



Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry: Inquiry into the state education system in Victoria

Hearing Date: 12 June 2024

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Parents Victoria

Received Date: 24 June 2024

1. **Melina BATH, page 63**

Question Asked:

My time has run out, but I guess what I am seeking from you is: what are those areas for improvement? Could you please put them on notice or respond to us in writing? That would be lovely.

Gail McHARDY: Yes, certainly can. Happy to.

Response:

Role of School Councils

School councils play a pivotal role in the governance and strategic direction of schools in Victoria. They ensure that the voices of principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members are heard and considered collaboratively in decision-making processes.

There are approximately 18,500 school council members—comprising principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members—in Victoria's government schools. This significant group could potentially be utilised more to help enhance educational opportunities and outcomes for students.

We see the significant role and responsibility school councils can have as:

- 1. Focus on Students' Best Interests:** Acting in the best interests of students and helping to enhance their educational opportunities.
- 2. Strategic Planning:** Contributing to the development and monitoring of the school's strategic plan.
- 3. Financial Oversight:** Approving and monitoring the school's budget as part of the process of ensuring resources are used effectively and beneficially for students.
- 4. Policy Development:** Assisting in the creation and review of school policies, an area that would be strengthened through a network of school councils.
- 5. Community Engagement:** Facilitating strong connections between the school and its community, fostering a collaborative and supportive learning environment.

Effective communication between principals and the Department is crucial for the smooth operation and continuous improvement of schools. This communication can ensure alignment on educational goals, a balanced integration of top-down and bottom-up ideas and initiatives, and improved support and resources for schools. It also facilitates the sharing of good practices and the dissemination of vital information that can positively impact student learning and wellbeing outcomes.

We recommend a state-wide network of school councils would further enhance this communication, serving as a significant conduit between principals, school councils, and the Department.

To enhance the effectiveness of school councils and improve communication, the following areas should be considered:

1. Adequate Funding and Support for Schools and School Councils' Value-Adding Governance

Role: Ensuring that schools and their councils receive the necessary funding, support, and resources to act in the best interests of all students.

2. Support for Principals, Teachers, Students, and Parents: Providing support and resources to principals to effectively manage their dual roles as executive officers of school councils and school leaders and managers, and supporting teachers, students, and parents in their respective roles within the school council and school community.

3. Enhanced Training: Reviewing provision and method of training delivery for school council members on governance, financial management, and strategic planning to ensure that the 18,500 school council members in Victoria's government schools are well-equipped to fulfill their roles, responsibilities and compliance obligations. E.g. Expand school onsite training criteria.

4. Reviewing and Benchmarking School Strategic Planning: Empowering and supporting schools to develop strategic plans that help make a meaningful difference in their communities. These plans can include shared goals that unite all school community members—principals, teachers, students, parents, and community members—around the common objective of improving educational outcomes and student wellbeing.

5. Clear Communication and Balanced Approaches: Maintaining clear, consistent communication channels—including through an e-newsletter and/or communication platform for school councils—between principals, school councils, and the Department to facilitate timely and effective information exchange. Promoting a balanced approach to top-down Departmental initiatives and bottom-up school community ideas to support collaborative decision-making.

6. Building and Supporting Learning Communities through School-Home-Community Partnerships: Strengthening strong partnerships between the school, home, and existing school community groups (eg. Parent Clubs) and community organisations, such as Parents Victoria and others, to support greater community participation. Advancing feedback mechanisms and providing necessary resources to ensure that the school council represents a diverse range of perspectives and needs, thereby helping to enhance the educational environment and outcomes for all students.

7. A State-Wide Network of School Councils for Good Governance and

Departmental Engagement: Developing a robust network of school councils to share and promote good governance practices across schools. This network can also serve as a significant conduit between schools and the Department, enhancing collaborative decision-making.

These improvements can foster more collaborative and effective school governance and learning communities, ultimately contributing to better learning and wellbeing outcomes for students in Victoria.

Gail McHardy, CEO, Parents Victoria Inc.