

IMPROVING
SCHOOL
GOVERNANCE

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GOVERNANCE

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1.0 Introduction

Goal

This module provides participants with an understanding of:

- the framework within which school councils operate
- what school councils do
- school council operations
- important features of their school.

Overview

School councils play a key role in Victorian government schools, and being a member of the school council is a rewarding and challenging experience. Acting as a team, council supports the principal to provide the best possible educational outcomes for students.

Although each councillor brings their own valuable life skills and knowledge to the role, councillors may need to develop skills and acquire knowledge in areas that may be unfamiliar to them. These might include developing the broad direction and vision for the school, interpreting data or financial statements, working effectively as a council, or understanding legislative and policy requirements.

This training program will help councillors to understand their roles and responsibilities and develop the skills and knowledge to perform their governance tasks successfully.

In addition to this governance module, there are three other training modules to support councillors in the areas of strategic planning, finance and policy development and review.

A module for school council presidents is also available.

1.1 Legislative framework

Why is this topic important?

The school council operates under a legislative framework within the Victorian government school system. The system has a strong history of establishing efficient and effective mechanisms that:

- meet the expectations of Victorians for well governed schools
- reflect local and statewide values
- meet the needs of local communities served by particular schools.

On completing this unit, school councillors should:

- know the legal requirements relevant to school councils
- understand the framework under which they operate.

Legislation

All school councils in Victoria operate under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the Act). Each school council is established by an Order of the Minister for Education, which specifies the council's membership, size and configuration; its objectives, powers, functions and accountabilities; and the role of its executive officer who is the principal.

School councils are also regulated by the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* and school councillors are subject to the Director's Code of Conduct made under the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

It is important that school councillors understand the key features of the legislation because it affects all aspects of their work: how they interact with the community, consider options, make decisions and generally how they conduct themselves. This strengthens community confidence in the school and helps to protect and build the school's reputation.

The Act lists school council's objectives as being to:

- assist in the efficient governance of the school
- ensure that its decisions affecting students of the school are made having regard, as a primary consideration, to the best interests of the students
- enhance the educational opportunities of the students of the school
- ensure the school and the council comply with any requirements of the Act, the regulations, a Ministerial Order or a direction, guideline or policy issued under the Act.

School council membership

Each school council's constituting Order outlines its structure and membership:

- **Parent members** – must be more than one third of the school council's total membership. 'Parent' includes a guardian or person responsible to maintain or having the custody of a student of the school. Department employees are eligible for membership in this category so long as they have children attending the school and the Department employees do not work at the school (save for the principal who is a member of the Department employee member category) of that school council.
- **Department employee members** – must not be more than one third of the school council's total membership. The principal is automatically included in this membership category and has full voting rights. Other staff (teaching and non teaching) are elected or co-opted to this category. To be eligible for election to this category, a person must be a member of the DET employee electorate of the school.
- **Community members** – is an optional membership category where a school council decides if it wishes to have community members. People are co-opted by the school council to a community member position to bring additional skills and perspectives to the school council. Parents are eligible to be co-opted to a community member position but Department employees are not. Students may be co-opted by the school council to a community member position.

Code of conduct for school councillors

School councils in Victoria are public entities as defined by the *Public Administration Act 2004*. School councillors must abide by the Directors' Code of Conduct issued by the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner. The code of conduct requires councillors to:

- act with honesty and integrity (be truthful, open and clear about their motives and declare any conflict of interest should it arise)
- act in good faith in the best interests of the school (work cooperatively with other councillors and the school community, be reasonable, and make all decisions with the best interests of students foremost in their minds)
- act fairly and impartially (consider all sides of an issue before making a decision, seek to have a balanced view, never give special treatment to a person or group and never act from self interest)
- use information appropriately (respect confidentiality and use information for the purpose for which it was made available)
- use their position appropriately (not use their position as a councillor to gain an advantage)
- act in a financially responsible manner (observe all the above principles when making financial decisions)
- exercise due care, diligence and skill (accept responsibility for decisions and do what is best for the school)
- comply with relevant legislation (know what legislation is relevant for which decisions and obey the law)
- demonstrate leadership and stewardship (set a good example, exercise care and responsibility to keep the school strong and sustainable).

There are also guidance notes for the code of conduct available on the Victorian Public Sector Commission website.

Indemnity for school council members

School councillors are indemnified against any liability in respect of any loss or damage suffered by the council or any other person in respect of anything necessarily or reasonably done, or omitted to be done by the councillor in good faith in:

- a) the exercise of a power or the performance of a function of a member
- b) the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the exercise of a power or the performance of a function of a member.

In other words, school councillors are not legally liable for any loss or damage suffered by council or others as a result of reasonable actions taken in good faith.

Resources and links

Education and Training Reform Act 2006

→ http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/eatra2006273/

Victorian Public Sector Commission Codes and Standards - Director's Code of Conduct

→ <http://www.ssa.vic.gov.au/behaviours-aamp-culture/codes-and-standards.html>

1.2

What school councils do

Why is this topic important?

Under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, a school council has particular functions in setting and monitoring the school's direction. Councillors need to understand what their role is, the powers and functions of the school council and how they are required to work with the principal and the school community.

On completing this unit, councillors should understand:

- how the designated functions of school councils translate into governance roles and responsibilities including those that require decisions of council
- the distinctions in roles and responsibilities of school council and those of the school principal
- how partnerships can assist the school council in undertaking its functions, powers and roles.

Functions of a school council

The functions of a school council are outlined in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* and include:

- establishing the broad direction and vision of the school within the school's community
- participating in the development and monitoring of the school strategic plan
- approving the annual budget and monitoring expenditure
- developing, reviewing and updating school policies
- raising funds for school-related purposes
- maintaining the school's grounds and facilities
- entering into contracts (such as for cleaning or construction work)
- reporting annually to the school community and to the Department
- creating interest in the school in the wider community
- informing itself of and taking into account the views of the community
- regulating and facilitating the after hours use of school premises and grounds
- operating a children's service at the school or other premises controlled by the Minister.

School council may also be involved in the principal selection process. When this occurs, a panel of councillors and Departmental staff is formed to review applications, interview shortlisted applicants and recommend one or more applicants to the Secretary of the Department. The Department's regional office staff would also be involved. With principal selection, panel members would be provided with training.

The school council president, upon request from the Regional Director, provides input in principal contract renewal discussions. The president advises the school council of that input at the next school council meeting.

What school council is not authorised to do

A school council is not authorised to:

- purchase or acquire for consideration any land or building
- employ teachers with no fixed date for the termination of that employment.

Unless authorised by the Minister, a school council is not able to:

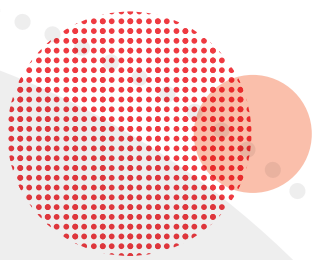
- license or grant any interest in land
- purchase a motor vehicle, boat or plane
- enter into hire purchase agreements or obtain credit or loans
- form or become a member of a corporation; or provide for any matter or thing outside of Victoria unless it is related to an excursion by school students or the professional development of school staff.

Distinctions in roles and responsibilities

Understanding the functional split between school council and principal is critical for the effective functioning of the school council. The school council has a governance role and the principal manages the school and is responsible for ensuring the delivery of a comprehensive education program to all students.

The following table shows, for each area of school activity, the roles and responsibilities of the council and the principal.

Area of activity	The principal ...	The school council ...
<p>Curriculum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leads development of teaching and learning programs • determines teacher, subject and time allocations; timetable; class sizes; and structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops the broad direction and vision for the school using guidelines provided by the Department
<p>Student management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements these policies • considers and, where appropriate, grants exemptions to dress code • manages all matters of student wellbeing, discipline and academic progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops student engagement policy and student dress code • consults with the school community policies
<p>Staff employment and management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is responsible (as delegate of the Secretary of the Department) for the employment and management of persons in the Teaching Service (including non-teaching staff) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves employment of some staff e.g. casual replacement teachers, canteen staff • recommends to the Secretary of the Department the appointment of a principal
<p>Buildings and grounds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oversees maintenance of all facilities • monitors implementation of contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocates contract for school cleaning • enters into contracts for building and grounds improvements





Strategic planning

One of the key functions of councils is to contribute to the establishment of the broad vision and direction for the school. Strategic planning is the process of reflecting on past performance, establishing future directions and deciding what will constitute success. In other words, it involves the school community considering the following questions:

- where have we been?
- where do we want to go?
- how will we get there?
- how will we know if we have been successful?

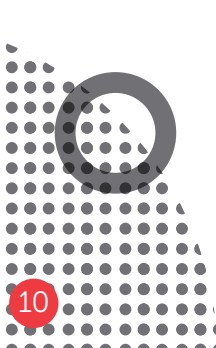
The School Performance Framework outlines a clear process for developing the school strategic plan and planning for improving student outcomes. The process includes:

- **evaluating and reviewing** of the school's performance against its current school strategic plan
- developing a four-year **school strategic plan**, which includes statements of the school's purpose, values and environmental context, and the school's goals, targets and key improvement strategies
- developing **annual implementation plans** that describe how the key improvement strategies in the school strategic plan will be implemented and monitored
- publishing an **annual report** for the school community (including parents/guardians, students and other interested people) about the school's successes and challenges in implementing the strategic plan and improving student outcomes.

The Framework also includes a process for schools to assess their compliance with school registration requirements.

The following table provides an overview of how the principal and staff, school council, and the school community would typically be involved in the strategic planning process. These roles and responsibilities are examined in detail in the strategic planning module.

The principal ...	The school council ...
Self-evaluation and review	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans and manages the self-evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviews the plan and timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises consultations, gathers and analyses data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in working groups and involves the community in consultations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> drafts the self-evaluation report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the final self evaluation report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans for the school review, briefs the reviewer and provides performance data for the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in setting the terms of reference and review panel meetings as required
School strategic plan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans and manages the planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> supports the development of a long term view of the school's directions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises consultations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> involves the community in consultations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepares a draft plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the draft plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates the plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implements the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitors the plan
Implementing, monitoring and reporting on the strategic plan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops the annual implementation plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contributes to developing the plan
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keeps the school community informed about progress in implementing the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitors progress in implementing the plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> drafts the annual report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorses the annual report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> organises a public meeting to present the annual report to the school community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reports to the school community on the school's performance



Finance

The school council is responsible for overseeing the school's financial performance. It is a legal and Departmental requirement that council makes sure that monies coming into the school are being properly expended and authorised.

To ensure this happens, councils are responsible for ensuring that the school has a functioning, effective system of internal controls. Internal controls are the procedures that make sure that:

- all financial activity within the school is sound, accurate and legal
- the school's assets are safe
- council can rely on the accuracy of the financial information it receives.

Council also helps develop the school's program (non-staff) budget that shows how the school will allocate its resources to implement the key improvement strategies in the school strategic plan and annual implementation plan. Council then monitors the school's financial performance against the budget in conjunction with the principal.

Finally, council is responsible for how the school raises income (over and above the funding provided by the government). It must manage any financial and reputational risks that could arise, and ensure that all legal requirements are met.

Most school councils have a finance sub-committee which handles many of council's routine financial responsibilities. The convener of the finance committee, as elected from council members, is preferably a non-Department parent member or a community member. The business manager/bursar should not hold this position. The convener may be appointed by council as its treasurer.

The following table provides an overview of how the principal and staff, school council and the school community would typically be involved in school financial management. These roles and responsibilities are examined in detail in the finance module.

The principal ...	The school council ...
Internal controls	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> puts in place a system of internal controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensures the school has and uses a system of internal controls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conducts school financial business in line with the system of internal controls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adheres to internal controls such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » appointing one councillor (normally the president or a delegated councillor) to approve payments and sign cheques » approving an investment policy if appropriate » approving trading operations » ensuring issues raised by the auditor are addressed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides financial reports to council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> considers financial reports
Budgeting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops the budget timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> approves the budget timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops program budgets with staff, and salary and revenue budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviews budget submissions and program priority list (done by the finance sub-committee if council has one)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluates program outcomes, prepares and prioritises budget submissions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviews and approves the budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates the budget to staff 	
Financial reports	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> prepares financial reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitors revenue and expenditure against the budget
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explains financial reports to the finance sub-committee and council, and recommends action as appropriate implements council's decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> takes action to address issues arising from the financial reports
Investing and fundraising	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assists with the review of fundraising proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> approves fundraising activity on the school's behalf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advises council about available cash and recommends investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops an investment policy approves amounts to be invested
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops a parent payments policy implements policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contributes to and approves the parent payments policy



Policy development and review

A school council is responsible for developing particular policies to reflect the school's values and support the school's broad direction, as outlined in its strategic plan. Legislation and Department imperatives require councils to develop some policies, and they may develop other policies to address local needs.

Council needs to know that policy is required when it relates to the governance of the school. This includes the implementation of government policy and guidelines.

The day-to-day operational policies and procedures in schools are managed by the principal and staff.

School council policies are documents that are made available to the school community as a means to clarify functions and responsibilities, manage change, promote consistency, meet standards and make decision-making transparent. Policy development offers council the opportunity to engage with the school community on matters of importance to that community.

Councils should review their policies regularly to ensure that they remain relevant and valid. They may decide to update a policy, bring a number of policies into a single policy or decide that a particular policy is no longer required.

The following table shows what the principal and leadership team, the school council and the school community are responsible for in terms of policy development.

The principal ...	The school council ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> advises council about the need for school policy to meet government policy and guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> determines the need for policy on local issues within its powers and functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> contributes to policy development as a member of council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops policy, including consulting with the school community if required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implements policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regularly reviews existing policies

Partnerships with others in the school community

In an effective school council, processes are characterised by a mutual sharing of information, knowledge and ideas. There is a focus on dialogue in which all school council members are able to exchange information, share experiences, honestly express perspectives, pose questions, clarify viewpoints, explore relevant research and develop a shared vision and way forward.

Effective school councils are also conscious of the need for positive working relationships and partnerships within the school community.

The main partnerships that school council will have are described below and will also potentially include businesses, industry, community organisations, universities, TAFE's and other schools.

The principal

The principal is the council's executive officer and is responsible for the organisation, management and administration of the school and implementing Department and school council policies. The principal is the leader of the school and is the Department representative in the school. The principal and council must have a close working relationship to bring together the school's strategic and operational activities.

Staff

Staff are represented on council. Staff are directly affected by council's strategic planning work (setting the school's long-term direction), policy development and budgeting (allocating resources for their programs).

Students

Councillors are required by legislation to keep students' best interests in mind at all times. At times a school council will consult with students, particularly in relation to policy development on topics of interest to students. Council might also have links with the student representative body. Some school councils co-opt students into the community member category.

The school community

The school community includes staff, students and parents. The broader community may comprise of businesses, industry, services clubs, sports clubs, early childhood services and other interested individuals and organisations. Parent and community representatives on council contribute community perspectives to all deliberations. They also build links with and explain the school's values and directions to the community.

The Department

All Victorian government school councils must comply with relevant legislation, Ministerial orders and directions as well as guidelines and Departmental policies.

1.3 Council operations

Why is this topic important?

Clarity in two areas assists school councils to operate effectively and efficiently:

- the roles and responsibilities of key members
- the way in which the council establishes a set of rules, or Standing Orders, to ensure that its meetings run smoothly and enable it to fulfil its governance functions to an optimum level.

On completing this unit, school councillors should understand:

- the roles and responsibilities of the school principal and school council president
- the roles and responsibilities of school council sub-committees
- the need for Standing Orders.



Roles and responsibilities of the principal and school council president

To avoid confusion over the role of the school principal and that of the council president, the table below provides a brief outline of the differences between their respective roles and responsibilities.

The principal	School council president
<p>As executive officer of the school council, the principal is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>The principal is an ex-officio member of all council sub-committees.</p>	<p>The role of the school council president is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively chair school council meetings (ensure that everyone has a say in meetings and that decisions are properly understood and well-recorded) • be a signatory to contracts, the school strategic plan and financial accounts • together with the school council, endorse the school self-evaluation, terms of reference for school review, the school annual implementation plan and school annual report to the school community • ensure council stays focused on improving student outcomes • with the principal, be council’s spokesperson and official representative on public occasions • when votes are tied, have a second or casting vote. <p>The school council president is an ex-officio member of all council sub-committees.</p>



Roles and responsibilities of school council sub-committees

Sub-committees assist council in the work that needs to be done and report regularly at school council meetings. They provide advice and make recommendations to school council, which has the final responsibility for making decisions.

The decision-making responsibilities of the council should not be compromised by the work of any sub-committee.

The membership, purpose and terms of reference of sub-committees are determined by the council. Members of a sub-committee may be school council and non-school council members. Sub-committees must have at least three members including at least one school council member. Sub-committees should have procedures for agendas, minutes and reporting to the council.

All school councils are encouraged to have a finance sub-committee. Some examples of other sub-committees are buildings and grounds (facilities), education policy, student leadership, information technology, community building or community relations, outside-school-hours care and canteen if the school provides such services.

Standing Orders

A school council may determine to make Standing Orders designed 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 membership 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, agendas, minutes, quorum requirements, meeting arrangements, open and closed meetings, effective decision making, member absence from meetings, arrangements for extensions of meetings and meeting etiquette.

Legal requirements

The *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* set out certain legal requirements in relation to the operation of school council meetings. These requirements cannot be overridden by the Standing Orders determined by a school council. Set out below are legal requirements and Department guidelines for the operation of school council meetings. School councils are also encouraged to provide additional guidelines to assist council to effectively and efficiently conduct its meetings. These guidelines might cover agendas, meeting etiquette, length of meetings and making informed decisions.



Number of school council meetings each year

A school council must meet at least eight times per year and at least once per school term.

Who presides at a meeting

The president must preside at meetings of the school council. If the president is unable to preside at a council meeting, a member of the council (other than an employee of the Department) elected by the school council must preside. A Department employee is ineligible to be school council president.

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 employees. Any parent members on school council who also work for the Department are counted as Department 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 school council meeting there is not a quorum, the meeting must stand adjourned to a time and place determined by the school council members present.

Decisions and voting

Decisions are always the decisions of the whole council. Decisions are made by voting. School councillors need to ensure their vote is based solely on the best interests of the students. All decisions of council, the motions as well as the name of the person that moved the motion and the seconder, should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Tied votes

When a vote is tied, the school council president has a second or casting vote.

Conflict of interest

If a school council member 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, the member must declare the conflict of interest. Furthermore, this member must not be present during the relevant discussion unless invited to do so by the person presiding at the meeting and must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter. A member's temporary absence for this purpose does not affect the meeting quorum.

Member absence

If a member is unable to attend a meeting, an apology should be submitted to the executive officer (the principal) and it should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Minutes

Minutes are the official record of the proceedings at a meeting. Generally a designated council member records a summary of what has been discussed, any decisions made and any actions to be taken before the next meeting. The minutes are written up under the agenda item headings and circulated by the principal to members before the next school council meeting where they are considered and confirmed.

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 the minutes of a school council meeting or other documents or records of a school council under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*.

Public reporting meeting

A school council must call a public 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 annual report to the meeting and, if the school council accounts have been audited, present a copy of the audited accounts.

Open and closed meetings

School council meetings would normally be open to the school community and conducted according to standard meeting requirements. Visitors or observers can be present at the council meetings with the agreement of the principal and a decision of council. Visitors have a right to speak but must do so through the person chairing the meeting (usually the school council president). They have no voting rights. There may be times when, for the purpose of confidentiality or other reasons, the council meeting, or part of the meeting, needs to be closed, such as considering a principal selection report.

Extraordinary meeting

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

The president or in his/her absence, the principal must call an extraordinary meeting of the school council if either of them receives a written request to do so from three members of the council.

Extended leave of council member

A member of a school council may apply in writing to the president for extended leave of up to three consecutive meetings. If leave is granted to a member, his/her membership is excluded in determining the requirement for a quorum of not less than half the members of the school council currently holding office.

Casual vacancies

A school council fills a casual vacancy by co-opting an eligible person to the relevant category. A person co-opted to fill a casual vacancy serves the unexpired portion of the vacating member's term of office.

A casual vacancy is created when a person dies, becomes bankrupt, is of unsound mind, resigns, is convicted of an indictable offence, was at the time of election or cooption ineligible, becomes ineligible, is a registrable offender within the meaning of the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, is absent from three consecutive meetings of the school council without special leave previously granted by the school council and subject to a decision of the school council, in the Department employee member category, goes on any form of leave with or without pay, for more than six months or where the maximum number of Department employee members is exceeded.



Other considerations

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 to consider, a significant amount of work may be undertaken by sub-committees. Reports from these sub-committees 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 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. The wisest decisions are made from a sound knowledge base.

Effective and informed 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.

Meeting etiquette

When discussing a topic, it is good practice (but not necessarily documented in the Standing Orders) that:

- only one person talks at a time
- all requests to speak are directed to the chairperson
- all speakers are listened to in respectful silence
- no 'side conversations' are held
- members listen to the discussion carefully in order to avoid making points that have already been made or asking questions which have already been answered
- when the chairperson indicates that the topic of discussion is closed, no further comments are made
- no-one uses jargon or insider knowledge
- all electronic devices (such as mobile phones and pagers) are silenced and no calls are taken during the meeting
- regardless of how difficult or challenging the topic, everyone stays calm.

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 chair 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.

Resources and links

School Policy and Advisory Guide – School Councils

→ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/councils.aspx>

School Councils - Making the Partnership Work

→ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/management/Pages/schoolcouncil.aspx>

School Councils – Council Meetings (including templates for meeting papers, avoiding or dealing with conflict on school council guidance, sample standing orders)

→ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/management/Pages/schoolcouncilmeet.aspx>

1.4 Understanding the school

Why is this topic important?

To provide good governance, councillors need to understand their school, what it seeks to achieve and how it functions. This means knowing about the organisation itself including areas such as the curriculum, teaching and learning program, support services, staffing structure, specialist programs, student numbers and demographics and physical facilities.

On completing this unit, school councillors should:

- be able to find information about the school
- be able to identify who's who at the school
- know about regional support services available to the school
- be aware of the school's curriculum, teaching and learning program and student assessment and reporting practices.

Finding out information about the school

The principal or school council president will usually welcome new councillors with a package of information about the school. This could include:

- promotional information given to families of prospective students
- the school's strategic plan
- the school's annual report
- a map of the school noting the major facilities
- a list of any specialist programs (such as Performing Arts or English as an Additional Language)
- minutes of the last school council meeting.

Most councillors will be quite familiar with one section of the school: where they teach, the class their child is in or where a subject of particular interest to them is taught. As council's role is to establish the broad direction and vision for the whole school, councillors should extend their knowledge beyond one specific area. Good sources of information are the principal and the school's most recent annual report to the school community.

Who's who at the school

As well as meeting the principal and teachers who are members of the school council, it is useful to find out who's who among the teaching staff. Government schools have three classes of employee: principal class, teachers and education support.

The principal is responsible for the delivery of a comprehensive curriculum, governance (in conjunction with the school council) and managing financial and human resources. A school might also have one or more assistant principals responsible for significant areas or functions within the school (such as Transition, Years P-2 or VCE).

Leading teachers may have responsibilities across a range of school operations. They typically coordinate a number of staff to improve teaching and learning. Leading teachers usually have titles such as year level coordinator, transition coordinator or literacy coordinator.

The majority of teachers in a school are classroom teachers. They plan, prepare and teach programs to achieve specific student outcomes.

Each school also has education support employees who work in school administration and operations and support teachers and students in the delivery of educational programs. They include business managers, school secretaries, teachers' assistants, library assistants, integration aides and multi-cultural aides.

When there is an agenda item concerning areas for which senior staff are responsible, school councillors may request them to address the meeting on the matter.

Regional support services available to the school

The Department's regional offices support early childhood services, schools and higher education and skills service providers. The Department has four regions in Victoria – North-Eastern Victoria Region, North-Western Victoria Region, South-Eastern Victoria Region and South-Western Victoria Region.

Regions are responsible for supporting and monitoring the provision of early childhood and higher education and skills services along with planning, managing, supporting and reporting on the delivery of outcomes for children and students 0-18 years. Through its regional offices, the Regional Services Group plays a key role in supporting schools by providing a range of services including facilitating the establishment of networks and services for local communities.

Regional offices offer advice and guidance in a wide range of areas including school management, workforce planning, leadership, youth pathways and student wellbeing. For example, the Child, Learner and Family Services Branch works with schools to arrange appropriate educational provision for students at risk and programs for students with disabilities.



Curriculum and student assessment

Prep to Year 10

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework describes the key knowledge and skills for children from birth to eight years. It links to the standards that apply for all students from Prep to Year 10 in Victorian schools.

The curriculum for Victorian schools is set by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). The curriculum for Prep to Year 10 incorporates the Australian Curriculum whilst retaining Victorian priorities and approaches to teaching and learning; in particular, knowledge and skills in the areas of physical, social and personal learning which are transferable across all areas of study such as thinking and communication.

The curriculum provides a coherent and comprehensive set of prescribed content and common achievement standards which schools use to plan student learning programs, assess student progress and report to parents. The curriculum encourages a flexible and creative approach to learning.

Victorian schools value digital learning. This takes place in a technology-rich environment using computers and other devices such as iPads, digital cameras and a range of online resources and software for learning and teaching. Starting from Prep, schools are integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into their curriculum in ways that not only increase children's digital literacy, but improve their ability to create, investigate, collaborate and share knowledge. In some cases, ICT is overcoming barriers of isolation created by living in a remote location or having a disability.

Languages education is a core part of the curriculum and all schools are provided with additional funding in their Student Resource Package (SRP) to support the provision of a

languages program. Schools have the flexibility to choose the language/s they provide in consultation with their community. Advice on how to select a language is available in the Guide to starting a languages program. Students (Years P–12) who do not have access to the study of a specific language in their school can attend language programs outside school hours at the Victorian School of Languages or at community languages schools.

All students are involved in an annual program of standardised assessment in addition to assessments completed by class teachers. Under the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed annually on the same days using national tests in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. The school receives feedback about the test results. The resulting data which identifies individual student achievement also rates the school's performance on a national scale.

Councillors can view NAPLAN results on the MySchool website. The NAPLAN results in literacy and numeracy are presented in a way which shows each school's performance against statistically similar schools (based on student backgrounds) and all Australian schools.

The VRQA State Register provides a rich source of information on individual schools including their latest:

- Government School Performance Summary
- Annual report to the school community.

Senior secondary

Victorian government secondary schools offer a variety of curriculum options for senior secondary students to pursue interests, qualifications and their future beyond school.

Victorian Certificate of Education

The Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) is a course of study designed to be completed over a minimum of two years. It is usually undertaken over Years 11 and 12. It prepares students for university and further training or employment, and is an internationally recognised qualification. There are more than 90 studies (subjects) in the VCE. Students can start their VCE as early as Year 10 and about half of Year 10 students undertake one or more VCE units. It is also possible to undertake a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship within the VCE.

A VCE 'study' or subject is broken up into four units over two years. Each unit is half a year or two terms in length and is numbered 1, 2, 3 or 4. Units 1 and 2 can be taken as single units, but Units 3 and 4 must be taken as a sequence of two units. Students are awarded the VCE by satisfactory completion of a minimum of 16 units. The school's VCE coordinator ensures each student is undertaking the right number of units and the right combination of units to meet VCE requirements.

Within the 16 units students must satisfactorily complete at least three units from the English group. They also need three sequences of Units 3 and 4 studies in addition to the English requirement. These sequences can be from VCE studies or from vocational education and training (VET).

Students in Year 12 may also undertake a first year university study that counts towards satisfactory completion of their VCE; this is called the Higher Education Studies in the VCE program.

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is an accredited hands-on option for Years 11 and 12 students, offering practical work-related experience and learning. Like the VCE, the VCAL is an accredited secondary certificate. Students who undertake the VCAL are likely to be interested in going on to training at VET providers, doing an apprenticeship or traineeship, or getting a job directly after finishing school.

The VCAL is offered at three levels: Foundation, Intermediate or Senior. Students enrol in a VCAL learning program at the level that matches their skills and abilities. For example, a Year 11 student may study at either the Foundation or Intermediate

level. Students can gain one or more VCAL qualifications at different levels depending on their abilities and learning goals.

Students in Intermediate and Senior VCAL must undertake VET studies (see following section) as part of their qualification. If students start their VCAL and then decide they would like to complete their VCE, they can transfer between certificates. The VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook provides further advice for students wishing to transfer from the VCAL to the VCE.

The VCAL has four curriculum areas, called strands. These strands are Literacy and Numeracy Skills, Industry Specific Skills, Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills. A student's VCAL learning program must include at least one unit from each strand. A student is awarded a VCAL certificate when they successfully complete the course requirements outlined in the VCE and VCAL Administrative Handbook. A unit of study can be one VCAL unit, one VCE unit or approximately 90 hours of VET units of competency and/or further education modules.

The school's VCAL coordinator is responsible for ensuring that VCAL students undertake the right number and combination of units to achieve their certificate.

Vocational Education and Training

Students who are interested in undertaking a vocationally oriented study program in a specific industry have the option of choosing to complete a Vocational Education and Training (VET) program as part of their VCE or VCAL studies.

VET programs provide students with a nationally recognised training qualification in conjunction with their VCE or VCAL.

VET programs are typically delivered through partnerships between schools and training providers. They enable students to take part in structured workplace learning and gain practical skills in the industry in which they are interested. VET programs include school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

Programs undertaken as part of the VCE or VCAL provide students with a pathway to university, further training or employment.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

In the past, many young people had to leave school to pursue an apprenticeship or traineeship. With the introduction of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, students can have the best of both worlds. Students taking part in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships undertake part-time paid employment, and structured training, while completing their VCE or VCAL.

The student enters into a training contract with an employer, and has a training plan signed by the school that is formally registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority. The school-based apprenticeship and traineeship becomes part of their study timetable, with the student spending some time during the normal school week in their employment and training.

Part-time apprenticeships and traineeships undertaken outside of school can also contribute to the VCE or VCAL.

Structured workplace learning

As part of a nationally recognised vocational education and training program, secondary school students can undertake structured workplace learning to acquire skills and knowledge in an industry setting. In Victoria, structured workplace learning is an important part of VET programs undertaken by VCE and VCAL students.

Resources and links

Community Languages Schools

→ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/languages/Pages/clsschools.aspx>

MySchool

→ <http://www.myschool.edu.au/>

School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships

→ <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vet/programs/sbat.aspx>

F-10 Curriculum

→ <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/foundation10/f10index.aspx>

→ <http://ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

→ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/curriculum/pages/vet.aspx>

→ <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vet/index.aspx>

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)

→ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/secondary/Pages/vcal.aspx>

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

→ <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/earlyyears/index.aspx>

Victorian School of Languages

→ <http://www.vsl.vic.edu.au/>

Victorian State Register

→ <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/>

Handout A1

Role of school councillors: scenarios

Scenario	Within the functions of school council?		Issues and how they might be resolved
	Yes	No	
1. The council contract sub-committee is recommending at tomorrow's meeting that the school cleaning contract be awarded to Nifty Cleaners. You have just been made aware that the owner of Nifty Cleaners is the brother-in-law of a councillor.			
2. One of the main reasons you joined the school council was to raise the profile of the arts in the school. As a result, you would like the council to recruit an additional arts specialist to the school.			
3. A local franchise of a fast food company has offered to donate four trampolines with attached safety netting to the school. Their logos would be attached to the equipment but there would be no other advertising. Should the school council accept the offer?			
4. A couple of parents have expressed concern to you about the performance of a particular member of staff. Should council consider instigating a performance review process for the school's teachers?			

Scenario	Within the functions of school council?		Issues and how they might be resolved
	Yes	No	
5. In order to attract high calibre leadership candidates to the school, someone has suggested purchasing a motor vehicle for the use of the school principal. Should council proceed with this suggestion?			
6. At the request of a group of parents, the council has decided to investigate the feasibility of running a before and after school care program.			
7. Council approves the school's budget for the forthcoming school year at its December meeting.			
8. Consistent with your family's interest in environmental issues, you would like to see climate change addressed as part of the science program. Should this be taken to council?			

Scenario	Within the functions of school council?		Issues and how they might be resolved
	Yes	No	
9. Council is considering whether its role includes encouraging parents and community members to contribute to the development of the school strategic plan.			
10. It has been suggested that council conduct a working bee to restore garden beds after recent heavy rain.			
11. It has been suggested that council establish a standard contract and users' guide for groups and individuals who want to hire the school hall.			
12. Several councillors feel it is time that the school uniform policy was reviewed.			

Scenario	Within the functions of school council?		Issues and how they might be resolved
	Yes	No	
13. A property adjacent to the school has come up for sale for the first time in a long time. Should the school council consider purchasing it?			
14. As a councillor of a small primary school, you are aware that some parents in your small community do not want multi-aged classes next year. Should this issue be raised at the next council meeting?			
15. You were nominated to council as a parent member by the school's parents and friends group. Council has proposed changes to its camps and excursions policy, changes that are opposed by the group. The group has asked you to vote against the recommendations when they are put at the council meeting. As a council member how would you respond?			

Handout B1

Sample Standing Orders for a School Council

These sample Standing Orders are intended as a guide only. A school council may determine its own standing orders but they must be consistent with the legal requirements set out in the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007*, the constituting Order of the school council and Department guidelines.

Sample Standing Orders for School Council

Introduction

The purpose of these Standing Orders is to assist school council to operate efficiently and effectively within the legal framework and Department guidelines for school councils.

School council membership

The membership of the school council according to its constituting Order is 15 members – eight Parent, five Department employee and two Community members:

Office bearers

The school council will have the following office bearer positions:

- President
- Vice president
- Treasurer.

Office bearers will be elected at the first meeting of the school council after declaration of the poll each year.

Election of office bearers

In the election of an office bearer, if the votes are tied, the school council will decide the outcome by either holding a new election or drawing of lots. If a new election is held and is also tied, the school council may decide the election by the drawing of lots or decide to conduct further elections until the election of office bearers is decided.

Sub-committees

The school council will have the following sub-committees:

- Finance
- Education
- Grounds and buildings.

Each sub-committee will be chaired by a member of school council unless otherwise decided by council. A sub-committee must include at least one school council member and have at least three members.



Meetings

Regular

The school council will meet twice a term on the first Monday of each month. The meeting will commence at 7.00pm and will finish no later than 9.30pm unless agreed by the school council. Meetings will be held in the conference room.

Public reporting (annual) meeting

The school council will call a public meeting in March each year and at that meeting will:

- (a) report the proceedings of the council for the period since the date of the previous public meeting
- (b) present the annual report published by the council
- (c) if the accounts of the school council have been audited, present a copy of the audited accounts.

The council may, from time to time, call additional public meetings.

Extraordinary meeting

- An extraordinary meeting of the school council may be held at any time decided by the council, if all members are given reasonable notice of the time, date, place and subject of the meeting.
- The president of the school council or, in the absence of the president, the principal must call an extraordinary meeting of the school council if either of them receives a written request to do so from three members of the school council.
- The president or the principal must call a meeting under the preceding paragraph by sending a notice to all school council members giving the members reasonable notice of the time, date, place and subject of the meeting.
- The business of an extraordinary meeting will be confined to the subject for which it is called.

Quorum for meetings

- For a quorum to be achieved at a council meeting, not less than one half of school council members currently holding office must be present and a majority of the members present must not be DET employees. Any parent members on the council who also work for the Department are counted as DET employees for the purpose of a quorum.
- If at the end of 30 minutes after the appointed time for a meeting of the school council, there is no quorum present, the meeting will stand adjourned to a time and place determined by the school council members present.
- A member of the school council may be present at a council meeting, in person or by video conferencing or teleconferencing.

School council decisions

- Decisions of the school council will be by a majority of those eligible to vote and who are present at the meeting, where the majority are non DET members. A vote by proxy is not valid.
- Members will vote on a matter and the number of votes for and against will be recorded in the minutes.
- Voting will normally be by a show of hands, but a secret ballot may be used for particular issues.

Tied votes

When a vote is tied (i.e. an even number of people are for and against a decision), the president (presiding member) has a second or casting vote.

Absence of the president and other members from a meeting

- If the president is unable to preside at a school council meeting, the school council will elect a member of the school council to chair the school council meeting (other than an employee of the Department).
- If a member is unable to attend a meeting, an apology should be submitted to the principal prior to the meeting.

Conflict of interest

If a school council member or a member of his or her immediate family has any direct conflict of interest (including a financial interest) in a subject or matter under discussion at a school council meeting, that councillor:

- must declare the conflict of interest
- must not be present during the discussion unless invited to do so by the person presiding at the meeting
- must not be present when a vote is taken on the matter
- may be included in the quorum for that meeting.

Extended leave of a council member

- A member of the school council may apply in writing to the President for extended leave of up to three consecutive meetings.
- If a member of a school council is granted extended leave, the membership of that member is excluded in determining the requirement for a quorum of not less than half the members currently holding office.



Agenda

The principal shall ensure an agenda is prepared for each regular meeting and distribute the agenda, draft minutes from the previous meeting and meeting papers such as sub-committee reports, principal's and president's report to school council members no less than five days before the meeting.

Open and closed meetings

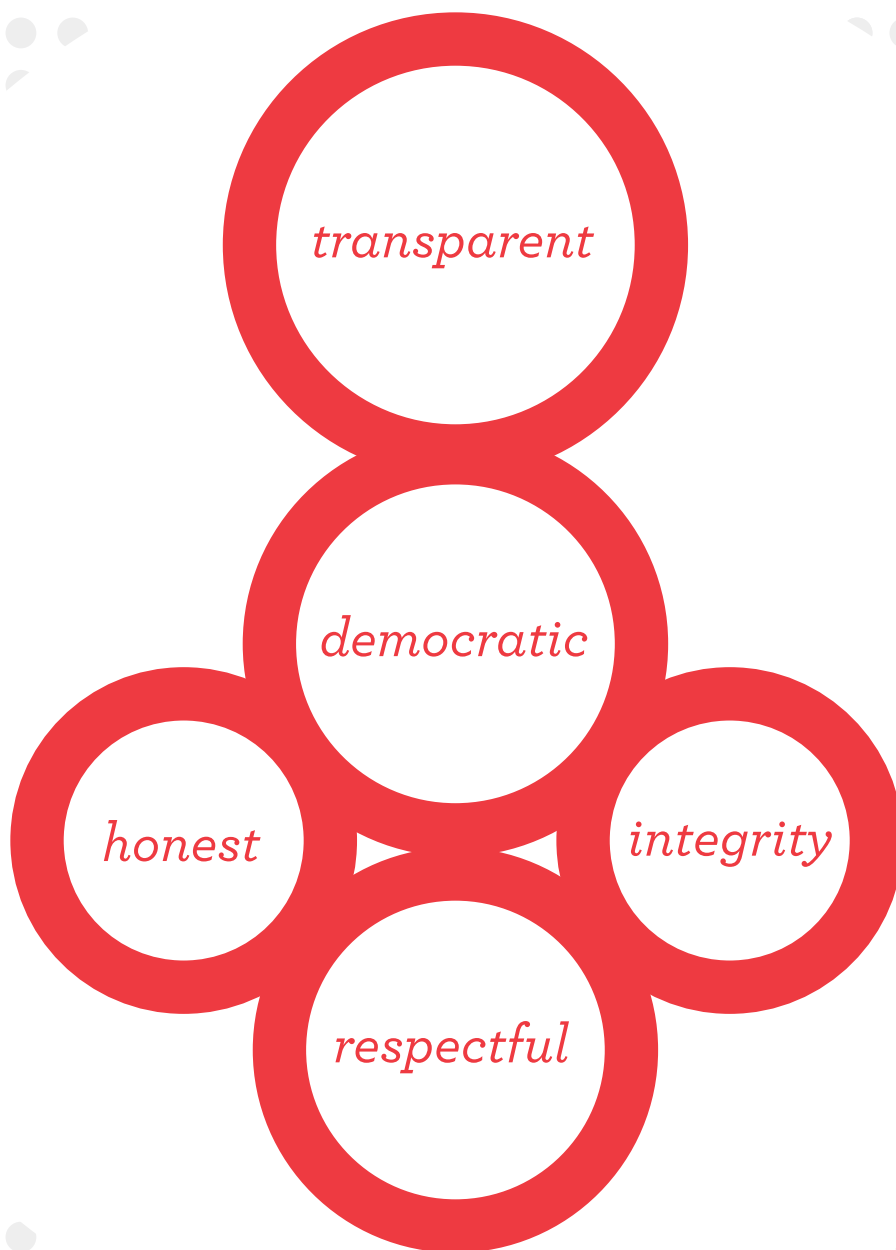
- School council meetings will generally be open to the school community but the principal and school council may decide that only members may be present at a meeting or part of a meeting.
- If the meeting is open, visitors may speak by invitation of the presiding member.

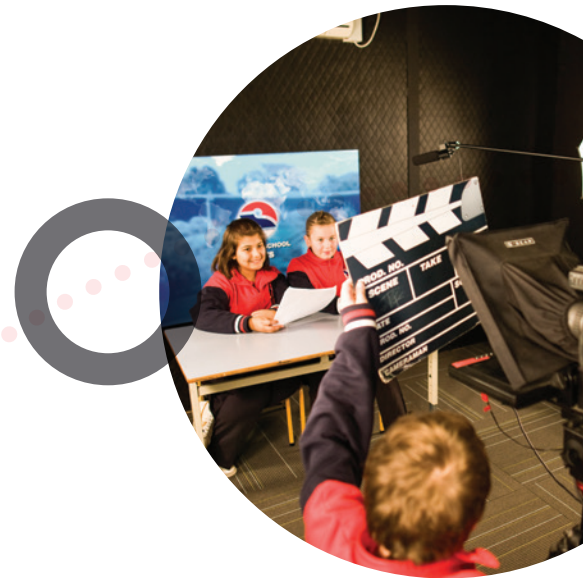
Length of meetings and extensions of meeting times

If business has not been concluded within 2.5 hours, the presiding member shall ask the members whether they wish to defer the rest of the business until the next meeting or to extend the meeting. A motion is necessary if council wants to extend the meeting. The meeting will be extended for no more than 15 minutes.

Minutes

- The principal will ensure a record of each school council meeting is kept and draft minutes are prepared after each school council meeting and distributed to school council members prior to the next school council meeting. The principal may delegate this responsibility to another person.
- The minutes will 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; a record of 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; and decisions of the meeting including motions and any amendments, names of movers and seconders, whether the motion was carried or rejected and the number of votes for and against.
- When school council minutes are submitted for confirmation, only questions regarding their accuracy as a record of the meeting are to be raised.
- Once the minutes have been accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting, they are to be signed by the school council president or the person who presided at the meeting.
- Business arising from the minutes is dealt with after the minutes have been confirmed.





School council principles

The school council will operate according to the following principles:

- **Respectful** partnerships
- Clear and **honest** two-way communication
- **Transparent** processes
- **Democratic**, informed decision-making
- Personal and professional **integrity**.

In the conduct of meetings, the following etiquette will be observed by members:

- Only one person talks at a time.
- All requests to speak are directed to the presiding member.
- All speakers are listened to in respectful silence.
- No 'side conversations' are held.
- Members shall listen to the discussion carefully in order to avoid making points that have already been made or asking questions which have already been answered.
- When the presiding member indicates that the topic of discussion is closed, no further comments are made.
- Members shall not use jargon.
- Members will ensure that all electronic devices (such as mobile phones) are silenced and no calls are taken during the meeting.
- Members shall stay calm regardless of how difficult or challenging the topic.