Aquinas College
School Advisory Council
Terms of Reference

MELBOURNE ARCHDIOCESE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Aquinas College is a school which operates with the consent of the Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne and is operated and governed by Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (MACS), where formation and education are based on the principles of Catholic doctrine, and where the teachers are outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.

1. Council structure

Members of the School Advisory Council

Serving on the School Advisory Council of a Catholic school is a form of Church lay ministry. It is a response to the call to support the local Catholic parish and school communities in a particular way. It is also a means for members of our community to share their skills and talents for the common good. A well-functioning council provides rich sources of wisdom and insight as well as a means of strengthening community links and potential for partnerships.

Aquinas College's School Advisory Council is to be comprised of a minimum of six (6) council members who value and share the educational mission and ethos of the Catholic Church comprising of at least:

a) the parish priest for primary / the president of the ACA for secondary (ex officio)
b) the principal (ex officio)
c) two (2) parents, guardians, carers of children attending the school
d) one (1) parishioner
e) another person from either category or co-opted to serve a particular need on the council.

Membership under (c) and (d) are not mutually exclusive.

Additional members up to the recommended maximum of ten (10) members may, according to local need, include:

f) additional parents, guardians, carers of children attending the school
g) additional parishioners
h) Business Manager
i) staff member (particularly for secondary schools)
j) student representative (secondary)
k) Parish Primary School Principals' representative
l) other person co-opted for a period of time to serve a particular need on the council.

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

A single parish representative may be sufficient for a council fulfilling its function in dealing with education matters relating to the school.

Recruitment and appointment of council members

The principal and parish priest/canonical administrator are responsible for appointing council members, after a process of discernment. The principal and priest may choose to be supported by others in the appointment process. Each school has the opportunity to establish its own practice of how to form the School Advisory Council whether it be by expressions of interest, by nomination or whatever means the parish priest/canonical administrator and principal determine meets its needs at the local level. When appointments are being made it is important to keep in mind the need for a balance of gender, diversity and skill sets in forming the council.

If the council requires the appointment of a council member to maintain a quorum or to fill a casual vacancy, the principal may make such an appointment, however any council member appointed in such a circumstance is appointed for the period to the next Annual School Advisory Council Meeting and at this time may apply for membership of the council in the ordinary manner.

Once appointed it is a requirement that all council members sign the school *Child Safety Code of Conduct*.

Child Safe Standards

Adherence to the school's child safe standards must be at the forefront of any appointment process. Council members must have both a police check and Working with Children check and must sign the school child safe standard agreement.

Expressions of Interest

Generally, expressions of interest to become a council member are made in advance of the Annual School Advisory Council Meeting. The process of applying for membership of the Aquinas College School Advisory Council is published in *The Lighthouse*. Anyone interested in becoming a member of the Aquinas College School Advisory Council may seek advice from the principal, Chair or parish priest on the process of appointment. Consideration will also be given to succession planning through staggered renewal of members to ensure continuing institutional memory.

Diversity

School Advisory Council seeks to be inclusive of all community members and will demonstrate a genuine commitment to gender equity and diversity regardless of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Collectively, council members should bring a range of personal skills and experience to add value to the Aquinas College School Advisory Council; for further information see 'The role of individual council members' in this document.

A process of discernment

The process of appointment is one of discernment, where interested persons are involved in a discernment process to assist potential new council members to understand:

- the mission and vision of MACS, the parish and school
- the roles, responsibilities and processes of the MACS Board and the Aquinas College School Advisory Council
- how council members, can support the principal and parish priest.

This discernment process commences when expressions of interest are sought for new council members, beginning with the provision of an information pack to those interested in nominating for a council position and /or a chance for potential nominees to discuss the role of the council and the expectations of a council member with the principal, chair or parish priest/canonical administrator.

Leading to induction

The process of discernment provides the foundation for the induction of new council members. The induction process continues after appointment and is a continuing process rather than an event. MACS provides a basis for formation and induction as outlined in the MACS *School Advisory Council Manual*. Formal induction to the Aquinas College School Advisory Council includes:

- introductory meeting with Principal including provision of *MACS School Advisory Council Manual* and tour of school facilities
- introduction of new members to school community in *The Lighthouse*
- welcome meeting with Aquinas College School Advisory Council Chair
- annual formation seminar.

New council members will be provided with:

- the MACS Statement of Mission
- an understanding of the history of the parish and school

- a MACS School Advisory Council Manual
- a tour of the school facilities.

Terms and conditions of appointment

The period of appointment is generally a term of two years, with the option of being reappointed for a total of three terms. The other terms and conditions of appointment of council members are contained in a letter of appointment from the principal which sets out, amongst other things:

- the terms and conditions in the letter of appointment that must be agreed to by the proposed council member
- details of expectations of council members
- applicable MACS school governance policies, including the applicable Code of Conduct, Conflict Resolution Procedure, and Conflict of Interest Policy.

A council member may be removed by the principal in collaboration with the parish priest/canonical administrator if a council member is in breach of the expectations of a council member (as outlined in this Terms of Reference) or applicable MACS school governance policies. A council member may appeal his or her removal to the Executive Director of MACS for review.

2. Role of the School Advisory Council

From 1 January 2021, the Board of Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (MACS) has responsibility for the strategic direction and oversight of the operation and management of MACS Catholic schools, including Aquinas College. Clear lines of authority, reporting and delegation have been established which delegate the day to day operational management of Aquinas College to the principal.

In keeping with the objects of the MACS Constitution, which states "The good work of educating the young, undertaken in the light of the Gospel, is a co-responsible task led by every member of the Catholic school community", the School Advisory Council provides a crucial point of connection between the wider school community and school leaders. While the School Advisory Council does not have a decision-making authority, it informs, advises and supports the principal and school leadership.

Advisory in nature

The School Advisory Council provides a forum for discussion and discernment, where the parent/guardian voice and perspective are available to inform and support the decisions made by the principal and parish priest for the good of school and parish where the wellbeing and outcomes for students is paramount.

School Advisory Councils do not have a legal identity and do not become involved in the day-to-day management of the school.

It is important that School Advisory Council members understand that their role is to give consideration to, and advice on, important school matters in order to support the principal in the context of the MACS governance arrangements. The School Advisory Council must act within the parameters of this Terms of Reference.

MACS provides support to the School Advisory Council, such as policy guidance and templates for the work of the council, but is not responsible for the activities of the council, utilising principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

The following are some ways the School Advisory Council supports the school and the principal:

- Promoting the school's Catholic ethos and culture
- Articulating and enacting the school's vision and mission
- Promoting faith formation and development
- Capital resource planning and maintenance
- Disseminating information about the school in accordance with these Terms of Reference
- Implementing school policies as required
- Supporting and communicating school and parish matters, including the school annual report
- Giving advice on issues such as enrolments, school improvement plans and enrolment trends
- Engaging in discussion about the annual school budget and other financial matters

- Giving advice about the school Master Plan

3. The role of individual council members

Qualities and skills of a council member

Each Catholic school is different, but all schools share the mission of the Church. The council should be composed of people who appreciate, value and share the educational mission and ethos of the Catholic Church. When seeking council members it is important to reflect on the qualities and skills of benefit to the council in carrying out its functions. Their capacity to contribute, their shared understanding and their positivity is essential.

The following is a list of some of the key qualities and skills for members of the School Advisory Council:

- commitment to the MACS *Statement of Mission*
- commitment to Catholic education in the parish and school
- commitment to the vision and mission of the parish and school
- an understanding of the role of parish priest, principal and council members
- willingness to ask questions and seek clarification
- ability to think strategically
- willingness to support the contributions of other council members
- capacity to listen in an active and meaningful way
- willingness to work cooperatively with others
- commitment to maintaining confidentiality at all times.

Expectations of the council member

Each council member is required to commit to the following:

- understanding the council's role
- having a positive and constructive attitude
- elevating any appropriate issues for consideration by the council
- preparing for council meetings
- attending each council meeting, unless there are extenuating circumstances
- bringing expertise and views to discussions on behalf of the whole community
- participating actively and responsibly
- participating in council work
- participating in council formation activities
- attendance at the MACS Annual General Meeting, if possible
- abiding by the applicable MACS school governance policies, including MACS *Statement of Mission, Code of Conduct* and *Conflicts of Interest Policy*.

4. Key roles

There are four key roles on a School Advisory Council. The Chair, the principal, the parish priest and the secretary each have a significant role on the council and each of these roles carries specific responsibilities.

The Chair

The role of the Chair is to:

- chair council meetings
- in conjunction with the principal and the secretary oversee the development of meeting agendas, checks papers for meetings and the draft minutes
- ensure the meetings are focused on the agenda
- encourage participation by all council members in meetings and at council events
- act as a spokesperson for the council when authorised to do so
- attend important parish and school events as appropriate
- participate as a member of the council.

Appointment

The Chair is elected by a quorum of the council members at the first meeting of the council after the end of the term of the previous Chair.

The Chair will normally be an independent member who is not employed by MACS or Aquinas College and is selected on the basis of the person's achievements and his or her record as a leader.

The Chair is appointed for a period of three years, subject to satisfactory performance. As the Chair will likely have served as a council member prior to appointment, the Chair's total time on the council may extend to four terms (nine to 11 years).

A Chair may be removed by the principal if the Chair is in breach of the expectations of a council member or the Chair (as outlined in this Terms of Reference) or applicable MACS school governance policies. A Chair may appeal his or her removal to the Executive Director of MACS for review

The principal

Key responsibilities of the principal's role include development of the faith community, particular focus on the safety and wellbeing of students, formulation of a vision for the whole school, attention to contemporary teaching and learning in order to engage all students, and stewardship of the people and resources with particular outreach to the parent community.

The principal works in collaboration with the Church authority, staff and members of the school community to achieve the mission of the school.

As such the principal's role on the council as an ex officio member is to:

- play a key role in developing the overall goals and priorities of the council
- play a key role in developing the agenda for meetings and the preparation of papers before meetings
- ensure follow-up of actions arising from council meetings
- act as the chief education advisor to the council
- make arrangements to maintain an archive of relevant council documentation in accordance with this Terms of Reference, including minutes from previous meetings
- make arrangements to distribute the papers before meetings, after preparation of the papers by the secretary
- make arrangements to distribute draft minutes to the council members, after preparation by the secretary
- ensure that council members are kept informed between meetings
- make arrangements to maintain a register and record of council, committee and working groups and all applicable documentation and records, including minutes, agendas and correspondence.

Appointment

The principal is an ex officio member of the School Advisory Council while in his or her role. The principal has full voting rights and is counted in the usual way for quorum purposes.

The parish priest / president of Association of Canonical Administrators (ACA)

The parish priest/canonical administrator's role on the council is to:

- be the key evangeliser and educator in faith within the parish and thus the custodian of mission of parish and school
- support the principal and council in the development and implementation of the sacramental program to ensure the school is faithful to its distinctive Catholic identity and spirituality
- provide strong pastoral support and effective Catholic leadership of the parish, which includes the school and college communities
- be engaged with, and bring to the council's attention, those aspects of the school's operations that have the potential to harm the parish's good name
- represent the parish as the beneficial owner of the land occupied by the school or college
- be involved in planning any transaction that will change the nature of the school property or affect the use of any other areas of the property.

The parish priest is an ex officio member of the School Advisory Council for parish primary schools in his parish, and ensures that the School Advisory Council supports the principal and the mission of the parish. Likewise the president or a designated representative of the ACA for regional colleges is an ex officio member of the School Advisory Council ensuring that the council supports the principal and the mission of the college

Appointment

As an ex officio member of the council by virtue of his office. The parish priest/canonical administrator has full voting rights and is counted in the usual way for quorum purposes.

The secretary

The role of the Secretary is to:

- take the minutes of council meetings
- oversee that the agenda and papers are confirmed in sufficient time to allow for their distribution at least a week prior to the meeting
- oversee management of all council correspondence
- oversee the provision of adequate notice of the Annual School Advisory Council Meeting and of any intention to call for nominations for council positions that become vacant.

Appointment

The secretary is appointed by the council at the first meeting of the council after the end of the term of the previous secretary.

5. Committees and working parties

To share and support the work of the School Advisory Council, the council may consider establishing a standing committee.

From time to time the council may also wish to establish a committee or working party for a specific purpose or to undertake a particular task.

The council may appoint additional members of a council committee or working group to assist with deliberations in the manner determined by the council in each instance.

Council committees and working groups may be focused on a specific area such as:

- finance
- policy
- capital improvements

- reputation management
- parent/guardian/carer engagement
- community development
- grants

Each committee or working party should be chaired by a council member who is responsible for reporting to the council on the activities of the committee/working party.

Council committees/working parties are directly responsible to the council.

Each committee/working party of the council should have clearly articulated expectations or terms of reference stating:
- the name of the committee/working party
- the name of the chair
- the purpose and tasks to be undertaken
- the names of the members
- quorum, meeting and reporting requirements
- the date for reporting back to the council e.g. actions since last report, what's happening now, future plans, items for council discussion
- duration of the committee/working party.

It is important that any council committee or working party understands that it may not speak publicly for the council, unless it has delegated authority to do so.

The terms of reference of each committee or working party of the council should be approved by the principal and appropriate records maintained by or on behalf of the principal.

A summary of the activities of each committee or working party should be included in the council's annual report to acknowledge the specific work undertaken by the committee or working party during the year.

6. School Advisory Council meetings

Meetings

The Aquinas College School Advisory Council meets 6 times during the year with the Annual School Advisory Council Meeting being one of these scheduled meetings. Apart from the Annual Meeting, ordinary council meetings are not public meetings.

Councils may call extraordinary meetings if required.

Agendas should be prepared and distributed prior to each meeting.

Quorum

A quorum must be present at each council meeting. The quorum of members who must be present for any decisions of a meeting to be binding or valid is two-thirds of the total number of council members at any given time.

Conduct of council meetings

Council confidentiality and solidarity are key ingredients in building trust at council meetings. As a general rule all council meeting proceedings are confidential. At times, there may be occasion to formally declare an issue, a paper and/or a discussion as particularly sensitive and confidential. This should be done by the Chair prior to a council meeting, and confirmed before the close of the meeting.

Council members must respect the right of individuals to express their views freely at council meetings without fear of their being named outside the council meetings as taking particular positions. As in all similar groups, a sense of trust among council members is vital for the wellbeing of the council.

A meeting should close by reviewing actions and deadlines set, and noting of the details of the next meeting.

Minutes of council meetings should be maintained.

Disclosure of interests by council, committee and working group members

All council, committee and working group members must disclose to the principal and Chair of the council, committee or working group (as applicable) any personal interest or duty which relates, or may relate, to the business of the school, in order to ensure that any actual or perceived conflict of interest or duty is identified and appropriately managed.

When an issue arises at a council, committee or working group meeting, relating to such an interest or duty, the member must not attend the meeting while that matter is discussed and must not vote on any related matter.

7. The Annual School Advisory Council Meeting

The council encourages full participation of stakeholders at the Annual School Advisory Council Meeting to ensure a high level of engagement and participation by the school community.

The Annual School Advisory Council Meeting of the council may take place at any time during the year but normally takes place in the final term of the school year.

The parish and school communities must receive adequate notice of this meeting and of any intention to accept any nominations for any council positions that become vacant.

The agenda for the Annual School Advisory Council Meeting is determined by the council and normally includes:

- presentation of the council's annual report by the Chair
- provision for questions from those present
- the announcement of newly appointed council members.

The council's *Annual Report* is an important communication document and is to be drafted using the MACS approved template. Preparation of the council's *Annual Report* is to be overseen by the Chair with the final version approved by the council. The council's *Annual Report* should acknowledge the activities, achievements and challenges of the council over the past year and indicates goals and focus for the following year. This report may also form part of the requisite *School Annual Report* published on the school website and the VRQA State Register unless otherwise determined by the MACS Executive Director, either generally or in any particular instance.

8. Record keeping

As a minimum, the principal must ensure the maintenance of the following council documents and records:

- the School Advisory Council Terms of Reference (this document)
- agenda and minutes of School Advisory Council, committee and working group meetings
- a register of the current members of the council, committees and working groups and any council members holding key roles
- the School Advisory Council correspondence file.

Agenda and minutes

The minutes of council, committee and working group meetings must be recorded in a consistent format and maintained in an appropriate archive system at the school.

Minutes of meetings should be distributed as soon as possible after the meeting to allow sufficient time for action items to be followed up between meetings.

The minutes should be approved by the council, committee or working group (as applicable) at its next meeting, as an accurate record of the meeting.

Council, committee and working group minutes are not public documents.

9. Evaluating the work of the council

The School Advisory Council must undertake an annual evaluation to reflect upon its performance and areas for improvement.

The council must agree the process to be followed each year following a MACS template and appoint a council member to oversee the evaluation process and, if appropriate, take a leadership role in implementing the findings. Each year the council should consider whether any improvements to its operation or this Terms of Reference should be recommended to MACS.

The council may determine to evaluate all aspects of its work or concentrate on some key areas. Areas for evaluation may include:

- Council processes such as meeting procedures, planning, communication
- the work of committees or working groups
- the nature and extent of involvement of the parish and school communities
- involvement in or assistance to key parish or school projects.

10. Publication of this Terms of Reference

An up-to-date version of these Terms of Reference must be available on the school's website at all times.