# school council meeting guidelines

## OVERVIEW

School council meetings should be:

* conducted in accordance with the school council’s Standing Orders. It is good practice to establish Standing Orders and review them each year following the election process
* held at least eight times per year and at least once per school term
* attended by members of the school council in person, or if unable to attend personally, by videoconferencing or teleconferencing
* chaired by:
  + the president of the school council, other than the meetings to appoint Community members and elect office bearers, or
  + the vice-president, if the president is unable to preside. If the council has appointed a vice-president and they are in attendance, the vice-president must preside, or
  + a member of the council (other than a member who is a Department employee), if the president is unable to preside and if the school council has not appointed a vice-president, or the vice-president is unable to preside at the meeting. The school council must vote on who will preside at the meeting, or
  + the school principal, if the school council by resolution removes the president from office. The principal will chair the meeting to fill the position of president
* resourced with support and relevant information by the principal, for the efficient conduct of meetings
* open to members of the school community, unless the council determines the need for a closed meeting.

## Quorum at a school council meeting

A school council meeting must operate with a quorum. A quorum requires not less than one half of school council members currently holding office to be present at the meeting and the majority of members present must not be Department of Education and Training (DET) employees. Any Parent members on school council who also work for the Department are counted as DET employees for the purpose of a quorum.

A member of the school council may be present in person or by videoconferencing or teleconferencing.

If at the end of 30 minutes after the appointed time for a council meeting there is not a quorum, the meeting must stand adjourned to a time and place determined by the school council members present.

### Some examples of school council meeting quorum requirements

#### Example 1:

Golden Secondary College has a total constituting Order of 12 members plus 2 Student members:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | Parents | DET | Students | Community |
| 12 plus 2 students | 5 (including 1 DET parent) | 4 | 2 | 3 |

The school council has a current membership of:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | Parents | DET | Students | Community | Vacancies |
| 14 | 5 (including 1 DET parent) | 4 | 2 | 3 | 0 |

An example of meeting the quorum requirements:

If seven members are present (one half of school council members currently holding office) the council will meet quorum under the following conditions:

* there are at least four Parent, Student and/or Community members present
* there are no more than three DET employee members present (including DET parents).

#### Example 2:

Sesame Street Primary School has a total constituting Order of 15 members:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | Parents | DET | Community |
| 15 | 6 (no DET parents) | 5 | 4 |

The school has a current membership of 14 members:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Total | Parents | DET | Community | Vacancies |
| 14 | 6 (no DET parents) | 4 | 4 | 1 |

An example of meeting the quorum requirements:

If seven members are present, (one half of school council members currently holding office)

the council will meet quorum under the following conditions:

* there are at least four Parent and/or Community members present, and
* there are no more than three DET employee members present.

## Standing Orders

A school council may develop and agree to Standing Orders to assist it to operate effectively and efficiently. It is good practice to establish Standing Orders and review them each year following completion of the election process. Standing Orders typically comprise:

* an introduction – that outlines the purpose of the Standing Orders, their influence in promoting teamwork, avoiding conflict, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the council, the school councillors’ code of conduct and the importance of following the Standing Orders
* reference to the constituting Order – which lists the membership structure by category and numbers
* an outline of office bearer positions and sub-committees
* a description of meeting procedures – how the school council will operate: including length of meetings; agenda; minutes; quorum requirements; meeting arrangements; open and closed meetings; effective decision making; member absence from meetings; arrangements for extensions of meetings; and meeting etiquette.

## Agenda

The agenda lists the business that council will consider at the meeting. Some items are for information only, some for discussion and others for decision. In order to avoid the agenda being crowded with too much business, a significant amount of work may be undertaken by sub-committees. Reports from the sub-committees can provide information and recommendations to council, and are considered at council meetings when appropriate.

Most information regarding agenda topics to be discussed in council meetings will be provided by the principal or in reports from relevant individuals or sub-committees. Meeting papers should be sent out at least five days prior to the meeting date to allow councillors to reflect on the issues, to gather more information if necessary and to canvass the opinions of school community members.

## Minutes

School council minutes must be taken and should record:

* the type of meeting (regular, extraordinary or public)
* date, time and venue of meeting
* names of attendees and apologies received from members
* name of presiding officer
* the business of the meeting including the decision on the minutes of the previous meeting, inward and outward correspondence and reports of any sub-committees tabled at the meeting
* decisions of the meeting including motions and any amendments, names of movers and seconders
* whether the motion was carried or rejected
* the number of votes for and against.

The minutes of the council meeting should be written up under the agenda item headings and circulated by the principal prior to the next meeting of council, where they must be confirmed as accurate and signed by the council president or the person who presides at the meeting.

There is no right of access to the minutes of a school council meeting under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000.* However, the school community should be kept informed of school council matters by way of a report in the school newsletter and/or on the school website.

For further information see: [Sample agenda and minutes template](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/management/minuteagenda.docx) <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/management/minuteagenda.docx>

## Decision making

For effective and informed decision-making at council meetings, there needs to be:

* a carefully prepared agenda and papers that are distributed at least five working days before the meeting
* frank and open discussion
* accurate records of decisions
* access to independent and external professional advice where appropriate.

School councils make decisions by a majority vote of eligible members who are present including the principal at a council meeting. If votes are tied, the presiding member has a second or casting vote.

## Length of meeting

School council meetings should require no longer than 2.5 hours, regardless of the setting. If business has not been concluded by the scheduled closing time for the meeting, the chairperson should ask councillors whether they wish to defer the rest of the business until the next meeting or to extend the meeting by a specified period of time, for example,15 minutes. A motion is necessary if council wants to extend the meeting.

## Conflict of interest

Conflicts of interest are an inevitable part of organisational life and many arise without any wrongdoing.

A conflict of interest occurs when a school councillor’s personal interests may influence, or may be seen to influence, their public duty. A personal interest may be a preference, relationship, connection, bias, personal property, hobby, or a desire to help family and friends. Personal interests can also be pecuniary (financial) or non-pecuniary.

Actual conflicts of interest occur when a school councillor’s private interest can influence their current public duty. Potential conflicts of interest occur where an actual conflict of interest may arise in future.

Perceived conflicts of interest occur where a reasonable person might suspect that a school councillor is subject to a real conflict of interest, whether or not one actually exists. Perceived conflicts may be just as damaging as ‘actual’ conflicts. Any reasonable perception that school council members, or their friends or family are benefiting from the exercise of the school council could result in the loss of public trust, both in the school council, the Department and the public service as a whole. School councils are obliged to identify these risks as well, and take action to mitigate them.

If a school council member or a member of his or her immediate family has an actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest (either a pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest) in a subject or matter under discussion at a school council meeting, the member must declare the conflict of interest.

If the school council decides that the conflict of interest is material, the councillor must not be present during the relevant discussion unless invited to do so by the chair of the meeting. They must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter. A school councillor’s temporary absence for this purpose does not affect the meeting quorum. The declaration of interest should be included in the minutes of the meeting.

If the conflict of interest involves a principal or Business Manager it must be entered onto the Conflict of Interest Register on eduPay and managed appropriately.

## Public reporting meeting

A school council must call a public reporting meeting at least once each year and report the proceedings of the council since the date of the previous public meeting. The council must present the endorsed Annual Report to the meeting and, if the school council accounts have been audited, present a copy of the audited accounts. The public reporting meeting can be held during the year at a time that suits the school community and school council activities and commitments.

## Extraordinary meetings

An extraordinary meeting of a school council may be held at a time decided by the council if all members are given reasonable notice of the time, date, place and object of the meeting.

The council president or in the president’s absence the principal, must call an extraordinary meeting if either of them receives a written request to do so from three council members. The president or principal must call a meeting by sending a notice to all school council members giving the members reasonable notice of the time, date, place and object of the meeting.

The business of the extraordinary meeting must only cover the specific matter for which it is called.