



# Williamstown Primary School

## School Council Standing Orders

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#### 1. PURPOSE OF SCHOOL COUNCIL

A School Council is the legally formed body that is given powers to set the key directions of a school. It is the major governing body of the school that, within the Department of Education (DE) guidelines, decides the future directions for the school and oversees the school's operation. School councils play a key role in Victorian government schools. Participating as a school council member is a rewarding and challenging experience. The school council supports the School Principal to provide the best possible educational outcomes for students.

#### 2. THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The School Council ("Council") operates under a framework provided by the:

- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act).
- Education and Training Regulations 2017 (the Regulations); and
- Williamstown Primary School's Constituting Order (the Orders)

Within this legislative framework, a school council may regulate its own proceedings.

### **3. BACKGROUND / OUR CONTEXT**

The governance framework of government schools sees shared responsibility between the school Principal and DE. Because of this it is particularly important that the roles, responsibilities, limits of authority and accountability of School Council members are clearly defined and well understood, and that the framework works well in practice.

At Williamstown Primary School, the School Council's role is highly valued. The School Council operates with our school vision and purpose in mind, working collaboratively with respect, good-humour, teamwork, and open communication.

### **4. COMPOSITION OF COUNCIL**

The Constituting Order of Williamstown Primary School states the composition of the Council is:

- 9 parent members, elected by the parent community of Williamstown Primary School, who represent more than one third of school Councillors.
- 5 DE employee members elected by the staff of Williamstown Primary School including the School Principal; and
- Up to 3 community members. Community membership is optional and these positions are co-opted, rather than elected. DE employees are not eligible for co-option to this category. Members of this category are appointed by a decision of School Council because of their capacity to assist the work of the Council. They may have special skills, interests or experiences or they may provide the perspective of the parent club and/or the student body. Community members have the same voting rights as elected members.

### **5. TERMS OF OFFICE**

Elected members of the Williamstown Primary School Council have two-year terms of office with half retiring annually, following the February School Council meeting. Elections are conducted according to the Regulations and the School's Constituting Order. Community members are appointed by the School Council and have two-year terms which also terminate on the same date as elected members. Upon retirement, Council members can stand for re-election.

### **6. CASUAL VACANCIES**

Should a casual vacancy occur on Council (e.g., if an elected member resigns), this vacancy is filled by Council co-opting a person from the appropriate category who then completes the rest of the term of office of the retiring member.

### **7. ORIENTATION / INDUCTION FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS**

The outgoing President, together with the School Principal, will ensure all incoming members receive appropriate training. This may be either face-to-face or online.

At the first meeting of the incoming school council, considerable time will be dedicated to discussing the culture of the Williamstown Primary School Council, its context and culture including:

- The work of sub-committees
- Managing your own and other's expectations of the role
- Capturing people's experiences, skill sets, expertise
- Setting the priorities of the Council for the year; and
- Best practice communication protocols

The DE's School Council Self-Assessment Tool will be completed annually (in November) and referred to in March at the first meeting of the new school council.

The first meeting of the School Council (March meeting) will predominantly be an orientation and handover meeting by sub-committees.

## 8. OFFICE BEARERS

The Regulations requires there be at least two office bearers – the President and the Executive Officer (the School Principal):

- **President** - The President is elected by all members of Williamstown Primary School Council and may not be a DE employee. The office of President of Williamstown Primary School Council should not be open to the same person for more than four consecutive years.
- **Executive Officer** - This position is filled by the School Principal. The School Principal is a full member of Council with the same voting rights as other Councillors. The School Principal is responsible for the implementation of School Council policies and for informing Council on educational, statutory, regulatory and Government policy issues.

Council shall also elect from its members the following Office Bearers:

- **Vice President** - There is no legal requirement to elect a Vice President but it is normal practice to do so. The Vice President acts as chair of Council meetings in the absence of the president. A Vice President is also a non-DE employee.
- **Treasurer** - There is no legal requirement for Council to have a Treasurer but it is normal practice at Williamstown Primary School to have one. It is recommended that the position be held by a non-DE parent or community member.
- **Minute Secretary** - May either be an elected member of School Council or a person appointed to this role and not a member of School Council and is therefore a silent observer with no voting rights. At Williamstown Primary School this is normally the School Business Manager.

## 9. QUORUM

A quorum requires not less than one half of School Council members currently holding office to be present at the meeting with a majority of members present who are not DE employees. Any parent members on School Council who also work for the Department are counted as DE employees for the purpose of a quorum.

A member of the school Council may be present in person or by video conferencing or teleconferencing.

## 10. SCHOOL COUNCIL DECISIONS

Decisions of Williamstown Primary School Council will be by a majority of those eligible to vote and who are present at the meeting, where the majority are non-DE members.

Williamstown Primary School Council will try to reach decisions by consensus but when that is not possible, a count will be taken with the number for and against recorded in the minutes.

Voting will normally be by a show of hands, but a secret ballot may be used for particular issues. It is important to note that only some policies, or aspects of policies, will require consultation and/or approval of School Council. The details of policy approval requirements can be found in the policy history of each policy and the WPS Policy Action Plan.

### **11. TIED VOTES**

When a vote is tied (i.e., an even number of people are for and against the decision), the President has the casting or deciding vote. It is therefore important that when the President offers a personal opinion on an issue, this is clearly stated. Councillors need to be able to clearly distinguish between the President's personal views and when a ruling is made as President of School Council.

### **12. PROXIES AND VOTING PROCEDURES**

Eligible members of Council must be present at a meeting to be part of the decision-making process. There is no provision in either the Act or the Regulations for proxies. Therefore, if a Council member is unable to attend a meeting, another person cannot attend and vote on their behalf.

### **13. WHEN THE PRESIDENT IS ABSENT**

In the absence of the President, the Vice President should chair the School Council meeting. If neither the President nor Vice President is present, Councillors may elect a member to chair the meeting. This person should be a non-DE employee (i.e., the School Principal should not chair the meeting.)

### **14. COUNCIL SUB-COMMITTEES**

Sub-committees assist Council in all the work that needs to be done. They report regularly at School Council meetings, provide advice and make recommendations to Council, which has the final responsibility for decisions. Sub-committees cannot make decisions for School Council, rather they make recommendations to Council.

Membership of sub-committees shall be considered at the first regular meeting of Council after the annual Council elections, when Councillors will nominate their preferences for committee membership. Some negotiation may be necessary to achieve general balance of size and representation. Each committee shall elect a convenor. Membership of sub-committees may be extended to include interested school community members with special expertise or interest in the area of the sub-committee.

Sub-committees should determine their meeting frequency. They do not necessarily need to meet monthly. Some sub-committees may only meet 3-4 times a year - if sharply focused on policy development and planning for the future.

A sub-committee should not be confused with a working party - that may be more operational in its focus and thus needs to meet frequently (e.g., a committee organising an event).

All School Councillors are expected to play an active role in at least one sub-committee.

Council will determine which committees it requires annually.

The sub-committees for 2024 are:

- Finance
- Education & Policy (EdPol)
- Buildings, Grounds & Environment; and

## **15. SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS**

Unless otherwise decided, School Council meetings will be held on a specified Tuesday from 6:30 – 8:30pm (latest), at least eight times per year. However, it is good practice to have monthly meetings when possible, excluding January and December. Meeting dates will be determined at the first meeting following the School Council election process of that year.

All members are expected to attend. If a member is unable to attend a meeting, an apology should be submitted to the executive officer (the School Principal) or President. Where a member is unable to attend three meetings in succession, voting rights of that member may be denied at the following meeting.

School Council must also hold at least one public meeting each year to report to the school community on its activities and to present a statement of the school's income and expenditure for the previous calendar year.

An extraordinary meeting may be held at any time decided by Council, provided all members are given prior notice of the date, time, place and purpose of the meeting. At least one week's notice is preferable if an extraordinary meeting is to be held.

## **16. VISITOR ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS**

School Council meetings are normally open to the school community. Community members should be encouraged to attend (via publicising meetings and upcoming agenda items as well as including previous minutes in the newsletter). Visitors or observers can be present with the agreement of the Principal and a decision by School Council, but they must direct all their comments through the chairperson. Visitors have no voting rights.

## **17. OPEN AND CLOSED MEETINGS**

While all School Council meetings are expected to be open to the school community, there may be times when the Council meeting, or part of the meeting needs to be closed to protect confidentiality or privacy or for another valid reason, (e.g., the selection and appointment of a new School Principal. (Should this occur, School Council will need to approve a recommendation (called a "motion") to go into a "closed" session. School Council should then go back into open session once the topic under discussion has been concluded.

## **18. EXTENSIONS OF MEETING TIMES**

If business has not been concluded by the scheduled closing time for the meeting, the chair should ask Councillors whether they wish to defer the rest of the business until the next meeting or to extend the meeting by a specified period of time (e.g., 15 minutes).

A motion is necessary if Council wants to extend the meeting for that evening.

## **19. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

If a School Councillor has a real or perceived financial or other vested interest in a matter being considered before Council, that Councillor:

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

## 20. AGENDA AND NOTES

The agenda, minutes from the previous meeting and any notes for the meeting, such as sub-committee reports, Principal's report, will be distributed to all Councillors, at least 5 business days before the following council meeting.

Requests for any agenda items and associated papers also need to be distributed 5 business days before the meeting. Such requests should be forwarded to both the School Principal and the School Council President or nominee.

Business arising from previous minutes and all sub-committee recommendations will be itemised in the agenda.

## 21. MINUTES

All decisions of Council shall be recorded as minutes. Also included in the minutes are the dates and times of the meeting, those present and apologies, and an overview of outcomes and future actions.

Minutes of every meeting will be distributed to all members by the Friday following the meeting. 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 chaired the meeting. Business arising from the minutes is dealt with after the minutes have been confirmed.

## 22. SCHOOL COUNCIL PRINCIPLES

School Councillors will at all times behave in a civil and respectful manner. Councillors will promote:

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

*These principles provide an area of focus during the School Council Induction program.*

Additionally, School Council members are encouraged to:

- Prepare for the School Council role and each meeting (e.g., read all tabled documents, complete school council governance and other relevant training);
- Express their views at the meeting.
- Make an effort to listen carefully and to understand other members' views.
- Ask questions and develop mutual learning.
- Think about what is best for the community as a whole and not just any one part of it; and
- Offer a different opinion as a way to learn more about an issue and to, ultimately, make a wiser group decision.

## 23. CODE OF CONDUCT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The Williamstown Primary School Council will operate under the principles of the WPS Community Code of Conduct. We will follow the Department of Education guidelines for addressing concerns and complaints within School Council, as outlined in the

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy>

## 24. RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- For further information or clarification refer to: *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* S.R. No. 61/2007 Part 3—Government School Councils

- For access to key information and documents for council members, including the School Council self-assessment tool and School Council training: Department of Education website: *School councils*.

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-training/policy>

## 25. REVIEW AND DOCUMENT HISTORY

This document is due for formal review in March 2025 although it may be changed at any time as required after discussion with School Council and the Principal or if guidelines change.

### Document History

Version Approval Date	Summary of changes	VRQA Requirement	DE Mandated Policy	School Council Input
May 2012	New document	N/A	N/A	Yes
May 2016	Updated	N/A	N/A	Yes
April 2017	Updated	N/A	N/A	Yes
March 2018	Updated	N/A	N/A	Yes
December 2018	Reviewed	N/A	N/A	Yes
March 2020	Reviewed	N/A	Yes	Yes
March 2022	Updated	N/A	Yes	Yes
March 2023	Updated	N/A	Yes	Yes
June 2023	Updated	N/A	Yes	Yes
March 2024	Updated	N/A	Yes	Yes

## Suitability Check Flowchart for Schools

