

# ***How does this decision affect student outcomes?*** **The ASCIV Principles of Good Governance**

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## **1 Introduction**

First and foremost School Councils are responsible and accountable for student outcomes. ASCIV offers the following paper on this premise, and on the premise that all Council decisions should be made within this framework.

This paper seeks to provide a best practice model for the governance of state schools in Victoria. It does not offer differing models of governance, but argues that, whatever Model(s) might be adopted for Victorian schools, the basic principles of good governance remain the same.

This paper will examine the nature of the school community and the School Council, the relationship between the self-managing school and learning outcomes, governance as a capacity of self-management and the principles of good governance.

## The School Community

The school community, as in other communities, is constructed of human relationships. It represents a microcosm of the society into which our children will become “...full political, civil and social citizens...” (1)

French sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that “...to become attached to society, the child must feel in it something that is real, alive and powerful” (2)

The function of the school community, therefore, is to provide a context that is relevant, robust and educative for the development of the future citizen.

Durkheim argued further that the school serves a function that cannot be provided by families or peer groups as the family is based on kinship relationships and the peer group on personal choice. “...Membership of society is based on neither of the principles of kinship nor personal choice. Individuals must learn to cooperate with those who are neither their kin nor their friends. The school provides a context where these skills can be learned...” (3)

It is society in miniature, a model of the social system. In school, children must interact with other members of the school community in terms of a fixed set of rules. This experience prepares them for interacting with members of society as a whole in terms of society's rules.

As a model of the social system, therefore, school community members should model the behavioural standards expected by that society. Principals, teachers and parents should model the behaviour that is expected of future citizens and that is acceptable to the wider community.

## The School Council

A school community operates to provide a specific service, that is, the provision of a curriculum that will provide the most appropriate and best outcomes for its students. It operates within a State Government legislative framework, it has its own regulations, that is, Codes of Conduct for its members, and it has its own punitive and discipline policies.

The school community also has its own governing body, the School Council, which is responsible for recognising and meeting the needs and expectations of the whole school community. Whilst a discrete community, the school community, as represented by the School Council, also has a responsibility to the wider State community in that it is responsible for the appropriate expenditure of public monies.

The School Council, therefore, should also model the best practice behaviour and standards that reflect the best practice behaviour and standards expected by, and acceptable to, the wider political (4) and business communities.

ASCIV bases its framework for good governance on the five principles of good corporate governance as set down by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (5)

## The self-managing school and learning outcomes

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) draws the link between governance and Outcomes *"...From our experience, we know that poor governance leads to poor outcomes for the sport from the grass-roots to the elite levels..."* (6)

Just as the ASC has found links between governance and outcomes in sporting organizations, so too have links now been established between parental involvement in schools and learning outcomes and self-managed schools and student learning outcomes.

OECD research has found that *"...close cooperation between family and school helps children to learn more effectively..."* Evidence shows that involvement of parents in policy making and school governance *"...can raise achievement levels..."* (7)

Professor Brian Caldwell, University of Melbourne, draws on research conducted in Victoria that finds that self-managed schools can show improved student learning outcomes.

Eight primary schools that expressed a willingness to participate in case studies following the survey of principals in 1996, were invited to name up to three areas of the curriculum where improvement in student learning had occurred and where they believed evidence was available to substantiate their claim.

Four schools were selected, reflecting diversity in size, setting and curriculum area where evidence of improvement was claimed. A wide range of curriculum areas was covered. Findings revealed that schools could cite evidence that their efforts have led to improved outcomes for students. (8)

Caldwell suggests that *"...structural re-arrangements are but a pre-condition if there is to [be an] impact on learning outcomes. Whether there is impact depends on making links across several levels to reach the classroom and the student..."* (9)

Whilst all seven findings by Caldwell have implications for School Councils, two findings hold particular implications for School Councils and good governance.

*2. There will be clear, explicit and planned links, either direct or indirect, between each of the capacities that come with self-management and activities in the school that relate to learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching.*

*7. A key task for principals and other school leaders is to help make effective the links between capacities for self-management and learning outcomes.* (10)

Caldwell argues that *"...the means are at hand to create a system of public schools that will provide a high quality of education for all students..."* The challenge lies in *"...how to put the pieces together..."* (11)

## Governance as a capacity of self-management

ASCIV believes that the School Council, as the governing body of the school and therefore one of the capacities of self-management, plays a primary and essential role in *“...putting the pieces together...”*

Within the framework of a council’s designated powers:

- *Determining the general educational policy, goals and priorities of the school*
- *Developing the school charter*
- *Monitoring and evaluation the performance of the school*
- *Reporting annually to the school community and DE&T*
- *Approving and monitoring the school budget*
- *Ensuring that all monies coming into the hands of the council are expended for proper purposes, (12)*

the School Council that exercises good governance can ensure the best outcomes for its students.

## Guiding Principles of Good Governance

The OECD principles encompass the following:

- *The rights of shareholders*
- *The equitable treatment of shareholders*
- *The role of stakeholders in corporate governance*
- *Disclosure and transparency*
- *The responsibilities of the board*

By embracing the OECD principles of governance as a framework, and by drawing explicit and direct links between Council decisions and student outcomes, ASCIV believes that Victorian School Councils can demonstrate world’s best practice in state school governance.

ASCIV also believes that the importance of the governing role of School Councils should be recognised in a change of title from “School Council” to “School Board”.

## 1. Clear delineation of governance roles

Victoria has gone further than any other Australian State in its shift towards self-management. Caldwell argues that it is now the *“...largest system of public education anywhere to have decentralized as much as 90 per cent of its state budget to schools for local decision-making, being 93.7 per cent in 2001...”* (13)

Monitoring the expenditure of government allocated funds (the taxpayers' money), as well as all other funds into a school, therefore, is a crucial aspect of the role of the governing body, the School Board.

An understanding of the relationship between governance and management is crucial, therefore, to good governance.

The concept of management and governance can be a difficult issue for both Boards and Principals to come to grips with. The governance/management interface is not clearly defined. The legislative framework is both prescriptive and permissive, and as such the self-managing model allows for considerable variation of application and implementation. There is no right answer, only *“...best practice.”*

Board members, in conjunction with their Principal, have the unique opportunity to define their governance/ management roles according to the expectations of their communities, and in the best interests of their students.

Successful schools are characterised by the fact that both the Board and Principal demonstrate that they have a very clear understanding of their different roles and responsibilities by functioning as a partnership team in a business-like manner.

- School Boards are responsible for organisational outcomes.
- Principals are responsible for organisational processes to achieve those outcomes.

It is ASCIV's experience that Boards, without a clear understanding of the governing and operational capacities of the school, govern ineffectively.

Keeping in mind that Board members, apart from the Executive Officer, are volunteers, (14) ASCIV draws on recent research and best practice relating to volunteer organizations. It is now widely accepted that for an organization to ensure success, it must have *“...a well stated goal, a focus, and a clear description of the role and requirements for the volunteers”* (15)

## 2. Effective governance processes

The Board must agree and document clear policies and processes for good governance and build a policy review process into the School Charter.

### 3. Effective governance controls

The School Board sets the vision and direction for the school through the school charter and oversees and monitors charter implementation. The Board sets the strategic direction of the school, identifies risk areas and makes adjustments as necessary. In monitoring the School Charter's implementation, the Board must:

- use up-to-date externally referenced information;
- use data to identify strengths and weaknesses; and
- closely analyse, continually monitoring progress towards targets.

School Boards should also seek expert advice outside the board if the required expertise does not exist within the board. For example, if financial expertise is unavailable within the board, then the board should be directed to seek appropriate advice from the broader community.

### 4. Governance improvement

A Board's performance must be regularly assessed and an effective Board and individual Board member professional development program be in place. ASCIV believes that all capacities of the self-managed school should be assessed, including the School Board. This should be included in Annual Reports and in the Triennial Review process.

It is now accepted practice that volunteers should have organization-specific training that recognises the value of the volunteer to the organization. During the International Year of Volunteers, 2001, it was announced that volunteers contribute 430 million hours of unpaid work per year. The value of this contribution was encapsulated in the announcement that *"...it is only right that we [the Federal Government] reward their selfless efforts by making an investment in their skills and abilities through practical support and quality training..."* (16)

ASCIV has long recognised the value of Professional Development for School Board members. If Board members are to make the informed decisions that will lead to improved outcomes for students, they must have the knowledge and tools with which to make those decisions. The DE&T also recognises the need for ongoing training for Board members. *Making the Partnership Work: Rules and Procedures* states that: *"...The President and executive officer are responsible for ensuring that new council members receive appropriate induction. All members should be provided with access to ongoing training and development programs. To this end an annual allocation should be made in the School Council's budget for training and development..."* (17)

It is ASCIV's experience, however, that only those Boards following good governance principles have an allocation in the budget that allows for, amongst other items, provision for ongoing training.

## 5. Member Responsiveness

The Board should, at all times, act in the best interests of, and reflect the needs of, all stakeholders of the school community in order to achieve the best outcomes for its students. Stakeholders can be the School Board, students, teachers, management, parents, local and broader community organizations, the DE&T and other education providers or organizations that can impact on, or contribute to, maximising student outcomes.

The School Board and its procedures, policies and decisions must be transparent, accountable and responsible to its community. Consultation with the community should be meaningful and relevant with guidelines for consultation processes set out in the Good Governance Manual.

School Boards should also seek appropriate representation on the board that reflects the diversity of its stakeholders.

## Conclusion

Whatever the context, adherence to the five principles:

- Clear delineation of governance roles
- Effective governance processes
- Effective governance controls
- Governance improvement, and
- Member responsiveness

is essential for best practice governance.

The principles have been recognised by the OECD for the corporate sector, have been adopted in the non-corporate sector and can easily be applied to the education sector: State, Independent, Catholic, Islamic, Jewish, primary, secondary and tertiary.

The principles are founded in common sense and provide a framework that will allow the best decisions to be made for the best student outcomes.

- (1) The definition of citizenship, as entailing three sets of rights, civil, political and social, is based on the work of British theorist, T.H.Marshall. T.H.Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1950
- (2) E. Durkheim, *Moral Education*, Free Press, Glencoe, 1961 (1925) p.275, cited in Haralambos, M. van Kreiken, R., Smith, P. and Holborn, M (eds.) *Sociology: themes and perspectives Australian edition*, Longman, Melbourne, 1996, p.209
- (3) Haralambos et al, p.209
- (4) *Political communities here mean Local, State and Commonwealth government bodies.*
- (5) OECD Principles of Corporate Governance, 1999
- (6) C.Ryan, *Sporting bodies urged to practise good governance*, Australian Sports Commission, 2002
- (7) *Parents as Partners in Schooling*, OECD,
- (8) Brian Caldwell, *A Theory of Learning in the Self-Managed School*,
- (9) *ibid.*
- (10) *ibid.*
- (11) *ibid.*
- (12) *Making the partnership Work: Roles & Responsibilities*, DE&T, Victoria, 2001, p.19
- (13) Caldwell
- (14) See Appendix 1 *School Councils in Victoria and Volunteers*
- (15) R.L.Head, *Commitment and Requirements for a Volunteer Organisation*, June, 2000. [www.suite101.com](http://www.suite101.com)
- (16) *\$8.1 Million Investment To Boost The Skills of Australia's Volunteers*, A. Vanstone, Minister for Family and Community Services, October, 2001
- (17) *Making the Partnership Work: Rules and Procedures*, DE&T, p.25

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