



# You're on a School Council... Now What?

A COGSO guide to Roles and Responsibilities for NT  
Government School Councils

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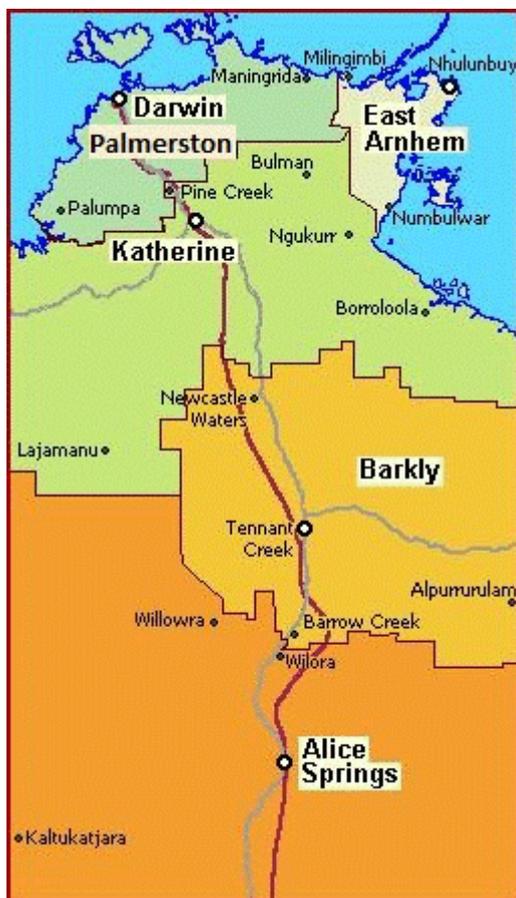
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## About COGSO

The Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations INC. (COGSO) was founded in 1971 as a Northern Territory (NT) wide body to represent the interests of School Councils, students, parents and school communities in NT Government schools. COGSO became an affiliate of the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) the same year and has taken an active part in representing the interests of parents of children in Government education at the national level since that time.

One of the main aims of COGSO is to promote parent participation in education and to work for improvements to the Government education system in the NT for the benefit of all students.

COGSO has set up 6 Regional Councils across the Territory, the East Arnhem Region, the Darwin Region, the Palmerston and Rural Region, the Katherine Region, the Barkly Region and the Southern Region, (as shown on the diagram below).



# 1. Welcome to your School Council

COGSO welcomes your participation in the education process of not only your child, but all children at your school, and all Government schools in general.

Other documents you should have copies of are:

- Your school's Annual Report
- Your School Council's Constitution
- Your school's Strategic Improvement Plan (Strat Plan)
- Your school's Annual Operational Plan (AOP)

## 2. Parent Involvement and Participation in NT Schools

All parents have the right to seek membership on their School Council. Each Council is incorporated under the *Education Act* and has a Constitution which requires the approval of the Minister for Education. This Constitution sets the membership structure of the Council and the terms of office of its members. A School Council elected under an approved Constitution may assume relevant functions conferred on it under the *Education Act (the Act)* or the *Education (College and School Councils) Regulations*.

Through the School Council, the community has the opportunity to work with other parents, teachers and students in providing relevant input to decisions being made by the school and DoE.

Ultimately, this partnership has the potential to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of children in our schools.

## 3. Roles and Responsibilities

### 3.1 Parents

Parents have a right to be involved in their children's schooling and to participate in the development of education policies at all levels of the education system.

Parents have a responsibility to:

- show an active interest in their children's schooling
- cooperate with school staff, other parents and children in the interests of their children's education
- keep staff informed of their children's progress and significant events which may affect their children's learning
- raise concerns promptly and appropriately
- be supportive of agreed school policies.

### 3.2 Teachers and Support Staff

The teacher's main role is the delivery of the education curriculum in the classroom. Teachers have representation on School Councils and decision making groups within schools.

In relation to parents, teachers have a responsibility to:

- build good relationships with parents and students
- keep parents informed about children's progress
- listen to parents and address concerns
- inform parents about curriculum and school policies
- provide balanced professional advice to parents
- encourage parent participation and involvement
- support school policies

### 3.3 Principals

The Principal is the representative of the Chief Executive of DoE, and as such is the Chief Executive of the school. The Principal is responsible for educational leadership and sound management practice and is required to ensure the implementation of Departmental policy. He or she is responsible for staff allocation and supervision.

In relation to parents the Principal has a responsibility to:

- consult with the school parents, staff and wider community and, where appropriate, students in the formulation of school directions
- support the School Council as the group which determines the broad direction of the school
- support staff and parents in the decision making process
- address parent concerns
- serve on School Council as an ex officio member (member who is there by virtue of office)
- communicate with and distribute information to all members of the school community.

### **3.4 Other areas of DoE**

Departmental personnel in central and regional offices have a responsibility to:

- promote the continued development of parental involvement and participation in schools throughout the NT
- provide guidance, support and training opportunities to school communities, where appropriate
- communicate with and provide relevant information to school communities
- support continued parent representation at all system levels, such as the NT Board of Studies
- value and acknowledge the efforts of parent volunteers.

### **3.5 School Councils**

The main functions of School Council are set out in the *Education Act*. School staff can be delegated by the Principal to assist the Council in meeting its legal responsibilities.

Under *the Act* the Council has a responsibility to:

- advise the Principal about the educational needs of the community, e.g. through the Strategic Improvement and Annual planning process
- advise the Principal about building links between parents, community groups and the school
- access and advise on the physical needs of the school
- determine the community use of school facilities
- determine, through the budgeting process, how the school's money will be spent
- oversee work on buildings and grounds being carried out at the school
- employ appropriate staff
- draft the context statement for the Principal and some senior staff to be used in the recruitment process
- chair or have a parent representative on selection panels for such positions

In addition School Councils will:

- determine broad directions for the school with the Principal and staff
- encourage and welcome the participation and involvement of all parents and staff
- share information about the Council's work.

#### **3.5.1 A School Council is**

- a body corporate (similar to a company but composed of unpaid members)
- able to sue and be sued (when carrying out its functions under the legislation)

#### **3.5.2 A School Council must**

- meet not less than eight times in a calendar year (including the Annual General Meeting (AGM)) maintain an account at an approved bank, have the account audited by 27 February each year and present an audited financial statement annually
- conduct an AGM and report to the school community on its activities once a year, before 15 March

### **3.5.3 A School Council member must**

- disclose his or her interest at the first meeting of the Council at which a contract or arrangement is first taken into consideration if the member is financially interested in the contractor familiarise themselves with the School Council Constitution
- act with discretion when dealing with issues of a confidential nature

### **3.5.4 A School Council may**

[*Education Act 71C, Functions of School Councils*]

- draw up and approve the annual financial budget of proposed expenditure
- take part in the selection of teaching staff for promotional vacancies through local selection panel
- inquire into and identify educational needs of its community
- encourage parent participation and community involvement in the school
- arrange and administer cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts
- advise the Principal in relation to job descriptions for executive teachers and school support staff
- run or lease the canteen
- allow use of the school buildings or grounds outside of school hours, for the benefit of the local community, subject to terms and conditions determined by the Council in accordance with DoE policy
- determine the amount of voluntary contributions, if any, to be asked of parents
- make by-laws and rules that are consistent with *the Act or Regulations*

The School Council may delegate some Council functions and responsibilities to others, such as the school Administration Manager or Administrative staff. These functions may include the purchase of goods, ensuring facilities and equipment are kept in good state or repair, planning for extensions/improvements to buildings and grounds and overseeing the organisation of urgent and minor repairs.

### **3.5.5 A School Council must not**

- conduct inquiries or investigations into complaints against teachers, including the Principal
- give instructions to teachers concerning their professional duties, or to employees of the Department in respect of their duties at the school

**The main functions of a School Council are set out in the *Education Act 71C* and are included in the School Council's Constitution.**

In addition, the School Council contributes to the educational functions of the school, i.e. school performance, curriculum development, assessment, review – through a number of means within the school and at a Departmental level.

Now this may seem a little daunting to a parent who is new to the School Council. You may even ask how on earth you are going to be able to help with any of this. Please, read on.

## 4. Structure of School Councils

A School Council may have between five and 19 members. Membership must include parents, teachers and the Principal. No more than one third of the total number of membership on the Council shall be persons employed in a school, as a teacher (including the Principal) within the meaning of the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*.

A Council may also have student representation and may invite up to five additional members who have expertise the Council requires. Generally, a term of office is two years with half of the Council retiring each year. Members may serve for a maximum of three consecutive terms (six years). Only the Principal may serve more. All elected and invited members have voting rights.

In addition, School Councils may establish subcommittees to help carry out various tasks by making recommendations to the Council. These groups are an ideal means of enabling more people to contribute to the work of the school because they can include people who are not Council members. There is no fixed pattern of subcommittees laid down for School Councils. It is a good idea for subcommittees to have their roles and membership reviewed each year after the School Council elections. Subcommittees should provide written reports on their activities to School Council meetings.

### 4.1 School Policy

All Government schools should have written policies and it is the School Council's responsibility to determine what those policies are in consultation with the school community. Through the parent handbook or prospectus, information about the school, the way it functions and school policies, can be made available to all members of the school community. School policies are separate from, but complementary to, school and DoE policy and procedures.

School policies may include:

- whole school matters, e.g. student behaviour, voluntary parent contributions
- broad organisational matters, e.g. reporting student progress to parents, adoption of particular strategies such as family groupings, team teaching or vertical timetabling
- priorities for the use of resources

School Councils are also responsible for ensuring that policies and practices are regularly reviewed and are consistent with Ministerial and Departmental policies. Policies should be prepared with advice from the school staff and in consultation with the general school community.

### 4.2 Budget and Finance

NT DoE makes grants to School Councils twice a year for the administration of schools.

The *Education Act* states the Council is to ensure that all money provided to the School Council is expended for the purposes it was allocated to that school.

The most effective method of carrying out this responsibility is to develop a sound budgeting and Annual and Strategic Improvement planning process. This should be open to input and scrutiny by the school community.

All resources available to the school should be taken into account and all the areas of proposed expenditure should be considered in light of the school policy, AOP and Strat Plan. The Council should identify priority policy areas that need to be reviewed in the future.

**The school's annual budget is formally approved by the School Council.**

As part of the School Council's policy making process it is useful for School Council to set guidelines for the amounts of money which can be committed for expenditure without reference to the School Council.

The School Council Treasurer provides information at each meeting about:

- how much money has been received for all sources outlined in the budget
- how much has been spent in each area in comparison with the budget
- the amount of money in each school account (including investments)
- details of any area where expenditure varies from the budget or where the budget needs to be adjusted.

If necessary the budget can be revised during the year to take account of changing circumstances. Many School Councils form a Finance Subcommittee to prepare recommendations on budgetary matters of the School Council.

## 5. The Work of the School Council

The work of the School Council is done in a number of ways.

### 5.1 Whole Council

Some issue can be dealt with at the School Council meetings, the members agreeing or voting to write a letter, contact a person, let a contract, initiate a new idea put forward by stakeholders in the school, or otherwise take action of something.

### 5.2 Standing Committees

Sometimes, however, the issues the Council might want to address might take a longer period of time than one meeting. With this in mind, the Council might decide to establish a number of standing committees and/or task/working groups.

These groups/committees are established to carry out specific tasks of the School Council that are ongoing, for example:

- Finance (which deals with all the finances of the Council)
- Canteen (oversee the operation and offerings of the canteen)
- Fundraising (investigate ideas to raise funds)
- Building and Grounds Maintenance (to plan for and oversee, major and minor works, and use of buildings)
- Pre-School Organisation
- Strategic Improvement Plan
- Annual Operational Plan
- Community Liaison/Relations
- Student Representative Council
- Policy Review/Assessment

Membership of any committee might comprise of representatives of the school community – one or two parents and teachers, and maybe a student . An explanation of the role of the committee and its expectations could be included in the school newsletter, inviting members of the community to nominate their interest in participating on a committee. This is an excellent opportunity to use the expertise available in the community. It also allows those members to contribute to the operations of the school without the commitment and responsibility of being a School Council member.

These committees usually meet weekly, monthly or as required. They should report back to the School Council. It is expected that they would first seek the ratification of the School Council before action can be taken on their decisions.

### **5.3 Roles of Committees**

Committees carry out specific tasks for the School Council. The role of the committee, and the necessity or it, should be reviewed regularly. Below are some committees and a list of tasks (by no means exhaustive) that they might perform for their Council.

#### **5.3.1 Finance**

- sets the budget for the coming year, after consultation with staff and other interested parties, and in relation to the school's Strat Plan
- oversees the income of the school
- decides on where the funds are to be spent, e.g. putting in submissions for grant funding, minor or major works on school buildings or grounds
- ensure finances are managed in accordance with the *Education Act 71G* and *71H*, and the *Functions 71C (1) (e)*
- identifies additional fundraising required to meet school priorities
- maintain the voluntary parent contributions policy
- refer decision making to the Council

#### **5.3.2 Canteen**

- oversee the running of the canteen
- discuss/review offerings of the canteen
- set prices
- oversee selection and management of staff
- maintain the canteen policy and ensure it reflects the ethos of the school
- refer decision making to the Council

#### **5.3.3 Fundraising**

- suggest ideas for school fundraising
- co-ordinate fundraising events
- work closely with the Finance Committee
- refer decision making to the Council

#### **5.3.4 Building and Grounds Maintenance**

- hire/lease of school buildings to other community groups
- overseeing minor/major works being done in the school grounds
- reviewing of school grounds to see where work (repairs etc.) needs to be done
- refer decision making to the Council

### **5.4 Strategic Improvement Plan and Annual Operational Plan**

The School Council plays a part in setting the goals for the AOP and Strat Plan and must sign off on its approval.

The Council:

- co-ordinates consultation with the whole school community on the development of an AOP for the coming year
- co-ordinates consultation with the whole school community on the development of a Strat Plan for the coming three years
- writes up the draft and final plans
- monitors the AOP monthly
- reviews the Strat Plan annually

Guidelines for committees can be written and attached to the Council's Constitution as an appendix.

## 6. Action or Working Groups

The names for these groups may be different at each individual school, but essentially their work and function is the same.

These groups are established in the short term to investigate a particular issue or organise an event. They meet as often as needed and report to the School Council on their progress, the final recommendation is ratified by the School Council and acted on. Once their task is completed the groups disband.

These might include:

- school birthday celebrations
- organising a series of parent seminars covering aspects of the curriculum
- planning a major school excursion
- carrying out a community project
- new curriculum initiative

These groups might at some stage in the future be re-established.

As in committees, the membership of these groups would come from the wider school community. They might not necessarily consist of entirely of School Council members who are interested in or have expertise in the issue.

## 7. Legal Obligations of a School Council

A School Council is like a body corporate, though made up of unpaid members. It can sue and be sued (when carrying out its functions under the legislation). Incorporation, as a School Council, protects the individual members of the Council. (It should be noted that *Section 71M* of the *Education Act* protects members of incorporated School Councils who act in good faith to carry out the functions of a Council).

The School Council must have a Constitution and abide by it in its work. All Council members should have a copy of their school's Constitution and be familiar with it.

The Council is responsible for the financial running of the school and the correct handling of all monies that come into the school. The accounts must be audited annually.

The Council must, under the NT Archives Service manual, *General Disposal Schedule for School Reports and Storage Procedural Guidelines*, correctly archive all Council records.

## 8. Effective School Councils

School Councils have certain roles and responsibilities to fulfil, each Council will develop its own style of operations to achieve this. What works in one school community may not work for another.

We are becoming more and more aware through readings, professional development, and our own experience, that the future of schooling has strong community focus. A school may well become the hub of the community and its wellbeing.

An effective School Council will develop a culture within the school community which embraces and values all of the community members.

Some characteristics of an effective School Council are:

- Council members have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities

- Council members understand the difference between policy development and review role of Council and the operational implementation and reporting role of the Principal
- Council members see the AOP and Strat Plan as the school's key working document
- Council has clearly defined processes to regularly monitor the implementation of the AOP and Strat Plan
- Council has clearly established processes for developing major policy ensuring that all sections of the community have an opportunity for input
- Council members receive financial reports which they understand and which accurately convey the school's financial situation
- Council's budget is consistent with the goals and priorities of the AOP and Strat Plan
- Council regularly seeks ideas and opinions of the broader school community and reports its business and outcomes to the school community
- Council budgets for and authorises approval for the employment of non-teaching staff and staff for short term projects
- Council consults all sections of the community in developing the school's Code of Conduct etc.
- Each member of the School Council is considered to be, and believes, he or she is an equal partner

## 9. Roles and Responsibilities of School Council Members

Whether you are on Council as a parent, teacher, student or Principal, and are an office bearer or an ordinary member you should be aware of the following:

- each member of a School Council is equally important
- without your presence, the Council may not be able to conduct business, for want of a quorum
- without your watchfulness, the Council may become the instrument of one or two strong personalities instead of a truly representative body
- without your energetic input, a Council may be apathetic and futile

Every Council member should be determined to contribute fully to their School Council.

Regular and prompt attendance at meetings and events is important, but even a regular attendee may just as well be elsewhere if they are not mentally and vocally active during meetings.

When it comes to minutes and reports, do your pre-reading and give thoughtful consideration to them – particularly the Treasurer's report. If there is something you don't understand, or if they contain something you disagree with, speak up. Other members will respect you for it.

Help the Chairperson conduct the meeting effectively by:

- being present
- reading the paperwork
- having reports ready
- being brief and to the point in discussions
- seek collaboration and representativeness
- seek creative ideas

The School Council is a team whose purpose above all else is to serve and promote the interests of the students. Each member should share and contribute. New members should be provided with basic information and encouraged so they can soon feel that they are part of the team.

### 9.1 Chairperson

The word 'Chairman' is the recognised legal term. It does not reflect a gender as the leader of the governing body. Each School Council should make its own decision on this matter.

The Chairperson is appointed by the School Council members.

The Chairperson's duties are to:

- act as the spokesman for the Council, in accordance with the Constitution
- act on Council resolutions
- keep the school community informed of Council decisions and activities
- chair meetings and, together with the Council Secretary, prepare agendas
- familiarise themselves with correspondence, reports and other materials that will be discussed at the meeting
- determine prior to the meeting what should be accomplished
- know the Council's Constitution, policies and legal responsibilities
- understand Council's meeting procedures
- ensure council members receive adequate information, so they can contribute meaningfully to discussion and decision making

The Chairperson is responsible for managing the meeting effectively by:

- starting on time
- ensuring that a quorum is present (in accordance with the Constitution) before declaring the meeting open
- ensuring the minutes of the previous meeting are confirmed
- preside over the meeting in an impartial manner
- facilitate, or arrange facilitation of meetings, ensuring that all members are included in the decision making process
- ensuring motions or amendments are clearly understood before the meeting proceeds further
- summing up debate prior to voting
- introducing and welcoming guest speakers and ensuring they are given a vote of thanks

A Chairperson must be a judge, referee, tactician, as well as friendly, confident, consistent, patient, impartial, objective and versed in procedure.

A Chairperson needs to develop his or her own style and this may change with experience, circumstance and depending on the skills of the group and desired outcomes.

The important aspect is that the group can work effectively to achieve its goals – if you all work together almost any problems that arise can be solved.

## **9.2 Secretary**

The Secretary is appointed by the School Council and may be a member. Under *Regulation 15 of the Act*, the Secretary can be the school Administration Manager/Business Manager.

The Secretary's duties are to:

- prepare, in consultation with the Chairperson, the meeting agendas
- organise notice of meetings in advance, in accordance with the Constitution
- arrange for distribution of meeting papers to Council members
- have all necessary documentation available at the meeting (Constitution, correspondence, etc.)
- take minutes at the Council meetings, confirm their accuracy with the Chairperson
- manage correspondence
  - record all incoming and outgoing correspondence
  - prioritise items as urgent attention of the Chairperson; circulation to members; agenda item for the next meeting; or information to relevant members

- have correspondence available at Council meetings
- prepare letters or documents as required by Council
- keep a record of member's terms of office, including casual vacancies, and give each member an updated copy

Minutes are a formal summary of the business conducted at a meeting; they must be clear and accurate. However they are much more than just a written statement of what transpired at the meeting. Once read and accepted at a subsequent meeting as being a true record, then minutes for a common consensus about agreements reached. Properly done, this can improve communication and minimise future conflict. This validation also transforms the minutes into a legal document recognisable in a court of law. This role of the minutes is particularly important in matters such as contracts, financial management, and employment matters.

Consider the reasons for keeping minutes when writing the up.

They should:

- provide an authoritative and permanent record
- provide confirmation of appointments made, expenditure and actions authorised
- provide a record of policy decisions
- provide information to members not present at the meeting
- set out precedents on rulings from the Chair
- be used as data for future historians

Good minutes assure the relevant community members that their interests are being protected, and act as proof that the Council is achieving its goals.

Given the high turnover of Council members it is important that the reason for certain decisions be recorded for reference by new members, some of whom may have to act on those decisions.

Councils may vary the form of their minutes but there are some items which need to be recorded as they arise, such as:

- the name of the organisation
- the type of meeting (executive, annual, general etc.)
- the time, date and location of the meeting
- the names of people present, and apologies
- confirmation of the previous minutes
- correspondence received and subsequent action
- financial statement, accounts for payment
- reports and action taken
- motions adopted, defeated, deferred or withdrawn
- the date of the next meeting
- time of the meeting closure

The NT Archives Service manual, *General Disposal Schedule for School Records and Storage Procedural Guidelines*, provides the authorisation for appropriate disposal of the records of NT Government schools. The manual has been drafted on consultation with DoE and designated to assist NT Government schools to meet their legal requirements for handling information. Specific reference to School Council records such as minutes, Constitutions and correspondence is made. The schedule is policy and is required to be adhered to. Please contact DoE for further information.

### **9.3 Treasurer**

The Treasurer is appointed by the School Council. Under *Regulation 15 of the Act*, the Treasurer can be the school Administration Manager/Business Manager.

In this situation the school Administration Manager/Business Manager would attend School Council meetings to fulfil this role, **however would not have voting rights**. Under *Regulation 14* a school Registrar working with a School Council differs from all other positions on the Council.

An Administration/Business Manager:

- is not elected by a body of the school community to represent the ideas of that group in local school decision making
- could be seen as having a conflict of interest as an employee of the Department and a member of a School Council
- receives a form of recompense for attendance at Council meetings, where all other members are voluntary
- under *Regulation 4* is not specified as a category of membership

The Treasurer's duties are to:

- prepare a monthly financial statement, which includes receipts, expenditure and variations to the budget, as well as the balance of all accounts
- to assist in the preparation of the school's draft budget for Council approval

#### **9.4 Principal**

The Principal serves on Council as an ex officio member with voting rights.

He or she can be expected to:

- demonstrate a high level of leadership, administrative and interpersonal skills in relation to School Council functioning
- ensure that decisions made at School Council meetings are within the powers and duties of the Council
- in consultation with the Chairperson, identify and encourage the use of the skills of individual Council members for the betterment of the school in undertaking the Council's responsibilities
- encourage the Council to understand its role in the setting of the school's goals and priorities and to utilise the AOP and Strat Plan as a basis for its decision making and review
- provide clear, concise, relevant and objective information to assist in decision making
- make clear distinctions in providing advice between territory-wide policy and school based information relevant to a decision. Give possible options available to the School Council, recommend options, include the source of the recommendations, and the reasons on which they are based, and any personal viewpoint he or she may hold on the matter
- in conjunction with the Chairperson, encourage members to attend both school based and external training and development opportunities that will enhance their knowledge and skills of Council and educational issues
- encourage the School Council to develop a Code of Conduct and/or a set of Standing Orders that incorporate its meeting procedures

As the DoE representative the Principal is the Chief Executive of the school.

## 9.5 Inclusive Practices

Our school communities reflect the composition of NT society. School communities must make every effort to implement inclusive practices for those members from all cultures, and for those children and families with disabilities. (Note: in term 2, 2012 over 40% of children in NT Government schools were Indigenous. [DoE 2012]).

School Communities are required under Federal Anti-Discrimination law to ensure members from each of the above groups are represented in their decision making and school community activity. Pro-active implementation of some of the following examples of inclusive practice will support the diverse groups in our school communities.

For example, members from all cultures can be supported by encouraging them to:

- stand as an elected parent representative on School Council
- participate as an invited member of Council
- join a Council committee or working group
- attend Council meetings as an observer

## 10. Training for School Council Members

For many new members, parents and teachers, the organisation and conduct of a Council meeting can be a strange and sometimes threatening experience. Support and encouragement to contribute to Council matters from other Council members, parents and teachers can lead to an increase in attendance at meetings. Making information about the Council, its Constitution and meeting procedures available to all members of the school community will assist people to participate with confidence. All members of the Council should be presented with a copy of the Constitution upon election.

The first meeting after the Council's AGM is a great opportunity to conduct an orientation meeting. This could include:

- introduction of individual members
- look at the purpose of the Council and its roles
- develop a structure to fulfil Council responsibilities

Folders should be prepared for each School Council member.

These should include:

- School Council Constitution
- Strategic Improvement Plan
- Annual Operational Plan
- The *Education Act*
- *Education (College and School Councils) Regulations*
- this booklet

### 10.1 Assisting people to participate

Making people feel that they are welcome, relaxed and their contribution is valued at School Council meetings is probably the most crucial way a Council can ensure growth of parent, teacher and student participation in the school.

All members can vote, including the Principal and invited members. It is only the Administration/Business Manager in his or her capacity as Secretary or Treasurer, should this be the case, who may not vote. *The Act* does not specify that meetings should be open to all, however the open meeting process is highly supported and encouraged, unless School Council is required to hold a closed meeting for reasons of confidentiality. The School Council meetings should be publicised and school community

attendance, (while having no voting rights and unless the Constitution allows, no speaking rights), should be strongly encouraged.

The following are some ideas which may help in increasing interest and maintaining the attendance at Council meetings:

- regular information about the School Council in the school newsletter, including:
  - names and email addresses of Council members
  - outlines of issues under discussion
  - requests for input from all members of the school community
- encourage the use of language that everyone understands. The use of jargon, abbreviations and acronyms excludes non-professionals from the discussion

## 11. Conduct of Meetings

"Making meeting work is the responsibility of every member, not just the facilitator. It's too easy to blame someone else... and forget that you are the group and it's your meeting as well" (Greg Andrew, 1985).

### 11.1 Purpose

The reason meetings are arranged is to receive information and to make informed, educated decisions.

Councils must meet at least eight times each year; including the Annual General Meeting, which must be held on or before 15 March each year. Approval from the Minister for Education, or his/her appointed nominee i.e. the DoE Chief Executive, is required if the meeting is to be held after this date.

### 11.2 Guidelines

Your School Council Constitution will provide some rules which the Council must follow when carrying out some of its functions. For example, voting and speaking rights, proxy voting, the quorum, notice of meetings, additional meetings.

### 11.3 What should a meeting look like?

There are many ways to conduct a meeting, depending on the purpose and desired outcome. A well organised meeting structured to address the desired outcome will be a rewarding experience for all participants and achieve results.

Note:

- a regular Council meeting has certain formal requirements, and some meeting procedures need to be adhered to
- subcommittee and working group meetings would be much less formal, with open, round table discussion
- a public forum needs to be structured, but is without formal procedures

A School Council which embraces the philosophy of healthy, collaborative school communities in its mission and beliefs will utilise all styles of meetings to suit its varying needs, and to ensure all of its community members have the opportunity to participate and communicate their ideas effectively.

Different strategies can be used within a Council meeting. Formal procedures can be followed to meet the official requirements, and then move into active whole group participation to discuss issues and employ strategies that promote win-win solutions. The final consensus view must still be recorded. Such discussions should always be led by a neutral facilitator who should ensure equal contributions from the participants, summarise discussions, and provide a visual record of discussions.

If the Chairperson has a special interest or strong views to express on a subject, he/she should hand the chair to a neutral member. This should be arranged in advance if possible.

Most importantly, people need to know their time is not being wasted. If their views are listened to and their input is valued, they will feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the decisions made by the Council.

One way to use time wisely is to circulate all reports prior to the meeting. People feel most valued when they contribute to discussion. Hearing other people talk about what they have already done, during a report session, can be non-productive time for many. Do the formalities quickly, and allow ample time for meaningful discussion on general business items of importance.

#### **11.4 What helps make a meeting work?**

- listen – active listening makes the speaker feel satisfied that his/her views are being heard and the listener has a better chance of understanding all of what the speaker is saying
- don't whisper while others talk – the speaker does not feel valued, it is distracting for others around you, and you miss out on information
- speak your mind – don't expect others to know how you feel if you don't tell them
- constructively criticise ideas rather than personalities – different views stimulate creative thinking and provide opportunities to find solutions which suit everyone
- don't monopolise discussion – allow others the opportunity to express their view
- avoid sitting in the same place, with the same people at every meeting – cliques are formed
- build on what people say – value the speaker and develop ideas
- keep your eyes on the speaker – let them know you are listening
- sit square on – use body language which includes people
- set up the room effectively – have chairs placed in a circle to include everyone
- welcome newcomers to the group
- always have introductions and thanks
- help the Chair and Secretary – make sure all decisions and action items are expressed clearly and repeated so they can be easily recorded in the minutes
- ensure action items or follow up tasks are delegated to a specific member/s of Council
- if you are just at a meeting for the sake of a meeting it is a waste of time – make sure there is a reason to meet, if not postpone the meeting
- if something is not working in a meeting, don't just do more of the same – change tack

## 12. Meeting Procedures

### 12.1 The Agenda

The business of a School Council meeting is set out in the agenda. This is prepared before the meeting by the School Council Secretary, in consultation with the Chairperson and Principal. It should be circulated to all members prior to the meeting. It is also useful to publish the agenda in the school newsletter so other members of the school community are aware of the matters being dealt with by the Council.

A typical Council agenda would look like this:

**ORDINARY MEETING**  
**(school name) School Council**  
**Date, time and location**  
**AGENDA**

**1. Welcome**

*by Chairperson*

**2. Present & Apologies**

*by Secretary*

**3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

*These should have been circulated to all members as soon as possible after the meeting to which they refer*

Motion confirming Minutes

**4. Business arising from the Minutes**

*Specific items under consideration may be listed here. Members of the Council may raise any matters referred to in the minutes*

**5. Correspondence**

**5.1 Correspondence In**

**5.2 Correspondence Out**

**5.3 Business arising from the Correspondence**

**6. Reports**

**6.1 Treasurer's**

*The Treasurer must provide a monthly profit and loss statements, balance sheets, accumulated funds, job profit and loss statements for Council projects i.e. Canteen and match current spending to the budget.*

Motion to accept the Treasurer's report

**6.2 Other/s (Chairperson, Principal, Subcommittee reports etc.)**

Motion that the reports be accepted

**7. General Business**

**7.1 Scheduled items e.g. Notice of Motions**

**8. Any Other Business**

*Any member may raise a matter which has not been discussed earlier in the meeting*

**9. Date of next meeting**

**10. Close of meeting**

*by Chairperson (must have a time)*

## **12.2 Quorum**

No business shall be discussed or decided unless a quorum of the Council is present. If a quorum is not present the meeting must be postponed to a later date when a quorum can be present.

## **12.3 Speaking Rights**

During the conduct of a meeting the Chairperson is in charge. No one should speak without permission from the Chair.

This procedure is adopted to ensure no one dominates discussion and everyone has the opportunity to speak. It is the Chairperson's role to allow people to express their views and contribute to the decisions of the meeting through a democratic process.

Parents, teachers and students who are not members of the Council can only take part in the discussion; if speaking rights for non-members are granted in the School Council Constitution, and they have the permission of the Chair; but they may not vote.

## **12.4 Decision Making**

Decisions of the Council may be made either by consensus of the group or by voting.

Voting is determined by a simple majority of the members present and voting. The Chairperson has a deliberative or normal vote which arises from his/her membership on the Council. This vote must be exercised at the same time as all other members who are voting on the issue concerned. In the event of a tie the Chairperson does not cast a deciding vote, if there is a tie in a vote the motion is lost for lack of majority.

The consensus method involves members expressing their views through debate and discussion. The Chairperson combines the points into a view that leads the group to arrive at an agreed decision. This method takes longer but results in a greater sense of ownership and commitment by all members of the Council. The consensus method provides members with a reasonable opportunity to contribute to decisions and is useful in building a team approach.

## **12.5 Formal Debate**

Council meetings do not have to be run on a formal basis. However, it is important that all Council members be aware of the procedures adopted for running the meeting so that people do not feel excluded from participating in the business of the meeting.

If the Council meetings are run on formal lines, debate will be constrained within the following rules:

- the mover puts the motion in the form:  
"I move that the John Doe Primary School Council... (take the following action)..."
- the mover gives a brief explanation
- the Chairperson calls for a seconder
- if there is not person prepared to speak in support of the motion as a seconder , debate on the motion is finished
- if there is a seconder, the mover proceeds to present the case for the motion
- the seconder may either speak in support of the motion immediately, or defers the right to speak at a later time in the debate
- other people; apart from the mover and seconder; may speak to the motion
- speakers are taken in alternating order for the motion, followed by a speaker against the motion
- the mover has the 'right of reply' after everyone else has spoken and before the original motion is put again
- an amendment alters or modifies the motion by specifying words to be deleted, added or altered

- an amendment needs a mover and a seconder. If the amendment is carried debate continues on the motion as mended
- debate is ended when
  - no one is eligible to speak
  - no one wants to speak
- a vote is taken, all in favour, all against
- the motion is either carried or lost
- if the vote is unanimous, the mover of the motion can request that the vote be recorded as unanimous in the minutes

## 13. Voting Procedures

Ideally decision making is best handled using a win-win process. If voting is necessary, it is usually a simple majority wins, with the Chairperson having a deliberative vote only.

### A suggested procedure for School Council elections

- Appoint a Returning Officer – a person who is a non-contestant and if possible, also a non-voter, i.e. a guest speaker or community member.
- Declare the number of positions vacant and the term of office for each position, i.e. parent and preschool representative, as set out in the Constitution.
- Explain the criteria for nominating for a position as defined in the School Council's Constitution and the *Education (College and School Councils) Regulations*.
- Refer to your Constitution as to whether nominations can be taken from the floor or must be submitted in advance
- If nominations can be taken from the floor: call for verbal nominations from the floor. The person who suggests a name is the mover, then seeks a seconder for the nomination and check with the person nominated that they accept the nomination. If a person is nominated and not present, consider if they would agree or if it is an acceptable situation
- If nominations cannot be taken from the floor: ensure that the correct nomination forms are collected prior to the meeting and have them available at the meeting for the Returning Officer
- Record the nominations of a board, in order of receipt or alphabetical order
- State when nominations are closed and explain the voting procedure
- The Chair or Returning Officer may like to ask the nominees to introduce themselves and explain why they would like to be on Council

**Note: When the voting concerns people or controversial matters, as opposed to motions, it is appropriate to use a secret ballot.**

- When nominations are called from the floor, there is no time to prepare a ballot paper. Provide a slip of paper to each person entitled to vote and ask them to write the name of each nominee they are voting for or write all the names in order of preference or copy the names alphabetically and number all the name in order of preference.
- The Returning Officer collects the ballot papers, making certain the number of papers handed out is the same as the number collected
- The Returning Officer counts the votes and announces the successful candidates
- All voting papers should be destroyed as soon as possible after the election

## 14. Amending a School Council Constitution

The following information is given as a guide only. Assistance should be sought from the School Operations department of DoE, should there be any queries in relation to the amendment of Constitutions, and they can be reached through the NT Government Switchboard (08) 8999 5511.

It is a good idea to review the School Council Constitution every three years or so, to ensure that it contains up to date titles and references, reflects the needs of the current membership and complies with the *Education Act*, the *Education (College and School Councils) Regulations*, *Secretarial Approvals* and the *Ministerial Approvals to School Councils*, copies of which are included in the *School Management Handbook*.

When a School Council identifies the areas of the Constitution that require amending, it can be very valuable at this stage to:

- check the proposed amendment against the Model Constitution, found on the DoE website (note: this is a guide only)
- consult with DoE legal officers to ensure the amendment/s comply with the *Education Act*, the *Education (College and School Councils) Regulations*, *Secretarial Approvals* and the *Ministerial Guidelines*
- Ask COGSO for assistance

The School Operations department can provide information, interpretations and advice on the relevant legislation and the amendment procedure and is available to support School Councils in the amendment process by:

- providing a copy of the current School Council Constitution and Model Constitution
- editing and commenting on the proposed amendments prior to presentation at a Special General Meeting

The proposed amendment/s to the Constitution must be ratified at a Special General Meeting called for that purpose, in accordance with the procedure outlined in the Council's Constitution and a two thirds majority vote.

When a School Council moves an amendment to their Constitution, it must seek the written approval of the DoE Chief Executive before the amendment can be acted on

Attachments to the letter of request include:

- a copy of the typed amended Constitution signed and dated by the Chairperson
- the minutes of the Special General Meeting
- a list of the amendments ratified

On receipt of this information the Chief Executive checks the Constitution for compliance with the *Education Act*, the *Education (College and School Councils) Regulations*, *Secretarial Approvals* and the *Ministerial Guidelines to School Councils* and seeks approval from the Secretary. This Minister for Education is advised accordingly of the amendments.

On receipt of the Chief Executive approval, a letter is sent to the Chairperson of the School Council advising that amendments have been approved. A memo is sent to the appropriate Principal and to COGSO advising them to the actual amendments to the Constitution and enclosing the revised version of the Constitution for their information.

## 15. Annual Operational Plan

## 16. Strategic Improvement Plan

A Strategic Improvement Plan is a statement of the school's priority educational directions identified by the local school community – parents, teachers and students – extending over a rolling three year period. The plan addresses the wider policies laid down by DoE and reflects the values, practices and organisational structure which influence the school's effectiveness and define its identity.

A Strat Plan identifies who will do what, when and how. It includes the resources required and the mean by which successful outcomes can be measured. As the plan is a continually evolving document, it is reviewed on an annual basis to reflect the changing circumstances at the time.

Since Strat Plans were formally introduced into the NT education system in 1990, they have become an integral part of the planning process at school, regional, divisional and Departmental levels.

A school's Strat Plan is developed by the school community and endorsed by the School Council in its behalf and submitted to the DoE Chief Executive. Whilst the plan itself belongs to the school community, it must reflect regional and Departmental priorities.

The annual review/evaluation of the Strat Plan, including reporting against the agreed performance indicators, has a very important function in informing the community and the Department of progress made by the school in achieving its planned outcomes.

### 16.1 Procedural outline for School Councils to consider

- Step 1** Review the school's current educational directions and develop a list of desired educational outcomes.
- Step 2** Prioritise the school's outcomes – ensure the number of outcomes are small and realistic.  
*An **outcome** is a statement of desired achievements, they should be realistic and simple.*
- Step 3** Develop Strategies to implement the identified outcomes utilising available resources.  
*A **strategy** is a set of actions designed to help achieve the outcome. A strategy is usually an answer to the question "what can we most usefully do to achieve the outcome?"*
- Step 4** Identify the resources available to achieve the outcome.  
***Resources** are what will be needed – personnel, facilities, materials, time, etc. – to achieve the outcome.*
- Note** *The inclusion of items with resource implications in the school Strat Plan must be considered carefully by the school as additional resources may not be automatically supplied by the Department.*
- Step 5** Determine performance indicators for each outcome.  
***Performance Indicators** are the situations, conditions or occurrences which would demonstrate that the desired outcomes are being or have been achieved. A performance indicator is a measurable or observable tangible action or event.*
- Step 6** Review/evaluate – each year the school community assesses whether the plan's outcomes have been achieved and set new priorities.
- Step 7** Report on plan outcomes – prepare a report for the community based on the review and evaluation, showing progress made by the school in achieving its planned outcomes. The review/evaluation will be an integral in identifying future priorities to be included in the Strat Plan.

## **16.2 Roles and responsibilities in the planning process**

### **School Councils**

School Councils have a responsibility to determine the educational needs, expectations and priorities of the school community and work closely with the Principal, teachers, staff, parents and students in the development of the Strat Plan. Following collaboration, the School Council is responsible for overseeing the development, implementation and review/evaluation of the plan and keeping the community informed.

### **Principal**

The Principal as the educational leader of the school community plans a vital role in preparing, implementing and managing the plan in collaboration with the School Council, by involving students, staff and parents in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and review of the plan. The Principal also takes appropriate action in response to reviews of the plan.

### **Teachers**

Teacher assist in the identification of educational needs. Teacher representatives on School Councils are able to put forward the points of view and priorities of teachers, for consideration in the planning process. They participate in the development, implementation and review of the plan by implementing its strategies and providing feedback, including recommendations for improvement, as appropriate.

## **17. Where You Can Get Help**

### **17.1 Education Act**

Part 70 of the *Education Act* is the section of the *Education Act*, this details the legislation that relates to School Councils.

### **17.2 Education (College and School Councils) Regulations**

### **17.3 COGSO's A How to Guide for NT Government School Councils**

This is a comprehensive guide produced and distributed by COGSO to all schools. Also available are smaller handbooks of specific sections of the guide.

### **17.4 Department of Education and COGSO websites**

DoE and COGSO have a lot of valuable information and resources for School Councils and members on their websites.

Information can be found on the DoE website at:

<http://www.det.nt.gov.au/parents-community/schooling/school-council>

The COGSO website address is: [www.ntcogso.org.au](http://www.ntcogso.org.au)

## 18. Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why have a School Council rather than a parent and teacher association?**

The Northern Territory Government has vested certain powers and responsibilities in School Council, so that their role in decision making at the school level and advising the Principal, Chief Executive and Minister is quite clearly defined. This is not the case for a parent and teacher association.

### **If I am a parent as well as teacher at the school, can I be a parent representative on the School Council?**

A teacher who also has children at the same school can only be elected to the School Council as a teacher representative.

### **If I am a parent as well as a teacher at the school, can I vote for both the teacher and the parent representatives?**

As a teacher at the school can only be elected to School Council as a teacher representative, you can only vote as a teacher representative.

### **Can a School Council tell a teacher what to do?**

A School Council cannot issue instructions to teachers regarding their professional duties, or to employees of the Department in respect of their duties at the school, that is the responsibility of the Principal. If a School Council have developed a school policy on certain matters and that policy is consistent with Departmental policy the Council can expect the school staff to cooperate in putting the policy into practice.

### **If parent or parents write to the Council with a complaint against a teacher, can the Council conduct an inquiry into the matter?**

Any complaints against a teacher should be referred to the Principal. The Council can request that the matter be investigated through the official channels and that the Principal report back to the Council on the result of the investigation.

### **What happens if the School Council and the Principal are unable to reach an agreement on an issue?**

If the disagreement cannot be resolved, the matter should be referred to the Chief Executive, for resolution. The Principal and the Council must abide by the Chief Executive's decision in the matter.

### **In drawing up the School Council Constitution, can the school community set a date for the Annual General Meeting at any time throughout the year?**

School Councils must hold their Annual General Meeting between 1 January and 15 March each year unless approved by the Minister or a person authorised to consent by the Minister.

### **Is it possible for people who are neither parents, teachers nor students at the school to become members of the School Council?**

A School Council may invite up to three members from the school community who Council considers to have special qualifications and knowledge or experience which will be able to assist the School Council. In addition a School Council may choose to invite the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and/or local Government nominee.

### **How long can elected parents and teachers serve?**

For three consecutive two year terms. That is, a total of six consecutive years.

**How long can the other members serve?**

The Principal is always a member; the preschool representative on primary School Councils may serve for maximum of three consecutive one year terms and the student representative on secondary School Councils can serve for three consecutive two year terms. An invited member can be a member for two years or a shorter term as determined by the Council and is eligible to become an invited member for a further term.

**Are Councils required to have invited members?**

It is up to the school community to decide whether the School Council Constitution should provide for people to be invited to join by resolution of Council members. Naturally, invited members have every right to decline any invitations to sit on School Councils. It is up to the School Council to determine who to invite and for what period of time.

It is suggested that School Councils invite members onto Council for a period of up to one year.

**Can invited members vote?**

Invited members are considered to be members of the School Council and therefore are able to vote at meetings of the School Council.

**Can a non-member speak at a School Council meeting?**

If the Constitution permits or the Council resolves, non-members may attend and speak but not vote at Council meetings. Most School Councils encourage non-members to attend and speak.

**When a Council employs a person to manage the canteen or work on the grounds, can they pay them any wage which is agreed to by the parties?**

The School Council can negotiate with prospective and current employees regarding the terms and conditions of their employment however the Workplace Relations Act and the relevant awards require that minimum standards must be observed.

**Does the School Council have to pay the insurance premium for workers compensation, voluntary workers cover and public liability?**

Currently DoE covers School Council employees under self-insurance.

**As School Councils are restricted in size to no more than 19 members, are there ways of getting more people involved and sharing the workload?**

*The Act* allows School Councils to establish committees to support the Council in performing its functions. The Constitution of the Council defines the roles and responsibilities of its committees. Many School Councils have an extensive subcommittee system through which non-Council members can be involved. Each subcommittee formed needs to appoint its own Chairperson who is responsible for presenting the committee's report to the Council. Some examples of subcommittees are: Finance, Grounds and Maintenance, Policy, Canteen, Parent Liaison.

*\*Additionally School Councils can seek approval of the Minister to sit outside the guidelines.*

**Can the Principal chair the School Council meeting?**

Where the Chairperson of the Council is not present at a meeting of the School Council, the members present shall appoint a Chairperson for that meeting from the members present and this may include the Principal.

**How and when does the school receive its funds?**

All money entering the school is paid to the School Council. The school receives Departmental allocations in two lump sums, usually in January and July depending on the timing of the NT Government budget cycle.

The money allocated by the Department is only acquitted once per year, at the end of the calendar year, by sending a copy of the audited statement of accounts to the Department. Grants such as Commonwealth programs money is paid and acquitted at other times, as stipulated in the grants conditions.

**Does the School Council have to employ a professional auditor to audit the financial accounts every year?**

The School Council is required to have the audit prepared by a person who is member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants or the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants or a person approved by the Secretary as suitable to carry out the audit.

**How important is it for a Council member to attend every meeting of Council?**

A quorum for a School Council meeting is half the current membership of the Council. Therefore it is important that members attend most meetings.

Councils must meet not less than eight times per calendar years.

**What is the situation with people who offer to assist with a School Council activity?**

DoE ensures that School Councils are covered for accidents to voluntary workers, where those workers are directly assisting an incorporated School Council or parent organisation.

**What protection is there for members of School Councils?**

Section 71M of the *Education Act* is intended to protect members of incorporated School Councils who act in good faith to carry out the functions of a School Council. In general terms, good faith implies acting honestly and in what they generally believe to be the best interests of the school and the Council.