

**PROGRESS, PLANNING AND GOD**

Workshop Presentation: Mr Noel Culbert

Saturday, 20 May, 2000

**1 Exercise – Looking Back and Looking Forward**

- **Past**  
*[List features of your school, which should be remembered.]*
- **Future**  
*[List the key features of the ideal future for your school.]*
- **Present**

The next phase of this seminar will address the implications of this research into the past and future of your school, for the present.

**2. God’s Presence**

The essence of Christian leadership is that we manage our schools in a manner which remains true to the Bible verse, *Matthew 6: 10 – “your will be done”* – from what we know as The Lord’s Prayer.

Whether, we are looking back to the past, forward to the future or dealing with the present, God’s timeless, unconditional, personal presence will guide us every step of the way – if we let Him do so.

**3. Key Dimensions of Strategic Governance**

Four key dimensions of effective governance in any organisation are **planning, monitoring, evaluating** and **policy development**. For example, School Council members discuss and resolve issues that are central to helping children learn. They plan systematically and for the long term, taking into consideration the needs and concerns of internal and external constituents, all the while balancing reality and politics. They match plans against results and adjust their plans accordingly. In the process, effective policies are developed.

The following chart is a useful practical guide for these important tasks:

<b>SCHOOL ACTION PLAN MODEL</b>						
<b>KEY ISSUE</b>	<b>WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE</b>	<b>HOW WILL WE GET THERE:</b>	<b>BY WHEN?</b>	<b>WHAT WILL WE NEED?</b>	<b>HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE HAVE ARRIVED?</b>	<b>LEADER: MONITOR</b>
	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Steps to be taken</i>	<i>Target Dates</i>	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Success Criteria</i>	

**3.1 Planning**

In conjunction with the Principal, a School Council needs to plan strategically in at least the following areas:

- clearly articulated policy priorities in line with the school’s vision;
- sources of income and allocation of those resources through annual budgets;
- necessary facilities, services and personnel for the school to operate;
- skills necessary for Council to conduct its business; and
- succession planning for the Chair and Members.



### 3.2 Benefits of a Strategic Plan

- ✓  guides decisions of the Council
- ✓  clarifies priorities for the school community
- ✓  helps ensure continuity when personnel change
- ✓  increases satisfaction when goals are visibly achieved

Planning processes are a useful opportunity to involve a wide cross-section of the school community in order to develop a sense of involvement, ownership and commitment to new developments.

#### Principles for Planning Beyond the Governing Body:

- Where possible, planning process will be consultative, involving staff, parents, students and the wider community.
- There will be a named governor responsible for monitoring the plan
- The plan will have an appropriate time-scale attached for its production and approval.
- The plan will have clear, appropriate and measurable targets.
- The resource implications of the plan will be stated.

### 3.3 Monitoring and Evaluating

In order to meet both internal and external accountability requirements, a Council needs to monitor and systematically evaluate its own performance as well as that of the Principal and the school.

Effective Council work is a journey, not a destination. The quality of the journey depends on the how the team works together in accomplishing its responsibilities. Although it is difficult to step back and reflect, periodic assessments to help to keep the Council on course.

## 4. Relationship between Council and Principal

### 4.1 Balancing Governance and Management

The relative responsibilities of the Council and the Principal are a balance between Governance and Management, in which the Council focuses on long-term strategic goals and policies while the Principal and senior management deal with operational issues, as well as supporting the Council.

Dr John Carver [quoted by Dempster, 1998] says that Councils should stay in the field of Governance, giving sufficient instructions that policies can be put in place by professionals with sufficient flexibility to allow for creativity in management solutions. While it is the Council's goals which are paramount, how they are achieved should be the responsibility of day to day management. Once a policy decision has been established by the Council, often on the advice of the Principal, it becomes the responsibility of the Principal and the staff to execute those decisions. The Council should be involved as little as possible in the daily operations of the school.

School Councils and Principals face and solve problems of immense magnitude. The Council and the Principal need to develop a relationship built on open communication, trust and respect. Council members have a solemn obligation to be open-minded, to read, to study and seek every opportunity



to be informed. Usually a well-informed Council and a Principal can meet problems rationally and set the direction of the school in a way that ensures the best education for every child.

#### 4.2 Governance by the School Council [adapted from Fuller, 1999]

As the governing body of the school, the Council has responsibility for the establishment of a policy and attitudinal framework within which the school can be efficiently and effectively managed. In its simplest form, the relationship principle is that the Council should not meddle with the matters of management and the Principal should not purport to deal with matters, which are the function of the Council.

Overlapping those discrete roles there is [usually] in practice an element of collaboration. The extent of that collaboration depends very much on the quality of the relationship between the Principal and the Council, particularly the Chair. A good working relationship between the Chair and the Principal will lead to significant collaboration because of a free and mutually beneficial exchange of ideas, gestures of support and general endeavour in the best interests of the school. All those benefits can be achieved without compromising the ultimate execution of the discrete responsibilities of management and governance.

Carver [1998] speaks of an important distinction, which Councils must make - the dichotomy of ends decisions and means decisions. In making decisions, the Council must decide on what results it wants the school to achieve, who will benefit and at what cost in terms of finances and effort expended – i.e., ends decisions. But Council must also decide how the results will be achieved – i.e. means decisions. Herein lies the potential for misunderstanding and conflict, because the means are the responsibility of both the Principal and the Council, depending on the level of detail.

Carver suggests that Councils largely stay out of means which he describes as:

- |                                     |                    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| • <i>procedures and processes</i>   | • <i>programs</i>  |
| • <i>the operational conditions</i> | • <i>services</i>  |
| • <i>methods and strategies</i>     | • <i>curricula</i> |
| • <i>activities</i>                 |                    |

Smoley [1999] has devised a self-assessment tool based on what he sees as the essential attributes of effective governance [**Do the Quiz on the Web [www.nsba.org/smoley/](http://www.nsba.org/smoley/) if you dare!]:**

- |                                      |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • functioning cohesively as a group; | • working toward Council improvement; |
| • exercising appropriate authority;  | and                                   |
| • connecting to the community;       | • acting strategically                |

In summary, the Council should ensure that it sets clear directions for the school, including appropriate planning procedures and policies, systematically monitors and evaluates performance against those parameters, then takes the necessary steps to continue the governance process.

#### 4.3 Management by the Principal and Senior Management

The School Council is directly responsible for hiring and evaluating the Principal. The Council encourages and empowers the Principal to lead the school toward its vision and to involve all staff in that leadership. The Principal is both adviser and executive officer to the Council.



As the Council's main consultant and adviser on all matters concerning the school, the Principal is expected to contribute to the Council's deliberations by furnishing reports, information and recommendations, both upon request and upon self-directed initiative. The *chief adviser* has the responsibility to keep Council Members thoroughly informed about educational matters, any problems ahead and options to deal with the problems.

The recommendation process used by the Principal is more than simply conveying personal preferences to the Council. When action is needed by the Council, the Principal should clarify the issue by stating the problem and identifying the contributing factors. Alternative solutions should be presented, complete with the educational and financial implications of each. Finally, clear and specific recommendations should be made, based on professional judgement, as to which alternative is preferable.

The Principal should be present during all Council meetings, with the possible exception of discussion of the Principal's evaluation. There may be an emergency situation that makes the Principal's presence impossible, but the Council should not intentionally schedule meetings without the Principal.

The focus of the Principal's duties and functions as the Council's chief adviser is to:

- develop and recommend policies necessary for the efficient functioning of the school;
- provide information to the school Council on vital matters pertaining to the school;
- prepare and submit to the Council a preliminary budget; and
- submit an annual report of the operation of the school to the Council.

Conversely, as chief executive officer of the school, the Principal sets the tone for the entire administration by:

- promulgating and carrying out policies of the Council;
- directing purchases and expenditures in accordance with the approved budget;
- formulating and administering educational programs for the school; and
- developing a program of maintenance and improvement or expansion of buildings and equipment.

The dual role of the Principal as educational leader and chief executive officer of the school may at times place the Principal in a difficult position. The Principal is the educational leader of the school; yet, as chief executive officer of the School Council, the Principal is duty-bound to execute the policies and directives of the Council. At times this may create a conflict, but is nevertheless an essential part of the skilled and sensitive role of the Principal.

#### 4.4 Relationship with other Senior Managers

For a number of reasons, it is desirable for the Council to have periodic dealings with the other Senior Managers in addition to the Principal. Personal rapport always eases the flow of communication to and from the Council, and a professional relationship with other Senior Managers can serve to increase the effectiveness of management.

For example, the Principal may ask one or more of the senior staff to accompany her/him to the Council or Committee Meeting to assist in briefings on a topic with which that person is familiar. Alternatively, the Council Chair may occasionally attend a Senior Manager's meeting with the Principal to give feedback or to be briefed on a particular topic. Such meetings are a useful way for Council to directly affirm staff for conscientious efforts and to learn first hand.

It can also be useful to involve the whole Council with staff and even parents in activities such as visioning and strategic planning as well as formal and social occasions. Strong ownership,



understanding and motivation can be forthcoming from such joint endeavours. None of these suggestions are intended to diminish the key role of the Principal as the chief adviser on, and implementer of, Council decisions.

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**References**

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- Fuller, T. *Council and the Head*. Paper delivered at AHISA Conference, Brisbane, 1999.
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Mr Noel Culbert is an educational and administrative consultant. He has postgraduate qualifications in Education, Psychology and Administration from The University of Queensland and Harvard University.

