VIC-EDU-F-047 MacKillop Education School Advisory Council Terms of Reference

The governing body for MacKillop Education Schools is the MacKillop Family Services Board (MacKillop Board). The governing authority is delegated to the Chief Executive Officer and the Group Director of The MacKillop Institute and MacKillop Education (Group Director), and they have responsibility for the strategic direction and oversight of MacKillop Education.

The Deputy Executive Principal and Campus Principals (School Leaders) have responsibility for the operations and management of MacKillop Education Schools (MacKillop Education).

MacKillop Education, informed by MacKillop's ethos and values, is committed to equity and access to learning for all children and young people. We believe in the transformative and liberating power of education, supported by a safe community that strives for excellence, enabling every student to flourish and achieve their full potential.

MacKillop Education exercises a preferential option to support children and young people who are disengaged and/or at risk of disengaging from education.

Our Values

Justice
We believe in the right of all people to be treated justly and fairly, irrespective of sex, race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, marital status, disability, sexuality or age.

Hope
We seek to foster hope that assists people to find meaning, through their faith, relationships and experiences.

Collaboration

We commit to working in a collaborative spirit through co-operation, partnership and empowerment.

Compassion

We seek to foster compassion, an attitude of the heart and an expression of our shared humanity that leads to a deep desire to alleviate another's suffering.

Respect

We seek to listen and learn from each other and build relationships with respect, being proud of what we hold in common and with understanding and tolerance of our differences. We seek to act with respect towards each other, the earth and all creation.

 *Further information about MacKillop Education's vision and mission can be found on our website in the School Philosophy Statement.

1.   Purpose of the School Advisory Council

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 governance responsibility or decision-making authority, it supports the Deputy Executive, Campus Principals and other leaders and provides an important connection to the whole school and broader education community.

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The School Advisory Council's role supports the overall governance of MacKillop Education as it 'is to give consideration to, and advice on, important school matters in order to support the school leaders and the strategic interest of the school' (MACS - *Working together in mission* p. 18).

2. Role of the School Advisory Council

Advisory in nature

The School Advisory Council provides a forum for discussion and discernment, where parent[1] voice, professional expertise and community perspective are available to inform and support the decisions made by the *School Leaders* as the custodians of the vision and mission, where students' safety, wellbeing and academic outcomes are paramount.

It is important that School Advisory Council members understand that their primary role is to provide assistance and advice on school matters to support the *School Leaders* in their role. School Advisory Councils do not have a legal identity and do not become involved in the day-to-day management of the school. The School Advisory Council must act within the parameters of this Terms of Reference.

The MacKillop Board, as the governing body, and the CEO and the Group Director The MacKillop Institute and MacKillop Education, are ultimately responsible for making any decision about the establishment of a council and its arrangements.

The following are some examples of the many ways the School Advisory Council may support the school and the *School Leaders*:

- articulating and enacting the school's vision, values and commitments
- promoting the school's ethos, culture and commitment to cultural safety
- promoting spirituality and wellbeing
- encouraging evidence-based practice and ongoing evaluation to ensure best practice in learning and teaching
- supporting a school culture that is focused on child safety
- supporting school policies, as required
- giving advice to the *School Leaders* on issues such as school improvement plans and enrolment trends
- giving advice to the *School Leaders* about growth and development
- foster collaboration between MacKillop Education, Catholic Education and the Department of Education (Vic) to enhance education outcomes for students at risk
- exploring opportunities for MacKillop to share their Reframing Learning and Teaching Environments (ReLATE) model with other schools across sectors.

3. Council structure

Members of the School Advisory Council

Participating in the School Advisory Council is a commitment to equity and access to education for all students and a practical expression of generous service. It is a response to the call to support our school communities, in a particular way. It also provides a forum for members of our school community and the broader 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.

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[1] The terms 'parent' and 'guardian' are used interchangeably and refer to any adult caregiver (or group of caregivers) who plays a primary role in a child's cognitive, social and emotional development, including persons/people with parental responsibility such as legal guardians and carers, grandparents, foster parents and extended family members.

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The MacKillop Education School Advisory Council is to be made up of a minimum of 10 council members who value and share MacKillop's educational vision, mission and ethos comprising at least:

a) Deputy Executive Principal

b) Geelong Campus Principal – Learning and Teaching

c) Mental Health and Spirituality Coordinator

d) Child Safety, Quality and Compliance Coordinator

e) Two guardians of children attending MacKillop Education Schools

f) Up to four other members in the broader education community who have the relevant knowledge, skills, expertise or interest and commitment to the vision and mission of the school to serve a particular need on the council.

At the Deputy Executive Principal's discretion, members of the school staff or senior student leaders, may be invited from time to time to attend meetings, depending on the content of the agenda.

4. Appointment and induction of members

Process of appointment of council members

The Deputy Executive Principal has the power of appointment, re-appointment and removal of members of the School Advisory Council. The appointment process will be an invitation by the Deputy Executive Principal.

When appointments are being made, the Deputy Executive Principal will keep in mind the need for a balance of gender, cultural diversity and skill sets in forming the council.

Council members are appointed for three years, and the appointments will normally take place from the beginning of a school year. The Deputy Executive Principal can at any time make an additional appointment to the council in the event of a vacancy in the minimum prescribed positions or to otherwise fulfil a need on the council; however, any council member so appointed will only hold office until the next set annual appointment round devised by the council following the appointment and, at this time, may apply for membership of the council in the ordinary manner. A preference will be given to new appointees over a repeat nominee (someone who has previously been on the council, had leave and returned) to ensure ongoing diversity and renewal.

Key considerations in appointment of council members

Child Safe Standards

Adherence to the school's Child Safe Standards must be at the forefront of any appointment process. As a condition of appointment, council members must have a Working with Children Check, and sign and comply with the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct.

Code of Conduct for School Advisory Council members

The school's Child Safety Code of Conduct sets up the baseline expectation that, like all members of the school community, council members are expected to actively contribute to a school culture by respecting the dignity of its members, affirming MacKillop's values and commitments.

Conflict of interest

MacKillop is committed to establishing a School Advisory Council that is free from fraud or corruption, or the perception of fraud or corruption. Conflict of interest arises where a councilor's duty to the school is affected by a personal (actual, potential or perceived) interest. In such cases, the line between personal and professional conduct may become blurred and interfere with a councilor's capacity to provide advice and fulfil their responsibilities on the council. Conflicts of interest may arise, but do not need to present a problem to any School Advisory Council if they are openly and effectively managed.

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Diversity

The School Advisory Council seeks to be inclusive of all community members and will demonstrate a genuine commitment to gender equity, cultural diversity and requisite skill sets.

Collectively, council members should bring a range of personal skills and experience to add value to the MacKillop Education School Advisory Council in accordance with the requirements under Section 5: The role of individual council members in this Terms of Reference.

Terms and conditions of appointment

The period of appointment for council members, except for the Deputy Executive Principal and MacKillop School Leaders is generally a term of three years, ending on the conclusion of the third year following their appointment, with the option of being reappointed for a total of three consecutive terms.

The Deputy Executive Principal and MacKillop School Leaders are ex officio members of the Council, meaning that their term continues for as long as they occupy that office, following which they cease to be a member of the council. Their successor in that office then becomes automatically appointed to the council.

A condition of appointment is that the member will:

- sign the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct, and MacKillop's Code of Conduct
- undertake a Working with Children Check as per the *Worker Screening Act 2020* (Vic.)
- accept the Terms of Reference.

The letter of appointment, sent out by the Deputy Executive Principal, sets out among other things:

- terms and conditions that must be agreed to by the proposed council member.
- details of expectations of council members
- a copy of these Terms of Reference
- reference to availability of school governance policies, including the applicable Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Child Safety Code of Conduct, Complaints Policy and the MacKillop Education School Advisory Council Conflict of Interest Form.

The office of a council member will become vacant if the member:

- is absent without the consent of the council from three successive meetings of the council unless the Deputy Executive Principal determines otherwise
- resigns by notice in writing
- is removed from office by the Deputy Executive Principal
- ceases to occupy the relevant office, in the case of the principal or any other ex-officio appointment to the council
- is unable to perform the role due to ill health.

Any period of office of a council member held, during a casual vacancy appointment by the principal (that is, a period of less than one year between annual appointment rounds) is disregarded in counting the maximum permitted tenure of office of a council member of three consecutive terms.

Induction

The induction process continues after the appointment and is a continuing process rather than an event. It will include:

- an induction session with the Deputy Executive Principal

New council members will be provided with:

- the Strategic and Annual Action Plans for MacKillop Education
- an understanding of the organisation and school

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- a *School Advisory Council Information Pack*, including MacKillop Family Services' Code of Conduct, the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct, MacKillop Education School Advisory Council Conflict of Interest Form, and other relevant school governance policies.
- a tour of one of the school's facilities.

Process of removal of council members

The Deputy Executive Principal may, remove a council member if the Deputy Executive Principal is of the view that a council member is not complying with the expectations of the role of a council member, or is engaged in conduct unbecoming of a council member or prejudicial to the interests of the school. The reasons for removal of council members will be outlined in writing by the principal.

A council member may appeal their removal to the Executive Principal/Group Director of MacKillop Institute and Education. The decision will be final.

Deputy Executive Principal of MacKillop Education acts on delegation by the Executive Principal/Group Director, The MacKillop Institute and MacKillop Education, who in turn acts on delegations from the CEO and MacKillop Board. No delegation of power prevents the exercise of a power directly by the CEO or MacKillop Board. For the avoidance of doubt, the CEO or MacKillop Board reserve the power to remove a council member from office if they are of an opinion that the circumstances are deserving of such action.

5. The role of individual council members

Qualities and skills of a council member

The council should be composed of people who meet high standards of community, group and individual behaviour, and appreciate, value and share the educational vision and ethos of MacKillop Education. 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 are essential.

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

- commitment to MacKillop's vision and mission
- commitment to equity and access to education for children and young people, at risk
- understanding of the role of the Deputy Executive Principal responsible for the operation of the school and as the leader of the Council
- 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 always maintaining confidentiality.

Expectations of the council member

Each council member, in addition to terms and conditions of appointment of council members contained in their letter of appointment and their acceptance of Terms of Reference and expectations, for School Advisory Council members, 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

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- declaring and not allowing any personal interests to conflict with the interests of the school, and properly managing any conflict of interest in accordance with the MacKillop's Conflict of Interest Policy

- 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

- acting honestly and fairly, in good faith and in the best interests of the school

- acting ethically and with a high level of integrity

- conducting themselves professionally and treating other council members fairly, sensitively, consistently and with respect

- undertaking council work with reasonable care and diligence

- participating in council formation activities

- keeping confidential the information received in the course of service as a council member

- not taking improper advantage of their position as a council member

- abiding by the applicable MacKillop school governance policies and key documents, including the MacKillop Education School Advisory Council Conflict of Interest Form and the school's Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Child Safety Code of Conduct and Complaints Policy.

6. Key roles

There are four key roles on a School Advisory Council. The chair 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 secretary, oversee the development of meeting agendas, and check 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

- oversee the preparation of the council's annual report, with the final version approved by the council

- participate as a member of the council

- develop the overall goals and priorities of the council

- ensure follow-up of actions arising from council meetings

- act as the chief education adviser to the council

- make arrangements to maintain an archive of relevant council documentation in accordance with these Terms of Reference, including minutes from previous meetings

- distribute the papers before meetings, after preparation of the papers by the secretary

- distribute draft minutes to the council members, after preparation by the secretary

- ensure that council members are kept informed between meetings

- plan to maintain a register and record of council, committee and working groups, and all applicable documentation and records, including minutes, agendas and correspondence.

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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 appointment round.

Appointment

A secretary is appointed by the council from among its members at the first meeting of the council after the end of the term of the previous secretary. The secretary does not have an additional vote as well as their ordinary vote on the council.

7. Committees and working parties

To share and support the work of the School Advisory Council, the council may consider establishing standing committees. The purpose of each committee is to advise the School Advisory Council on specific matters. Committees are not a requirement, but an additional advisory structure if needed.

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, for example a centenary celebration.

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. Any co-opted members of committees who are not council members will be held to account to the same expectations as those of a council member, as outlined in Section 5. They must have a Working with Children Check, sign and comply with the school's Child Safety Code of Conduct and MacKillop's Code of Conduct, and the School Advisory Council Conflict of Interest Form.

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

- finance
- property
- parent engagement.

Function

If a committee or working party is seen as desirable, the School Advisory Council Committee Terms of Reference template is to be used to establish the committee or working group. The following structures need to be adopted:

- 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 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
  - the 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
  - the duration of the committee/working party.

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It is important that any council committee or working party understands that it may not speak publicly for the council.

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

8. School Advisory Council meetings

Meetings

The MacKillop Education School Advisory Council meets six times during the year.

The School Advisory Council may call extraordinary meetings if required.

Agendas should be prepared and distributed prior to each meeting, with sufficient notice and time for preparation by council members. Minutes will be taken at each meeting.

Quorum

A quorum must be always present at each council meeting for the meeting to be validly constituted, and all discussion and agreement by consensus made at the meeting valid. The quorum for meetings is half of the total number of council members at any given time. The Deputy Executive Principal should always be part of the quorum. The Deputy Executive Principal can delegate the role of Chair during periods of extended absence.

Conduct of council meetings – consensus and confidentiality

In the conduct of School Advisory Council meetings, it is important that conversations are encouraged. Good, healthy dialogue where members listen to each other creates positive connections and builds good relationships, enabling the council to explore ideas and proposals.

Equally important is that members enter the meeting well-prepared for the discussions that will take place. An agenda will have been circulated prior to the meeting, and any important proposal will have been highlighted and any relevant documentation circulated. This will provide an opportunity for informed dialogue to take place, rather than 'off the cuff' thinking.

It is hoped that a well-informed discussion where each person has a chance to speak, is listened to intently and feels their ideas have been respected will lead to proposals and ideas being agreed to by consensus. At the heart of an agreement by consensus is the ongoing welfare of the group and good relationships of the members appropriate to a School Advisory Council.

Council confidentiality and solidarity are key ingredients in building trust at council meetings. As a rule, all council meeting proceedings are confidential. At times, there may be occasion to formally declare an issue, a paper 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 being named outside the meetings as taking 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.

Disclosure of interests by council, committee and working group members

In accordance with MacKillop's Conflict of Interest Information all council members must disclose any personal interest which relates, or may relate, to the operations of the school to ensure that any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest with a duty that the person has on the council is identified and appropriately managed.

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The Conflict of Interest requirements must at all times be complied with by all members of the council, and the members of any committee or working group established by the council.

9. Engaging with the school community

The council encourages full participation of stakeholders to ensure a high level of engagement and participation by the school community. Schools must employ a variety of strategies to provide evidence to meet Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) minimum standards, which require a school to 'publish a clear statement of its philosophy and be able to demonstrate how the school's philosophy is enacted' per Schedule 4 clause 16 in the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017* (Vic.).

The School Advisory Council is required to ensure that it has a dedicated page on the school's website which publishes up-to-date versions of:

- Terms of Reference
- School Advisory Council Information Pack
- MacKillop Education's Code of Conduct
- School Advisory Council Annual Report
- List of council members and key roles
- List of committees and membership.

A key piece of evidence that could demonstrate how the school's philosophy is enacted is the School Advisory Council Annual Report. The School Advisory Council Annual Report is an important communication document. 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 and committees over the past year, reference the council's self-evaluation, and indicate goals and focus for the following year. In turn, these goals will provide a basis for the evaluation the council undertakes in the following year.

This report is to be submitted to the Executive Principal/Group Director and shared with the school community.

The School Advisory Council is required to ensure that its dedicated webpage is reviewed and updated annually.

10. Record keeping

As a minimum, the Deputy Executive Principal must ensure the maintenance of the following council documents and records:

- the school's School Advisory Council Terms of Reference (this document) and the terms of reference of any committee or working group established by the council
- the agenda and minutes of School Advisory Council, committee and working group meetings
- copies of the School Advisory Council Annual Report
- a register of the current members of the council, committees and working groups, and any council members holding key roles
- a register of interests disclosed by council, committee and working group members
- the School Advisory Council correspondence file.

Agenda and minutes

The minutes of council meetings must be recorded in a consistent format and maintained by the Deputy Executive Principal and electronically stored in the MacKillop information management system.

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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 at its next meeting, as an accurate record of the meeting.

Council minutes are not public documents. A brief report approved by the Deputy Executive Principal may appear in the relevant publications to communicate the work of the council to the community.

Publication of this Terms of Reference

An up-to-date version of the Terms of Reference must be always available on the school's website.

11. 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 to the process to be followed each year as advised by the Deputy Executive Principal. The Deputy Executive Principal. will 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 these Terms of Reference should be recommended. While essentially an internal self-improvement process, for transparency's sake, a summary of the evaluation will be included in the School Advisory Council Annual Report.

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 and communication
- the work of committees or working groups
- the nature and extent of involvement of the school communities
- involvement in or assistance on key school projects.

12. References

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) 2022, School Advisory Council Manual, accessed 14 April 2023 cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/Melb/Document-File/Compliance/Policies/MACS-Policies/governance/School-Advisory-Council-Manual.pdf

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) 2021, Working together in mission, Melbourne Archdiocese of Catholic Schools Ltd, East Melbourne, accessed 14 April 2023 www.macs.vic.edu.au/MelbourneArchdioceseCatholicSchools/media/Documentation/Documents/SAC/MACS_Working-Together_WEB1.pdf

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