



# A guide to Catholic Parish School Boards in the Diocese of Cairns

## What is the role of a school board?

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

The school board has a decision-making role in certain policy areas and an advisory role in others. The Principal has responsibility for the day-to-day leadership and management of the school. The school board often operates as a “sounding board” in considering ideas and providing advice and counsel to school leadership.

School boards also play an important role in helping to define and celebrate the special religious character or charism of the Catholic school.

## What does a school board do?

A school board has the following responsibilities:

- To support and promote the Catholic identity of the school and contribute to its evolving charism such that the school remains reflective of Catholic mission and values.
- To work to ensure the school has a dynamic function in the life of the Parish and wider community.
- To provide advice and counsel to the Parish Priest and Principal, as appropriate, on a wide range of school operational functions including, but not limited to:
  - ✓ strategic planning and school renewal
  - ✓ budgets and financial management,
  - ✓ staffing,
  - ✓ curriculum and the school’s educational program,

- ✓ inclusive practices,
- ✓ capital works and school development,
- ✓ school maintenance,
- ✓ parent and family engagement,
- ✓ communication and marketing,

while always having regard for diocesan and government requirements and areas relating to professional judgement.

- To work to ensure that the school fulfils its potential as an option for all who seek its values, including the poor and students with disability.
- To contribute to the selection process for the school Principal.
- To contribute to the formation and evaluation of school policies and core documents, particularly those which assist in defining the character and purpose of the school.
- To contribute to the induction and ongoing formation of School Board members so that they understand the scope and extent of their role.
- To contribute to the advocacy role of Catholic schools to influence governments for the betterment of the school.

## Are school boards different from company boards?

A very important distinction is that school boards are about service, not power. Decisions are based on the process of shared wisdom that values everyone’s input into the discussion. Matters are decided through reflection and consensus rather than being put to a formal vote. There is a higher regard for listening to, and understanding, the views of others, than advocating one’s own opinion or position.

The experience of many board members is that membership adds depth to their own personal and faith development.

### **What does a school board look like?**

School boards generally have no less than seven and no more than 12 members. The Parish Priest, Parish Finance Council Chair and Principal are *ex officio* members, meaning they are members by virtue of the positions they hold.

It is expected that a significant number of members will be parents of current, prospective or recent students of the school. Members should reflect a diverse range of backgrounds and skills and help develop relationships with the Parish and wider communities.

Staff are not eligible to be members of school boards for schools at which they are on staff, but staff of the school may be invited to Board meetings to provide briefings and join discussions where their expertise is required.

### **What background should board members have?**

All school board members should have:

- A demonstrated commitment to Catholic values and the ministry and mission of Catholic education. Members do not necessarily need to be Catholic but should be supportive of the values of Catholic Education and the Catholic Church.
- An understanding of local Church policies, particularly as determined by the diocesan Synod process.
- A genuine desire to be of service to the school community.
- The necessary skills to contribute to the school board's work.
- The ability to work collaboratively and constructively with other members of the school board.
- Adequate time to give to school board duties.
- Willingness to act within the code of ethics for school board members.

### **How are board members appointed?**

There will be an open call for nominations within the school and parish communities. This is done through meetings, newsletters, websites, social media and local announcements.

Those wanting to nominate for the board should complete a nomination form that is available from the school.

Nominees are then invited to attend a formation program (generally two evenings) to further understand the role of the board and discuss how they might contribute.

The final decision on the composition of the board rests with the Parish Priest in consultation with the Principal. Existing school boards might have a selection committee that addresses the nomination and formation of new members.

### **What time commitment is required?**

Board appointments are for three years with provision for a three-year extension. The practice of most school boards is to meet once or twice a term with meetings no longer than two hours.

### **How does the board's role intersect with the P&F?**

School boards and P&Fs both have important and overlapping roles in school communities. P&Fs generally have a dynamic, 'here and now' agenda with a major role in encouraging parent involvement in the life of the school and parent engagement in student learning. School boards are generally more reflective, long term and strategic in their orientation and are often structured to provide a diverse range of specialist advice and counsel to the school's leadership.

### **Like to know more?**

A range of information is available on the Cairns Catholic Education website [www.cns.catholic.edu.au/our-school-communities/school-boards-pf-executives](http://www.cns.catholic.edu.au/our-school-communities/school-boards-pf-executives). This information includes constitutions, nomination forms, the code of ethics, readings and videos.