consent</li> <li>Parent request</li> </ul>	As Required
Front Office Staff	A point of contact for parents/carers if they are unable to access a teacher A point of contact to set up appointments with school staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information from parents/carers passed on to the staff notice board or personally as necessary</li> <li>Appointments booked</li> </ul>	Ongoing/as required
School Notice Board	To keep parents/ carers informed of school activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated with upcoming events or information</li> </ul>	Weekly
Face Book	To keep parents/ carers informed of school activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated with upcoming events or information</li> </ul>	Daily where possible

### STUDENT COMMUNICATION

MECHANISM	PURPOSE	ACTION	FREQUENCY
Informal meetings with student and teacher	To share relevant information to support student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student or teacher initiates meeting</li> </ul>	As required
Class Meetings	To promote positive social development and raise issues for class discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers schedule class meetings into the weekly program, utilising the opportunity for social skill development</li> </ul>	Weekly
Student Representative Council (SRC)	To allow students to make positive contributions to the school environment and wider community through participation in decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Executive teacher coordinates representatives elected from kindergarten to year 6 classes.</li> <li>Each term the SRC coordinates a fundraising activity</li> </ul>	Semester elections and regular meetings
School Psychologist	To enable students to discuss any issues they may have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By referral from Executive or class teacher and with parent/carer consent and student request</li> </ul>	As required



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Assemblies	To recognise and share achievements and information with students and parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assembly schedule each term detailing whole school and junior</li><li>• Parents advised of special presentations</li><li>• Assemblies prepared by students and their teachers and hosted by students</li></ul>	Assemblies are held fortnightly on Friday afternoons. Notification is through the newsletter and on the main noticeboard
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## REPORTING TO AND FROM PARENTS/CARERS

MECHANISM	PURPOSE	ACTION	FREQUENCY
Informal meetings with parents/carers and teacher	To share relevant information to support individual students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parent/carer or teacher initiates meeting</li> </ul>	As required
Assessment and Reporting Guide for Parents	To outline the assessment and reporting practices and schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Printed pamphlet distributed with the first newsletter each year</li> </ul>	Early Term 1 each year
Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)	To assess literacy and numeracy skills of kindergarten students against their ACT cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardised computer- based testing of each student individually</li> <li>Reports provided for parents</li> </ul>	Term 1 and term 4
Information Night	To provide information to parents and carers regarding the pedagogical programs in place for the year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information sheet for parents and carers</li> </ul>	By week 3 term 1
Parent/Teacher Interviews	Parents students and teachers meet to discuss student achievement, progress and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the issuing of written reports, notes are sent home inviting parents and students to attend individual interviews</li> </ul>	End term 2 each year
National Assessment Program – Literacy & Numeracy (NAPLAN)	To assess student performance in Language Conventions, Writing, Reading and Numeracy against National benchmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One week of testing in term 2</li> <li>Reports are issued to parents by the beginning of term 4</li> </ul>	Week 3 term 2 – Testing
Semester Written Reports	To provide a comprehensive report about students’ academic progress, achievements, social development and work habits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers complete assessment and moderation, and prepare written reports. These are submitted to the executive for review and comment</li> <li>Reports and posted to parents and carers</li> </ul>	Week 9 term 2 Week 9 term 4
A to E Reports	To provide A to E grade for each student for English, Maths and Science for each semester, and teaching team selected other learning areas once each year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers to moderate across the grades for identified learning areas</li> <li>Provide grades for entering on Maze</li> <li>Parents given option to receive these reports</li> </ul>	Monday of Week 10 in term 2 Monday of Week 10 in term 4
Student Portfolios	To provide students, teachers and parents with an opportunity to reflect upon student learning and support written reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students and teachers compile portfolios</li> </ul>	Sent home twice a year with semester written reports and as requested
Special Needs Team	To foster optimal educational outcomes for students with special needs –consultation with parents, departmental representatives and outside agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparation and monitoring of Individual Learning Plans for identified students.</li> <li>Student Centred Appraisals of need (SCAN) and in school reviews for students receiving support</li> </ul>	Meetings with relevant stakeholders held as required Ongoing monitoring throughout the year
School events E.g. Grandfriends’ Day, school concerts and performances	To foster a sense of school community through shared experiences and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notes to advise as required</li> </ul>	Throughout the year



## 6. Contact

- For further information please contact the school executive team at Maribyrnong Primary School.

## 7. Research Base

Communicating together involves a two-way sharing of information and helps to develop a common understanding, meaning it is easier for parents, carers and school staff to support one another and to support student learning. Effective communication also helps families and staff to build a trusting partnership and develop honest and respectful relationships. When families and staff have a genuine interest in one another, people are able to be open about their thoughts and feelings. When families communicate effectively, this allows early school staff to understand potential impacts on student behaviour and learning. When families and staff share information, everyone can be aware of children's strengths and challenges and can work together to support children's social and emotional wellbeing.

Effective communication can help to acknowledge, understand and respect diversity. Diversity refers to differences between individuals. Differences may be in life experiences, family circumstances, family values, languages spoken and cultural and community backgrounds. When families and staff share information about children (e.g., languages spoken at home) it assists in creating connections between home and learning at school. This helps staff to understand what is important to families.

Some families may prefer face-to-face contact while others prefer telephone or email contact which may lead to face-to-face communication. Communication decisions may be related to individual, family, cultural or community values, priorities and commitments. Families may begin their communication with staff in small steps. It is important to acknowledge it can take time for families to become comfortable and friendly with other families and the early childhood service. This is where different methods of communication can play an important role in easing the process. Most families will usually find a combination of communication methods will be comfortable and best able to meet their needs. When we listen to and learn from families, incorporate their cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge in curriculum, and develop with families ways they can be actively involved in their children's education at home, we go beyond the good intentions of school-to-home communications and enter into meaningful dialogue that can lead to student learning.

Effective communication helps families and staff share important information about children. Families benefit from effective communication with staff as:

- Effective communication helps build relationships between families and staff through respectfully sharing information and observations.
- Families and staff are more likely to share information if they feel listened to and understood by each other.
- Families feel more involved in their child's experiences at the early childhood service.

Staff benefit from regular, effective communication with families by:

- Building a deeper understanding of the children in their schools.
- Feeling appreciated in their role (e.g. when families talk and share information staff provide about children).
- Understanding what is happening with families and children (e.g. when families share information with staff, this knowledge helps them support children).

A shared understanding allows for meaningful support to be given to families and children.

Children benefit from effective communication between families and staff because:

- It helps both families and staff to be mindful of children's needs on a particular day.
- A model of communication is demonstrated to children, which may help them in their own social development.
- It helps children build good relationships with staff when they see their families and staff communicating well.
- Their family may wish to become more involved, which helps them better understand and contribute to children's social and emotional development.
- The classroom program and curriculum can build more effectively on children's interests and developmental needs.

Research is clear about the kinds of parental involvement that lead to student learning. Henderson and Mapp (2002) analyzed 80 studies of parental involvement in K–12 schools. Some of their key findings provide clear guidelines for effective communication include:

- Family involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement.
- Family involvement that supports student learning at home is linked to improved student achievement.
- Families of all cultural backgrounds and education and income levels can have a positive influence on their children's learning.
- Family involvement efforts that recognize cultural and class differences, address family needs, and build on families' strengths are effective in engaging diverse families.

The plethora of research available is quite clear about the benefits of creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue between home and school; indicating that effective, responsive, well-planned home/school communication has the following results:

- improved assessment scores
- improved student outcomes
- more positive student attitudes
- lower early school leaver rates
- less high risk behavior
- higher staff morale
- enhanced relationships between school and community
- increased parental support for school's initiatives and programs
- increased donations of goods, materials and services to the school
- improved parental opinion of and regard for the school.

It is clear then Initiatives that focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members are more likely to be effective in creating sustained connections that support student learning.

Given this research, we as educators must:

- Create opportunities for students and families to learn together at home. Dialogue journals, for example, encourage family members to write about topics such as their response to books that students read at home or how parents use math in their daily home and work lives (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995).
- Establish respectful two-way communication through the provision of a variety of modes. Family visits, informal conversations at students' out-of-school activities, email correspondence, phone calls and student-led parent–teacher conferences all help in this effort.



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- Learn together as families and educators. Learning about each other's cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic worlds helps to create strong bridges for students through culturally relevant curriculum and instruction based on family funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

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