



Purpose

This document outlines the role of a School Advisory Council for school/s governed by the Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited (DOBCEL).

Context

DOBCEL is a Company established by the Bishop of Ballarat to govern and operate all Catholic schools in the Diocese, which were governed prior to 2021 as Diocesan or Parish schools, (and of further schools that will be established by the Company), according to the *DOBCEL Constitution*. The Bishop of Ballarat is the sole Member of DOBCEL. Further information on the DOBCEL Governance structure is available on [The Board webpage](#) on the DOBCEL website.

As the governing authority, DOBCEL is accountable to a range of regulatory and Government authorities. These include the *Australian Securities and Investment Commission* (ASIC), the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission* (ACNC), the *Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority* (VRQA), the *Department of Education and Training Victoria* (DET), and the *Commonwealth Department of Education* (DoE).

The DOBCEL Board is committed to strong and close oversight of its schools. The Board is responsible for all legal, employment, financial, regulatory, risk, compliance, and policy matters.

Each DOBCEL school is operationally managed locally by the principal, who acts under a set of delegations determined by the DOBCEL Board.

DOBCEL is committed to working with school leaders and school communities to build thriving Catholic school communities. A key dimension of this collaborative work is establishing and effectively operating school advisory councils to support the work of the principal and the school.

School advisory councils are not part of DOBCEL's governance structure - they sit separately from the delegation and reporting lines to the DOBCEL Board. They are formed and created at a school level to provide informed advice and a community voice to the principal and to support the principal in their leadership responsibility for the educational community. The role of the School Advisory Council is to support the overall governance of DOBCEL and give consideration to and advice on important school matters to support the principal and the strategic interest of the school.

The School Advisory Council should be a safe place where the principal, parents, and school community members can collaborate to support the principal and school leadership team in their agenda for continuous school improvement.

Legislative Context

[Ministerial Order 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards](#)

Principles of Governance

School Advisory Councils are required to reflect and adhere to the Principles of Governance stated in the [DOBCEL Principles of Governance](#)

Advisory in Nature

School Advisory Councils provide a forum for discussion and discernment, where the parent/guardian voice and perspective are available to inform and support the decisions made by the principal for the good of the school.

It is important that School Advisory Council members understand that their primary role is to provide support and advice on important school matters to support the principal in the context of the DOBCEL governance arrangements. School Advisory Councils do not have a legal identity and do not become involved in the day-to-day management of the school. The School Advisory Council must act within the parameters of these Terms of Reference.

The following are some ways School Advisory Councils support the school and the principal:

- supporting the enactment of the [DOBCEL Strategic Intent and Directions](#)
- articulating and enacting the school's vision and mission
- endorsing the school's Catholic ethos and culture
- provide input into and support for the school improvement/strategic plan development and delivery
- actively supporting and promoting child safety practices within the school, including the *National Safeguarding Principles for Child Safe Organisations* and *Ministerial Order 1359*
- supporting the processes of school improvement and school review
- supporting the principal in meeting responsibilities and accountabilities for educational outcomes, effective stewardship of resources, master planning and annual reporting
- supporting the principal in the encouragement of family engagement
- supporting the ongoing sustainability of the School Advisory Council and its membership in its succession and learning
- enriching faith formation and development
- implementing school policies as required

While a vital forum for parent and community voice, the School Advisory Council is not a forum for individual parent advocacy or special interest representation and does not become involved in the day-to-day management of the school.

All management and operational matters such as the delivery of curriculum, human resource matters, parent complaints, programs and policies are the responsibility of the principal, who may seek the advice of School Advisory Council members concerning these matters from time to time.

The Executive Director or the principal is the approved spokesperson for the school for initiatives, announcements and issues raised in the local media. No School Advisory Council member has the authority to speak on behalf of the School or the School Advisory Council unless explicitly delegated and authorised by the principal.

Membership of the School Advisory Council

Serving on the School Advisory Council of a Catholic school is a form of Church ministry. It is a response to the call to support the local Catholic community 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 school advisory council provides rich sources of wisdom and insight as well as a means of strengthening community links and potential for partnerships.

School Advisory Council membership is managed by the principal in consultation with the School Advisory Council Chair and approved by the Education Consultant. Membership considers the school's size and the current school context. The following may serve as a guide:-

School Advisory Councils should comprise of a minimum of six (6) but can be fewer, and a maximum of ten (10) council members who value and share the educational mission and ethos of the Catholic Church, comprising of at least:

- a) the principal (not counted in committee numbers)
- b) other Member/s of school leadership (preferably not more than 2 and not counted in committee numbers)
- c) the Parish Priest if available or a delegate
- d) a minimum of two (2) parents, guardians, or carers of children attending the school (school staff who are also parents of students at the school should not ordinarily be members of the School Advisory Council)
- e) other persons who, in the opinion of the Principal and the Chair, have the relevant knowledge, skills, expertise or interest and commitment to the mission of the school to serve a particular need on the Council may be co-opted by the principal.

The opportunity to express interest in becoming a parent or guardian member of the School Advisory Council will be made available through the school newsletter or other regular communication channels from time to time. Anyone interested in becoming a parent or guardian member of the School Advisory Council may seek advice from the Principal or Chair on the process of appointment. This process is to be determined at the local level and may involve discernment by the SAC regarding an appropriate diversity of skills and talent represented on the SAC and in the case of multiple expressions, may include an election to the SAC. To ensure continuing institutional memory, consideration will also be given to succession planning through the staggered renewal of members.

At the Principal's discretion, members of the school staff or students may be invited from time to time to attend meetings, depending on the content of the agenda.

Prerequisites for Membership

In keeping with [Child Safe Standards](#) and the school's obligation and commitment to ensure the safety of all children in the care of the school, the DOBCEL Board requires all School Advisory Council members to adhere to the School Volunteer Policy and specifically:

- provide the school with proof of identity – photo identity (eg license, passport)
- hold and present an up-to-date *Working With Children Check* (WWCC)
- abide by the school's Child Safe Policies and the school's *Safeguarding Children and Young People Code of Conduct*

Tenure

The ex-officio members will be ongoing members for the term of their appointment to that role. Other members would normally serve a two or three-year term (as agreed locally) with a limit of two consecutive terms. Any mid-term vacancy will be filled by appointment for the balance of the term by the Principal in consultation with the School Advisory Council Chair and approved by the Education Consultant.

Vacancies

A vacancy would be declared when a member:

- reaches the end of their term.
- resigns from office by verbal or written notice to the principal.
- fails to attend three consecutive meetings of the SAC without reasonable excuse and/or apology.

Should a vacancy arise, the Principal and School Advisory Council Chair may approach and appoint a substitute member for the balance of the former member's term of office or leave the position vacant. Any period served in such a casual vacancy will not count as a term of office.

Conflict of Interest

DOBCEL is committed to building School Advisory Councils that are free from fraud or corruption or the perception of fraud or corruption. Conflict of interest arises when a member's duty to the school is affected by a personal (actual, potential, or perceived) interest. In such cases, the line between personal and professional conduct may become blurred and interfere with a member's capacity to provide advice and fulfil their responsibilities on the Council. Conflicts of interest may arise and do not need to present a problem to any School Advisory Council or DOBCEL if they are openly and effectively managed.

The *DOBCEL Conflict of Interest Policy* addresses the requirements for disclosure and management of conflict of interest and extends to School Advisory Council members. It is a requirement of the role that council members abide by and comply with this policy.

Diversity

School Advisory Councils should seek to be inclusive of all community members and will demonstrate a genuine commitment to gender equity, cultural diversity, and requisite skill sets.

Collectively, school advisory council members should bring a range of personal skills and experience to add value to the school and DOBCEL. The Principal and SAC Chair should ensure the facilitation of expressions of interest in respectful and culturally sensitive ways to optimise diversity in the SAC.

School Advisory Council Chair

When the position of School Advisory Council Chair becomes vacant, the members will discern the appointment of a chair from amongst themselves. The term of appointment is for no more than two consecutive years.

The Chair is to facilitate all meetings and will ensure that:-

- each meeting is conducted in a respectful, proper, and organised manner.
- there is full participation during the meeting and all members have been offered the opportunity to present their views or comments.
- all matters on the agenda are given the appropriate time for discussion and deliberation.
- discussion at meetings is related only to school advisory council matters and no other business.

The SAC may determine to have a Deputy Chair to support succession planning and the absence of the chair. Alternatively, in the absence of the Chair, this responsibility will be delegated to another member nominated by the Chair in consultation with the principal.

The Chair may also be involved in setting the meeting agenda with the principal.

A formal meeting format should be followed.

From time to time the School Advisory Council Chair may be required to represent the school at relevant external meetings and functions.

School Advisory Council Administrative Support

Administrative Support will be overseen by the principal and executed by them or their delegate.

The responsibilities for the distribution of agenda, recording and distribution of minutes and other meeting papers may be delegated to a member of the School Advisory Council or a member of the school staff. To provide the necessary support, the individual delegated the administrative support role is not required to be a member of the School Advisory Council but is in attendance only.

School Advisory Council Meetings

The School Advisory Council will meet according to a schedule developed at the commencement of each school year, at a time and place convenient to members. The School Advisory Council is required to meet at least once per term. To support attendance at meetings the use of video conferencing is encouraged. The meeting should only proceed if there are at least two members present in addition to school leadership.

Meetings should not ordinarily exceed a maximum time duration that is agreed upon by the School Advisory Council. It is recommended that meetings should proceed for no more than 90 minutes.

The agenda will be developed by the principal, in consultation with the Chair and members as needed.

The agenda should be provided to members seven days prior to the meeting. The agenda will include the meeting time, date, location and all items for discussion. Where possible, supporting documentation will be forwarded with the agenda. Agendas should always include the following items:

- Acknowledgement of Country
- Prayer
- Declaration of any Conflict of Interest

- Principal's Report
- Child Safety and Child Safe Standards
- Risk Management, Compliance and DOBCEL Policy Framework

Meetings will be conducted at a time mutually agreeable to members, but consideration should be given for this time to be sufficient to allow appropriate time for discussion.

Whenever possible, recommendations of the School Advisory Council are to be reached by consensus. Though full consensus may not always be possible, members are encouraged to reflect, consult, generate ideas, consider the school's best interests, and trust in the collective wisdom of the group.

Committees of the School Advisory Council

The School Advisory Council can establish special purpose committees to provide the principal with further advice or specialised support. Examples may include special committees such as milestone (eg 100 years) community celebration planning, major capital project reference group, significant fundraising initiative planning, etc.

Record Keeping and Communication

The School Advisory Council will keep minutes of meetings for circulation to members before the next meeting.

Minutes will record discussion summaries, recommendations and names of those present. Minutes of meetings are confidential and not for circulation outside School Advisory Council membership.

Consideration should be given to a summary of meaningful and non-confidential outcomes from each meeting being circulated within the school community by the Principal in the School Newsletter.

Deliberations at School Advisory Council meetings are confidential to the School Advisory Council and all recommendations that are made public are to be fully supported by all School Advisory Council members.

Dispute Resolution

School Advisory Council members must be committed to timely and just resolutions of any disputes or grievances and will observe and respect the following grievance procedures.

- Where there is a difficulty, dispute, or grievance involving a student or parent/legal guardian with a teacher, the issue will not be raised at a School Advisory Council meeting. The parent/legal guardian will be requested to raise the matter directly with the principal and refer to the DOBCEL Complaints Policy for information about how this will be handled.
- Where there is a difficulty, dispute, or grievance between the principal and member or members of the School Advisory Council that is not about School Advisory Council business, the issue will not be raised at a School Advisory Council meeting. The matter will be dealt with following the procedures as outlined in the *DOBCEL Complaints Policy*.

Termination of Membership

The Principal and School Advisory Council Chair may discern the need to terminate the membership of a School Advisory Council member where serious concerns over capacity, integrity, communication style, or alignment with the values of Catholic education are demonstrated. The advice and approval of the Education Consultant will be sought before a decision is enacted. The School Advisory Council Chair is responsible for enacting the decision.

If the School Advisory Council Chair membership needs to be terminated, the principal will refer this to the Education Consultant. Following an investigation by the Education Consultant, the School Advisory Council Chair will be advised of the outcome of the investigation by the Education Consultant.

Supporting Documentation

Board Charter

Conflict of Interest Policy

Complaints Policy

Constitution

DOBCEL Strategic Intent 2020 – 2024

Responsible Persons Policy and Procedure

DOBCEL Principles of Governance

All DOBCEL policies are founded on and reflect the Principles of Governance stated in the [DOBCEL Principles of Governance](#).

Policy Category	Governance
Responsible Directorate member	Deputy Director: Stewardship
Policy Owner	Board
Assigned Board Committee	Family and Community Engagement
Ratification Date	June 2023
Review Date	May 2025