



**CATHOLIC
EDUCATION
MELBOURNE**

Guidelines for a Parish Education Board

2018

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Guidelines for Primary Education Boards

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Introduction

Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Canon 803 of the Code of Canon Law states that:

A Catholic school is understood to be one which is under the control of the competent ecclesiastical authority...No school, even if it is in fact Catholic, may bear the title 'catholic school' except by the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

The 'competent authority' in the Archdiocese of Melbourne is the Archbishop of Melbourne who, as chief pastor and teacher, is responsible for Catholic schools within his jurisdiction. The Archbishop has an obligation to watch over and inspect Catholic schools situated in his territory, even those established or directed by members of religious institutes.

Parish schools are administered by the parish priest under the supervision of the Archbishop of Melbourne. The governance of school is undertaken by the parish priest with the support of the principal.

The establishment of boards in Catholic parish primary schools in Victoria

The establishment of school boards coincided with the changes brought about by Vatican II for the laity to take a more active role in the Church and the expansion of the Catholic education sector in the late 1960s and 1970s.

The Archbishop of Melbourne supports the establishment of boards for parish primary schools which encourage partnership and participation of school, parish and the wider community in the life of the school and parish.

While the provision of a school environment that supports the Catholic ethos is largely the responsibility of the parish priest, principal and school staff, boards play a significant role in supporting the spiritual and educational welfare of students.

Preferred title of parish primary school boards

The majority of Catholic parish primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne have established boards or an equivalent body.

The preferred title of a board of a parish primary school is a Parish Education Board (PEB) This name visibly makes and strengthens the links between the parish priest, principal, parents, school staff and parishioners in the provision of Catholic education in the parish community.

The parish priest, upon consideration of local circumstances is responsible for making any decision about the establishment of a board or its arrangements.

Advisory in nature

Boards in parish primary schools are an advisory body governed by its constitution.

Boards provide a forum for discussion and discernment, where the parent voice and perspective are available to influence the decisions made by the principal and parish priest for the good of school and parish where the wellbeing and outcomes for students is paramount.



Principles of Catholic School Governance

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) publication Catholic School Governance (2002) states the following 'general and binding principles for the governance of Catholic schools'

'The Love of Christ, which is the fundamental recognition that Catholic education is animated by and based upon the love of Christ for all people.

The Role of Parents, as the primary educators of their children, in whose place ("in loco parentis") and with whose collaboration, Catholic schools fulfil their mission.

Faithfulness to the Mission of the Church, which is the mission of the Christ, to preach the Good News, including fidelity to the teachings of the Church;

Church solidarity, which is the obligation of members and agencies of the Church to support those other individuals and agencies of the Church in need, and to work for the good of the whole Church community;

Support for the common good, which is the general obligation on members of the Church not only to support the Church, its agencies and members, but also to ensure that the work of the Church and its agencies contribute to the benefit of society as a whole.

Embracing the poor, which is the obligation on the Church community to continually assess its actions and policies to ensure that they empower the most disadvantaged and marginalised.

Educational Quality, which is the obligation upon all those involved in Catholic education to strive to provide the highest possible quality of education to those attending Catholic schools.

Participation, which is the principle that powers and functions in any community are exercised, wherever possible, by the persons and bodies closest to and most accountable to those affected.

Inclusiveness, which is the principle that Catholic education should be open to all those who wish to receive a Catholic education, and that all those engaged in Catholic education in whatever capacity will be welcomed and valued in the pursuit of the educational mission of the Church, to the extent that they support that mission.

Unity in Diversity, which is the recognition that the Holy Spirit inspires different communities in different ways, bestowing upon them diverse charisms which provide inspiration for action, all for the same purpose of promoting the Kingdom.

Stewardship of resources, which is the obligation of all agencies of the Church to use financial and other resources responsibly, particularly with a view to ensuring the well-being of future generations.

Rule of Canon Law, whereby every agency of the Church is constituted and operates in accordance with Canon Law.'



Good governance

Through on-going discussion, dialogue and reporting the partnerships between PEB, Priest and Principal “ensure that a school is clear about its philosophy and can articulate it to staff, students, parents, guardians and the school community.” *VRQA Guidelines to the Minimum Standards*, 15.

PEBs provide a structure and a process for shared leadership and collaborative decision-making. Their existence creates a climate of good governance that supports the “effective development of the strategic direction of the school” *VRQA Guidelines to the Minimum Standards*, 13.

What are Catholic schools about?

Catholic schools are

- partners with parents in the education of their children
- partners with the Church in faith education
- community providers of a public service
- available to all families across Victoria: city and country
- committed to the achievement of the public goals of excellence and equity
- significant service providers delivering a cost-effective service to the community
- welcoming communities and promote quality interpersonal relationships
- inclusive and safe and foster a strong sense of wellbeing
- accountable for the proper expenditure of government funds and parent fees
- accountable to parents and governments for student learning

Catholic schools

- practice and celebrate Christian values
- offer an outstanding education as schools of first choice for Catholic parents
- provide religious education and opportunities for faith development in communities where prayer and sacramental celebrations are integral
- educate for engagement in civic and public life, involving community service and issues of social justice
- provide high quality academic, social and vocational education
- build environments focused on achievement, challenge, creativity and enjoyment
- include highly qualified and caring teachers committed to the ethos of Catholic education

The relationship between parish and parish primary school

At the heart of our Catholic Tradition lies relationship. The relationship between the parish and the parish primary school in the provision of Catholic education is crucial to the faith development and learning outcomes of students, the enlivening of parish life and the development of community. It is important that schools and boards:

- recognise, develop and maintain fruitful relationships within the parish
- recognise the role of the school in the overall mission of the parish
- recognise the contribution of parish to school
- understand relationship of school to parish
- play an active role in the life of the parish, including the education of all within the parish.



Catholic Education Melbourne support

Catholic Education Melbourne assists schools by providing services which include:

- ✓ provision of print and online material
- ✓ assistance with the formation of new boards
- ✓ professional development for new Chairs of Boards
- ✓ advice and support to principals, parish priests and canonical administrators in relation to the role of the board in their particular setting
- ✓ advice and support to newly appointed principals in relation to the role of the board in their particular setting
- ✓ support for network and cluster activities

The purpose of this consultancy service is to support principals, parish priests and canonical administrators, in their responsibilities related to strengthening the parish-school community. The service provides them with resources and advice in working with existing boards and in establishing new boards.

The specific formation requirements of individual boards are the responsibility of the relevant principal, parish priest and canonical administrators as leaders of the parish-school community.

For more information on School Boards, please contact 9267 0228 or email schoolboards@cem.edu.au.

Purposes and responsibilities of the Board

Broadly, the key functions of the PEB may include:

- providing advice on education matters relating to whole of parish including the school

or

- providing advice on education matters relating to the school

Boards established by the parish priest to act as an advisory body for the school focus on matters concerning the development of the school and the education and welfare of the students.

PEB Constitution – Clause 6

6. PEB purposes

The purposes of the PEB are to:

- (a) act as an advisory body to the parish priest and principal, on matters concerning education in the parish
- (b) act as a forum for discussion on matters concerning education in the parish primary school
- (c) provide a link between the parish priest, principal, teachers and parishioners in relation to the provision of Catholic education in the parish community
- (d) promote community development by fostering a strong interrelationship between parish and the parish primary school, Catholic secondary colleges and pre-schools.



PEB Constitution – Clause 7

7. PEB responsibilities

The responsibilities of the PEB are to:

- (a) promote the Catholic ethos of the school and to support the Religious Education programs
- (b) provide advice on the development and review of school policies
- (c) plan for the future of the parish primary school and its ability to accommodate future enrolments
- (d) provide advice on budget planning and finance-related matters
- (e) contribute to the selection process for the school principal
- (f) ensure the appropriate provision of faith development and RE programs for children attending Government schools
- (g) foster adult education in faith.

The role of a parent leader as a support for the principal and school in maximising positive outcomes for each student is important.

Descriptors for the role of the Board

Parent engagement is a driver for involvement on school boards. Apart from the formal description above, US researcher Anne Henderson, in conjunction with parents, principals and board members from Catholic schools across Melbourne, listed the following as possible descriptors for the board role:

- be a positive role model in the community
- be welcoming entity
- support staff to connect with parents
- be a sounding board
- contribute skills and knowledge
- be the voice of the parents
- be key communicators
- do strategic planning
- uphold the Catholic ethos
- be part of creating a vision for the school
- acknowledge and affirm parent contributions
- advocate inclusion
- provide opportunities to be involved
- develop partnerships with community
- market the school



Parish Education Board Membership

Serving on the board of a Catholic school is a form of Church lay ministry. It is a response to the call to support the local Catholic parish and school communities in a particular way. It is also a means for members of the community to share their skills and talents for the common good.

A well-functioning board provides a rich sources of wisdom and insight as well as a means of strengthening community links and potential for partnerships.

Composition of the PEB

Through representation on the board, each board member assumes a leadership role in the school and parish. Each member must be committed to the ethos of the school as articulated in its mission and vision statements. The size and composition of the board is determined by the board constitution and should directly reflect the needs of the school and parish community. It is important that the composition of the board represents the breadth of involvement in the school and parish communities. The board should be composed of those who appreciate, value and share the educational mission and ethos of the Catholic Church.

PEB Constitution – Clause 8

8. The Parish Education Board (PEB)

Membership

- 8.1 The PEB shall be composed of at least ten (10) members who appreciate, value and share the educational mission and ethos of the Catholic Church. It shall consist of:
- (a) the parish priest (ex officio)
 - (b) the school principal (ex officio)
 - (c) four (4) parents of children attending the parish primary school elected by the parents of the school, including a nominee of the parent and friends association
 - (d) three (3) parishioners nominated by the parish priest
 - (e) other persons co-opted for a period of time to serve a particular need on the education board.

Membership under (c) and (d) are not mutually exclusive. A single parish representative may be sufficient for a PEB fulfilling its function in dealing with education matters relating to the school.

If a board member is named as ex officio, it means that they are a member of the board by virtue of their office or role. Unless otherwise provided, ex officio members have full voting rights and are counted in the usual way for quorum purposes. (Renton, N. E. 1990 Guide for meetings 5th Edition)

Recruitment and appointment of board members

Recruitment of board members can be an ongoing task for all members of the board but the period prior to convening the annual general meeting is a common time to recruit new board members.

The process of applying for board membership and being appointed to the board should be clear to all members of the school and parish communities. From time to time these processes may need to be publicised in newsletters, by means of a special letter or perhaps on websites. Those interested in becoming a member of the board should seek advice from the school principal or parish priest on the process for appointment to the board. The process (e.g. nomination and



election, by appointment) is determined by the parish priest in conjunction with the school principal.

Letter of appointment

The parish priest should formally write to the new board member advising them of their appointment and the term of their appointment (see Constitution Clause 12.3). The letter may also include the role clear expectations of board members especially in regards, the support of Catholic education and the Catholic ethos; meeting attendance; participation on committees/working parties; participation in formation and professional learning activities; and confidentiality requirements. It would also be useful to include details of the proposed induction process for the new board member and include a copy of the commitment. An estimated time commitment per month/Term may also be useful information to include.

Commissioning

It is recommended that the parish priest formally commission the board members at the beginning of each year in a liturgical ceremony. This formalises the role of the board and gives the board a profile within the parish and school communities.

Board membership tenure

It is advisable to appoint board members for a period of three years, with the option of being reappointed. Information about the tenure of board members should be included in the board constitution.

PEB Constitution – Clause 12.3

12.3 The terms of appointment for members of the PEB are as follows:

- The four (4) parents of children at the school will be elected for three years, and may be re-elected
- The three (3) parishioners will hold membership for three years, and may be re-nominated

In considering the membership and terms of appointment of board members it may be useful to consider the following questions:

- Should there be an upper limit on the years a person may serve on the board continuously?
- Should there be a limit to the time a person serves in any one office of the board?

Strategies

To make visible the work of the board, and assist in recruiting new members may the board could consider:

- practical considerations of rotating meeting days and times; advising the time commitment per month required of a board member; the possibility of one off or shorter tenures
- regular articles in the school and parish newsletters about the activities of the board
- board members representing the board attending school and parish events
- encouraging parents to meet with the principal, or other board members, to discuss the role of the board
- publishing the annual report of the board and providing it to the school communities
- inviting potential board members to join a working party or committee of the board as an initial step towards seeking board membership
- making the board and



- Should the board consider establishing a committee to carry out an education program for prospective board members on the role and function of the board?
- What efforts should be made to interest parents of students entering the school for the first time to consider board membership? This applies particularly to parents of prep students.

Qualities and skills of a board member

Each Catholic school is different, but all schools share the mission of the Church in the Archdiocese of Melbourne. The board should be composed of people who appreciate, value and share the educational mission and ethos of the Catholic Church. When seeking board members it is important to reflect on the qualities and skills of benefit to the board in carrying out its functions.

The following is a suggested list of key qualities and skills for members of boards.

- Commitment to Catholic education in the parish and school
- Commitment to the vision and mission of the parish and school
- An understanding of the role of parish priest, principal and board members
- Willingness to ask questions and seek clarification
- Ability to think strategically
- Willingness to support the contributions of other board members
- Capacity to listen in an active and meaningful way
- Willingness to work co-operatively with others
- Commitment to maintaining confidentiality at all times

Expectations of the board member

Each board member is required to commit to the following:

- understanding the board's role
- having a positive and constructive attitude
- preparing for board meetings
- attending board meetings
- bringing expertise and views to discussions on behalf of the whole community
- participating actively and responsibly
- participating in committee work
- participating in board formation activities

If possible, members should attend all scheduled meetings but if this is not possible, at least 75 per cent.

The board may consider developing a Code of Conduct incorporating core values and guiding principles for the work of the board.



Developing an effective Parish Education Board

In order to fulfil their responsibilities, it is crucial that all board members familiarise themselves with the role of the Catholic school, the way that Catholic schools operate in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (i.e. their governance arrangements) and the expectations of the particular communities they serve.

Induction process for new members

It is important that new board members are supported by a systematic and comprehensive induction process to familiarise themselves with those matters.

A thorough and supportive induction for new board members will ensure that they are able to contribute effectively.

A good induction process will be well planned and engaging, and subject to review by the board.

The board executive should ensure that responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the induction process for the new board member is delegated to a current member of the board. The key objective of the induction process is to assist new board members to understand:

- the mission and vision of the parish and school
- the roles, responsibilities and processes of the board
- how board members, can support the parish priest and principal in their roles
- The outcome of the induction process is for new board members to be able to contribute as effectively as possible from their first board meeting.

The induction of new board members should be viewed as a process rather than an event. It may be valuable to consider the process as commencing when nominations are being sought for new board members. For example, the provision of an information pack to those interested in nominating for board positions and /or a chance for potential nominees to discuss the board with the principal or chair to gain an understanding of the role of the board and the expectations of a board member.

The board executive may arrange follow-up briefings with the new board member after the first board meeting, and at an appropriate time during the year, to offer any further support and guidance. Consideration may be given to a 'buddy' system for the first 6 months of membership.

The principal and chair should ensure that the new board member is given

- an understanding of the history of the parish and school and a tour of the school facilities
- a board induction kit.

A suggested board induction kit

Parish and school related documents

- History of the parish and school
- School's annual report
- School strategic plan
- Staff organization chart
- Map of the physical layout of the school
- Recent newsletters of the parish, school and/or board

Board related documents

- Constitution and handbook
- List of current board members and their contact details
- List of dates for future board meetings and events
- List of current committees, their terms of reference and membership
- List of board committees and working parties and their terms of reference
- Role descriptions and expectations of board members; code of conduct
- Minutes of the last three board meetings with a summary list of current action items
- Copy of the policy schedule for the review of school policies



Important dimensions to consider in induction and formation are the

- underpinning values,
- theological perspectives and
- understandings about contemporary educational issues that inform the work of the board and equip board members to exercise their responsibilities in a manner that is faithful to the heritage and tradition of the Church and school.

In developing the induction program, the board may consider the following questions:

- •What information would be useful to provide to the new member before the first board meeting?
- •Is the level of formality of the induction meeting and its venue appropriate to the local context?
- •How will the board and meeting be made welcoming and inclusive to the incoming member?
- •What formation activities would be appropriate for the new board member?

Prior to their first board meeting, a meeting should be arranged between the new board member and the parish priest, principal, and chair.

Ongoing board formation

A characteristic of an effective and high performing board is that it is engaged in ongoing board formation activities and programs. Board formation is essentially about board members participating in programs and activities that will enhance their skills as a board member and provide further knowledge about the operations of the board.

It is recommended boards place a 15 minute board formation activity on the agenda of every board meeting. Other activities may be more extensive and involve the school community and the parish.

Board Formation

The specific formation requirements of individual boards are the responsibility of the relevant principal, parish priest and canonical administrators as leaders of the parish-school community.

Focused formation provides a framework for structured, meaningful and purposeful board work. Consideration may be given to formation in the following areas and examples:

about Catholic education

- what it is in Church, parish and school
- why do we have Catholic education
- what role does it play in society

about your school

- how it came to be, including any specific charism
- its Catholic identity
- its links to parish
- what is good about it
- its place in your community

about education in a Catholic school today

- what does learning and teaching look like today
- Catholic Education Melbourne School Improvement Framework – your school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Action Plan (AAP) about your board
- what is Catholic school governance - Catholic School Governance, NCEC 2002; CEM
- your goals, strategies, processes and expectations
- your people, their skills and gifts

about oneself and others

- working with others
- building community

Understanding of all members in all areas cannot be assumed. How can each member be helped and nurtured to be their best as a board member supporting school and parish?



Some suggestions for board formation

Developing teamwork and links with the school community and the parish

- Commissioning the board during a Sunday parish liturgy
- Engaging in discussions on charism or faith development
- Scheduling a board dinner or social event
- Inviting staff members to give presentations on current programs and activities in the school
- Participating in parish events
- Clearly identifying the expectations of the board member and establishing a code of conduct for the board
- Developing a community resource bank/list that helps the parish and school link in to and develop partnerships

Streamlining board processes

- Reflecting on how the board engages in discussions and deliberations
- Clarifying the roles of the board officers such as the chair, executive officer and board committees
- Revisiting the rules and procedures of board meetings

Evaluating the work of the board

- Undertaking an annual appraisal of board performance
- Auditing the board constitution and handbook
- Holding an annual board retreat (renewal day)
- Reassessing board goals at a midpoint in the year

Supporting the inclusion and contribution of individual members

- Developing a kit or package for prospective board members
- Inducting new board members
- Establishing mentors for new members

Developing knowledge and expertise

- Participating in a network for board chair
- Joining other boards for selected discussions or activities
- Participating in CEM school board seminars
- Inviting speakers/experts to present to the board
- Discussing articles in the Board Business newsletter
- Discussing relevant articles about boards
- Attending a relevant conference, seminar or network

Enhance interaction with the community

- Linking with other schools in your area by establishing a network to share ideas and discuss common issues



Seeking advice from CEM regarding issues and concerns that may arise

Professional learning and support for boards With respect to the operation of boards, Catholic Education Melbourne acts as an agent of the Archbishop in facilitating the formation and ongoing support of boards. Catholic Education Melbourne conducts board formation through a program of professional learning activities for board members that are provided centrally and on a regional basis.

Conduct a skills audit

Boards and committees operate most effectively when their members come with different skills, knowledge, backgrounds and experiences. Research on board effectiveness continually highlights the importance of skills and diversity on a board.

A skills audit can be used to identify areas of knowledge or skill that need to be developed within the existing board, through targeted recruitment or co-opting of members onto committees.

Steps:

- 1 List the skills relevant to the role and responsibilities of the board and each committee, including skills that may be required 1-3 years forward with reference to the schools strategy/action plan;
- 2 Note the skills and skill levels of current members; analyse the adequacy of each skill level for the board/committee purposes;
- 3 Prioritise the skills areas with reference to the schools strategy /action plan;
- 4 Determine what action may be appropriate for strengthening the skill profile of the board e.g. professional development for current members, recruitment, co-opting;
- 5 Draw up an action list nominating who is responsible for the action and include due dates.

Succession Planning

Succession planning is critical to the board's development. It is the responsibility of each board member to enhance the profile of the board in the parish and school communities and bring to the attention of the board executive potential board members. The use of non-board members on committees and working parties is a useful tool in succession planning. The board should be conscious of the need to prepare current board members for taking the role of office bearers. One way to do this is by introducing a suitable person to the position of deputy chair 12 months before the chair is due to step down. This arrangement provides an opportunity for the deputy to understudy the chair with a view to taking over the following year. The deputy could also relieve the chair of some duties during the chair's final year.

Operation of the Parish Education Board

An effective board:

- is clear about its roles and responsibilities
- has an effective working relationship between the board and the parish priest
- is committed to ensuring that the parish and school work in partnership
- pays attention to maintaining relevant and up-to-date documentation and processes.



Together Everyone Accomplishes More

A school board functions best as a cohesive team. The responsibility lies with each board member to create and maintain an environment and culture for teamwork to occur and be fruitful.

Teams develop through individuals working together with common purpose and objectives in a collaborative, cooperative and committed way. While individual contributions by board members are valued, their particular skills and experience, utilised for the benefit of the board, the school and the community, are maximised when working as a team.

Two key benefits of working as a team are:

- high quality outcomes as a result of combined individual contributions.
- meaningful learning and sharing of knowledge.

Some qualities of effective teams are:

- mutual trust and respect
- being prepared to put the team's objectives ahead of your own
- a clear understanding of team goals to be achieved
- clearly set roles and expectations
- open communication.

Office bearers

There are three key office bearers on a board. The chair, executive officer and secretary have a significant role on the board and each of these roles carries specific duties and responsibilities. The chair is elected by the board. This person should not be ex officio or a school or parish employee.

The Chair

The role of the chair is to:

- chair board meetings
- in conjunction with the executive officer oversee the development of meeting agendas, approve papers for meetings and the draft minutes
- ensure the meetings are focused on the agenda
- encourage participation by all board members in meetings and at board events
- act as a spokesperson for the board when authorised to do so
- attend important parish and school events as appropriate
- participate as a member of the board executive.

Chairing a meeting

The role of the chair includes the chairing of board meetings, ensuring meetings are focused on the agenda and encouraging participation of all members in meetings and board events.

The quality of the meeting, its outcome and the commitment of the board to the outcome is a reflection of the how well this is achieved.

Consider the following:

- are the values of the board in place and applied?
- is there effective dialogue?
- is the board meeting a stimulating, learning conversation that informs and builds understanding of all members?
- is there support and encouragement for honest, trust based exploration of ideas and possibilities?
- is each board member able to offer their best and be heard, acknowledged and valued?
- do board outcomes reveal and apply the collective wisdom of the board?



The principal

The principal, as leader and manager of the school, is the executive officer of the board. The role of the executive officer is to:

- play a key role in developing the overall goals and priorities of the board
- play a key role in developing the agenda for meetings
- ensure follow-up of actions arising from board meetings
- act as the chief education advisor to the board
- participate as a member of the board executive.

The secretary

The secretary is appointed by the board. The role of the secretary is to:

- take the minutes of board meetings
- maintain an archive of minutes from previous meetings
- arrange for the distribution of papers before meetings
- ensure that board members are kept informed between meetings
- manage all board correspondence
- maintain a file of board correspondence.

The board executive

The board executive is a standing committee (Sample Constitution clause 10) of the board and its members may include the parish priest, the principal, the board chair, and one other board member. Through their leadership, the board executive provides support to the principal and the board.

The board executive has an important role in ensuring that the board is both proactive and focused in supporting the mission, vision and school improvement plan. The board executive is also responsible for modeling professional, collaborative and positive working relationships.

In order to ensure that board papers are distributed in good time before a meeting, the board executive should strive to meet two weeks prior to each board meeting to confirm the agenda (Sample Agenda) and to approve the board papers.

The roles and responsibilities of the board executive

Responsibilities of the board executive may include:

- setting the board meeting agenda
- leading the induction of new board members
- managing the annual process to evaluate the board performance, that is, its efficiency and effectiveness
- preparing the annual board report for the parish priest and for the parish-school community
- organising ongoing board formation activities
- monitoring membership and succession planning
- implementing directions set from time to time by the board
- undertaking an annual audit of the board constitution and handbook.



In addition, the board may agree that the executive has the authority to take actions on behalf of the board between regular meetings. Such actions should be ratified at the subsequent board meeting.

Board meetings

The frequency of board meetings should be set out in the board constitution and should be reviewed on an annual basis. It is common practice for boards to meet 6 – 8 times during the year with the annual general meeting (AGM) being one of these scheduled meetings. Apart from the AGM, ordinary board meetings are not public meetings.

Boards may call extraordinary meetings if required. Agendas should be prepared and distributed prior to each meeting. It is the role of the board executive to ensure that the agenda and papers are confirmed in sufficient time to allow for their distribution at least a week prior to the meeting. Board confidentiality and solidarity are key ingredients in building trust at board meetings. As a general rule all board meeting proceedings are confidential. At times, there will be a good reason to formally declare an issue, a paper and/or a discussion as confidential. This should be done by the chair prior to a board meeting, and confirmed before closing the meeting.

Board members should also respect the right of individuals to express their views freely at board meetings without fear of their being named outside the board meetings as taking particular positions. As in all similar groups, a sense of trust among board members is vital for the wellbeing of the board.

A meeting should close by reviewing actions and deadlines set, and noting of the details of the next meeting.

Minutes should be maintained.

Succeeding together

Aspects of good governance such as fairness, transparency and accountability rely on effective dialogue.

Dialogue is not always about converting another to your point of view. Rather it is about understanding and acceptance, and influencing a decision or disagreeing with civility.

It is desirable that:

- the language used is clear, concise and pertinent
- the tone is patient, gentle and peaceful
- trust is promoted so as to build confidence between the speaker and the listener, as well encourage a willingness to listen
- there is sensitivity to the particular situation and the needs of the listener.

An objective process to assist in discussions may include the following steps:

1. Determine and agree on specific goals—what is to be achieved
2. Assess and get a clear picture of the current agreed reality
3. Brainstorm options to achieve the goals
4. Conclude with a measurable outcome which can be assessed at a later stage

Encouraging conversation

Conversation creates positive connections, builds good relationships and provides an opportunity to explore ideas and proposals.



Conversation best occurs in an environment of trust (open and honest communication), mutual respect (value and appreciation of others) and mindfulness (responsibility for own words and actions).

The art of conversation takes practice and requires each person to participate, to actively listen, to ask clarifying questions and to give time to allow the conversation to flow, the topic to develop and understanding to be gained. Boards can benefit from meetings where there are conversations which support reports and information sharing.

Listening is one of the most important skills a board member can have. How well you listen impacts on the effectiveness and quality of work undertaken and relationships built and maintained. The better you listen the more you improve your productivity and your ability to influence and persuade others.

To help you concentrate and truly hear what the other person is saying:

- give the speaker your undivided attention and acknowledge the message;
- show by your manner that you are listening;
- make sure you are clear about the message without imposing your own assumptions, beliefs and filters;
- summarise the speakers comments and clarify points if necessary;
- defer formulating your rebuttal or counter arguments while listening.

Active listening requires respect and understanding of each other, and trust in the processes of your meeting. A school board member in gaining information and perspectives as an active listener is better able to contribute to the school and build more productive working relationships.

The Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the board can take place at any time during the year but normally takes place in the final term of the school year. The parish and school communities should receive adequate notice of this meeting and of any intention to hold elections for any board positions that become vacant.

The agenda for the AGM normally includes:

- presentation of the board's annual report by the chair
- provision for questions from those present
- election of prospective board members.

Annual Report – a communication tool

The board's annual report is an important communication document prepared by the board executive. It acknowledges the successes, activities and achievements of the board in the current year and indicates the following year's goals and tasks. It is also an opportunity for the board to reflect on what could have worked better and what may need to be re-worked or let go.

This report may also form part of the requisite School Annual Report published on the school website and the VRQA State Register.

Committees and working parties

To share and support the work of the board, the board may consider establishing committees (e.g. Sample Constitution clause 11: Faith formation and development Committee, Fundraising Committee, an in the instance of a multi-school board, a School Advisory Committee, Group purchasing and resource sharing Committee).



Board committees and working parties are an effective means to make better use of board members' expertise, by allowing those with particular knowledge, interests and skills to concentrate on those areas. Board committees also create opportunities for leadership and succession planning.

From time to time the board may also wish to establish a committee or working party for a specific purpose, or to undertake a particular task. These committees may have the option of co-opting additional members to assist with their deliberations. They may be focused on a specific area such as:

- policy
- capital improvements
- reputation management
- parent engagement
- community development
- grants

Each committee or working party should be chaired by a board member who would be responsible for reporting to the board on the activities of the committee/working party. Board committees/working parties are directly responsible to the board. Each committee/working party of the board should have clearly articulated expectations or terms of reference stating:

- the name of the committee/working party
- the name of the chair
- the purpose and tasks to be undertaken
- the names of the members
- meeting and reporting requirements
- the date for reporting back to the board e.g. actions since last report, what's happening now, future plans, items for board discussion
- duration of the committee/working party.

It is important that committees/working parties understand that they may not speak publicly for the board, unless delegated authority to do so is stated.

The terms of reference of each committee or working party of the board should be recorded in the board handbook.

A summary of the activities of each committee/working party should be included in the board's annual report to acknowledge the specific work undertaken by the committee/working party during the year.

Parish Education Board documentation

As a minimum, each board should maintain four key documents:

1. The Parish Education Board constitution
2. The Parish Education Board handbook
3. Agenda and Minutes of Parish Education Board meetings
4. Parish Education Board correspondence file.



Constitution

The board constitution describes the role and function of the board, its membership and accountabilities. This document, developed by the board, must be ratified by the parish priest. Once ratified, it provides a sense of status, purpose and direction for the board. The constitution is the first point of reference for the board to clarify its purpose. It is important that the document clearly describes the roles of the parish priest, principal and office bearers in relation to the operation of the board.

It is the responsibility of the board executive to ensure that the board is operating within the constitution. A PEB Constitution template is provided on CEVN.

Handbook

The board handbook is a manual of information, policies, processes and protocols for the smooth and efficient running of the board. It provides more specific details of the rules described in the board constitution. The board handbook should be developed in a flexible format to accommodate updates as they arise. For example, a loose-leaf binder could be used with each page dated in the footer. It is the responsibility of the board executive to ensure that the handbook is kept up to date.

A Sample Handbook content headings is provided on CEVN.

Agenda and Minutes

The minutes of board meetings should be recorded in a consistent format and maintained in an appropriate archive system. The minutes of each board meeting should be distributed as soon as possible after the board meeting so as to allow sufficient time for action items to be followed up between meetings. The minutes should be approved by the board at its next meeting, as an accurate record of the meeting.

Board minutes are not public documents.

Suggested Agenda and Minutes formats are provided on CEVN. Some ways to improve board minutes

- Do not record the discussion, unless a general sense of the issues will explain the actions to be taken or will inform future actions.
- Include as a cover page or end page, a summary of action items from the meeting.
- Put the date, time and venue of the next meeting at the end of the minutes.

Evaluating the work of the board

Before undertaking an evaluation of its work, it may be useful for the board to consider the anticipated benefits of such an exercise and how the results of the evaluation can be used most effectively.

An evaluation of the work of the board may include the following benefits

- A suitably conducted evaluation should assist you in determining whether the board is meeting its objectives and where improvements can be made.
- Planning and evaluation are intimately connected; the results of your evaluation should flow into planning the work of the board for the following year.
- A regular process of evaluation can assist the board in ensuring that the board is productive and that the time of board members is being used effectively.



The evaluation process

Evaluation is more than administering a survey or delivering a report. It is a process that has several key steps that usually include the following:

- having an agreed purpose for the evaluation
- asking a key question and perhaps a series of related questions
- identifying the information needed to answer the question/s
- designing and testing a method for collecting the information
- collecting the information
- analysing the information
- determining the answer to the question
- using the answer.

It is important that the board agrees on the process to be followed and has a role in its development. It is suggested that a member of the board oversee the evaluation process and, if appropriate, take a leadership role in implementing the findings.

Areas for evaluation

The board may wish to evaluate all aspects of its work or concentrate on some key areas. These areas may include both outcomes and processes. However, the questions that the board establishes at the beginning of the evaluation process will assist it in determining which areas should receive the most attention. Areas for evaluation may include:

- board processes such as meeting procedures, direction setting, planning, communication
- the work of committees/workgroups
- the nature and extent of involvement of the parish and school communities in the work of the board
- involvement in key parish or school projects.

Strategies to assist the evaluation process

There are many different strategies and tools that can be used in the evaluation process.

- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Peer review
- Statistical analysis
- Report writing
- Reflection on key aspects

The most important question is: 'what is the most appropriate mix of strategies and tools for the kind of information that is being sought'?

A carefully developed questionnaire is an effective way of undertaking a short, focused evaluation. The sample questionnaire for assessing the effectiveness of the board may be useful. Refer also to the instructions.

The evaluation tool may also be adapted and used by boards.

A possible question and approach



Is our board making a difference? To answer this question:

1. Explore what your board looks like when it is functioning within its scope and at its best with regards to but not limited to the following:

- Leadership
 - Relationships
 - Working together
 - Clarity of roles, expectations and objectives
 - Diversity of skill sets and experience
 - Processes
 - Culture e.g. trust and dialogue, respectful and supportive questioning, constructive challenging of assumptions
 - Continuous learning and improvement
 - Evaluation of performance
 - Leadership
2. Develop and agree on actions that can be taken to be your best.
3. Identify descriptors for the board's values that demonstrate its effectiveness.
4. Timetable the steps you will take to be the best board you can be.

An independent facilitator can help the discussion to stay on track, to clarify points as needed, can provide context, and will capture data, key themes and questions to be answered.

A time to reflect

Taking time to reflect on the principles that guide how a board operates, and planning for the development of all board members is a key activity of a board.

Has your board asked the question: Are the teachings of Christ as encapsulated in the mission and values of the school reflected in the processes and procedures of the school board?

For example,

- How are parish and school values such as inclusiveness and respect for each person reflected in the board's protocols and meeting procedures?
- Are values such as co-operation and teamwork reflected in the board's approach to discussion and advice giving?
- Are the key principles of the school's guiding charism being honoured by the board and used in the formation of board members?
- Is the parish-school prayer used by the board at meetings?

Business of the Parish Education Board

Each member of the board has an opportunity to make a unique contribution to the board and its contributions to the parish and school. As a group, the board can provide valued contributions to the learning outcomes of the children and to the mission of Catholic education.

How can the board make valued contributions?

- Align board goals and activities to the School Improvement Plan.



- Undertake an annual board evaluation and review process
- Promote the school in the community – be an ambassador for the school.
- Assist with the ongoing development of the school website and marketing plan.
- Record and celebrate the history and achievements of the parish and school e.g. a commemorative book, a celebratory event.
- Build relationships with other boards e.g. networks and clusters and attend professional development programs.

Goal setting

A plan setting out the general directions and goals of the board for the next 12 months is an important document for the board to develop if it is to be proactive and effective in its support of the parish, school and principal. The development of such a plan is best facilitated by the principal, so that it can be aligned with the strategic or school improvement plan.

Support for Catholic ethos

This is the most critical responsibility of the board. Working in conjunction with the parish priest and principal, the board is responsible for seeing that the school is faithful to its charter as a Catholic school.

While the board is not involved in the day-to-day operation of the school, it exercises an overall role in

- ensuring that the requirements of the Archdiocese in the area of religious education are honoured and
- the characteristics of the school as a Catholic school are pursued with diligence.

What can be done?

- Develop your school's core values
- Reflect on your school's Catholic identity as an important element of the School Improvement Framework (SIF). The use of the available Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) surveys and questionnaires provide a stimulus for reflection and a means of articulating and making explicit what your school is trying to do to make them distinctive.
- Social inclusion in education

A beginning point in addressing the challenge of inclusive schooling is to reflect on the following questions:

What are the practices and structures within the school that best support and encourage full participation in education?

What are the practices and structures within the school that might deter, discourage or exclude some students from full participation in education?



Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

Catholic Social Teaching promotes a vision of a just society that is grounded in scripture and in the wisdom gathered from the experience of the Christian community as it responded to social justice issues through history. As Church institutions, Catholic schools are called to witness in word and action the key principles of Catholic Social Teaching. They are:

Dignity of the Human Person Made in the image of God, every person has an equal human dignity which gives rise to inalienable rights. People are more important than material possessions and must never be treated as instruments for the benefit of other persons.

The Common Good Collectively, and as individuals, we are interdependent and responsible for all of humanity. We must work for the development of all humankind and an equitable distribution of goods and services. The rights and duties of individuals must be harmonised under the common good.

Solidarity Social by nature, human beings can only achieve their full potential when they work in collaboration with others. Solidarity involves standing in unity with those in need and speaking up for their rights.

Subsidiarity The principle of subsidiarity places responsibility as close as possible to the grassroots. Decisions or policy setting should be made at the closest possible level to those affected by the initiative.

Preferential Option for the Poor and Vulnerable We must put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

Catholic schools “are committed to creating inclusive, engaging and mutually respectful environments where all members of the school community flourish” (CEM 2010). Such a commitment necessitates a broad agenda. It covers issues that include:

- establishing a climate of welcome and a culture of wellbeing
- attending to access and affordability
- focusing on inclusive leadership within the school
- ensuring quality teaching and learning that builds in achievement for all students
- providing a wellbeing framework and action plans that support students and works in partnership with family and community
- valuing the rich and diverse experiences of all members of the community.

