

Brighton Secondary School

INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE IN SCHOOLS AND PRESCHOOLS

Increasing parent involvement in local governance – a case study

Leader

Olivia O'Neill, Principal



“Meetings are so much better. Council members are animated and engaged.”

Olivia O'Neill

The setting

Getting the community involved

Schools can often find it difficult to get parents involved in local governance decision-making, as they are very busy balancing family, work and other commitments.

Principal Olivia O'Neill has implemented strategies that she found successful in getting parents more meaningfully involved.



“The weekend day conferences have always been transformational.”

Olivia O’Neill

The steps

Weekend day conferences

For over 10 years, Brighton Secondary School has involved their governing council in a weekend day conference. Olivia believes these conferences have been a particularly successful way to engage council members and create an effective decision-making group.

The conference is held in term 2, following the election of the new council. It’s a great opportunity for council members to remove themselves from their day-to-day involvement with the school and:

- **get to know one another and bond as a group**
- **focus on strategic planning and future goals**
- **deepen their understanding of school governance and what their roles and responsibilities are on council**
- **develop a better understanding of the curriculum, programs and services of the school.**

The conference adds to the abilities and skills of the school’s governing council. It also brings members together as a positive group of people who value each other as individuals and respect one another’s opinions and contributions.

More meaningful and structured meetings

As parents have many competing demands on their time, Olivia drew on her own learnings at Harvard University to start using strategies for more engaging meetings. The changed format of the meetings has meant real difference to the level of involvement from council members and to the level of discussion and decision-making.

Rather than a more traditional meeting agenda, the Brighton Secondary School Governing Council’s agenda for meetings starts with items for discussion, then items for decision. This focuses the council on the agenda topics and encourages discussion, conversation and debate.

Once these items are dealt with, the agenda then moves onto reports. In previous meetings the reports were the main focus, which got in the way of discussion and conversations.

The new approach creates interest and conversation and allows all parents on council a chance to get involved and ask questions. This has had a positive impact on shaping plans for the school.



“This fantastic facility for our students would not have happened without the passion and commitment of our governing council.”

Olivia O’Neill

How it helped

More engaged parents

Council members, especially parents, feel more confident to contribute and raise matters of concern. This has led to more meaningful discussions and better decision-making as more members get involved.

The weekend conferences also allow staff to share initiatives and programs that are happening in the school, and for parents to gain a better insight into what their children are learning.

Olivia says these strategies have helped to unite parents on the governing council and to create an environment of meaningful involvement, with a focus on planning for the school’s future.

Practical resources for the school

Olivia highlighted that the school’s excellent drama theatre can be attributed to the fact that she has a highly engaged and active governing council. Council members identified the need to have a theatre in the school, and led the project that lobbied the Holdfast Bay Council to secure a grant for the school. The school got a grant of \$1 million to build the theatre.