

**FORMAL PARENT GROUPS IN SA CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

In a broad sense, the role of a school’s formal parent committee\* is to:

*… support and leverage the knowledge, capacities and ‘social capital’ within the school’s parent community and collaborate with school staff and the parish to provide a Catholic education experience that nourishes students, families and staff …*

Parent committees work in many, different ways to contribute to the wellbeing and success of their school communities and the students whose needs and aspirations sit at the centre of these.

**Tips for Progress and Success**

* Review your committee’s role – in Term 1 when you are looking forward and in Term 4 when you can look back.

What is its role? What do your members think? What do school leaders and staff think? Do you, as ‘parent leaders’ and the school leaders have a common understanding of the committee’s purpose and the ‘boundaries’ within which it operates?

Consider you can grow beyond being ‘just’ a fund-raising or friend-raising committee.

How might it work with staff to promote and support parent and family engagement in children’s learning at home and school?

How can it work with staff and other people to reach out successfully to parents who don’t feel welcome in the school, or who think education is the job of teachers, or have work and life challenges that mean they can’t often come to the school?

What social capital does the committee have (connections to other parents, other people, local community resources, services and networks)?

* Consider your annual ‘work plan’. What can you lock into place, put on the school calendar and heavily promote because they are regular or ‘known’ events and activities?

Can you commit to at least one new idea? This might be a theme, rather than a single activity – something you are going to highlight or work on across the year.

Liaise with the principal about the committee’s role in welcoming new families to the school community and promoting the importance of parents working in partnership with the school and engaging in their children’s learning

* Talk about why new people have joined the committee and others have stayed on. Take the time to find out what inspires each member, what interests them, what they like and don’t like to do, what they’re good at and what they might be willing to have a go at.

While you may (rightly) feel there is lots of planning and doing to do, and so you’d better get cracking, it is important to invest time in getting to know each other and building your team.

* When you have confirmed your purpose and key annual priorities, make sure the wider parent community hears about them via an attention-getting flyer and other means like the school’s Facebook page.

Let parents know they are welcome to join the committee, but also to just volunteer to help with one or two things. Emphasise that absolutely ‘every little bit counts’.

Map out your planned events and activities on a year planner and keep the school community informed and up to date on your planning for these.

Consider combined school/parish activities as these can be a great way to build community and social capital.

* Create a dedicated section in the school newsletter to communicate with your wider parent community.

Promote and celebrate your work and successes in the school newsletter, parish newsletter and even the local paper.

* Thank and celebrate everyone who contributes to the success of the committee’s activities.
* Keep up to date with the work of the Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities – for example:
* Like our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Federation-of-Catholic-School-Parent-Communities/153137151493359>
* Promote our Charter for Parents in Catholic Schools SA
* Check out the resources and information on our website.
* Table any correspondence from the Federation at your meetings
* Invite us to a meeting to speak or just to listen and socialise
* Mention the Federation and its activities in your school newsletter section
* Invite us to facilitate a workshop for your committee or school parent community
* Send some representatives to Federation events such as our parent forums, workshops and the AGM.

Note:

\*Various terms are used to describe the formal parent committee in SA Catholic schools (e.g. Parents and Friends Committee, Community Connections, Secondary Parent Group.)