

Belair Jean Bonython  
Kindergarten

# INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE IN SCHOOLS AND PRESCHOOLS

How to get parents more involved – a case study

**Leader**

Lynette Jones, Director



“...to make sure parents get the most out of being on the council, the annual general meeting, including the induction, was moved to the very beginning of the year. This means our council members are fully engaged in activities in a positive and meaningful way earlier on, and this deepens their involvement. Members feel comfortable with their roles and responsibilities and this is reflected in their decisions.”

Lynette Jones

## The setting

### Governing council – not just fundraisers

For many years the governing council (also known as a management committee) at Belair Jean Bonython Kindergarten acted as a fundraising group, instead of being involved in important decisions about the preschool.

Preschool director Lynette Jones wanted to see how she could change this, and build a culture where parents felt valued and able to contribute.



The council has continued to be committed to excellence, and worked with preschool staff to achieve an 'exceeding' rating and 7/7 for all standards.

## The steps

### Less time fundraising

Lynette drew on her experience working and engaging with families to look at ways she could shift the focus of the council from fundraising activities to more meaningful decision-making. Lynette looked at different aspects of the preschool to see how the governing council could be involved, take ownership, and drive improvement.

### Induction and relationship building

A key part of the kindergarten's success is the induction process that Lynette delivers for her governing council members. Since the membership of a preschool council changes annually, Lynette starts the year with a thorough induction for the new parents.

This annual event, run shortly after the preschool's annual general meeting, gives parents:

- an overview of the preschool, its values and culture
- expectations for governing council members
- a behind-the-scenes look at how the preschool operates
- an overview of the programs and curriculum for preschool children
- a look at the differences between governance and management, and the different roles and responsibilities
- the department's strategic plan
- the preschool's operational plan, including the National Quality Standards.

The induction is a way for governing council members to meet and develop positive and meaningful relationships with each other and with preschool staff.

Importance is given to agreed protocols for meetings, including listening to each other, showing respect for the opinions of others, even if they differ from their own, and not interrupting others, etc.

At this meeting staff and governing council share a meal, which provides further opportunity for social interaction and bonding. Council members are invited to share their values and aspirations for the preschool for the coming year.

Each new member gets an induction information pack with key DECD and National Quality Standards documents.

To support shared understanding and respect, governing council members also sign a code of practice that outlines the expectations for council members.

### 7 out of 7 –National Quality Standards (NQS)

As part of the shift to meaningful involvement, the governing council took on responsibility for NQS Quality Area 6 – collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

To support their work around NQS Area 6, each year the council reviews the preschool's practices and activities using a reflective practice process. This process draws on parent survey responses, general surveys and comments from the previous year.

This allows the council to make suggestions for improvement, working under the NQS framework. The council plans ways to engage with families and the wider community that supports the attainment of NQS Area 6 requirements. They also plan an implementation time frame and evaluation process that will allow them to evaluate their achievements. This then forms the basis for the following year's review.



"I believe that because of this work we have established real collaborative partnerships with our families, which is exactly what NQS Area 6 is all about."

Lynette Jones

## How it helped

### Deeper involvement

This approach to community involvement in the preschool is in its third year. It has proved to be a very successful way to engage with and involve parents in local decisions.

Each year the council reviews what was done in the previous year, and looks at how they can continue to add value, increase the sense of culture and community, and create improved connection within the preschool.