



Kerry Street Community School

Governance Structure

January 2005

Introduction

Kerry Street is a community, made up of individuals. Each person contributes to the community in a different way and will remain with the community for a different length of time. The strengths and personalities of the members and the amount of time and energy they have available to contribute to the school influence the dynamics of the community. In this way the community changes and grows over time. The way tasks are best accomplished, the way responsibilities are shared between different roles, the support systems that operate, the extent to which parents influence the curriculum and many other things are affected by the current membership.

The current community has no desire to restrict the Kerry Street of the future into doing things the way we find works best. We encourage the ongoing development of a community structure that best serves the interests of the members themselves, while reflecting the core beliefs and aims of the school.

In this document we have outlined the way we currently organise the governance and management of the school, where relevant explaining how this relates to the school ethos. We recommend writing down commonly understood processes as they evolve because this clarity helps all members of the community to cooperate and participate with confidence.

Further Information

Certain procedures have been legally established in the constitution. Over a longer period of time, it is expected that the constitution would also require changing. This governance structure should be read in conjunction with the constitution, which details topics including:

- The objects of the school
- The responsibilities of the council
- Membership of the Kerry Street community
- How the council functions; membership, elections, officers, committees, delegation of responsibility to coordinator, council meetings
- Annual General Meeting, Whole School Meetings and Special Whole School Meetings; purpose and authority, procedure, voting
- Minutes of meetings

Job descriptions have been written for members of staff. It is also helpful to refer to these in conjunction with this document.

Diagram of Governance Structure

Relationships Between, and Roles of, Individuals and Groups

Whole School Community

The Kerry Street Whole School Community is made up of all members of the association. It includes all students, staff and parents and we welcome the involvement of everyone. As a group, we are all morally responsible for the well-being and growth of the school. We all participate, contribute and support each other.

Council

To facilitate the operation of the school, a council is elected. The council has the legal responsibility for fulfilling the stated objects of the school. They represent the community and are responsible for the governance, management and administration of the school and the provision of the educational program.

In practice, the council deals primarily with governance, policy, long term planning, budgeting, unresolved grievances, maintenance of buildings and grounds, facilitating involvement of volunteers, appointment of staff, marketing, fundraising, major changes and initiatives, and expulsions.

Council members are expected to be available to members of the community and represent their views, be proactive in identifying opportunities and difficulties and presenting them for discussion, attending meetings, participating in discussion and acting upon decisions made and facilitating the involvement of community members.

Office bearers, president, secretary and treasurer, have additional responsibilities, as detailed in the constitution.

To facilitate the management and administration of the school and the provision of the educational program, the council appoints a coordinator and employs staff, and delegates practical responsibility and day to day authority to them. The council supports and monitors the staff and the staff report to the council.

Staff

Staff members work as a team to provide a service to the families of the school, in the form of the educational program and the management and administration of the school. The Education Coordinator is a member of the permanent teaching staff and acts as the team leader.

For specific information, see the job descriptions of the education and administration coordinators, administrator, permanent and specialist teachers and teachers' aides. In general:

- The role of coordinator, as described in the constitution, has been divided into that of education coordinator and administration coordinator. The education coordinator is responsible for all

aspects of the educational program. The administration coordinator is responsible for all aspects of administration and organisation of school processes. The two coordinators work closely together.

- The administration coordinator delegates certain responsibilities to the administrator. The two roles may be fulfilled by one person.
- Permanent teachers are responsible for their own classes and work together with the coordinators to provide and improve the overall educational program of the school.
- Specialist teachers are responsible for their own classes but are not expected to be responsible for the overall school program, though they are encouraged to be involved.
- Teachers' aides are responsible for working under the direction of the teachers to assist in the implementation of the educational program.

Volunteers and Sub-Committees

The school could not operate without volunteers. Volunteers enrich the community and provide skills, effort and energy to help the community grow and prosper. Volunteers may form sub-committees. They may work individually or together on a specific project or be responsible for an aspect of the functioning of the school over a longer period of time. All members of the school community are encouraged to volunteer in some capacity.

Volunteers are delegated responsibility by either the council or staff and will be supported and monitored by the relevant group or individual. Sub-committees will have a convenor, who is responsible for coordinating the members of the committee.

Volunteers are responsible for the task they have agreed to undertake. These tasks are virtually unlimited in their variety.

Parents and Students

Parents are responsible for working together with the school for the benefit of their children. Students are responsible for participating in activities and contributing to the group.

A cooperative relationship between staff and families is of benefit to everyone. When parents become contributing members of the community, the staff is supported and able to provide a better educational program.

All council members, staff members, volunteers, parents and students are in turn members of the whole school community.

Meetings

Meetings are held with varying degrees of formality, from staff members conferring on a break to the Annual General Meeting. Here is described the more formal meetings of the school, where minutes are kept and the agenda is open to input from the school community.

The roles and procedures of the Annual General Meeting, Whole School Meetings, Special Whole School Meetings and Council Meetings are detailed in the constitution so are only briefly described here.

Annual General Meeting

The AGM is held early in term 1. All members of the school community are encouraged to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to elect the new council and accept the treasurer's report. If there is other business it will be discussed at a separate meeting, which may be held immediately before or after the AGM.

Special Whole School Meetings

Special Whole School Meetings are called when required. All members of the school community are encouraged to attend. They are for highly important topics (specified in constitution) where it is desirable for a decision to be made by the whole school community, rather than a representative body. Decisions made at these meetings will not be overturned by council.

Whole School Meetings

Whole School Meetings are held twice a term and additional meetings may be called for a specific purpose. All members of the school community are encouraged to attend.

These meetings are to gauge community opinion, gather information or support, discuss new ideas, raise concerns, organise community initiatives, and pass on information. In most instances this meeting will make recommendations, rather than decisions, to the responsible individual or group. These recommendations are not binding but are usually followed unless: new information or ideas arise, long term planning or important information has not been considered, the recommendation turns out to be impractical, or the process of the meeting was not fair or representative. At times, decisions will be made at whole school meetings, and action taken, if the topic is community based and not the direct responsibility of another person or group, for example, organising a nit check at school or participating in the Children's Fiesta.

Council Meetings

Council meetings are held at least three times a term, as determined by the council. Council members are expected to attend all meetings and other members of the community may attend to speak about a particular topic. Council planning meetings are often held during holidays, especially over the Christmas break. Permanent and other staff members are usually included in these planning meetings.

The council is elected by the school community and responsible for representing the community and working to attain the objects of the school. Therefore, the council is the ultimate decision making body within the school. They will delegate responsibility to staff, volunteers and sub-committees but remain legally and practically responsible for ensuring these responsibilities are being fulfilled.

Staff and Teacher Meetings

Staff meetings are held regularly throughout the term, as determined by the staff. They may be after school, on organised afternoons where volunteers supervise students, or on pupil free days. All staff members are invited to attend. In practice, the permanent teachers and the administration coordinator form the core of the meeting group. Teachers' aides and specialist teachers usually attend only if they are specifically concerned with an item on the agenda. The administration coordinator will usually only attend for the items related to their responsibilities.

The role of these meetings is to discuss and organise all aspects of the management of the school and the educational program, and to support one another and share information.

Sub-Committee Meetings

Sub-Committee Meetings are held when desired by the committee. Their purpose is to coordinate and facilitate the work of the committee, within the authority delegated to them.

Kids' Meetings

Kids' Meetings are held weekly during school time. They are part of the educational program and designed to give students a say in the operation of the school, a chance to discuss issues and organise events important to them, and an opportunity to improve speaking, listening and negotiation skills.

Recommendations from these meetings are sometimes referred to council or whole school meetings. Kids' Meetings do not make decisions that are the responsibility of other groups or individuals, for example, whether lollies are allowed at school.

Decision Making

Factors contributing to effective decision making:

- Different types of decisions are made in different ways
- Individuals and groups entrusted with responsibilities are empowered to make decisions related to these responsibilities. They are also encouraged to consult with other members of the school community when they think it may be useful or desired.
- The process does not become belaboured, creating unnecessary work or delays
- The process is not rushed, especially when the outcome is important, the issue is complicated, the solutions are varied, or opinions are strong or divided.
- All people who choose to contribute to a decision have their opinions and ideas heard and respected
- Issues are considered in detail and within the broader picture
- Solutions are creative, practical, compassionate and consider everyone's needs
- Decisions are clearly recorded
- Decisions are acted upon promptly
- Decisions are communicated to other members of the community
- Decisions are reviewed for effectiveness and changed if desired.

Common sense is the best guide to how to make decisions. Decision making is directly related to responsibility. The time taken, information gathered and/or the consultation level recommended generally increase with the number of people whose areas of responsibility are affected by the decision, the importance of the decision, how long term the consequences of the decision will be, the number of people interested, and how controversial the topic is.

Decisions may be made by relevant individuals with or without consultation. Many decisions are made informally by groups, eg, staff, sub-committees, busy bee helpers. Other decisions are made formally at meetings.

The vast majority of group decisions are made through discussion of available information and options by all people involved and general agreement (or consensus) on a course of action. On some occasions, general agreement is not attained. In this case, a process must be decided on to make the decision.

When situations become tense or controversial, it is usually of benefit to:

- consult more
- take more time
- get more information
- use structured processes to ensure all members of the community are heard
- monitor these processes to make sure they are serving the community
- be clear in defining and communicating solutions and who will act upon them
- make a time to review and ensure this review is carried out.

Strength is often required from a leading member of the community, for example the coordinator or council president, to keep the decision making process on track and identify and state if it is not working for any reason.

The benefits and disadvantages of consensus and voting will be considered for the particular circumstance. In both cases, information, discussion and the generation of creative options is essential.

Voting is fast, definite and usually reflects the opinion of the majority. However, it does not always allow all people to feel heard or respected which affects the long term effectiveness of the solution; the outcome can be affected by a small number of influential individuals; it does not always result in the most creative and complete solution; the way the question is worded can affect the outcome; and it can ignore the strong opinions of a significant number of people.

Consensus considers all views; can result in solutions that suit everyone, even in difficult situations; and creates a sense of community and strength through the contributions of many people. It has the disadvantages of being more time consuming, both for the people involved and the time frame of the process; can still result in people not feeling considered or valued, even if they eventually agree with the group decision; the outcome can still be affected by an influential minority, and if not well facilitated, a minority of people with a strong view can eventually persuade the group to conform with their wishes.

In general, we avoid the use of voting unless time is a factor, the significance of the decision does not warrant the work involved, a consensus process has failed to reach a decision, or the consensus process has broken down in some way and is not providing a fair and representative outcome. Conditions for voting at various meetings are set out in the constitution.

Communicating Decisions

Often communicating a decision is as important as making it. It is also important to communicate about opportunities for community input into decisions, such as meeting dates and requests for feedback.

Methods of communicating information include:

- verbal, in person or by telephone
- meetings
- minutes; in minute books or photocopied and distributed
- weekly newsletter; in pigeonholes or by email
- notices in pigeonholes
- posters on front door

Common sense is used to decide on which methods of communication are most suitable in a particular situation. It is important to establish who will be responsible for ensuring the information is distributed. More than one method may be needed, or the same method repeated. Clarity is always important. In sensitive situations, early and clear agreement about all aspects of communication is helpful.