



CATHOLIC EDUCATION
Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn

SCHOOL BOARD & COMMUNITY COUNCIL REVIEW ISSUES PAPER



FOREWORD

School Boards and Community Councils have an important role in the life of our schools. We value the knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm that parents and carers bring to these forums.

School governance is generating much discussion in Catholic school systems across Australia. This discussion stems in part from the changing expectations of parents, regulators, and governments about the role that parents, carers and members of school communities can and should play in the context of our schools, and the increasingly complex regulatory environment in which schools operate.

The Catholic Education Commission endorsed the creation of a Working Group to review the role of school boards and community councils in systemic schools within the Archdiocese, and to make recommendations about potential opportunities for further development and/or refinement of the school board and community council model.

The Working Group has undertaken some preliminary consultation and has identified some of the issues to consider in framing its recommendations to the Catholic Education Commission. These issues are set out in this Issues Paper. The Working Group is seeking to draw on the experiences, expertise, and perspectives of key stakeholders in formulating their recommendations, and would greatly appreciate any comments that members of school boards and community councils, parents and carers, clergy, school staff and other members of school communities may provide about the topics raised, and the questions posed in this Issues Paper.

We would encourage you to discuss the role of your school board or community council (both now and in the future) with your peers, colleagues and community members, and send your thoughts, comments and perspectives to the Working Group via governance@cg.catholic.edu.au¹ prior to 2 September 2022. You can also submit answers to the Discussion Questions in this paper through the Review webpage: <https://cg.catholic.edu.au/school-board-and-community-council-review/>. The webpage also links to resources that may be referred to in the Final Report, including documents that reflect models in place in other Catholic Dioceses.

The Working Group is very much looking forward to working with you in the weeks ahead on this important issue and appreciates your assistance with this important piece of work.

Yours sincerely

Ross Fox

DIRECTOR on behalf of the
School Board and Community Council Review Working Group

¹ Comments will be deidentified if any personally identifying information is provided and any comments referenced in the final report to the Catholic Education Commission will not be attributed to particular individuals.



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TERMS OF REFERENCE

In early August 2021 the Catholic Education Commission endorsed a Review into systemic school boards and community councils across the Archdiocese.

The Review of School Boards/Community Councils Working Group (**Working Group**) will investigate and analyse school board/community council arrangements across the 56 CECG schools with reference to:

- Modern school governance considerations relevant to the current structure and operation of systemic school boards/councils;
- Challenges for schools (if any) associated with the board/council framework (with reference to current constitutions, and case studies);
- Cross jurisdictional approaches to the role and structure of bodies similar to school boards/councils; and
- Potential opportunities for further development and/or refinement of boards/councils in the Archdiocese, and any associated opportunities to enhance parent engagement at the school level either within or outside of the existing framework.

The Working Group comprises the Director of Catholic Education, a Primary School Principal, a Secondary School Principal, a Regional NSW Principal, an ACT Principal, and a current Chair of a school board/community council and a Catholic Schools Parent Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn representative. With the exception of the Director, membership of the Working Group will be finalised following an EOI process.

The Working Group will oversee research, consultation and engagement with appropriate internal and external stakeholders.

The Working Group will also oversee the production of a Report to the Catholic Education Commission with associated recommendations.



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SCHOOL BOARD AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL REVIEW ISSUES PAPER

BACKGROUND

Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn (**CECG**) comprises 56 schools across the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and a central Catholic Education Office. Collectively the 56 schools are referred to as a school system. CECG educates approximately 20,000 students within our school system on an annual basis. All staff employed in CECG schools and the Catholic Education Office report to the Director of CECG. The Director of CECG is ultimately responsible for the overall management, compliance and administration of the school system, and each school within the school system. Within the school system, each Principal assumes responsibility for the day-to-day management, compliance, and administration of each school in accordance with the relevant CECG financial, governance and policy frameworks.

CECG recognises the invaluable role that parents and carers in the lives of the children that attend CECG and as members of our school communities. At each school within the Archdiocese, parents and carers can participate in the life of the school in a variety of ways, including as a member of a school board or community council that exists at the school.

WHY WE HAVE SCHOOL BOARDS AND COMMUNITY COUNCILS

School boards were implemented in systemic schools in the Archdiocese in the late 1980s to enable parent participation in decisions relating to the school, to facilitate Catholic identity and leadership in the parent cohort and to encourage transparency and accountability with respect to school finances. School boards operated in tandem with P & F Associations, with P&Fs assuming responsibility for fundraising activities to generate income for the school and school boards assuming a role in governing the school, including in the area of school budgets. The structure of school boards has evolved to some extent in the decades since the 1980s, most significantly with the introduction of a community council model in the early 2000s, which created an option for schools to consolidate the board and the P&F into a single forum. However, the role of the school board from a decision-making perspective has remained largely unchanged during this time, despite changes in broader systemic governance arrangements. Under the current constitutions, school boards and community councils have decision making authority and/or input into issues such as school budgets, levies, loan commitments and fee collection processes. It has been noted that at least some school boards and community councils do not actively exercise these powers.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

In recent years the time that parents and carers have available to them outside of working hours has become increasingly valuable, and many parents and carers have less time available to them to participate in forums such as school boards and community councils. The regulatory environment within which schools operate has become increasingly complex and prescriptive and as a consequence a number of parents have reported reservations about participating in school governance forums. There is also increasing recognition about the complexity that forums such as school boards create in school system governance structures, when they have decision making authority but are not employees, the employer or director in the system. In light of these issues, a number of Catholic school systems across Australia have reviewed and recast the role of school boards to reflect a contemporary approach to parent and carer participation in the life of Catholic systemic schools.

OTHER MODELS OF GOVERNANCE

The majority of models in operation in other Catholic school systems now recognise the role of the Principal within a broader systemic context of decision making, governance and accountability. Parents and carers are relied upon to support the Principal in an advisory capacity rather than making decisions for the school. At the same time, financial and regulatory duties exist within the governance structure of the school system, rather than with parents and carers, thus allaying concerns expressed by some parents under existing models about the extent of their legal responsibilities if they participate in these types of forums.

Beyond issues of compliance, several Catholic school systems have sought to shift the focus of parent involvement in decision making and governance of the school to authentic engagement with school staff about student learning. This shift recognises the invaluable role of parents as their child's first educator and the benefits that can be realised both at home and at school when parents and carers are actively and meaningfully engaged in strategies that can help a child through their lifelong learning journey.

PRELIMINARY VIEWS OF THE WORKING GROUP

The Working Group has undertaken some initial targeted consultation with internal stakeholders, reviewed the school board and community council models and associated documentation, and has looked at some of the examples that have been developed in other Catholic school systems. The Working Group has also had some preliminary discussions with a narrow group of stakeholders, including representatives from the Catholic Schools Parents Association Canberra and Goulburn (**CSPACG**).

The Working Group notes the immense value that is placed on parent participation in the school community. While the school board model has been effectively implemented in schools for the past four decades, it appears evident to the Working Group that there is scope to refine the current school board and community council model to potentially remove financial and compliance responsibilities from parents and carers that participate in these forums, adopting the same or a similar approach to the approach that has been adopted by other Catholic school systems.

However, it appears imperative to the Working Group that the perspectives and expertise of the parents and carers remains accessible, albeit in a capacity that provides support and advice to the Principal and school leadership, and that parent and carer relationships, and contributions to school activities, continue to be fostered within the broader school community. If possible, any refinement to the model should recognise the inherent benefits of parent and carer assistance in community building activities and fundraising, with the necessary input of parents and carers into how money raised through parent and carer led fundraising activities is used by the school.

The Working Group has also looked closely at models that seek to increase parent engagement in children's learning, and the Working Group is keen to explore options that might encourage or facilitate parent engagement opportunities at the school level and how Catholic identity, mission and faith formation can continue to be fostered through this model.

In this context the focus of the Working Group is now looking to develop a model that:

- (a) Is faithful to the role of parents as the first educators of their children;
- (b) Facilitates a cohesive parent community that is supportive of the Catholic mission, purpose and strategic objectives of the school;

- (c) Maximises the benefits of the discretionary effort of parents, noting the time poor nature of families and the competing priorities on parent and carer time;
- (d) Provides opportunities for parents to draw on their own skills and experience to make positive contributions to the school; and
- (e) Enables genuine collaboration between the Principal and school community.

While the Working Group has formed some preliminary views, in developing the recommendations for the Catholic Education Commission, the Working Group is keen to ensure that it has obtained and appropriately considered the perspective of parents and carers of students that attend CECG schools, and those parents and carers that have participated in school boards and community councils. The views of school staff, particularly Principals is also a vital part of the Review process. It is important to understand what is working well, and the nature of any issues or barriers to participation. The Working Group welcomes innovative ideas and ideas for improvement.

To this end the following discussion questions have been formulated.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For all parents:

1. In what ways do the parents and carers at your school best support your school?
2. How would you like to become or remain involved in the life of the school? Are there any barriers to this involvement?
3. How do school boards and community councils best support schools? What issues should they provide advice on?
4. Is there anything that would make participation in a school board or community council or other parent group easier from your perspective?
5. Any other comments?

For parents that are current or past members of the school board or community council:

1. What have you appreciated about participation in the school board or community council?
2. What issues do you think require clarity in terms of the role or operation of the school board or community council?
3. Have you encountered any issues in your role as a member of the school board or community council?
4. Do you see value in new or different models of parent engagement? For example, with less focus on formal meeting governance and more focus on collaboration?
5. What would the ideal role of school board, community council or other parent/community body be?
6. What do you see the proper role of the Principal and the Parish Priest being in this context?

7. Any other comments?
8. About you – for example are you:
 - a. A current or former member? If you are a former member, how recent was your last appointment?
 - b. Were you a member of a school board, or a community council or have you been a member of both?
 - c. Were you a member on primary school, central school or high school/college school board or community council?

For Principals, school staff and Catholic Education Office staff:

1. What do you appreciate about the school board or community council model?
2. What issues do you think require clarity in terms of the role or operation of the school board or community council?
3. Have you encountered any issues in your role as a member of the school board or community council (if applicable)?
4. Do you see value in new or different models of parent engagement? For example with less focus on formal meeting governance and more focus on collaboration?
5. How would you define the ideal role of school board, community council or other parent/community body?
6. What do you see the role of the Principal and the Parish Priest being in this context?
7. Any other comments?

SHARE YOUR VIEWS

There are a number of ways that you can respond to the Discussion Questions including by way of return email (governance@cg.catholic.edu.au), or by completing the relevant online form on the CECG website <https://cg.catholic.edu.au/school-board-and-community-council-review/>. If requested by the relevant School Board or Community Council Chair, a representative from the Working Group will also be available to virtually attend School Board or Community Council meetings to receive feedback during August 2022.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could provide us with your comments by 2 September 2022.

If you have any questions about the Review, please contact Sarah Meier, General Counsel Governance, Policy and Risk Manager via email governance@cg.catholic.edu.au