



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:

- 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 its community
- have a clear understanding of its roles and responsibilities
- include members who represent the diverse views of the school community
- have a clear and consistent process for decision making
- maintain high ethical standards
- have members with trust and respect for one another

- evaluate and communicate with the school community about its activities
- regularly review and evaluate its own performance
- trust and delegate to individuals and its own sub-committees
- 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 its strategic plan
- making sure that 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.

The principal is an ex-officio member of all council sub-committees.



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.

For the majority of school councils, there are three categories of membership (parent, DET employee and community). 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 and parent members of the school if they work at the school. 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.

School councils are subject to the Public Sector Values which are set out in section 7 of the Public Administration Act 2004 and the Code. The Public Sector 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.

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 the relevant 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 and a copy of the annual report and the accounts of the school council if they have been audited must be 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 any direct conflict of interest (including a pecuniary interest) in a subject or matter under discussion at a school council meeting, that member:

- (a) must declare the conflict of interest
 - (b) must not be present during the discussion unless invited to so do by the person presiding at the meeting; and
 - (c) must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter; and
 - (d) may be included in the quorum for that meeting.
- The declaration of interest should be included in the minutes of the meeting.

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.

SUBCOMMITTEES

The school council may form subcommittees to assist them in performing their functions and obligations. Subcommittees must consist of at least three members, one of which must be a school council member. Subcommittees must meet as directed by the school council and report, in writing, to the school council at subsequent meetings of the school council.

CONTRACTS

School councils seeking advice about contracts should contact the Legal Division of the Department of Education and Training:

legal.services@edumail.vic.gov.au

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, email:

school.council@edumail.vic.gov.au