



## ASCIV Response Paper to:

The VCEC School Inquiry

Making the Grade: Improving governance and accountability in the school system

June 2013

## Preamble

ASCIV welcomes the opportunity to provide a position on the governance proposals as outlined in Chapter 6-12. It is important to note that the position is reflective of the membership of the Board that has as part of its membership school principals, (current and retired) current school council presidents and representation from the corporate business sector who have long standing relationships with schools. The commentary provided within the summary is representative of the experiences of the Board.

Victoria has a long and successful experience of local autonomy of schools and a one council - one school model. ASCIV believes that this one size fits all approach is no longer viable, in particular in meeting the needs of small schools and those schools wishing to enter into governance arrangements beyond simple coalitions.

Our overall view on the governance in schools, at the moment, is that it is varied in success from examples of high performance and high functionality with a strong sense of direction and purpose, to councils that require the support of comprehensive training portfolios and support mechanisms. In particular the resource expenditure on interventions far outweighs that expended on training and prevention. Much of this "heavy lifting" falls to the poorly resourced associations.

There is consensus amongst board members that there is a need for professional development in the area of school council management and function that is multi-faceted. Indeed, we would go so far as to say that improving school governance through better selection and training of school councillors might lie at the heart of focusing council attention on improving student outcomes.

The Board shows preference to a differentiated model of governance that allows for flexibility of operation without prescribing to a 'one size fits all' mandate.

A review of the current structure and limitations placed on schools by the current council schedules is immediately required.

ASCIV believes that a move in the Governance mode from "participatory democracy" to "Policy Governance" ref: J. Carver 1999 would provide more active engagement of councillors in setting direction and outcomes for schools. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that a change in governance level will result in the desired increase in student learning outcomes. Work by Hattie and others show that governance is a low level contributor to improved learning outcomes for students.

ASCIV requests that a detailed examination of the size, structure and purpose of governing bodies be undertaken, to establish an effective and efficient governance model.

ASCIV is committed to the principle of subsidiarity. A task force, including the stakeholders, should be established to determine exactly which functions are best delivered at a school level, the middle level (if adopted) and the central level.

ASCIV has concerns that a middle layer of Governance has the potential to grow its own bureaucracy and could possibly stifle innovation in our schools through a conservative approach to governance and management.

ASCIV asks that consideration be given to, at a minimum that, the current support associations being funded adequately to provide training and evaluative services or the establishment of a purposed "School Council Support and Development Agency" tasked to provide training and evaluative services to School Councils.

Our detailed responses to each of the recommendations follow:

## Draft recommendation 6.1

### ASCIV's position

ASCIV agrees that a reduction in the complexities of Principal accountabilities, which should be simplified, would be an advantage.

The current four year review and strategic planning cycle is working well in many schools. A five year school review cycle does not appear to be optimal in all cases, and a number of high performing schools would prefer a four year cycle. Further in the event of a new Principal taking over a school, there should be the flexibility for deviating from a set format of review. This would allow the incoming principal to request a full review of the school and ensure that the principals performance cycle is tied to the cycle of the school.

## Draft recommendation 6.2

### ASCIV's position

ASCIV generally favours a reduction on the burden on Principals and School Councils and a reduction in the number of DEECD policies with which schools need to comply would be an improvement. ASCIV favours generic policies and where appropriate these should be capable of being adapted to take account of local circumstances. For example, at present all schools are required to have an "investment" policy. Having provided advice to schools on this matter, we would assert that the policy document is almost universally the same.

The summary page suggestion on the schools policy is a sound idea. Indeed the current DEECD website is almost unworkably complex.

ASCIV agrees with greater flexibility for principals over the Student Resources Package and individual schools receiving cash instead of centrally provided programs. As a matter of urgency, a task force should be set up consisting of principals, stakeholders and senior public servants with extensive knowledge in this area to determine which funds can be best allocated to schools.

ASCIV agrees with this recommendation and recommends as a matter of urgency, the establishment of a taskforce to identify and verify the reduction of red tape.

## Draft recommendation 6.3

### ASCIV's position

ASCIV agrees with the introduction of a Balanced Scorecard management system, which will be a great improvement on the current methodology. Again, this should be developed by a panel of principals and eminent researchers in the field.

Extensive training will need to be available to all Principal Class Employees and School Council Presidents to enable them to be conversant with the required outcomes and processes.

ASCIV would support the Balanced Scorecard management system for teacher and staff development under the same conditions as above.

ASCIV cautions against between school comparisons on educational outcomes, because cohort numbers in most government schools are too low to produce meaningful and reliable comparisons. Margaret Wu, The University of Melbourne, has explained how and why the use of assessment data is justified between systems, states, regions and networks, but **not** schools.

We would support the timely provision of information about the Balanced Scorecard to all people affected by it.

## Draft recommendation 6.4

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV does not support the relaxation of the requirement that Principals are registered teachers. The definition of “Instructional Leadership” needs to be specified clearly.

ASCIV does not accept that the development or adoption of middle level boards leads to improved learning outcomes and asks for clear evidence that there is a causal relationship.

ASCIV finds it difficult to sustain an argument about the importance of the role of middle level in the government school sector, when the government has reduced the importance of the role and substantially reduced support resources for this tier.

There is clear evidence regarding the example of schools in low socio economic areas improving results more effectively and at a greater level when the resources are put into schools. There is not a demonstrated connection between a change in governance arrangements and improved student achievement.

Two schools with similar socio-economic backgrounds, size, dynamic leadership, reflective practice, vigorous feedback, on site professional learning can get completely different outcomes. The school with a greater allocation of resourcing for additional teacher support and effective intervention is most likely do better in improving outcomes.

## Draft recommendation 6.5

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV does not support this draft recommendation and believes that it is highly desirable for Principals of Special settings have a qualification in Special Education. If the reason here is lack of candidature, then the DEECD should improve access to special education courses for aspirant principals.

We question the efficacy of talent spotting and ask for evidence to be provided that this approach will work effectively.

## Draft recommendation 6.6

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV asks for the provision of empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of talent spotting. Where else in the world has this occurred and what defines whether or not a person has this potential?

ASCIV agrees with the provision of strong support for leaders in the making with a comprehensive induction program, mentors and ongoing support and advice.

ASCIV agrees with making available guidance and case studies to facilitate the sharing of leadership development strategies across schools, and revising performance and development processes to enhance incentives and accountability for developing leadership across the school system. However, incentives need to be clarified as do what the accountabilities are before we would be convinced that this is a strategy likely to succeed.

## Draft Recommendation 7.1

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV welcomes a robust accountability system to ensure all teachers are accountable for high competency. Much work has already been done on the Balanced Scorecard approach as part of a Commonwealth Government trial into a performance management system and perhaps elements of the trial could be useful in drafting a framework.

High quality teaching and learning is the “core of teachers work and evidence from schools” could support the intention of improving student performance at each school.

ASCIV calls for the term to be clearly defined and strongly associated with the AITSL standards. ASCIV questions what would this evidence look like across all schools in particular consistency of interpretation. We also question the capacity of schools to deliver on this aspect. Ref: Grattan Report Ben Jensen 2010.

ASCIV recommends that it is clearly established that Expert Teachers and Leading teachers will have specific accountabilities to achieve, associated with the development of less experienced teachers.

The bureaucracy will need to give specific guidelines for schools within the Schools “compact” and provide a pathway for teachers in schools to be accountable for this work. Development of templates and acceptable evidence needs to be undertaken with the professional associations.

Clarity is needed around teachers who do not meet the standards. The question arises, is this professional misconduct or unsatisfactory performance?

## Draft Recommendation 7.2

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV is of the opinion that all forms of data discussed will equip teachers to inform about judgement for student plans for individual improvement. ASCIV also agrees with the position of non NAPLAN year testing should include all indicators that can measure growth during a school year and include all year level teachers in a school to provide classroom observations support.

ASCIV supports the adaptation of the Students Attitudes to School Survey as it will provide valuable information about teacher perceptions and can also assist in part of the data collected to support teacher performance.

ASCIV further suggests that any surveys used to measure attitudes or opinions need to be psychometrically evaluated and validated.

## Draft recommendation 7.3

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV supports the recommendation

## Draft recommendation 7.4

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV asserts that the Principal is the leader of the school and should be the decision maker to allow for remuneration for highly skilled teachers to be paid at a level that can be accommodated in the SRP, not the existing bureaucratic processes within finance guidelines.

## Draft recommendation 7.5

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV supports the recommendation

## Draft recommendation 8.1

### **ASCIV's position**

The ASCIV Board agrees in principle with all recommendations in 8.1

The ASCIV Board holds that schools need greater flexibility to use selection criteria more closely related to the needs of the school. The current restriction is unnecessarily bureaucratic.

The current mandate to use the Recruitment On-line system restricts applications from a wider field of candidates and imposes limits on type and scope of documents that may be submitted to schools. It is based on an archaic model of selection and should be discontinued.

“Take steps to inform” is loosely phrased and this could be as little as a sub-note on a website. ASCIV requires:

- Detailed training for school councillors.
- A well timed and focussed advertising campaign including the use of social.
- A number of “good school checklists” including DEECD publications, provide questions for parents to ask principals about class size. DEECD documents and publications should be immediately changed to refer to teacher: pupil ratios.

ASCIV calls for detailed and mandatory training for all school councillors.

The wording of “current arrangements in Catholic School sector” lacks clarity and should spell out exactly what is needed. Such as part time work may be spread over several days in the working week and a minimum number of hours per day are specified eg 1 hour.

Consultation needs to be explicitly explained. The definition provided by Dr Peter Honey may be useful here. “Consulting isn’t the same as collaborating. When you invite someone to collaborate it is whole hearted invitation for them to join you as equal partners in the decision making process..... Consulting someone however invites less involvement on their behalf. In effect, you seek their opinions, advice and guidance but reserve the right to ignore the lot and make up your own mind.....”

The current fortnightly requirement for consultation is onerous and often used to delay effective decision making. The number of and type of items needing consultation is far too broad: class size, teaching hours, anything to do with the day to day work of teachers, etc.

## Draft recommendation 8.2

### **ASCIV's position**

The ASCIV Board agrees with this recommendation but finds it limited in scope when referring to the original request. The advice and support provided needs to be at the highest level and include detailed briefing responses, advice on dealing with Union representatives and accompanying the Principal to the Merit Board hearings.

The ASCIV board believes that in the cases of serious misconduct the matter is dealt with by an independent senior DEECD person, skilled in investigative inquiry processes.

The ASCIV board believes that the current process of “personal” grievance leads to frivolous complaints. Matters before the Merit Board should be based on process not personal matters. It should be noted that similar bodies do not exist in other states.

The ASCIV board believe that principals should have the right to conduct professional learning during school holiday breaks and further have greater flexibility in the use of study leave and study tours that do not require approval by regional or central authorities; these could be approved by the board.

The requirements for staff to be trained in such items as first aid and anaphylaxis, whilst essential for OHS reasons are not central to the professional learning program of the school and should be conducted and funded by the central authority on a state-wide basis during school holidays.. By doing so we ensure that school professional learning funds are directed at improving classroom instruction.

## Draft recommendation 9.1

### **ASCIV’s position**

This may be achieved in the current model. It has previously been achieved through networks. There are a number of smaller schools which would greatly benefit from a model of governance, that is reflective of a membership that draws upon the expertise and experience of many key stakeholders, where consistency in policy and the decision making processes that drive student learning improvement, facilities and finances are paramount to success.

Mid-size to larger schools, which have little trouble recruiting a council and run effectively and efficiently, would pose the argument that the current model works well for them in their local context.

ASCIV requires a review of all services that may be considered as cluttering up the role of the principal and how this might be effectively undertaken at the “middle” level of governance without a growth in the bureaucracy.

Improving partnerships can be done in the current model or with some minor constitutional changes to accommodate further co-option of members into the configuration of school councils.

## Draft recommendation 9.2

### **ASCIV’s position**

We agree in principle, it must come with the pre-cursor of clearly defining what is worth keeping in the principal role description and a clear set of accountabilities that are measurable. As identified by consultation with the appropriate professional organizations.

ASCIV requires a definition of the clause “any actions necessary” and must abide by the provisions of Fairwork Australia and the enterprise bargaining agreement as published from time to time.

ASCIV requires the employment model defined and if a move from the principal employed by DEECD and enters a contract with DEECD, then performance issues that are deemed in breach of the role and contractual obligation must be monitored, addressed and determined by the employer. There is no place for dual accountability to both DEECD and to the Board.

ASCIV believes that highly trained and well supported principals are a key to successful governance practices and school improvement.

If the employment mode is to change, then the Council will need industrial relations and recruitment training and high level HR support.

There will be a need to view and review multiple sources of data and determine suitable benchmarks that clearly identify a school's performance. This would have to be determined and negotiated with the industrial associations who represent principals and the employer.

## Draft recommendation 9.3

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV is highly supportive of comprehensive training opportunities for Principals as Executive Officers of School Councils, members of School Council and the wider learning community as outlined in 9.4

This recommendation presumes a move to a federated model for all schools. ASCIV is not committed to a one size fits all approach to school governance.

ASCIV requests a transparent cost benefit analysis of multi school boards versus single school councils. This review is essential and it is essential that principals and council presidents contribute to this at all levels.

## Draft recommendation 9.4

### **ASCIV's position**

A more strategic focus, can be enhanced in the new model or in a differentiated model, as previously stated, there is a need for rigour in training on Governance, HR- particularly employment, financial management and community relations, ensuring the enhancement of the Executive Officer and council members.

The implementation of high level training for Councils is a matter of urgency. We believe that ASCIV and the other professional organizations are best placed to advise on and assist with the delivery of School Council training.

A high level process for the monitoring of Council performance is an imperative regardless of the governance model and should be linked to the training of Councils. ASCIV is well placed to provide advice on this process.

## Draft recommendation 10.1

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV favours the collection of the place of residence information for students enrolled in schools.

However, collection of information for students not accepted should only be from select entry schools or schools with a DEECD approved school ceiling for enrolments. A case could be made for collecting data regarding students with disabilities not accepted for enrolment.

Schools that are not select entry, or without DEECD approved ceilings should be accepting all enrolments.

Principals and Council members may require training under on the provisions of the Equal Opportunity Act

## Draft recommendation 11.1

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV board agrees in principle with recommendation 11.1

As a matter of urgency the term “default autonomy” should be delineated and defined. A “One size fits all”, model is not acceptable. There needs to provision for flexibility to especially accommodate for the smaller schools or those who wish to formally federate.

A 10 year review of the autonomy regime appears to be an overly long time. ASCIV recommends bringing this closer in line with current school review procedures that are every 4 years.

ASCIV support the performance reporting and monitoring regime, with the balanced scorecard to identify schools where disadvantaged students are not meeting the required standards. We would wish to see this regime supported by funding to provide preventative and intervention teaching practices.

## Draft recommendation 12.1

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV Board agrees with Draft recommendation 12.1

ASCIV welcomes the opportunity for schools to be able to seek private sector partnerships/services that will:

- be economically viable.
- provide enhanced educational services
- improve school infrastructure and the learning environment.

A review of all centrally provided services should be undertaken to ensure value for money. Where this can't be proved, monies identified should be allocated directly to schools via the SRP.

## Draft recommendation 12.2

### **ASCIV's position**

ASCIV supports provision for an independent, public review of the default autonomy regime and its ability to improve student learning outcomes.

ASCIV supports a much shorter review timeline of four years, enabling the ability to implement any required changes to the default autonomy regime well before 10 years.

In presenting this position members of the ASCIV Board would like to thank the Commission for their consideration of our views.

Graeme Lane  
Chief Executive Officer  
Association of School Councils in Victoria.