

## Communication Policy

<b>Policy Category:</b>	<b>3. Administration and Information Management</b>		<b>Policy No.</b>	<b># 3.08</b>
<b>Related Policies and Documents:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2.07 Complaints Handling Policy</li> <li>• 3.03 Acceptable Use of Information and Communications Technology (Staff) Policy</li> </ul>			
<b>Approved By:</b>	School Council	<b>Date Approved:</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> September 2023	
<b>Version Control:</b>	Version # 1.0 (September 2023)			
<b>Review Period/Cycle:</b>	Two-Yearly	<b>Next Review Date:</b>	September 2025	

### GUIDING SCRIPTURE

Love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:39).

### PURPOSE

In response to the command to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 22:39), God's people are called to treat other people in a sensitive, respectful and loving manner. Our community can only function effectively when all members afford and treat each other with respect.

This policy aims to ensure that consistent and effective communication between all school community members takes place, with processes that allow for open, respectful, courteous and honest two-way communication. The policy establishes expectations to ensure that all members of our school community use communication practices and language that promotes clear, accessible, inclusive and respectful interactions.

### SCOPE

The scope of this policy applies to all students, parents/guardians and staff at St John's Lutheran School. The policy provides parents/guardians with an appropriate framework to communicate with school staff.

### POLICY STATEMENT

At St John's Lutheran School we are committed to providing a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment which promotes open communication, fairness and positive relationships where all members are respected and valued. Effective communication between the school, parents/guardians and the community form the foundation for developing and maintaining meaningful partnerships and enriches the learning experience of the students. As a school community, we are committed to working together to meet the various needs of our school community. Central to achieving this is trust and open, positive and respectful communication between all members of the school community that reflect our Lutheran ethos.





The school is committed to responding promptly to enquiries, concerns, suggestions and positive feedback and will use various forms of communication to engage and inform our community.






### DEFINITIONS






**Social media:** online services, mobile applications and virtual communities that provide a way for people to connect and participate in online conversations and share content. Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok and blogs.

### COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

St John's Lutheran School uses a range of strategies to communicate effectively with our school community.

Communication Tool	Description of Use
 <p><b>Telephone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For urgent matters, student absences, enrolments, changes to contact details, and to arrange time to meet with teachers or the School Leadership Team. Also for personal concerns and issues that cannot be discussed via email.</li> <li>• Please contact the office by telephone: Phone: 07 4162 3988</li> <li>• Please note that office hours are Monday to Friday – 8:00am-3:30pm.</li> <li>• Staff may not always be able to return telephone calls during the normal school day and may take up to 24 hours to return the call.</li> <li>• Staff will not respond on the weekend, after hours or school holidays.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Email</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All teachers have a school email address. To email a staff member, simply the first initial of name and the first 3 letters of surname followed by @sjls.qld.edu.au (for example, for John Smith, use <a href="mailto:jsmi@sjls.qld.edu.au">jsmi@sjls.qld.edu.au</a>).</li> <li>• Teachers will endeavour to check emails daily during school days (unless absent or on leave) however this will depend on school commitments.</li> <li>• Teachers will respond to parent/guardian emails within two (2) business days, during the school week.</li> <li>• Administration staff and the Leadership Team will access their emails at various times throughout the day and will respond to email also within two (2) business days, during the school week.</li> <li>• For urgent matters please telephone the school rather than emailing.</li> <li>• Parents/guardians may use email contact to advise of short-term student absences through illness: <a href="mailto:office@sjls.qld.edu.au">office@sjls.qld.edu.au</a></li> <li>• Please do not use email to pass on messages about going home arrangements as staff may not always be able to access emails during the school day.</li> <li>• If parents/guardians have a question or concern about their child's learning, behaviour or social issues, they should email the teacher. Where further discussion is required then a meeting time or phone call can be arranged. Using email to communicate about sensitive matters such as these ensures that concerns can be addressed and recorded in a more formal way. These issues should not be communicated using SeeSaw.</li> <li>• Please refer to the <i>Section 4 Email Communication</i> outlining further expectations for parents/guardians.</li> </ul>
  <p><b>School App</b></p>	<p>Through the St John's Lutheran School App parents/guardians can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record student absences</li> <li>• Access current and previous newsletters</li> <li>• Complete online ordering for tuckshop and uniforms</li> <li>• Access the school calendar</li> </ul>

Communication Tool	Description of Use
 <p><b>Website</b></p>	<p><a href="http://www.sjls.qld.edu.au">www.sjls.qld.edu.au</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The St John's Lutheran School website provides access to information about the school including important policy documents and school information and reporting documents</li> <li>• Contains relevant contact information and links to other resources and communication tools.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Social Media</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media is used by the school to keep families and the community up to date with what is happening in our school. It provides snapshots of classroom learning and activities, whole school events and promotes important school dates.</li> <li>• The school social media pages are public pages. Please refer to <i>Section 5 Social Media – Acceptable Use Guidelines</i> outlining expectations for parents/guardians and students when contributing or commenting on school pages</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Newsletters</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole school newsletters are published weekly and emailed to all families. This keeps parents/guardians informed of important information and events and is the main method of communicating.</li> <li>• A copy of each week's newsletter is also available on the school website and the school App.</li> <li>• Parents have a responsibility to read newsletters to stay abreast of current happenings at the school</li> </ul>
 <p><b>SeeSaw App</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SeeSaw App is used for students in Prep to Year 4 to share information about what and how children are learning at school.</li> <li>• Examples of activities and learning tasks encourage a shared dialogue between parents and children about their classroom learning.</li> <li>• In addition, SeeSaw may also be used to highlight upcoming events or give class reminders or information.</li> <li>• The SeeSaw message facility may be used to communicate brief, non-sensitive and non-urgent information.</li> <li>• Teachers may not have an opportunity to check SeeSaw messages during school hours due to teaching and other commitments.</li> <li>• Teachers will respond within two (2) business days, during the school week.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Face to Face Communication</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointments with teachers and school leaders can be made via email or through the office. Refer to "Email" section above.</li> <li>• If you wish to discuss your students' needs with the class teacher, it is important to remember that teachers are busy with the students in their classes from 8:30am to 3.00pm, therefore meeting times will need to be outside these hours at a mutually convenient time.</li> <li>• Communication between parents/ guardians and staff is always welcomed and encouraged.</li> </ul>

Communication Tool	Description of Use
 <p><b>SMS Text Messaging</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school office may use SMS text messages to the main caregiver if your child is absent, or for class group notifications, for example, advising of time of return to school after camps or excursion.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Parent/Teacher Interviews</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A compulsory parent/teacher interview will be held at the end of Term 1, while an optional interview may be held at the end of Term 2.</li> <li>Parents or teachers may initiate individual interviews as necessary during the year.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Report Cards</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At the end of each semester, written progress reports are sent home to parents/guardians.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Information Evenings</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information evenings are held early in term one each year and are an opportunity for parents/guardians to meet their child's new teacher/s and commence the home / school partnership.</li> <li>Teachers will discuss processes, procedures, expectations and the curriculum.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Diaries – Early Years</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diaries will be the daily communication between home and school.</li> <li>This can be used to notify staff in regard to home arrangements</li> </ul>

## PROCEDURES

### 1. Communication Expectations

#### 1.1 Expectations of all Stakeholders

St John's Lutheran School is committed to ensuring that open and respectful, two-way communication is available to all members of our community. As a caring Christian community, we can only function effectively when all members afford and treat each other with respect, care and concern.

There is an expectation from St John's Lutheran School that communication and all interaction between school staff and parents/guardians is mutually respectful, courteous and constructive. Verbal and/or physical aggression or threats, offensive language and derogatory comments, whether face to face, over the phone, via email, on social media or through any other communication channel is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Negative or aggressive communication does not lead to a positive working relationship with the school or staff.

School staff are not expected to respond to communication that is unacceptable, and these will be directed to the Principal.

St John's Lutheran School supports stakeholders to voice their opinions and concerns and have these acknowledged, provided they are raised in a respectful and constructive way.

If parents wish to raise a grievance or complaint, they should follow the procedures outlined in the school *Complaints Handling Policy*, available on the school website [www.sjls.qld.edu.au](http://www.sjls.qld.edu.au)

### 1.2 Expectations of Parents and Guardians

We request that parents/guardians:

- Contact the school office by telephone for all medical and health concerns
- Do not use school email addresses for personal purposes
- Do not contact teachers on their personal mobile phones
- Send only non-vital messages via email. For example do not use email to inform the school of changes to school pick up arrangements as the teacher/staff member may not see the message in time. In these instances please telephone the school office
- Don't seek to discuss in detail a student's academic progress learning expectations or behavioural issues by email. These are best addressed in person or over the phone. Use email to arrange a suitable time with the teacher to discuss these matters. When agreed between the teacher and the parent or carer (following a meeting or telephone conversation) email may be used as a form of ongoing communication.

It is the responsibility of parents or guardians to communicate to the school the following information:

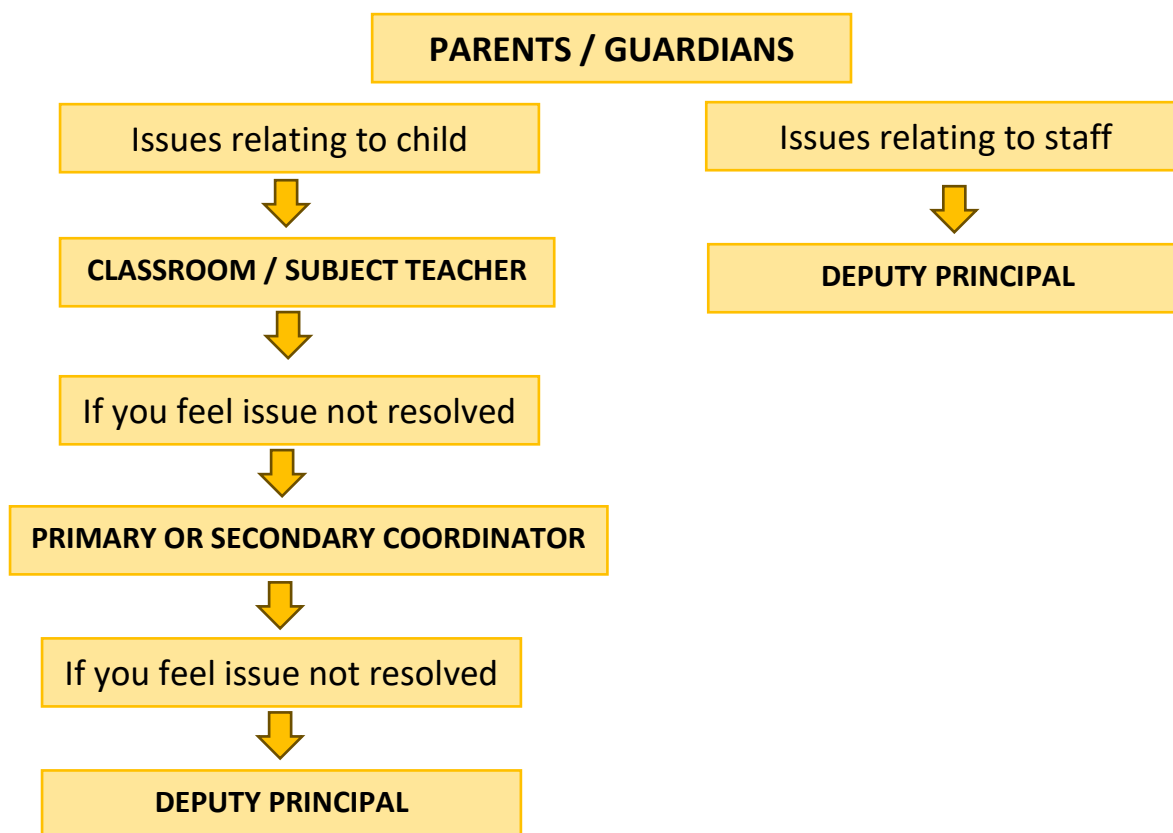
- Changes in family circumstances
- Medical issues that change or arise
- Any significant incidents and changes that are likely to affect the child at school, their attendance at school or their completion of homework
- If your child has a communicable disease (head lice, chicken pox, etc.)
- When your child is home sick or any planned absences (absences can be notified via in person, writing, phone, school App or email)
- Any issues relating to custody or access
- Change of address or contact details including telephone number and email address.

### 1.3 Expectations of School Staff

- Staff will contact a student's parent/guardian in a timely manner by phone or by email to make an appointment to meet in person to discuss concerns that arise about a student
- Email should not be used in the first instance to discuss a sensitive issues which was not initiated by or had not been previously discussed with the parent or guardian. For sensitive issues and concerns, communication should be preferably via a meeting organised to address concerns. Once agreed between the teacher and the parent or guardian (following a meeting or telephone conversation) email may be used as a form of ongoing communication
- Staff will aim to respond to parent or guardian emails within one (1) business day during the school week
- When an email is received from a parent or guardian that requires some time to gather information and reply properly, then the staff member should respond acknowledging that the email has been received and indicate when a fuller response will be sent
- Staff are to use language that is clear and accessible to parents or guardians and the community and should avoid or explain confusing educational terms
- Care is to be taken in the language used in email messages. Users should endeavour to be polite, courteous and professional in all messages and use common sense to dictate what is acceptable and what is not. Messages that are sent in haste without proper consideration or checking can cause upset, concern or misunderstanding
- When on leave, staff will activate an auto reply message on their email account detailing relevant leave dates
- Staff should not respond to offensive or abusive emails and should forward them to the Principal.

Further procedures for communication protocols by staff can be found in the # 3.03 *Acceptable Use of Information and Communications Technology (Staff) Policy*.

## 2. Parent / Teacher Communication Processes



## 3. Raising Issues, Concerns, Compliments or Suggestions

At times parents and carers may have concerns regarding a student's academic progress, wellbeing, social relationships or a general classroom matter. **These concerns should be raised directly with the student's class or subject teacher in the first instance as soon as possible after the issue occurs.** Complete and factual information about the concern or issue should be provided, maintaining and respecting the privacy and confidentiality of all parties.

To allow for appropriate record keeping and follow-up, email should be used to alert teachers about a concern or a sensitive matter rather than SeeSaw message.

### 3.1 Contacting a Classroom or Subject Teacher

When a parent/guardian wishes to contact a member of staff, the procedure is to contact the teacher involved giving a brief outline of the issue or concern and arranging an appointment if appropriate. Contact should be made using one of the following approaches:

- Contact the teacher in writing via email asking to organise a suitable, mutually convenient time
- Contact the school, either by phone or the Administration Office personally and 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
- Speak briefly with the teacher either before or after school hours and request a suitable meeting time.

Where a teacher has been approached and attempted a resolution, but the issue remains unresolved, an appointment should be made with the Deputy Principal to discuss the issue further.

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### 3.2 Contacting the Deputy Principal

For most discussions, the classroom or subject teacher will be parents' first point of contact. However, the Deputy Principal is available to meet with parents/guardians and students where the issue or matter relates to relationship management or staff.

### 3.3 Contacting the Principal

The Principal is available to meet with parents/guardians where they have an issue, concern, or matter of interest about the general operation of the school, a school policy, school management, staff members or very complex student issues.

### 3.4 Issues Arising Between Students and Families

No parent should approach the children of other families or their parents/guardians with a school related or non-school related issue on the school grounds. Such matters must be addressed to the Principal or Deputy Principal and not be discussed with other persons.

### 3.5 Compliments and Suggestions

Often throughout the school day teachers are going above and beyond for the students that they teach or come into contact with. At times, parents/guardians become aware of this and want to make the Principal aware of this.

There also may be times where a parent/carer may also have a suggestion to make our school better and they have not been able to voice this through any channels. There are a number of ways that this can be brought to light.

- Email the school and let us know. This will be forwarded to the Principal
- Write a note to the Principal informing them
- Call the Principal to let them know.

## 4. Email Communication

Email is the preferred method of communication between the school and parents/ guardians, unless the nature of the communication is urgent, in which case telephone or SMS is the most appropriate. Email is often a convenient and helpful way to communicate with your child's teacher, but parents and teachers should follow the same guidelines as for any professional communication.

Emails must always be respectful and constructive. If the email relates to a concern or a problem, it should focus on understanding the problem and finding a solution. Avoid sending negative or confrontational emails.

Staff will not respond to offensive, contentious or abusive emails and should forward them to the Principal.

Emails containing personal or sensitive information should not be passed on to a third party without permission of the sender.

## 5. Social Media – Acceptable Use Guidelines

### 5.1 Acceptable Use and Behaviour – All Community Members

Social media is commonly used by members of the St John's community to express their views, comments, and ideas on a range of topics.

Staff, parents and students must behave ethically when interacting online and will be held accountable for their actions inside and outside of school hours where their action have a negative impact on the

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well-being of students or staff and the reputation of the school. This applies equally to social media engagement in school-related or private settings.

This policy is not intended to discourage nor unduly limit personal expression or online activities, however potential for direct or indirect damage to be caused to others in our community or the school through inappropriate use of social media is very real.

As such, a person's online behaviour should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration that a person uses face-to-face, and be in accordance with the Lutheran Ethos of the school.

When using social media, ALL members of our community are expected to:

- Understand and adhere to the Terms of Use of the relevant social media platform, as well as applicable laws (such as child protection, discrimination, harassment, bullying, copyright, privacy) and school policies
- Demonstrate reasonable personal and professional boundaries and behaviours
- Demonstrate good digital citizenship
- Ensure their online behaviour reflects the same standards of honesty, respect, courtesy and consideration, that a reasonable person uses when communicating face-to-face
- Respect the rights, privacy and confidentiality of others
- Not knowingly provide incorrect, defamatory or misleading information about the School's own work, the work of other organisations, or individuals
- Consider whether how and what they post reflect on their professional or personal character, and the welfare of others
- Protect the privacy and security of the school, its employees, students, parents, partners and suppliers
- Think before they post.
- **Not post** or respond to material that:
  - Is offensive, abusive, derogatory, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, violent, racist, sexist, or humiliating to another person or organisation
  - Is pornographic or contains nudity
  - Vilifies individuals based on their religion, gender, race or sexuality
  - Contains material (written, audio, video and other electronic forms) that infringes copyright
  - Contains personal information about another individual without their consent (including identifying information, email addresses, phone numbers or private addresses)
  - Contains images or recordings of students, staff or parents without the consent from the subject or parent of the student. No photographs of students of St John's Lutheran School are to be posted (with the exception of a parent's own children and where approved by the relevant parent/s from time to time)
  - Is otherwise unlawful or might cause damage to the school's reputation or bring it into disrepute
  - Falsely represents another individual or organisation.

Parents and students are to be mindful that, by posting comments and having online conversations on social media sites, they are broadcasting to the world. Even with the strictest privacy settings be aware that comments expressed via social networking pages under the impression of a 'private conversation' may still end up being shared into a more public domain, even with privacy settings on maximum.



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Parents are to keep in mind that St John's Lutheran School staff members are not required or obligated to make/accept invitations to or from parents to join social media/social networking sites, and parents should respect each individual staff member's personal preferences concerning their social networks. Likewise, parents are not required/should not feel obliged to accept a social media/social networking invitation from another St John's Lutheran School parent or from a school staff member.

Parents should never discuss sensitive school matters with staff or other parents using Facebook, blogs and other social media outlets.

If parents come across positive or negative remarks about St John's Lutheran School and/or its operations online that they believe are important, you may pass those posts to the Principal who will consider such comments on a case-by-case basis.

If you don't get it right, be sure to correct any mistake you make immediately, and make clear what you have done to fix it. Apologise if the situation warrants it. If it's a major mistake, e.g. reporting confidential information, let someone know immediately, so that St John's Lutheran School can take the proper steps to help minimise any impact this may have.

### 5.2 Acceptable Use and Behaviour – Staff

In addition to the above requirements outlined in *Section 5.1 Acceptable Use and Behaviour – All Community Members*, staff have the following responsibilities:

- Staff are to maintain appropriate boundaries between their personal and professional lives online
- All interactions between staff and students via social media platforms must only occur in an educational context and be fully transparent (that is, readily accessible for viewing by the Principal, or Principal's delegate, at all times)
- Staff members must not accept students as 'friends' on their social network sites or interact with students on social networking sites. Staff are advised to use professional discretion before accepting ex-students or parents of current students as 'friends' on their social networking sites
- Staff are to maintain appropriate privacy settings on their personal social media accounts
- Staff are not to use their school email address when creating or accessing personal social networking accounts
- When using social media in a personal capacity, staff should:
  - Conduct themselves in accordance with the expectations and responsibilities of an employee generally, and are to uphold the values of the school
  - Ensure their communications and conduct do not interfere with their work performance, compromise them professionally or cause damage to the relationship between them and the school
- Understand their obligations under relevant school policies and legislation including, but not limited to *Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct Policy, Professional Boundaries Policy, Upholding Confidentiality and Privacy Policy, Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Policy, Copyright Policy*
- Understand the impacts and recognise the public visibility of their conduct and communications online, including what they 'like', share, comment on, 'follow' or 'join' on a social media platform
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that their online conduct and communications will be understood as representing their own personal view and not those of the school. Staff must not falsely imply (whether intentionally or not) that they are authorised to speak on behalf of the school, or that any views they express are those of the school. Staff are not to use the school logo that may give the impression of official support or endorsement of personal comments made online
- Do not post material that is, or might be construed as, inappropriate or improper conduct in a personal capacity that reflects seriously and adversely on the school

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- Do not use or disclose on social media any confidential information or personal information obtained in their capacity as an employee of the school. This includes personal information or images of other staff or students, without written consent from the parent/carer or individual (if over 18 years of age)
- Uphold the highest Professional Standards as outlined in, but not limited to, the *Code of Conduct Policy*, the *Code of Ethics for Teachers in Queensland* and the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, which are applicable when using social media
- Inform the Principal of any conduct or communications that may not meet the requirements of this policy
- Conduct and/or communication in a personal capacity which is considered to be inappropriate or improper will be managed in accordance with the school's *Disciplinary Action, Misconduct and Underperformance Policy*
- If staff become aware of negative remarks about the school and/or its operations online, they are obligated to pass these on to the school.

### 6. Breach of this Policy

Any breach of this policy will be considered by the Principal or their delegate as serious and will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

All reports of cyber bullying and other technology misuses will be investigated and may result in a notification to the police or other relevant authority where the school is legally obliged to do so.

Failure to comply with this policy by a parent may, in serious cases, put at risk the continuation of their child's enrolment at St John's Lutheran School (i.e., in serious cases, termination of the enrolment contractual agreement by St John's Lutheran School may result).

Student sanctions for misuse of social media may include, but are not limited to, the loss of computer privileges, detention, suspension or exclusion from the school.

<p><b>Communication of this Policy</b></p>	<p>The St John's Lutheran School <i>Communication Policy</i> will be communicated to staff via the school intranet and to parents/community members via the school website.</p>
<p><b>Legislation / References:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)</li> <li>• Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)</li> <li>• Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</li> <li>• Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)</li> <li>• Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)</li> <li>• Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)</li> </ul>