# School council governance

## Quick reference guide

## The importance of good governance

Good governance enables school councils to effectively perform their functions and meet their objectives, to act with integrity, and to respond strategically to changing demands and educational challenges. Good governance relies on the professional ethical leadership of the principal, the president and the individual school council members, and the establishment of effective meeting procedures.

Properly functioning school councils are characterised by sharing of information, knowledge and ideas from members who may have vastly different but equally useful experiences and skills. Members should be able to exchange information, share experiences, express perspectives, pose questions, clarify viewpoints, explore relevant research and develop a shared vision and way forward.

To fulfil their functions and objectives, school councils should:

* have a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities
* focus on improving student learning outcomes
* involve the community in conversations about key issues and challenges on education
* be actively involved in the development of the School Strategic Plan
* promote meaningful parent and community participation and actively seek the views of the community
* include members who represent the diverse views of the school community
* have a clear and consistent process for decision making
* maintain high ethical standards
* regularly review and evaluate its own performance
* devote time to its own growth and development, through induction and training.

## Principal as executive officer of the school council

The principal as ex-officio member and executive officer is responsible for:

* providing council with timely advice about educational and other matters
* preparing the council’s agenda in consultation with the president
* reporting regularly to council about the school’s performance against the School Strategic Plan
* ensuring council decisions are acted on
* providing adequate support and resources for the conduct of council meetings
* communicating with the school council president about council business
* ensuring that new council members are inducted
* liaising with the Department, through the relevant regional office, about school council related matters.

## Membership

The size and configuration of a school council’s membership is determined by its constituting Order and can be changed by submitting a Schedule 9 request once a year.

There are three categories of school council membership (Parent, DET employee and Student). In addition, there is an optional Community member category and for a small number of school councils, a Nominee member category.

More than one third of the membership must comprise Parent members. DET employees must not comprise more than one third of the membership. DET employees are ineligible to be Community members. DET employees are ineligible to be Parent members of the council at the school they work. The principal as an ex-officio member is included in the DET employee category.

A person must be eligible for election or co-option to school council. They must not be an undischarged bankrupt, of unsound mind, serving a sentence for an indictable offence and or a registrable offender within the meaning of the *Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004*.

## Code of conduct

School councillors must abide by the Code of Conduct for Directors of Victorian Public Entities (the Code) issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner under the *Public Administration Act 2004* (the Act). School councils are also subject to the Public Sector Values. The Values are Responsiveness, Integrity, Impartiality, Accountability, Respect, Leadership and Human Rights. All members should act in accordance with these values and use them to guide information sharing, relationship building and decision-making.

The Managing School Council Conduct document provides information and advice on the Code of Conduct and managing conflict on council should it arise.

School Councillors work together in the best interests of the school to:

* assist in the efficient governance of the school
* ensure council’s decisions affecting students are made having regard to the best interests of the students
* enhance the educational opportunities of students
* ensure the council adheres to legal and Department requirements.

## Meetings

### Quorum

For a school council to make a valid decision, a quorum must be achieved at a meeting. A quorum is achieved if not less than one-half of the members currently holding office are present and a majority of the members are not DET employees. Any Parent members on school council who also work for DET at another government school, are considered DET employees for the purpose of determining whether a quorum is achieved. Members may attend a meeting in person, by videoconferencing or teleconferencing.

### Annual public reporting meeting

A school council must hold a public meeting at least once a year at which the proceedings of the council since the last public meeting must be reported, a copy of the Annual Report presented and the accounts of the school council, if they have been audited, are presented.

### General meetings

School councils must hold at least eight general meetings a year and at least once per term. An agenda and papers for each meeting must be distributed at least five working days before each school council meeting.

### Chairing meetings

The president elected by the school council presides at school council meetings other than a special meeting held after the election to elect office bearers where the principal presides.

### Decisions

A school council decides matters by voting. If votes are tied, the presiding member has a second or casting vote.

### Conflict of interest

If a member of the school council 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, that member must declare the conflict of interest. If the school council decides that the conflict of interest is material, the councillor

1. must not be present during the discussion unless invited to so do by the chair of the meeting and
2. must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter and
3. may be included in the quorum for that meeting. The declaration of interest should be included in the minutes of the meeting. A school councillor’s temporary absence for this purpose does not affect the meeting quorum.

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.

### Minutes

The principal must ensure an official record of school council meetings is maintained. The minutes should record a summary of matters discussed at the meeting, decisions made and actions to be taken.

The school council should keep the community informed about its operations by publishing a report following a meeting in the school newsletter and/or on the school website.

A person does not have a right of access to school council meeting minutes, documents or records under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*.

### Open and closed meetings

School council meetings would normally be open to the school community. Visitors can be present at council meetings with the agreement of the principal and a decision of council. School council may decide to close a meeting or part of a meeting.

## Sub-committees

The school council may form sub-committees to assist them in performing their functions and obligations. Sub-committees must consist of at least three members, one of which must be a school council member.

Sub-committees must meet as directed by the school council and report, in writing, to the school council at subsequent meetings of the school council.

## Delegations

## The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 allow school councils to delegate their powers and duties.

## A school council must generally obtain approval from the Minister for Education to delegate a power or duty to a person or body other than the Principal.

## A school council cannot delegate any of its functions or powers in relation to the approval of the school budget or Annual report.

## The delegation must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting of school council and a register of delegations must be kept by the school council. The instrument setting out the delegations, and the terms and conditions of the delegations, must be signed by the President of the school council and delivered to the delegates.

## A person or body to whom a delegation has been made must provide a written report about any activities performed as a delegate at each ordinary meeting of the school council.

## Contracts

School councils seeking advice about contracts should contact the Legal Division of the Department of Education and Training at legal.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

## Further information

The School Operations and Governance Unit (SOGU) of the Regional Services Group provides advice and guidance to school councils on a range of governance issues.

Councillors can contact SOGU directly at school.council@edumail.vic.gov.au or 03 7022 1343 or

03 7022 1345 for information and advice.

Councillors can also contact their regional office for information and advice.

School councillors can also find information and advice on the Department’s webpage [School councils](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncils.aspx) <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/community/Pages/schoolcouncils.aspx> and in the School Policy Advisory Guide at [School Councils](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/pages/councils.aspx) <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/pages/councils.aspx>.

The Department offers comprehensive face to face training free of cost to school councils of Victorian Government schools. The training is based on four modules of the Improving School Governance (ISG) materials; Governance, Strategic Planning, Finance and School Council President.

Face to face training is accessed by contacting the provider, Synergistiq on 03 90695598 or email: sct@synergistiq.com or online at [School council training](https://www.synergistiq.com/councillortraining/) < https://www.synergistiq.com/councillortraining/>