



Merici College

Community Council

Executive Governance

Guidelines



INTRODUCTION

“The primary right of parents to educate their children must be upheld in all forms of collaboration between parents, teachers and school authorities, and particularly in forms of participation designed to give citizens a voice in the functioning of schools and in the formulation and implementation of educational policies.”

*Pontifical Council on the Family
CHARTER OF THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY*

The Community Council, in accordance with the authority entrusted to it by the Archbishop, is to assist the school to fulfil its mission in accordance with the Code of Canon Law, Archdiocesan directives and guidelines and policies of the Catholic Education Commission and the Catholic Education Office.

The Community Council provides the opportunity for members of the school, parish, and Archdiocesan communities to support the mission of Catholic education in the school. Working with the Principal, Parish Priest and staff, the members of the Community Council and its committees provide leadership to the wider school community.

The Community Council is an advisory council. The policies of the school are always set within the mission of Catholic education. In the areas where it has responsibility for the development and monitoring of school policy, the Council operates within the policies and procedures determined by the CEC and the CEO.

The Principal has responsibility for the day-to-day leadership and management of the school.

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The Community Council Charter is designed to assist members of Catholic school communities who have been appointed to or elected to serve. The guidelines explain how Catholic schools fit within the ministry of the Church in the Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The guidelines outline the role and responsibilities of those involved in this ministry of Catholic schooling and offers practical ways to ensure that the important work of school governance and parental participation are both effective and rewarding. The local level guidelines present in this document are derived from the Archdiocesan Guidelines.

The Catholic school is a community of students, staff, Pastor, and parents which is striving to imbue the education process with Gospel values and actively model a Catholic lifestyle. In all its actions the school community should aim to be Christ-like ensuring that each member is treated with justice, compassion, and love.

The Catholic school community should be a place of hope, allowing all members to experience wonder, learning and peace while working for the common good and building up the Kingdom of God.



While members of the community take different roles, as Pastor, Principal, staff, teachers, parents and students, all are responsible for helping to ensure that the school is Christ centered and that it witnesses to the Gospel.

The Catholic school community is a ministry of the wider Church. To ensure that it strives to fulfil this ministry, those who contribute to its leadership as members of the local governance structures need to develop constantly their understanding and commitment to the Catholic Church's mission in education.

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY

Catholic schooling is different from government education systems in that it seeks to integrate Catholic values into all its aspects. It is committed to educating the whole person with the person's spiritual dimension as an essential element.

Although Catholic schooling is different from the government education system, it is still bound by the accountability requirements of the Australian Government, and State or Territory Governments for any government funding. The educational standards, facilities and personnel of Catholic schools come under government supervision of one kind or another. This accountability is managed by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and monitored by the Catholic Education Commission (CEC).

Australian, State or Territory Government funding is a significant part of the overall income of Catholic schooling for recurrent costs e.g., salaries.

Catholic schools may be eligible for capital funding according to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) guidelines, and if capital projects are approved by the Australian Government.

Catholic schooling makes a positive contribution to the community, and accordingly, is recognised through government financial support.

Parents and members of Catholic communities make a very substantial financial contribution to Catholic schooling and in this way make a substantial contribution to the Australian community.

ARCHDIOCESAN LEVEL

The Archbishop has the canonical authority to define policy regarding the establishment and operation of Catholic schools within the Archdiocese. He has established parish primary schools, parish central schools and secondary schools within the Archdiocese. Congregational schools have also been established with his consent and operate under his general pastoral supervision.



Catholic schools are an integral part of the on-going life and faith education process. They hold a unique place and play an essential role in the mission of the parish(es) in which they are located and for the wider Archdiocesan Church. The Catholic school as a faith community lives in, and not separate from, the larger faith community of the parish. Responsibilities for the management of Diocesan Catholic schools are shared by the Archbishop, the CEC, the CEO, Parish Priests, Principals and school staffs, and the local school governance structure, according to the Church's code of Canon Law, and policies and procedures approved by the Archbishop or his delegates.

In 1985 the Archbishop established the CEC to develop and monitor policies related to schools and the ministry of Catholic education. Such policies become official in the Archdiocese when approved by the Archbishop.

The establishment of the CEC reflects an appreciation of the Church as a community where all members engage in a process of discernment and offer service to the Church and school community.

The CEC has, in addition to its ex-officio members, members selected for their capacity and interests from a cross section of the Archdiocese to reflect the interests of Priests, parents, schools and the wider Catholic community. Members serve for terms of 4 years.

The Commission may establish Working Parties to investigate, discuss and make recommendations to the Commission on issues determined by the Commission. The Working Parties are established on a needs basis and follow a clearly prescribed Terms of Reference.

The Director of the CEO, who is appointed by the Archbishop, is the Executive Secretary of the CEC. The Catholic Education Commission works closely with the Catholic Education Office which monitors and implements CEC Policy. The CEO is also a valuable source of information and expertise in the development of the CEC's policies.

The CEO has its own policy making and executive functions. The Director is responsible for the management of the school system and the implementation of Archdiocesan education policies and is the delegated employer of all staff in Archdiocesan Catholic schools.

LOCAL PARISH LEVEL

The Parish Priest is the leader of the parish community of which the school is an integral part and has a vital role in the education of all parishioners. Under the authority of the Archbishop, he has the responsibility for promoting the spiritual and moral development of all Catholic adults and children entrusted to his care. In consultation with the Parish Pastoral Council, the Parish Priest makes the final decision on the pastoral goals of the parish.



THE FAMILY

Parents are recognised as the first educators of children in faith and in life.

The Catholic school, with the parish, provides encouragement and support for parents in the education of their children and families in the formation of their faith.

Partnership between parents, the parish and the school ensure that children are able to engage in a process of life-long learning which begins in early childhood and continues throughout adult life. The relationships and attitudes developed within family, parish and school provide the basis for successful and rewarding experiences for children in their faith journey.

Parents, members of the parish community, Pastor, Principal, and teachers in partnership, provide action and a sense of purpose to the school. They ensure that the school remains responsive to its Christian ideals and to the needs of a rapidly changing society. Parents play an active part in the development of the school through the support of their children and through the support of the school's governing body. Parents help ensure that the Catholic school meets the needs of young people in Australian society today.

Catholic schools aim to provide an option for the poor, whether in terms of material poverty or poverty in spiritual growth, or in capacity to learn or in emotional well-being. Parents, through their ongoing financial support and concern for the good and proper management of Catholic schools, assist in ensuring access and equity for all of those who wish to receive a Catholic education for their children.

CATHOLIC ETHOS

The Catholic ethos of the school derives from the motivation for the existence of the Catholic school and its work. To this end, the first responsibility of the Community Council is to strive to ensure that the school is truly and distinctly Catholic. In order to do this, the Council must consider the values and traditions of Catholic education. Study of Vatican documents such as *'The Catholic School'* and *'The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium'* can assist Council members in understanding these values and traditions. These documents recommend consideration of the Catholic school under the aspect 'Catholic' and of 'school'.

Under the aspect of 'Catholic', Council members need to be aware of what makes a school a 'Catholic' school. The Principal and Parish Priest should guide consideration by the Council of this issue. Ideally the Council, lead by the Principal and Parish Priest, should include this discussion of the issue explicitly on its agenda at least once each school year.



Council members, whose faith tradition is other than Catholic, have an added responsibility to learn about Catholic values and traditions and to bring those aspects to their personal discernment. Council members need to continually strive to develop the Catholicity of the school.

Council members need to develop a pastoral sense which should be modelled on the example of Christ who came to serve others, not to be served. The Council's concern is not just with things, but essentially with people.

The Council should have a special regard for the poor, the disadvantaged, the powerless – modelled on the example of Jesus Christ, who showed such special care for 'the little children' and the disadvantaged.

Under the aspect of 'school', activities of the Council could include:

- A genuine interest in, and support of, the educational programs and practices at work in the school to make it a 'centre of human formation' ('The Catholic School' p 25), in keeping with the mission of Catholic education.
- Properly maintaining and developing buildings and grounds to provide a suitable environment for the learning process to flourish.
- Taking suitable steps to build up support for the school among the community it serves. This will involve the promotion of the school and developing a community spirit through genuine pastoral care of members of the school and community.

The Council should reflect on its own effectiveness in serving the school community.

The Council will have input into the Registration and Renewal Programs and other reviews which are conducted by the CEO.

PASTORAL CARE

The Council holds a special role in celebrating the achievements of the school community and providing opportunities for the school community to reflect on its journey together.

While the Council assists in the leadership of the school and in helping to set priorities, the Council best serves the school community's interests by adopting a role of collaboration rather than domination.

The Council should try to establish a friendly, working relationship with those people or groups who share the Catholic school ministry.



CODE OF ETHICS

The Council of Merici College will:

Acknowledge that schools are a significant expression of the teaching mission of the Catholic Church and function within its structure.

Become more knowledgeable about the mission of Catholic education, as expressed in their school, and sincerely promote it to the various communities with whom they have influence.

Recognise the need for continuing education about their responsibilities and know that they are an advisory body and do not officially represent the school's governing authorities.

Be fully and carefully prepared for each meeting by doing the required readings and completing necessary tasks for committee work and reports.

Be loyal to the Council's decisions even if personally opposed to the final recommendations and decisions.

Respect the appropriate confidentiality of matters raised at meetings.

Be alert to alternate solutions to problems by keeping an open mind.

Disqualify themselves from discussion and voting on an issue where there is a conflict of interest with the member's family or business interests or if the outcome will grant them any pecuniary or material benefits.

Pray with and for other members of the Council, the School Executive and staff, and the Catholic school community.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

Members of the Council, whether in a voluntary capacity or as members of staff, contribute through their interest, expertise, and commitment to the development of the school as a community of students, staff, Pastor and parents as a centre of human formation in keeping with the mission of Catholic education.

The Merici Community Council Executive shall be comprised of the following:

- The Principal is an ex officio member and the Executive Officer of the Council.
- The Parish Priest is an ex officio member. The Parish Priest may nominate an alternate to attend in his place.
- Up to two (2) members of staff elected by the staff.



- At least one (1) and up to four (4) parent members appointed in accordance with the School Community Council Charter.
- As many as three (3) other people appointed by the Council for their expertise.

Criteria for Membership

- The Chairperson of the Council Executive will normally be a Catholic and a committed member of a Catholic parish.
- All Council Executive members should maintain themselves in spiritual growth, motivation, commitment and competence according to the values and traditions of the Catholic Faith.
- Have an understanding of local Church policies relevant to Archdiocesan Catholic schools.
- Demonstrate a genuine desire to be of service to the school community.
- Have the necessary skills to contribute to the work of the Council Executive.
- The ability to work collaboratively and constructively with other members of the Council Executive.
- Adequate time to give to Council Executive duties.
- Willingness to act within the code of ethics for Council Executive members.

Term of Office

- Only ex officio members may remain as members of the Council Executive for more than six (6) consecutive years.
- A term of membership of the Council Executive shall be for a period of two (2) years for all other Council members.
- Members of the Council Executive may be elected for a maximum of three (3) consecutive terms. Executive members may not hold the same position of Chair or Deputy Chair beyond two (2) consecutive terms.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF COMMUNITY COUNCIL EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

The Chair

The Chair of the Community Council Executive is a significant leader in the school community and holds special responsibility for the mission of education within the Church. For this reason, he/she will normally be a Catholic and a committed member of a Catholic parish.

The Chair is the key to the success of Council Executive and Council Open Forum meetings. His/her responsibilities include ensuring that:

- The Annual School Community Council Plan is prepared in collaboration with the Principal.
- Two Community Council Open Forum meetings are held per year.



- The Council actively develops an atmosphere of prayerful reflection and true Christian discernment.
- The agenda is prepared in collaboration with the Principal who is the Executive Officer of the Council.
- The Council adheres to and promotes Catholic Education ideals and policies.
- The Charter and Governance Guidelines for the Community Council are adhered to, in spirit and in letter, and that the Council functions smoothly and efficiently.
- Good communications are established and maintained between the Council and all individuals and groups interested in the school's welfare, particularly at the local level.
- The meeting is kept moving - by focusing on main issues, by helping discussion, and by maintaining enough formality to allow for full participation without unnecessary discussion.
- All Council Executive members take an active part in discussion, bringing about decisions that are owned.
- Council Executive members respect the opinions and views of others and show, in their deliberations, principles of Christian justice and charity.
- Consensus is always aimed at, even though it may not be achieved in every case. The Chair works to build agreement, helps members see where they disagree and ends discussion when it is not productive.
- No member, including the Chair, regularly dominates the meeting to the exclusion of the opinions and ideas of others. The Chair should seek other opinions and, at times, an expression of opposing views.
- Harmony and mutual trust are promoted within the Council Executive and members are encouraged to respect other opinions and views.
- Problems are recognised and clarified.
- Council Executive members are called on for information and advice.

Staff Members

Staff are appointed to the Council because of their expertise, commitment and judgement as a member of staff. While they may be selected by their colleagues, their role on the Council is not a representative one. They offer the Council their skill and wisdom in the best interests of the school and Catholic education. Staff bring to the Council their professional knowledge. No staff member is eligible to hold the positions of Chair or Deputy Chair on the Council.

ELECTION PROCESS

Where the position of Chair is vacant:

- Expression of Interest for nomination of membership will be sought from current members of the Council Executive over a three-week timeframe.
- Election of Chair will be held with the community. A preferential ballot will be held if more than one nomination is received.



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP

- The Council Executive as set out in 4.2.4 of the Community Council Charter may appoint a minimum of zero and a maximum of eight additional members to the Council Executive in accordance with the approved School Community Council Guidelines following an expression of interest process.
These members may be other Community Members of Council, Working Group Leads.
- The Principal will appoint staff and ex-officio members of the Council Executive.