

Charitable Objects of St. Catherine's School

The Objects for which the Company is established are to promote and provide for the advancement of education by providing, conducting, governing, carrying on and maintaining in the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, a boarding or day School or Schools for girls in which the teaching shall be in accordance with the principles of the Church of England.



ST CATHERINE'S SENIOR SCHOOL

STUDENT EXCHANGE TRIPS AND STUDY TOURS POLICY

This policy was first written in July 2007, reviewed and continued in 2008, and revised further in May 2014, July 2015, November 2018 and June 2024, in line with the School Policy review schedule which ensures that policies are kept up to date.

1. RATIONALE

St Catherine's School is committed to providing an educational and cross-curricular experience for students and sees overseas travel and exchange opportunities in other countries as a significant chance for students' self-development. To this end, the School has established a link with St Catherine's School, Melbourne and St Catherine's School, Sydney

We feel that it is a privilege for our students to be given the opportunity to represent their School and their country on an overseas exchange trip/study tour.

Taking a student out of her usual environment and providing her with different challenges enforces her resilience and enhances her maturity and growth. Students undertaking exchanges reflect on their experiences positively and the programme has had a significant positive impact on all students.

2. AIMS

- To heighten awareness of other cultures
- To provide an opportunity for students to develop and grow personally through experiencing challenging opportunities

3. GUIDELINES FOR STAFFING

A group of interested staff will co-ordinate the selection procedure for candidates who apply to join either the Melbourne or Sydney Exchanges.

It is recommended School practice that a staff member will accompany St Catherine's students to their exchange destinations and ensure their appropriate induction and be there in support for the beginning of their stay. He/she will also be the liaison person for the St Catherine's exchange girls' parents and will usually be the contact person in school for the Melbourne or Sydney girls on their return to St Catherine's, Bramley.

3.1 Selection of Staff

The role of the accompanying staff member/s will be advertised internally. Applicants will be interviewed by the Headmistress. The Headmistress will make the final decision as to which staff member/s will accompany exchanges. This may vary from year to year.

4. GUIDELINESS FOR STUDENT APPLICANTS

4.1 Student Submissions

Students wishing to participate in the programme will submit a curriculum vitae and a letter of application to the Headmistress, outlining:

- Reasons for wishing to participate
- The contribution they have made to date to St Catherine's School
- The contribution they would make to the host school

4.2 The Selection Committee

The Selection Committee will include members of the senior staff of the School as well as other staff who have either led international expeditions or other tours or had personal experiences of exchange visits in the past or have personal experience of living in the exchange destination country.

The Selection Committee will select the School's very best candidates, following a panel interview, giving consideration to:

- The student's track record
- The student's potential to be resilient
- The student's contribution to St Catherine's, Bramley, to date
- The family's willingness to host in a reciprocal manner
- The student's potential to represent St Catherine's, Bramley, positively at all times

Students will also be selected according to the criteria for the particular trip/tour as established by the Selection Committee.

Students are expected to abide by all the School's policies prior to selection, during the selection procedure, after selection and during the exchange. Failure to comply with any policy may result in the withdrawal of the exchange offer and the award of the exchange or trip to another student.

Once a decision has been made regarding which students can participate in an exchange, it is important that parents and students are communicated with appropriately. Those who are not successful will be understandably distressed and disappointed, as may be their parents.

During the process, parents and students are informed regularly that places are limited and that not being successful is not necessarily a reflection of a student's lack of suitability in participating, but just that a decision has had to be made. It may also be that the student would be suited to a similar opportunity but later in her education and with more experience to take to it, such as a GAP year post-School. Unsuccessful candidates will receive a feedback session with members of the selection panel.

All applicants will be notified of the result of their application in writing. Acceptances are requested within a week, with payment of the relevant deposit.

4.3 The Family

Students' families will understand that the decision of the selection panel is final. The Headmistress reserves the right to intervene if she has any concerns about the selection of an applicant.

Host families will include the guest student in all family activities, and it is hoped that any holiday time in the exchange, or weekends, would afford the host family a chance to show the exchange visitor aspects of the UK, London etc. which would broaden the girl's experience during her visit.

Parents must sign a Parent Agreement Form as a condition of their daughter's participation in an exchange or school trip.

It is expected that students selected for Exchange will host their Exchange sister during her time at St Catherine's. If she is a boarder or weekly boarder, then she will host her Exchange sister within her own normal routine as a boarder/weekly boarder, both in School boarding accommodation and at home at weekends if applicable.

4.4 Student Withdrawal

In the unlikely case where a student is withdrawn by the School from the Exchange Programme prior to departure, the full amount of the deposit paid will be reimbursed.

4.5 Allocation of Exchange Partners and Briefing of Families

The two schools will consult in order to provide the best 'match' between exchange partners, taking into account the students' interests and enthusiasms. Prior to departure, all students and families will be briefed about either St Catherine's School, Melbourne or St Catherine's School, Sydney, the host school's expectations and the culture/customs of Australia.

Deciding to participate in an exchange is a serious decision and girls are encouraged to discuss the exchange with their parents. As well as the extended period away from home and staying with another family and school, there is also the requirement to host a girl for a term. This involves providing accommodation but also ensuring that they have an interesting and engaging experience. At times there are challenges, and it is important that the student and her parents are ready to deal with the difficulties as well as the delights of being a host and experiencing an exchange.

Parents of applicants are required to have their School fees and accounts paid up to date.

4.6 Communications between students and their family

The internet can facilitate regular communication via email and Skype and exchange students are encouraged to take advantage of these forms of communication when available and necessary. It is important, however, that communication is regulated so that the nature of the exchange experience is not compromised. Being away from home and independent is a challenging experience and perseverance is necessary. Too frequent communication, particularly if there are stressful times, can hamper the development of confidence and reduce the ability to make the most of the exchange.

A student who contacts her parents to let them know that she is homesick, does not like the food or is lonely, may in fact only feel this for a few hours, but can leave her parents concerned for days or weeks following a poorly timed email or phone call. Students are encouraged to share such concerns actively with the host family who are near to hand to support and help her manage the challenges.

5. EMERGENCIES

Emergency telephone numbers and safe haven addresses will be supplied by the School to the departing students. It is recommended that each student carries a mobile telephone with an international facility.

During the exchange, the host school takes responsibility for the students in its care. To facilitate appropriate risk management, the following details are exchanged between schools.

- Names, address and contact details of students' parents
- Medical Information – specifically medical history and any known allergies or medical conditions
- Written “Informed Consent” from parents for activities and events that are expected to occur on the exchange.

The host school will be asked to sign a data handling agreement and/or asked to agree to appropriate handling of data consistent with UK requirements under GDPR.

In the event that a student has a medical condition, allergy or medical history that requires additional care or protocols (such as Anaphylaxis) then appropriate documentation and management protocols are requested.

Students visiting Australia with Anaphylaxis are requested to bring an EpiPen rather than an AnaPen. If a device is not compliant then appropriate documentation is requested.

During exchanges, the host school takes responsibility for day-to-day management of the student. In the event of a medical or social issue about which the staff consider necessary to contact their home school or parents, this communication is done through the teacher-in-charge of the exchange. It is important that the school staff are informed of any issues. All those involved must bear in mind that the distance and time difference can result in poor communication and distress to parents if communication is not clear and timely.

In the event of a serious medical emergency all efforts will be made to gain parental consent for any medical intervention but if this is not possible the parental consent given via the school medical forms on entry to the school for staff in charge to act in loco parentis will be implemented .

6. CURRICULUM

During a student's absence for exchange, she is obliged to continue with schoolwork in ICT and Maths. These subjects, being cumulative, require students to continue during their time away so that they can return to class without gaps in their knowledge. Other subjects can be picked up again on the student's return and in line with her GCSE options. For the St Catherine's Melbourne Exchange, the lead member of staff and the Director of Studies will talk at length to the exchange girls about GCSE option choices before they depart on their exchange, and how to manage School exams on their return. Students should not feel under pressure to excel in these exams after a term on the Melbourne exchange. The exchange is to be relished and enjoyed for its educational value as an exchange. While girls must give their exams their focus, some slightly lower grades will not ultimately affect their GCSE performance.

7. COSTS

Each parent is required to pay for their daughter's flights to either Melbourne or Sydney, and an additional admin fee to cover the costs of the staff attending and other administration. The expectation is that the host school provides tuition at no charge, providing access to a uniform, computer/iPad (if required) and textbooks. It is, of course, a reciprocal relationship. Similarly, host families provide accommodation and meals as well as any other day-to-day expenses such as transport. Host families have traditionally also provided opportunities for their student on weekends and during holiday periods. Students are required of course to take some spending money for their personal expenses. The costs of additional extra-curricular activities, such as music lessons, are determined depending on individual circumstances.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

St Catherine's families hosting a visitor from Australia will be required to undergo regulatory checks from Surrey Children's Services Fostering Department. This is because, by UK law, if a child is hosted for more than 28 days in an exchange programme such as this, then the process is classed as “private fostering”. The checks will involve:

- Providing documentation necessary for SCS in full to carry out an enhanced DBS check on each member of the household over the age of 18
- Consenting to allow your family doctor to be contacted regarding your suitability to host a child
- One SCS inspection visit to the household before the exchange participant arrives from Melbourne/Sydney and one additional visit once she is here

8. POST EXCHANGE

At the conclusion of the exchange, all participants will write 'thank you' letters to the host school and family. Participants may also be given the opportunity to present an assembly to the school community or a part of it, working alongside their exchange sisters during their visit to Bramley.

Participating families and students will take part in a debrief and students will report back to the School at the conclusion of the experience.

St Catherine's, Bramley staff will write a report for each student visiting from St Catherine's, Melbourne and St Catherine's, Sydney, and will request that the same is provided for St Catherine's, Bramley girls following their Exchanges to Melbourne or Sydney.

The return to school following an exchange can be a difficult experience. Following a period of being the centre of attention and experiencing so much that is new, to return to the routines of their 'normal' life at home can cause some stress. Attending classes again where the other students have had curriculum experience and developed skills, and also re-joining friendship groups that have changed since they left can all cause challenges. The exchange co-ordinator and relevant Housemistress should meet with girls on their return to talk about the challenges and give strategies to help them make the transition back into the school and their community as quickly and effectively as possible.

Signature of Senior School Headmistress:

Date:

Please see the attached letter from Surrey County Council Fostering Team re Fostering arrangements

THIS POLICY WILL BE REVIEWED IN 2026/27