

Department of

Education

**School Councils**

**INFORMATION SHEET - Frequently Asked Questions**

***Parents***

***Why should I be a member of the school council?***Parents provide different viewpoints and have a variety of skills and knowledge that they can bring to the role. It is important to have a parent’s voice on the school council to ensure the best outcomes for students and the school community.

***How can I become a member of the school council?***If you have a child enrolled at the school, including the preschool, you can be elected by other parents at the school. Speak to your principal about the election process, it is that easy.

***What sort of time commitment is expected?***The time commitment is less than people think. A school council member will usually have to attend about 2 meetings a term and where possible assist with activities and events organised by the council.

***Do I have to get a Working with Children (Ochre) Card?***You will have to apply for a card from SAFE NT. Ask your principal for advice or SAFE NT. In many instances the school council will pay for your application as a volunteer.

***I don’t have any real experience. I think I would be out of my depth.***If you are committed to your child/ren getting a quality education then you already have what a council is looking for. Your principal can provide further information but councils need passionate and devoted parents that can bring different skills and experiences to the team.

***Parents and other council members***

***Who is on a school council?***The law requires that a council consists of the following members:

* parents of students enrolled at the school
* at least one teacher (other than the principal) who teaches at the school
* the principal
* student members (if secondary education)
* invited members (when invited by the school council).

***How many people are on a school council?***A school council must have at least five members but no more than 19 members. The constitution will tell you the exact number.

***Is it possible for people who aren’t parents, teachers or students at the school to become members of the council?***Yes. A council can invite one or more members (an invited member) from the school community who the council believes has special qualifications, knowledge or experience that can help. An invited member may also be a local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) or a local government nominee. Councils cannot ask a teacher or principal from another government school to be an invited member.

***Are councils required to have invited members?***When developing the constitution, a council can decide whether they will have invited members. It is up to the council to decide who to invite and for what period of time, as long as it meets requirements under law and the constitution.

***Can invited members vote?***  
Yes. Invited members have voting rights, the same as all other members.   
 ***How long can members be on the council?***

* Parent, teacher and student members can serve three consecutive two-year terms (a maximum of six years in a row).
* Invited members serve for a length of time determined by the council but only a maximum of two years at a time. Invited members are also eligible for a maximum of three consecutive terms, with the exception of an MLA or person nominated by the local government council. These people may serve longer.
* The principal of the school is always a member.

***If I am a parent as well as a teacher at the school can I be both a teacher and parent representative?***No. You can only be a member of a council in one capacity, that is, as a parent, teacher, principal, or where relevant an invited member.

***Are there ways of getting more people involved with the council and sharing the workload?***Councils can establish committees to assist them. Many school councils have committees so more people can contribute to the work of the school. Some examples of regularly used committees are finance, grounds maintenance, policy, canteen, and parent liaison. All recommendations of the committees are to be put to the council for consideration and ratification (approval).

A committee can consist of people who are not council members, although those people who are not members must be invited to participate.

***Who can take on the role of chairperson of a committee?***The chairperson of a committee must be a member of the school council. Each committee needs to appoint its own chairperson and the chair is responsible for presenting the committee's information to the council.

***Can the principal chair the council meeting?***Where the chairperson of the council is not present at a meeting, the members must elect a chairperson from the members that are present at that particular meeting. This may be the principal.

***Can a non-member speak at a council meeting?***Yes. Non-members can attend and speak with permission from the chairperson but cannot vote in making decisions. Most councils encourage non-members to attend and contribute.

***Does a professional auditor have to be employed every year to audit the financial accounts for councils?***A council is required to have its yearly audit prepared by a person who is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Institute of Public Accountants, or the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants.

The auditor, or firm of auditors, must not be appointed to audit the accounts of the council for a term of more than three years.

***When a council employs a person to manage the canteen or work on the grounds, can it pay them any wage it likes?***The council can negotiate with potential and current employees regarding the terms and conditions of their employment; however, relevant industrial relations awards and conditions must be complied with by law. Most council’s are subscribed to an industrial relations service that can provide further advice.

***How many times a year must the council meet?***To effectively support the school it is preferred that councils meet once a month during the school year. As a minimum though, councils are expected to meet at least eight times in a calendar year, including the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The AGM needs to take place by 15 March.

***How important is it for a member to attend every meeting?***  
A quorum for a meeting (i.e. the minimum number of members in attendance to make the meeting legal) is at least half the current council membership to be present at the meeting. It is important that members attend as many meetings as they can.

***What is the situation with insurance cover for council members and other people who volunteer to assist with a school activity?***Government schools have insurance cover for school councils and other volunteers. Please refer to the [Northern Territory Government (NTG) Self Insurance and Government Schools policy](https://portal.ntschools.net/sites/MYOBUpload/FMISP%20Document%20Library/NTG%20Self%20Insurance%20and%20Government%20Schools%20Policy.pdf) for further information or speak to your principal.

***Does the council have to pay the insurance premium for workers compensation, voluntary workers cover and public liability?***The Department of Education, through the NTG self-insurance arrangements, provides this coverage to councils. Claims are assessed on a case by case basis.

***What legal protection do members of a council have?***Section 184 of the [*Education Act*](https://legislation.nt.gov.au/en/Legislation/EDUCATION-ACT) protects council members who act in good faith in their role as members. In general terms, good faith means acting honestly and in the best interests of the council, i.e. the school and its students.

***Can a council tell a teacher what to do?***No. A council cannot tell teachers or employees of the department what to do in respect of their professional duties at the school. That is the responsibility of the principal.

***If a parent(s) writes to the council with a complaint against a teacher, can the council conduct an inquiry into the matter?***Complaints against teachers should be referred to the principal. If the complaint is against the principal it should be referred to the department using the process found in the department’s [Complaints Management for Schools policy and guidelines](https://education.nt.gov.au/policies/complaints). Complaints about school council employees or decisions should be made to the school council via the chairperson or principal.

**Further information**For further details talk to your school principal. Advice on school councils is available from the Department of Education or the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations.

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