Communications Policy

Rationale

At Northcote 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. 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, effective communication between all members of the school community.

Aims

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

Guidelines for Implementation

Northcote Primary School will use a range of strategies to communicate effectively with the school community. These are listed in the Appendix- Mechanisms for Communication.

• The main source of school community information is the electronic newsletter and it is an important tool for communicating the happenings at the school.
• Families without email access alert the office upon enrolment, and will receive a paper hardcopy of the newsletter.
• It is the responsibility of parents and carers to read the newsletter to stay abreast of the current happenings at the school.
• It is also the parent’s/carer’s responsibility to ensure that their current email is up to date so that communication is ongoing and available to use as required.

• The Mechanisms for Communication (see appendix) will be reviewed annually to reflect and update the current operational communication processes at work in the school.
• It is acknowledged that teachers have time constraints during the school day and issues or concerns are best dealt with when uninterrupted time and attention can be given to them.
• 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 or Assistant Principal, should be informed immediately and the urgency of the matter conveyed.

1.1 Curriculum and class information
• Teaching teams will communicate curriculum information and homework expectations at the beginning of the year via a team newsletter, the Question and Answer Information evening (Q&A sessions).
• Further curriculum information will be sent out more frequently in the Prep to year 2 teams and at a minimum of once per term for the year 3 to 6 teams.
• Specialist Teachers will convey information related to their areas of student learning via the school newsletter.
• Extra and incidental curriculum information may be sent via email throughout the year and is done so at the discretion of each teaching team including the specialist teaching team.

1.2 Guidelines for communication- appropriate use of Email
Northcote Primary School considers email a vital communication tool and recognizes the importance of proper email content and speedy replies. Nevertheless the high volume of email traffic and the resultant impact on workload issues necessitates some guidelines for all users of the school’s email system. Staff members are provided with Department of Education official email accounts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of communication both within the organization and with the broader community.

• To facilitate a speedy response, try to limit emails to less than 200 words.
• Clearly and concisely explain your issue or question.
• Try to direct the enquiry to the most relevant person.
• Staff are not always online due to teaching and meeting responsibilities. Families should expect that teacher response to emails will happen within 3 working days.

1.3 Guidelines for communication- Phone
Northcote Primary School encourages parents and staff to use the telephone as an important tool to communicate personal concerns and issues that cannot be discussed via email. It is also important that all conversations by all parties are respectful and courteous. Telephone communication is also useful for queries; urgent messages that need to be relayed to students and/or teachers; and to inform/explain student absences.

Staff may not always be able to return telephone calls during the normal school day and may take up to 3 working days to return the call. Email may then be used to respond to the call and arrange a meeting time.

1.4 Guidelines for communication- Social Media
Northcote Primary School has a Facebook page dedicated to the Northcote Primary School Fete, Community Sub-committee, Fundraising and social events.
To support the positive intent of this platform, it is important to remember that:

- Social media is one form of communication from the school but not the main form and is not a forum for open discussion about general or specific school concerns or issues.
- Social media is used to build a sense of community
- Social media such as Facebook is used by the school to promote and provide information regarding the school fete and it is important that the tone and feel remains positive about the school community.
- The moderator has the right to withdraw inappropriate comments and discussions.
- Social media could be used to supplement and highlight information from the newsletter

2. Contact Procedures

2.1 Contacting a classroom or specialist teacher:
When a parent 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:

- 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 yard duty.
- Contact the appropriate teacher in writing or via email, asking them to organize a suitable meeting time.
- Speak briefly with the appropriate teacher, preferably after school hours (not at a time when they are preparing for teaching, or actually teaching, or on yard duty), and ask them to arrange a suitable meeting time. You want the teacher to be able to give their full attention, undistracted, to your concerns and this is often difficult for teachers to do this before school as they are busy preparing for the day’s learning program for all of the children. Please consider this if you approach the teachers in the morning and try and make it a request for a dedicated time together when you can both discuss the issues without distractions.

2.2 Contacting other school personnel:
When a parent 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 or the Assistant Principal, using one of the three approaches outlined above.

When parents 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 Office Manager or an administration officer to arrange a suitable meeting time.

If the issue relates to a school policy or School Council coordinated programs such as the Out of School Hours Care or any other issue except individual children or staff, parents may wish to discuss
with the School Council President. The School Council President can be contacted by email (email school and the school will forward on); or phone the school office and the office will pass on your details to the SC President.

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 the most appropriate person to resolve the issue, as well as ensuring that contact is made as soon as possible.

3. Procedure for Complaints or Issues

Northcote Primary School will deal with all complaints and issues sensitively, promptly and confidentially. The school’s approach to handling concerns and complaints is based on our values of:

- providing a safe and supportive learning environment
- building relationships between students, parents and staff
- providing a safe working environment for staff.

These procedures cover concerns and complaints about:

- general issues of student behaviour that are contrary to the school’s code of conduct (outlined within the Student Engagement and Wellbeing policy)
- incidents of bullying or harassment in the classroom or the school yard
- learning programs, assessment and reporting of student learning
- communication with parents
- school fees and payments
- general administrative issues
- any other school-related matters except as detailed below

The procedures do not cover matters for which there are existing rights of review or appeal, as detailed in the Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide. Those matters include:

- student discipline matters involving expulsions
- complaints about employee conduct or performance and complaints that should be dealt with by performance management, grievance resolution or disciplinary action
- complaints by the Department’s employees related to their employment
- student critical incident matters
- other criminal matters.

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.
- 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 for time period as outlined in the Public Office of Records then destroyed.

3.1 Issues arising between students and families:
No parent should approach the children of other families with a school related issue on the school grounds. Such matters must be addressed to the Principal or Assistant Principal and not discussed with other persons. This will then become a school matter and will be dealt with by the Principal at his/her discretion.

Resources
• Appendix A – Email Protocols for Teacher and Parent Communication (attached)
• Appendix B- Mechanisms for Communication (attached)
• NPS Raising Concerns and Complaints Policy (school website)
• DET documents – School communication Toolkit
APPENDIX A
Email Protocols for Teacher and Parent Communication

Protocols for Parent email use:

Email may be a fast and convenient way for you to send messages but this may not be the case for many of our teachers. Teachers read emails at different times of the day and so an immediate reply is not possible. A staff member will determine how best to contact you given the nature of your email. This may be via: email or by phone to schedule a personal conference with you,

To use email effectively in a school setting, we have developed the following guidelines for parents/carers:

Email is appropriate for:

- To report an absence or forthcoming appointment for a child/children
- Brief enquiries about general school matters
- School related issues
- To pass on relevant information to the appropriate personnel e.g. minor issue
- As a communication tool between teachers and parents.
- When agreed between the teacher and the parent (following a face to face contact) email may be used as a form of regular communication about a student’s day at school in place of a communication book.

Email is not ideal for:

- Your child’s academic progress. This is best addressed through a telephone conversation or a personal conference with your child’s teacher.
- Use as a tool for in depth discussion but can be used to raise a topic to be discussed at a face to face meeting
- Sending non-vital messages by this medium. For example, do not use email to inform the school that your child is to meet you somewhere when the day ends. Instead use the telephone to contact the office to be sure that the message is received in real time, clearly understood and passed on to your child.
- Threatening or offensive language

When sending email:

- Identify yourself in the subject line of your email and if appropriate, the name of your child.
- It should only be addressed to the intended recipient (To: as the primary recipient)
- The use of ‘Cc’ (Carbon copy) is to be used if you would like another recipient to be aware of your email as a secondary recipient but not as an invitation to respond
- The use of ‘Bcc’ (Blind carbon copy) is to be used for tertiary recipients as a privacy measure or if sending to recipients who do not know each other, such as in a mailing list so that email addresses are hidden.
- Ensure emails are respectfully written as meaning can be misinterpreted.
• Acknowledgement of emails received by staff should be given within 3 working days. The response might simply be to let the recipient know their issue is being dealt with and will be addressed by a certain date.

Privacy
• Please remember that email is not necessarily confidential and can be subject to FOI (Freedom of Information) regulations. Confidential information should be conveyed by phone or personal contact.
• Due to privacy, DL (Distribution Lists) will not be available to parents and the general community
• Events committee may use the email DL lists to contact parents for support and promotion for scheduled events only.

Protocols for Staff email use:

The school maintains email accounts for teachers to facilitate parent/teacher communication and internal as well as system wide staff communication. The school reserves the right to block or filter email messages to staff that are not directly related to school business or to the school’s educational mission.

1.1 Staff using email to correspond with parents must adhere to the following:
• Staff must use a school provided email account for all staff/parent communications
• Email must never be used to discuss contentious, emotional or highly confidential issues. These issues should be dealt with face to face or by telephone.
• Email parents only when they have agreed that email is an appropriate form of communication
• The use of Cc and Bcc may be used by all parties to notify others of the conversation only if relevant.

1.2 When sending an email:
• Emails should be short and directional in nature and only include facts.
• Care should be given when using student names. Refer to students by first name, initials or ‘your son/daughter’ depending on the content. Do not discuss non-related students or issues to parents
• Email messages to parents should be consistent with professional practices for other correspondence. This includes grammar, format and salutation.
• If you wish to make a complaint, it is recommended that you do not write a lengthy email, in the first instance. You may use email to contact a person from the leadership team to discuss the matter with you in person.
• The use of Cc and Bcc may be used by all parties to include others in the conversation only if relevant

1.3 Privacy
• All emails that reside on the DET servers may not be confidential. Email messages may be requested by the public under FOI (Freedom of Information) laws and may, unless they are exempt under the law, be open to public inspection.
• When sending an email to all parents that have given permission at one time, the Bcc (Blind Carbon Copy) facility must be used to list addresses to ensure that privacy is maintained.
APPENDIX B

MECHANISMS FOR COMMUNICATION

## STAFF TO STAFF COMMUNICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MECHANISM</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
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</table>
| School Strategic Plan (SSP)                    | · To review current school practice and performance.                      | School improvement Process - review current goals on an annual basis to set direction of AIP and develop future goals every 4 years | · 4 year review cycle  
                                           | · Set goals for strategic planning                                      |                                                                             | · Parent, staff and student survey annually                               |
| Annual Implementation Plan (AIP)              | · To articulate the actions to be taken to achieve one year targets that will work towards 4 year priorities | · Leadership and staff formulate plan at the beginning of each year to implement the goals of the strategic plan  
                                           |                                                                             |                                                                             | · AIP reviewed at the end of each year                                   |
| Intranet school staff site for all staff      | · To provide information on school issues;                                | · New staff to access in their own time                                                      | · Developed annually                                                      |
                                           | · To introduce new staff to all the policies and procedures in a digital form as part of the induction process |                                                                             |                                                                             |
| Performance and Development reviews           | · To implement whole school goals                                          | · Leadership team supports staff through formal and informal meetings to plan/support and evaluate the pathways process.  
<pre><code>                                       |                                                                             |                                                                             | · Staff prepare documentation prior to formal meeting times               |
                                       | · Annual review to identify professional learning                         |                                                                             |                                                                             | · Principal advises the Department when the processes are completed     |
                                       | · Career path planning                                                    |                                                                             |                                                                             |                                                                             |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meetings Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and School Improvement</td>
<td>· To ensure whole school cohesion, strategic planning and management</td>
<td>· Principal, Assistant Principal, Leading teacher, Team Leaders, raise issues, share information and plan at whole school level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>· Weekly (3 times per month; not when Data Managers meet)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Managers Meetings</td>
<td>To contribute to whole school cohesion, strategic planning in relation to the goals and priorities of the School Strategic Plan</td>
<td>To ensure qualitative and quantitative collection of student performance data in a systematic manner (Assessment Schedule)</td>
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<td>To support professional learning and analysis of data; To support the use of technology in a way that enhances instruction, student learning and engagement;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To manage the development, provision and implementation of Information Technology hardware and software; To evaluate provision of appropriate IT in the school; Every 3rd week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff meetings</td>
<td>Raise issues and discuss school management activities and programs</td>
<td>Staff meetings held weekly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development meetings</td>
<td>To provide professional development in key learning areas as identified in the AIP</td>
<td>Staff to build capacity in teacher professional knowledge and skills in Key areas of AIP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Major component of weekly staff meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Learning Team meetings</td>
<td>To share, analyse and moderate student data and discuss, plan and implement strategies</td>
<td>Prep; Year 1/2, Year 3/4 and Year 5/6 PLTs meet; Specialists meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLTs</td>
<td>· To share information, raise issues, plan and discuss team and class management;</td>
<td>All teachers are members of a collaborative teaching team</td>
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<td>One Weekly in class time (APT) One Weekly after school meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td><strong>whiteboards</strong></td>
<td><strong>To provide daily information, timetable changes and staff absences</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>School calendar- digital</strong></td>
<td><strong>To provide an overview of excursions/incursions/Camps/school events</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ongoing</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ongoing and updated throughout the year</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MECHANISM</th>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newsletter</td>
<td>To communicate key events, policies, ideas and achievements to the school community</td>
<td>Admin staff to coordinate items</td>
<td>Newsletter distributed weekly, (Thursdays) in digital form and linked to the website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council and sub committees</td>
<td>To represent the school community in governance of the school, including the development of the strategic plan and policies, raising funds, ensuring the school meet the DET’s compliance regulations.</td>
<td>Elections held annually. Position on school council held for two years · Meeting times and articles are published in the school newsletter · School council and sub committees reformed each year</td>
<td>Meetings held at least twice a term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class newsletters</td>
<td>To inform parents of the Program of Inquiry and curriculum development · To inform parents about the curriculum overview for each term</td>
<td>PLT teams to send home information to inform parents about the student learning program in summary</td>
<td>Preps: Weekly 1/2s: Fortnightly 3/4s: Once per term 5/6s: Once per term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Question and Answer’ Q&amp;A evenings</td>
<td>To inform and engage parents in discussion of the teaching and learning style appropriate to each area; organisational arrangements of each team; the expectations of the students; how parents and teachers can work together to support the individual learning of their children; and an overview of the curriculum across that team level/s. To discuss any overall concerns or questions parents may have in general terms</td>
<td>Teaching Teams to prepare presentations for Q&amp;A evenings to engage with parents; Teaching teams to email parents prior to evening to seek feedback re questions or concerns they would like address so that presentations can be customised and relevant for parents.</td>
<td>Teaching Teams &amp; Specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Expos</td>
<td>To inform and showcase student’s</td>
<td>Area levels schedule expos and invite</td>
<td>Once per term during class time as</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENT VOICE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>understanding and achievements at the end of an inquiry unit of investigation</strong></th>
<th>parents / other classes and teachers to attend to share student’s learnings</th>
<th>appropriate for each level.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student contact details</strong></td>
<td>To ensure all student information, health issues and contact details are up to date</td>
<td>Email of student information sent home for review by parents/carers to ensure contact details are accurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School website</strong></td>
<td>To provide information about the school and its programs</td>
<td>The website is updated weekly and includes the newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Assemblies</strong></td>
<td>To recognise and share achievements and information with parents and students</td>
<td>Assembly conducted weekly by scheduled team area level. Each nominated level to present an aspect of their learning · Opportunity for sharing of skills and achievements with students, teachers and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent information forums</strong></td>
<td>To inform and consult with parents about school initiatives and programs, e.g. School Improvement</td>
<td>Hosted by teachers, leadership personnel or principal (school Council?) as required to provide opportunities for consultation with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community events</strong></td>
<td>To foster a sense of school community through shared experiences and activities</td>
<td>Notes to advise as required School / School Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECHANISM</td>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>ACTION</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Informal meetings with student and teacher | To share relevant information to support students  
· Feedback mechanism for students | Students or teacher initiates meetings on informal needs basis and discusses learning goals | As required               |
| Team or home group meetings     | To promote positive social development and raise issues for class discussion | Teachers schedule meetings into the weekly program, utilising the opportunity for social skill development | Weekly                    |
| Junior School Council          | To provide authentic opportunities for students to make positive contributions to the school environment and wider community  
To learn about the democratic process of governance and raising issues | Staff member coordinates representatives elected from all classes/home groups. | Annual elections and regular meetings |
| Student Action Teams            | To provide authentic opportunities for students to make positive contributions to the school, environment and wider community e.g. sports activity clubs with 1/2 children at lunchtimes | Years 5/6 teachers coordinate action teams from year 5/6 cohort | Commence in Terms 1 after Student Leadership conference. |
| Assemblies                      | To recognise and share achievements and information with parents and students | Area levels / Specialists / Music Programs are scheduled to ‘host’ and present an aspect of their learning program at Monday morning assemblies.  
Recognition of ‘Pupil of the Week’ – teachers to prepare week prior to go in newsletter. Announcements including sports results | Weekly                     |
In school Transition | To support students in-school transition and allocation of students to home groups and teaching team groups

Students complete circle of friends to nominate 6 children they would like to be in either home group or team group for following year – doesn’t always have to be best friends. Parents invited to request students ‘not be placed’ or ‘please place with’ after consultation with their child, email to school. Teachers allocate children to home groups and across teams for following year, based on range of information including student and parent requests. Children will have at least one of their nominated friends from their circle.

Commence in November.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Initiator</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal meetings with parents/carers and teacher</td>
<td>To share relevant information to support individual students</td>
<td>Parent/carer or teacher initiates meeting</td>
<td>As required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student led conferences 3-way conferences</td>
<td>Students present their learning to the parent and the teacher</td>
<td>Parents use booking system to organise a time to be involved in 3 way student led conference</td>
<td>End of term 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent / Teacher Interviews</td>
<td>Alternative to 3-way conferences between parents and teachers only.</td>
<td>Offered as an alternative choice for parents in place of 3-way conferences.</td>
<td>End of Term 2 or as requested by parents or teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN National Assessment Program Literacy &amp; Numeracy</td>
<td>To assess student performance in Language Conventions, Writing, Reading and Numeracy against national benchmarks</td>
<td>One week of testing in term 2 May</td>
<td>Week 4 Term 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester written reports</td>
<td>To provide a comprehensive report about students’ progress, achievements, social development and work habits</td>
<td>Teachers complete assessment and moderation and prepare written reports</td>
<td>Second last week of term 2</td>
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<td>Reports are submitted to the leadership team for review</td>
<td>Generally second last week of Term 4.</td>
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<td>Data is collected electronically and stored for data analysis</td>
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<td>Reports issued to parents before 3 way SLC or Parent / Teacher Interviews</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Students portfolios or evidence of progress            | To provide students, teachers and parents with an opportunity to reflect upon student learning  
· To support written reports and as a body of evidence to demonstrate student achievement | Students and teachers compile portfolios  
· Used during the Student Led Conference as the vehicle for demonstrating their learning | Not all teams use as formal portfolio, may be in form of collected samples of work.  
Available prior to 3way conferences and parent/teacher interviews. |
| Special needs team                                     | To foster optimal educational outcomes                                      | Notes to advise as required.                 | Meetings with relevant stakeholders held as |
| for students with special needs and learning difficulties - consultation with parents, departmental representatives and outside agencies | - Records kept in individual student files (confidential) to follow the student as they pass through the school  
- Teachers use At Risk process to identify and track student intervention strategies | required  
- Ongoing monitoring throughout the year |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition year 6 – 7</td>
<td>To support students and parents transitioning from year 6 to year 7.</td>
<td>Initial transition information disseminated at Q&amp;A session in March to both years 5 &amp; 6 parents, with likely timeline. Information made available regarding secondary school open days and tours. Transition coordinator sends ‘Applying for Secondary school placement’ information home to all year 6 student families as soon as it becomes available from the Region (generally May)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Transition Kinder to Prep  ‘Ready, Set, Go!’ | To provide a tour of the school and programs for prospective parents | Group tours for prospective prep parents Individual tours for new families moving into Northcote area Principal/AP. Confirmation of enrolment and transition information emailed out to parents.  
‘Ready Set Go!’  
Transition to primary school program commence in November x 3 sessions for both parents and | Term 2  
Term 3 & 4 where required. |
|  |  | Prep Transition coordinator and Prep team |  |
This policy was ratified by School Council: