

Doreen Primary School
School Council
Guide
&
Code of Conduct





Introduction

This guide is based on documentation provided by DEECD in 2011 titled "Improving School Governance".

It is both a synopsis and gleaned version for consumption by school councillors at a small primary school. If a more "robust" knowledge needed, the full document should be accessed at the school in a hard copy, or via the DEECD internet site in the School Councillors section under the heading - Improving School Governance.

It is hoped the often "murky" area of roles and responsibilities can be made clearer and therefore less open to "misunderstanding" between the governing bodies in a school setting.

An example of a set of standing orders is also included. They are a sample set only, but have been adopted at Doreen Primary School to ensure School Council meetings provide the quality outcomes we need them to do.

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.

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 Public Sector Standards 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).

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.

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.

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.

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.

Functions of a school council

The functions of a school council may 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.

Distinguishing Roles of the Principal and the School Council

The Principal	School Council
Curriculum	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leads curriculum development and implementation • 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
Student Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implements 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 before adopting changes to these policies
Staff Employment and Management	
<p>*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)</p>	<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
Buildings and Grounds	
<p>oversees maintenance of all facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitors implementation of contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocates contract for school cleaning • enters contracts for building and grounds improvements

The Principal	School Council
Finance	
Internal Controls	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • puts in place a system of internal controls • conducts school financial business in line with the system of internal controls • provides financial reports to council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensures the school has and uses a system of internal controls • adheres to internal controls such as appointing one councillor (normally the president or a delegated councillor) to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> »» approve payments and sign cheques »» approve an investment policy if appropriate »» approve trading operations and ensure issues raised by the auditor are addressed • considers financial reports
Budgeting	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develops the budget timeline • develops program budgets with staff, and salary and revenue budgets • evaluates program outcomes, prepares and prioritises budget submissions • communicates the budget to staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves the budget timeline • reviews budget submissions and program priority list • assists in developing the school budget • approves the budget
Financial reports	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepares financial reports • 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"> • monitors revenue and expenditure against the budget • takes action to address issues arising from the financial reports

Investing and Fundraising

- assists with the review of fundraising proposals
- advises council about available cash and recommends investments
- develops a parent payments policy
- implements policies

- approves fundraising activity on the school's behalf
- develops an investment policy
- approves amounts to be invested
- contributes to and approves the parent payments policy

Doreen Primary School Council - Standing Orders

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 designated Thursdays, at least twice per term. 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 staff 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 DEECD employees. Any parent members on the council who also work for the Department are counted as DEECD 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 DEECD 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.

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.

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 and principal's report to school council members no less than two days before the meeting.

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.