WELCOME PACKAGE

FOR FAMILIES JOINING A

CATHOLIC SCHOOL COMMUNITY

The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA)
121 George Street, Thebarton 5031 Phone: 8301 6685 Fax: 8301 6656
www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au
Dear Parents/Carers,

Welcome from the Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities

What an exciting time for you, your child and your family as you join this school community.

Parents and carers are integral members of our Catholic school communities and you are about to enter into a very important and powerful partnership with the school in the education of your child.

The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities is the active voice for families with children in South Australian Catholic schools and a strong advocate for parent engagement in children’s learning and in the life of our school communities. We are commonly referred to as The Federation.

The Federation’s ‘Welcome Package for Families Joining a Catholic School Community’ aims to provide you with a range of ideas, resources and links to resources to support and encourage you in your role as your child’s first, foremost and continuing teacher.

There is consistent, positive and convincing evidence from Australian and overseas research that children achieve better outcomes from their education when schools, families and the community work together to support their learning.

There are many ways to engage in your child’s learning and to be involved in the life of the school community.

The most significant support for a child’s learning happens at home. A healthy diet, enough rest, a place to study, support with home work, high expectations and positive messages about school and the importance of education are essential.

Parents and carers are busy people with a range of competing demands on our time but each of us has something to offer our Catholic school communities and can contribute in whatever way best suits our particular circumstance.

Whether it’s as a member of the Parents and Friends Committee, volunteering to help in the canteen, listening to reading, helping out in the classroom, being a Learning Assistance Program (LAP) volunteer, being involved in the development and reviews of school policies, helping out at school events, joining the School Board/Governing Body, assisting in working bees, attending school social events, attending parent information evenings – the list is endless.
Parents also play a very important role in contributing to the smooth running of a school and, thereby, maximising every child’s learning experiences. This is achieved by ensuring your child arrives to school on time, supporting the school policies and expectations and supporting your child to do the same, reading newsletters and returning forms and surveys promptly. This contributes to a productive and positive partnership between families and schools.

The Federation exists to support you in this crucial role and so I invite you to do one or all of the following:

- Visit our website at [www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au](http://www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au)
- Register your contact details with us so we can directly communicate, connect and consult with you. You can do this by going to: [http://www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au/the-parent-voice/have-your-say](http://www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au/the-parent-voice/have-your-say)
- ‘Like’ and ‘follow’ our Facebook page at: [https://www.facebook.com/pages/Federation-of-Catholic-School-Parent-Communities/153137151493359](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Federation-of-Catholic-School-Parent-Communities/153137151493359)

**Why?**

Because by being our ‘friend’ and following us on Facebook or subscribing to our data base you will:

- Connect directly with the work of the Federation;
- Receive information about current and relevant issues in education;
- Participate in any surveys or online forums so your voice can be heard;
- Have access to a wealth of resources and information to support you to support your child’s learning.

The ‘Welcome Package for Families Joining a Catholic School Community’ includes:

- Federation Brochure
- A Message for Parents and Families
- The Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA
- Basic Tips to Support Your Child’s Learning
- Information about Parent Teacher Interviews
- Information on volunteering in a Catholic school
- A Grievance Process for Parents

The Federation wishes you and your family well as you head into this new and exciting stage in your child’s learning journey.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ann Bliss
Executive Director

[www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au](http://www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au)
Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA

As integral members of a Catholic school community, parents*:

- Value and respect the Catholic identity of the school, its relationship to the parish community and the expression of its Catholic ethos through rituals, traditions, symbols and the teaching of Catholic beliefs
- Actively support their children’s participation, and commit to a personal participation, in the school’s Catholic rituals, traditions and outreach programs
- Share the responsibility for their children’s faith, moral, social and emotional development
- Model Christian values in word and deed with all members of the school community
- Value and respect the diversity of faiths and cultures within the school community
- Contribute to a welcoming and inclusive community

As partners in the education of their children, parents:

- Support their children’s learning at school and home
- Contribute to the life of the school in ways that reflect their interests, skills, experience and capacity to do so
- Respect and support school policies and regulations
- Contribute to consultation and decision making processes
- Work collaboratively with teachers and staff
- Respect the skills, knowledge and experience of school leaders and teachers
- Work toward resolving grievances appropriately and with respect
- Access information and resources provided by the school to support them in their role as the primary educators of their children
- Support their children’s consistent and punctual attendance at school
- Fulfil their obligation to pay all fees and levies in a timely manner, however if they experience genuine financial difficulty, negotiate with the principal to make appropriate arrangements
- Contribute to a culture where privacy and confidentiality are assured
- Act as positive advocates for their children
- Contribute to the development of a safe school environment for students, staff and the wider school community
- Contribute to the development of a health promoting environment for students, staff and the wider school community
- Acknowledge and support the work of the school’s governing body and associated committees
- Promote and encourage a collective responsibility to support the Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA

In holding positions of responsibility within Catholic school communities, parent leaders:

- Act as role models within their school communities by reflecting the values and ethos of the school
- Work constructively with the principal, the staff and the wider school community
- Build and nurture a sense of community

*In this Charter, the term ‘parent’ includes carers and legal guardians

This Charter was developed in consultation with parents, principals and the Catholic Education Offices by The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities (SA)
In choosing a Catholic education for your child, you choose an educational environment “animated by (the) Catholic faith and in partnership with families … which create(s) opportunities for encountering life to the full - in all its personal, religious, political and cultural richness”. Catholic Education SA Mission Statement, Strategic Plan (2010 - 2014)

This Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA acknowledges and promotes the various roles of parents as integral members of Catholic school communities:

- Parents as Partners
- Parents as Educators
- Parents as Decision Makers
- Parents as Life-Long Learners
- Parents as Advocates
- Parents as Leaders and Role Models

The key statements in the Charter capture the unique opportunities and responsibilities that come with this. They recognise:

- Parents as the first and continuing educators of their children
- The critical importance of partnerships between parents, families and schools
- The contribution that parents make by valuing the Catholic identity of our schools and the expression of a Catholic ethos
- The shared responsibility for the education of students in Catholic schools
- The shared responsibility for the moral, spiritual, emotional and social development of students in Catholic schools
- The importance of positive and constructive working relationships between parents, families and our schools.

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We welcome your comments

*In this Charter, the term 'parent' includes carers and legal guardians*
The Federation was established by parents for parents, children, families and schools.

Its work is maintained by parents who are passionate about education and committed to serve.

Visit the Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities website for other information and resources to support your child’s learning

www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au
Our Vision
To be an independent, influential voice committed to achieving quality and equity in educational opportunities and outcomes for students in Catholic Schools.

Our Mission
To exert influence in pursuit of policy outcomes that promote choice, quality and equity in education.

To provide an active voice for families with children in South Australian Catholic Schools.

To develop and share resources that build the capacity of parents to be partners in their children’s education.

To promote and support Catholic Education.

We believe...
A quality education with quality resources and facilities are the right of every child.

Therefore, we...
Advocate for a greater public investment in education for all children
- Advocate for an equitable share of public funds for students in Catholic schools.

We believe...
Parents have a right to contribute to the shaping of education policy and practice.

Therefore, we...
- Consult with parents on key education issues
- Represent Catholic school parents in decision making and advisory forums in relation to national, state and Catholic education policy and initiatives
- Affiliate with and contribute to the work of Australian Parents Council (APC) and Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA) to ensure a voice at the national level.

We believe...
Parents are integral members of Catholic school communities.

Therefore, we...
- Communicate and connect with parent groups and parents in SA Catholic schools.

We believe...
Families provide children’s first, ongoing and most significant experience of love, faith and learning.

Therefore, we...
- Develop and share information and resources that empower parents with the knowledge and skills to support their child’s learning, capabilities and wellbeing.

We believe...
When schools and families work in partnership to strengthen family engagement in learning and schooling, children and young people perform better academically, stay in school longer and enjoy their schooling.

Therefore, we...
- Lead and support parent and family engagement in learning and schooling through:
  - Practical and individualised consultancy for school communities
  - Professional learning and training for school leaders, educators and parent leaders
  - Parents Initiatives in Education (PIE) grant funding to Catholic schools in South Australia.
- Research, gather and share evidence of leading practice.

The term “Parent” is inclusive of caregivers who have the primary responsibility of a child or young person.
**During the Interview**

**Attitude**
- Approach the interview with a positive and relaxed attitude.
- See it as an opportunity for a two-way discussion where you will be informed as well as actively contribute.
- Set the scene for a positive and constructive meeting by using open and positive body language.

**Communication**
- Respect the teacher’s professional skills and expertise.
- Be respectfully assertive.
- Be constructive.
- Discuss issues without getting personal.
- Express your needs and concerns calmly.
- Remember you both want what’s best for your child.

**Listen**
- The best communicators are keen listeners.
- Clarify points you don’t understand.
- If you don’t understand the ‘jargon’, ask for it to be described another way.

**Ask your prepared questions**

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**After the Interview**

**Follow up matters discussed at the meeting.**
An important part of the parent’s role begins after the interview.

**Discuss the interview with your child**
- Talk about his/her strengths and celebrate these.
- Talk about the ideas you discussed to continue to support his/her learning.
- Negotiate goals with your child that encourages them to take increased responsibility for their own learning.

**Follow up agreed action as soon as possible**
Did the teacher:-
- Recommend resources or strategies?
- Offer ideas that support your child’s study routine?
- Propose accessing additional support?

**Update the teacher about any action taken**

**Remember:**
- Formal parent/teacher interviews are only one form of communication between you and your child’s teacher.
- Keep connected using mutually agreed forms of school/home communication such as email, your child’s diary, communication book, wiki’s, blogs, SMS or phone.

www.parentfederation.catholic.edu.au/
Before the Interview

Be Prepared

- Your child may try to dissuade you from meeting with his/her teachers! Don’t be swayed. It’s your responsibility to keep connected in this way.
- Know the names and subject areas of your child’s teachers.
- Clarify if your child is expected to attend and their role in the interview.
- Discuss the upcoming interviews with your child. Ask ‘What am I likely to hear about your strengths and challenges in this subject”?
- Reflect on what you know about your child as a learner. Your insights are invaluable in parent/teacher conversations.
- Are there any issues in relation to your child’s study/work habits that you’d like to discuss (e.g. attitude, application, punctuality, attendance, work completion, amount of homework)?
- Are there family/home issues (e.g. change in living or working arrangements, loss of grief, illness) that the teacher may need to be aware of to be of support for your child?
- Plan and write down your specific questions/comments before the interview.
- Know where the interview will be held and be on time. Also be prepared for the meeting to run a little late.

“As partners in the education of their children, parents work collaboratively with teachers and staff”

Charter for Parents in Catholic School SA

Parent/Teacher Interview Checklist

You may wish to prepare questions and/or comments about some of the following areas:

Child's progress, strengths and challenges
- Academically, socially, emotionally.

Child's attitude to school and in class
- Attention and task completion
- Punctuality
- Independence/self-directed learning
- Initiative.

Child's commitment to schools expectations
- In class
- School rules and routines.

Child's relationship with peers
- Friendships
- Team work/collaboration.

How to help at home
- Homework routine
- Time management/organisation
- Hints or strategies to support their learning.

Curriculum and school/class activities
- Program for the semester/year
- Topics being covered
- School and class activities/traditions/celebrations
- How parents can contribute to the life of the school community.

4 Key Questions to ask in the time you’ve got

1. What have you observed about my child as a learner?
2. Is there anything about my child’s learning or social needs that I should know?
3. What can I share with you about my child’s learning style, strengths and challenges that would support you?
4. What can I do as a parent to help my child progress in school this year?

Further examples of FAQ’s:

- What opportunities are there for me to learn about what is covered in this subject?
- What opportunities are there to see examples of my child’s work?
- What are the assessments and assignments for this subject?
- How does my child participate in class discussions/class room activities, seek support?
- What amount of time might we expect our child to commit to homework for this subject?
- How would you describe my child’s ability to work collaboratively?
- How would you describe his/her relationship with his/her peers?
- How would you describe my child’s ability to cooperate, work independently, follow directions and follow class expectations and routines?
- How is my child progressing in comparison to others in his/her year level?
- What extra resources could we access to support what is covered in this subject?
- Can you tell me the best time and way to contact you if I have a query or concern?
A SUGGESTED GRIEVANCE PROCESS
FOR PARENTS/CARERS

When raising an issue or concern with your child’s teacher or school principal.

As partners in the education of their children, parents…
work toward resolving grievances appropriately and with respect
(Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA)
• Keep an open mind. You may not have all the facts. The first task is to seek clarification.

• Take your concern directly to the appropriate person. If the issue relates to the class program, routines or a situation that occurred in class, speak directly with the teacher. If it relates to a whole of school policy or practice, make a time to speak with the principal. Going over a person’s head will make it difficult to maintain a trusting partnership.

• Make an appointment, or at least think carefully about the best time to make contact. Avoid times when the teacher or Principal is supervising the class or yard.

• Be aware of the impact of your emotions. Reflect, plan and rehearse what you need to say before approaching the teacher or Principal. It may help to jot down a few points before the meeting. Attempt to keep your emotions in check. This will minimise the possibility of acting or speaking inappropriately.

• Approach the teacher or Principal in a polite, objective manner that shows a commitment to resolving the issue together. Try an opening statement such as “There is a misunderstanding that we need to clear up” or “There is a problem we need to solve together”.

• Begin by expressing an overall appreciation of the work of the school and teacher or at least an understanding of the challenges facing leaders and teachers in their work. Something like “I appreciate the work you do in leading the school in what must be a very challenging role, however, there is an issue I need to raise with you.” or “I value the work you do in the classroom and understand that it can be quite challenging and demanding, however, there is an issue I need to raise with you”.

• Remember that you both have one thing in common and that is a commitment to the learning and wellbeing of your child.

• You may consider writing a note of appreciation to the teacher or school once the issue has been dealt with and resolved. This strengthens the partnership between home and school.

• If you believe the issue has not been dealt with appropriately or resolved to your satisfaction, you may request a copy of the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools’ “Procedures for Resolving Complaints-2004” http://www.cesa.catholic.edu.au/media/files/1820.pdf, for further information about your rights and responsibilities.

“As partners in the education of their children, parents… act as positive advocates for their children.”
(Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA)

(This resource was adapted from an article by Barry Dwyer).
We’re Engaged! Some Basic Tips To Support Your Child's Learning

Parent engagement in children’s learning is the new buzz phrase – for good reason.

“…positive parental engagement in learning improves academic achievement, wellbeing and productivity” (Emerson et al 2012).

Family practices, behaviours and attitudes to school and learning significantly impact on a child’s educational success.

You are ‘engaged’ in your child’s learning when you:

- Talk positively about school in general, their school in particular and the benefits of doing your best at school;
- Have high expectations – expect your child to do their best, apply themselves to their learning and complete work that has been set when its due;
- Support your child’s consistent and punctual attendance at school;
- Ensure they have a healthy diet and enough rest;
- Develop a good working relationship with your child’s teacher/s – attend parent information sessions, read school and class newsletters, respond to notes and permission slips; attend parent/teacher interviews; keep an open line of communication about things that matter to your child’s learning and wellbeing; resolve grievances appropriately;
- Ensure that your child has the time, space and resources to do their homework – and to relax;
- Talk with your child about school, what they are learning, their friendships, what homework they have and how they feel they are doing;
- Taking their age into account, talk with your child about current affairs, things going on in the world, TV shows you watch together. Ask their opinion on issues and respect their point of view;
- Provide opportunities to experience a range of cultural and social experiences;
- Participate in the life of their school community in whatever way best reflects your interest, skill and capacity;
- Read aloud with your child and/or encourage them to read often;
- Be a positive advocate for your child’s learning, social and emotional needs;
- Encourage and praise qualities such as persistence and having a go particularly when the task is challenging for your child;
- Encourage your child by acknowledging their successes, and;
- Acknowledge that you are your child’s first (and lifelong) teacher and ‘partner’ with their teacher/s and school in their education!
Because by being our ‘friend’ and following us on Facebook or Twitter you will:

- Connect directly with the work of the Federation;
- Receive information about current and relevant issues in education;
- Participate in any surveys or online forums so your voice can be heard;
- Have access to a wealth of resources and information to support you to support your child’s learning.
The Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities is the peak body for parents with students in Catholic schools in South Australia.

“Animated by our Catholic faith and in partnership with families, our schools are communities which create opportunities for encountering life to the full—in all its personal, religious, political and cultural richness”

(Mission statement from the Catholic Education SA strategic plan 2010—2014)

Parents are integral members of our Catholic School communities.
As partners in the education of their children, parents contribute to the life of the school in many ways that reflect their interests, skills, experience and capacity to do so". (Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA)

Why is parent and family involvement in our school communities so important?
- It sends a strong message to your children that you value their education and their school
- Builds valuable partnerships between the school leaders, teachers, staff and parents
- Provides practical help for busy teachers and staff
- Builds parents' understanding of school processes and practices
- Models parent involvement and partnership to the wider school community;
- Builds community and a sense of belonging.

“When schools and families work in partnership, children perform better academically, stay in school longer and enjoy their schooling”. (Australian Government Family School Partnership Framework, 2008)

*The term parent includes carers and legal guardians

There are many ways to become involved in the life of your school community.

Everyone has something to offer:
- As a member of the Parents and Friends Committee or School Board
- Helping in the canteen or library
- Listening to reading
- Helping out in the classroom or Learning Assistance Program (LAP)
- On policy development or review committees
- Helping out at school events
- Assisting in working bees
- Coaching;
- Fundraising

Who can offer to volunteer?
- Parents/carers or legal guardians
- Grandparents
- Aunties or uncles
- Older siblings
- Friends and other members of the local community

How can I become a volunteer?

Contact the school office to speak about the varied opportunities and register your interest in being involved.

What will be required?
- You will be required to fill in a Volunteer Details Form.
- You must have clearance from the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide—Police Check Unit. Your school can assist you with this process.

What can I expect?
You will receive a brief induction to the role that will include:
- Information on relevant school policies
- Relevant training in relation to the OH&S and duty of care responsibilities of volunteers
- Relevant Training in relation to child protection and the responsibilities of volunteers as mandatory notifiers.