Board Information Pack
15/02/2016
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1. Who can apply to be a member of the Canberra Montessori Society Board?

Any member of the Canberra Montessori Society may stand for election to the Board, providing:

- They are a current financial member;
- They are not a staff member of the Canberra Montessori School;
- There is no other conflict of interest that would affect their ability to serve on the Board;
- They nominate correctly; and
- They can dedicate the time required to serving on the Board.

2. What is the difference between the Canberra Montessori Society and the Canberra Montessori School?

The Society is the organisation that owns the School. At the moment, the Society does very little except run the School, although we are currently looking at ways to expand the activities of the Society outside of the School. The Board belongs to the Society, and our main task is the management of the School.

3. What are the benefits of being on the Board?

The main benefit is that you get to make a very real and substantial contribution not only to the education that your child receives, but also that of every other child at the school.

You also get great experience in the running of a business. We may not always think of it this way, but while CMS is busy providing an amazing learning environment for young people it is also busy being a business with an annual turnover of $2 million or so. As a Board member you will deal with issues related to education, capital development, human resources, legislation, school ethics, finances, strategic planning and much more, all of which is focussed around the continued development and improvement of the Canberra Montessori School and the Canberra Montessori Society.

Board membership can be an extremely satisfying and enjoyable way to serve the greater School and Society community.
4. We pay an annual membership for the Canberra Montessori Society, but there are two adults in our household. Can both of us vote and/or stand for the Board?

No. Technically, Society membership belongs to only one person; although usually we don’t worry about asking you to nominate who is the member unless you wish to participate in elections as either an elector or electee. You can transfer your member rights to another parent in the same family. For more details, please see Section 5 of our Constitution, which is available [here](#).

5. What does the Board look like?

The Board is composed of up to 12 members that have been nominated and accepted by the CMS members. Specific positions on the Board include the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Public Officer, and Secretary.

Other Board positions include leadership roles in the following [Sub-Committees](#), which may change from time to time.

- Building
- Bursary
- Capital Development
- Finance
- Communications
- Policy
- Operational Liaison & Compliance

6. How much time do I need to commit to the Board?

The amount of time you need to commit to each month depends on which committee(s) you are involved in. At a minimum, however, you should allow 5 – 6 hours per month, which includes 2 or so hours for the monthly meeting as well as some additional preparation, reading and follow-up time. For more information regarding the amount of time required for each committee, please look at [Roles & Time Commitments](#).

7. What happens at a Board meeting?

The Principal and Board members attend each meeting. Our aim is to have each meeting complete in under 2 hours, but depending on the amount of work on the agenda they can take longer. Traditionally we meet on the first ‘teenth’ Tuesday of the month at 6:45pm at the school, but this is discussed with each new Board as its members are elected.
For each meeting:

- An agenda is circulated in advance of the meeting.
- We have announcements and notify the meeting of any conflicts of interest
- We all confirm our continued eligibility to serve as Board members
- We run through the action items from the last meeting to monitor progress on each
- We check our progress against milestones and goals for the Strategic Plan and the Board Work Plan in general, adding tasks as required
- We go through the Principal’s Report, and discuss as required
- We go through each Committee’s Report, and discuss as required
- We go through Other Business, which may include
  - Items for Noting (e.g. school has been successful with a grant application)
  - Items for Decision (e.g. changes to fee structure)
  - Items for Discussion (e.g. upcoming AGM)

8. I wouldn’t know a balance sheet from a balance board. Do I have to understand finance and accounting to be on the Board?

No, but it is a good idea to be familiar with them. After all, you will be involved in decisions based on financial reports that affect the future of the school. We’ve got some really good templates and ‘dashboards’ that help explain the financial status of the school, and the Finance Committee members are always willing to answer questions. You need to feel comfortable that you understand the information presented to you; you must not rely on ‘whatever the Finance Committee says’ to make your decisions. We also look at appropriate Board development sessions to run when each new Board commences, so this can be an area we address if necessary.

9. As a Board Member, will I have any legal or financial responsibility for the operation of the School?

Yes. As a Board Member, you will have legal and financial responsibility. This may sound a bit intimidating, but it’s worth remembering a few things here.

- If the Board or individual Board Members are found to have been negligent in their duties, it is possible to face criminal or civil penalties, including fines and gaol. However...
- Canberra Montessori Society has insurance to protect Directors of the Board against financial liability in the case of legal claims (for example, if somebody successfully sued the school for some reason)
- As long as you exercise due care with your involvement in decisions (that is, you ensure you understand all information provided to you, you ask questions if you are concerned, and you participate in discussions and votes accordingly) you have been
a responsible Board member. Even if a decision results in a poor outcome, as long as the Board took all reasonable steps to ensure they were making the right decision, the Board is acting responsibly. Everyone makes mistakes now and then, including Boards. The important thing is that at all times we do everything we can to avoid making those mistakes.

We realise that our members are volunteers and do not necessarily have Board experience. So there are a couple of things we do to help you understand your responsibilities.

- We always have an induction session with the Association of Independent Schools, which provides a lot of information on the roles and responsibilities within a Board.
- We have created information packs for both prospective and new Board members so the details they need are easy to hand, including links to useful articles and resources.
- We try to actively seek out new information about Board participation and encourage all Board members to do the same.
- We try and circulate all information pertaining to upcoming discussions in a timely matter and we commit, as individuals, to reading all information and preparing for meetings appropriately.
- We have developed policies and procedures to help ensure that we do meet all our legal and financial responsibilities as a business, an employer and a provider of education.

10. There is a pressing issue I believe should be discussed at Board level. If I join the Board, will I be able to get my issue addressed?

You should not join the Board if you are doing it because you are passionate about a single issue to the exclusion of all others. You should only nominate for the Board if you are interested in participating in the management of the school as a whole and accepting the responsibilities that come with that.

Having said that, you will certainly be able to participate in robust discussion on a number of topics and you will be able to request items to be added to the agenda. As many Board members are also parents, this is something we have to consciously manage and we do ask Board members to use their Parent Hat and Board Hat as appropriate.

**EXAMPLE: I AM CONCERNED ABOUT SOMETHING IN MY CHILD’S CLASSROOM AND I FEEL THE CLASS DIRECTOR IS NOT DEALING WITH IT APPROPRIATELY.**

*With my Parent Hat on, I can talk to the Class Director directly. If I’m not happy with the response I receive, I can talk to the School Administration Director or Principal. If I’m still not happy, I can, as a Parent, put my matter forward to the Operational Liaison Compliance Committee (OLCC) of the Board.*

*With my Board Hat on, if the matter is brought to the Board by the OLCC, I will declare my conflict of interest and participate in discussion as the Chair deems appropriate.*
EXAMPLE: I AM CONCERNED ABOUT A PATH AT THE SCHOOL WHICH HAS FALLEN INTO DISREPAIR.

With my Parent Hat on, I can let the Administrative staff know so they can mention it to the maintenance contractors, or let me know what is happening.
With my Board Hat on, I can ask the OLCC to include it as an item for discussion as it relates to a safety issue for the community as a whole.

11. What do you look for in Board members?

The Board needs members which can contribute skills and talents to the number of functions they are responsible for. This can depend on the current composition of the Board and in general relates to the function of the Board.

We also hope that in general Board members will use their connections and networks to further the strategic interests of the school as appropriate. We need Board members who will think strategically about the School’s future and look for ways to further the Strategic Plan - for example, a Board Member may be able to connect the school to a new strategic partner, an individual or business interested in philanthropic support, or introduce us to opportunities to develop a different revenue stream.

If you don’t have those ‘connections’, don’t worry - there are many ways your skills could be used on the Board, as outlined below. The Board is responsible for:

- Developing the School’s Strategic Plan and ensuring it is implemented.
- The appointment of the Principal.
- Ensuring that the School fulfills its functions as set out in the Education Act, 2004.
- Promoting contact between the Board, the parents and the community.
- The development of Board policies.
- Maintaining the School’s finances.

12. Who runs the School; the Board or the Principal?

In a nutshell, the Principal runs the school and the Board supervises the Principal.

To go into it a little more in depth, however, as a Board member, it’s important to be able to distinguish between Strategic and Operational matters.

Operational matters are the responsibility of the Principal. So the Principal has day-to-day responsibility for staffing, the curriculum, ensuring the school meets all its responsibilities, maintenance of the building and grounds, financial management, keeping up enrolments, etc.

Strategic matters are the responsibility of the Board. Strategically it would be a disaster if the school wasn’t managed well, so a key part of the Board’s work is to oversee the work of the Principal. The Principal will also seek advice from the Board when operational decisions can affect strategic outcomes.
The Board recognised that **strategically**, it is imperative to build our enrolment base to ensure a strong flow of students through the school and maintain a healthy organisation, and thus we needed to be able to expand our early childhood offerings. **Operationally**, the Principal advised the Board on logistical and practical requirements for buildings which would facilitate both new Cycle 1 classes and provide a better environment to meet the growing needs of our Cycle 3. **Together**, the Board and Principal set a scope of requirement for the new building that ensured it met our needs both now and in the future. **Operationally**, the Principal acquired three separate quotes and ensured the building plans met all regulatory requirements and managed the building process with regular reports to the Board. The Board will **strategically** review use and impact of the building to ensure that we are getting the best use of it, and other facilities, to meet the long term strategic goals of the school.

Similarly, the Board would always discuss with the Principal any **strategic decisions** that would affect **operational outcomes** before they were finalised. The Board and Principal work very closely together and the strength of this relationship is crucial to the ongoing success of the school.

In addition, the Board is responsible for things like strategic planning; where do we want to be in 5 years or 10 years or 20 years from now? 2016 is the first year in our ten year strategic plan, 2016 - 2025.

N.B. The 2016 -2025 Strategic Plan will be published and launched at the opening of the new building. If you would like more information on this Strategic Plan, please contact board.chair@cms.act.edu.au.

13. **What if I decide I don’t like being on the Board or can’t stay for any other reason?**

It is always possible to resign. However, we’ve provided this information pack in the hope that by giving people a clear understanding of the expectations they won’t run into this problem. If you do feel you have to leave the Board, we ask that you give us as much notice as possible so we can make sure we cover the work that you were doing. Before any of that happens, though, please talk to the Chair or Deputy Chair; we may be able to help with any issue you are having.

14. **What if I have to miss a Board meeting?**

We all understand life happens and sometimes things can’t be avoided. Having said that, please only join the Board if you intend, to the best of your ability, to attend all 12 meetings each year.
15. **What is a conflict of interest, and what happens if, as a Board Member, I have one?**

Conflicts of interest are anything that may affect your ability to make impartial and balanced decisions in the best interests of the school.

**EXAMPLE: A BOARD MEMBER OWNS A COMPANY THAT IS TENDERING FOR A CONTRACT AT THE SCHOOL.**

_The Board member would raise this as a conflict of interest. The Board would decide if this was a manageable conflict; if so, they may require that the member in question absents themselves for any discussion or decision relating to that contract._

**EXAMPLE: A BOARD MEMBER WORKS FOR A COMPANY THAT HAS JUST WON A CONTRACT FOR THE SCHOOL.**

_The Board member would raise this as a potential conflict of interest. The Board may decide that there is no actual impact on the ability of the Board member to carry out their duties but notes the conflict to show that due process has occurred._

While we try to avoid them wherever possible, in many cases they can be managed appropriately. If you think you may have a conflict of interest, please discuss it with either the Chair or Deputy Chair prior to your nomination.

16. **I really want to contribute to the operations of the school, but I’m not sure I’ll have enough time to be on the Board. Can I still be involved in some way?**

Yes, you can. The Board has a number of Sub-Committees, some of which are made up of a combination of Board members, Society members, staff and potentially even members of the public. For more information on these Sub-Committees, please look at Sub-Committee Work.

17. **As a Board member, will I be able to talk directly to the school community about the Board’s activities?**

Yes… and no. As a Board member, you must sign a confidentiality agreement prior to starting on the Board. Many things we discuss are confidential.

In addition, sometimes members of the broader school community will feel that if they say something to you at pick-up then it means that you will by default bring it to the Board. It is really important that all of us, Board members and community alike, use the proper communication channels to bring matters to the attention of the Board, if required. This ensures that every matter is dealt with equally. For more information on the communication channels, please see Communication: Board, Principal & Community.
18. I still have some questions. Who can I talk to?

Please contact either the Chair or Deputy Chair by emailing board.chair@cms.act.edu.au and they will be happy to help however they can. We will also be running an information session prior to the AGM (Tuesday 15 March 5.45pm) so please contact board.chair@cms.act.edu.au if you are interested in attending.

19. I would like to be nominated for the Board or a Sub-Committee. What do I have to do now?

Great! You need to fill out the nomination form and have it signed by another member (who can only nominate you and no others). This includes the following information:

- The formal information for the nomination;
- Our Nomination Checklist which confirms that you understand what you’re signing up for in terms of the time commitment and responsibilities.

Then submit your nomination either to the Front Office (attention Board Chair) or email it to board.chair@cms.act.edu.au.
**ROLES & TIME COMMITMENTS:**
**BOARD WORK VS. SUB-COMMITTEE WORK**

**BACKGROUND**

The CMS Board is established under the CMS Constitution for the purpose of promoting Montessori educational philosophy, promoting the rights of the child in society and to establish and run Montessori schools. (Our constitution is available [here](#)). In order to ensure that certain aspects of the Board's work are completed, Sub-Committees of the Board have been created. These Sub-Committees perform the work set out in their respective Work Plans and report back to the Board as a whole.

The nature of the Sub-Committees can change from year to year as priorities and focus of the CMS Board change. For 2016 the Sub-Committees are:

- Operational Liaison and Compliance Committee (OLCC)
- Finance
- Building
- Capital Development
- Bursary
- Communications
- Board Policy

**GENERAL BOARD WORK**

*Monthly Commitment: 3 hours plus 2-3 hours preparation.*

Strictly speaking the Board Work is all of the work of the Sub-Committees plus those tasks that the Board undertakes to achieve the purposes of the Canberra Montessori Society. In practical terms, the work of being on the Board includes:

- Monthly Board meetings
- Creating and reviewing the strategic plan and ensuring appropriate progress occurs
- Running the Annual General Meeting
- Ensuring the effectiveness of the Principal
- Ensuring that the Sub-Committees are working effectively
- Approving large financial decisions of the school
- Approving the school budget
**SUB-COMMITTEE WORK**

In addition to the general Board work, Board members serve on at least one sub-committee.

**OPERATIONAL LIAISON AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE (OLCC)**  
*Commitment: 2-3 hours per month.*

The OLCC is the point of contact between the Board and the Principal, and is responsible for ensuring the School is meeting all its regulatory and legal requirements. In addition, the OLCC is the point of contact for the Board for any dispute resolution.

**FINANCE**  
*Commitment: 2-3 hours per month.*

The Finance Committee is responsible for overseeing and governance of the use of school funds through ensuring adequate financial statements are being produced by the school and reviewing those statements and strategies.

**BUILDING**  
*Commitment: Usually 1 hour per month, but can vary greatly depending on current project*

The Building Committee is responsible for any new building projects. In 2016 this involves working with the Principal on a new building project, and working with the Capital Development Committee on applications to fund future building projects. The Building Committee also works in conjunction with the Learnscapes committee to insure that new buildings fit in with the overall design and principles of the school.

**CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT**  
*Commitment: 2 hours per month, but can vary depending on the current project.*

The Capital Development Committee is focussed on promotion of the Building Fund and on attracting funding from sources outside of the Canberra Montessori Society to fund the larger projects that are part of the strategic plan. This does not include the operations of the Fundraising Committee.

**Bursary**  
*Commitment: 2 hours per term*

The Bursary committee approves applications for assistance with School fees. This is an important role and serves a dual purpose – to approve applications on the Board’s behalf, and to maintain the privacy of the individuals and families applying.
**COMMUNICATIONS**

*Commitment: 2-3 hours per month*

The Communications Committee is responsible for all communication from the Board to the Society members, and for facilitating this communication through various media, such as the newsletter and yearbook. It also takes responsibility for any surveys or similar activities, and the regular updating of this Board information pack.

**BOARD POLICY**

*Commitment: 1-2 hours per month*

The Policy Committee is responsible for maintenance of the policies of the Board (not the School). While only guidelines, the policies are part of the mechanism for the Board to retain the history of past decisions that may apply to current situations.

**COMMUNICATION: BOARD, PRINCIPAL & COMMUNITY**

**HOW THE BOARD WORKS WITH THE PRINCIPAL**

The Board is responsible for strategic work, such as developing various strategic plans, and overseeing, or providing a governance framework, for operational work.

The role of the Principal, among other things, is to implement directions from the Board and to translate strategic plans into operational tasks so that strategic goals are attained.

The Principal must remain autonomous in managing day-to-day operations to remain effective. Only when these day-to-day operations relate to the ability to achieve strategic goals or the governance framework would the Board get involved. In general, this level of involvement will be providing the longer-term direction, actions or outcomes required by the Principal.

However, there is an exception to this. The Operational Liaison Compliance Committee (OLCC) is a link between the Board, the Principal and operational issues. When an operational issue has been escalated to the Principal and is still not resolved; or the issue directly relates to the Principal, the OLCC is the appropriate channel to raise these operational issues. The OLCC will then manage the issue through appropriate channels. This may mean the OLCC directs the Principal in operational matters, or may raise the issue with the whole Board for resolution.

It is therefore not appropriate for a Board member to directly raise operational issues at Board meetings. To help understand the flow of communication, a flow chart below is included. It is, however, very appropriate for a Board member to directly raise strategic or governance issues directly at Board meeting (via the Board Chair).
Communication Pathways at CMS

Is your Enquiry ...

Educational?

Class Director
Your child’s teacher is the one who knows your child best within the school and will be able to address any concerns you might have regarding your child’s progress and developmental needs. Your Class Director is also the best person to discuss interactions with Specialist teachers. Please make an appointment rather than trying to catch them at drop off or pick up.
E: firstname.lastname@cms.act.edu.au

School Administration Director
If further discussion is required regarding the implementation of the Montessori programme, policies or procedures, our School Administrator is available to assist. Please make an appointment through the Executive Assistant.

Administrative?

Parent Handbook
Try referring to your copy of the Parent Handbook first, it is a valuable resource and may answer some of the questions you have. If you need another copy, please ask at the Office.

Class Parent
If you would rather talk to a parent regarding policies or procedures, your Class Parent is available.

Administration
Our Admin staff are also available to help with any administrative enquiry you may have.

Business Manager
If your enquiry is regarding school fees, donations or other financial matters please speak to our Business Manager.
E: amy.duan@cms.act.edu.au

How do I contact …?

Class Parents:
• Contact list provided in Term 1.
• Their pocket outside your classroom.

Admin Team:
• 02 6287 1962
• reception@cms.act.edu.au
• office@cms.act.edu.au (Exec. Assistant)
• accounts@cms.act.edu.au
• principal@cms.act.edu.au

CMS Board:
• boardchair@cms.act.edu.au

All staff can be contacted by email:
• Firstname.lastname@cms.act.edu.au

To contact the OLCC, please email board.chair@cms.act.edu.au, which will go straight to the current Chair of the Board.

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CMS Board Work Plan

The CMS Board is established under the CMS Constitution and through its operation has established a number of policies to provide a framework for the Board to work under.

This document highlights the elements of the work plan and the associated timetable to deliver those elements that are not contained in other sub-committee work plans.

Annual Work Plan Elements

The Board will, according to its Policies:

- Confirm confidentially agreements
- Review or develop the strategic plan so highlights can be presented at the AGM
- Review mission, vision and values
- Prepare and present short term fundraising goals at AGM
- Approve the annual budget, including fee increases
- Provide comment to the OLCC in regards to the Principal’s Annual Performance Review
- Priorities and targets for capital fund-raising will be established and monitored
- Perform annual Board Effectiveness Survey and Review
- Authorise an annual Capital Development Plan
- Write the Annual Report
- Maintain a listing of all current Board Committees and their members by the Board Deputy Chairperson
- Maintain a conflict of interest register
- Maintain a Board member and Board Committee contact list

Additional Work Plan Elements

The Board will:

- Review the Ten Year Strategic Plan annually, with a major renewal every 3 years to re-extend it to the full 10 years.
- Perform the recruitment of the Principal
- Perform other duties, as required
IMPORTANT BOARD DOCUMENTS

CONSTITUTION

The Constitution for the Canberra Montessori Society is the ‘rule-book’ by which the Society and the Board operates. As a Board Member you will need to be familiar with our Constitution; you don’t need to know it by heart, of course, but you will almost certainly need to refer to it from time to time.


STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2015 a large part of the Board’s work involved reviewing the Strategic Plan created in 2010 and updating it according to the 3 year cycle we work on. Although the Plan covers a 10 year period, it will be reviewed annually by the Board, with a major review which includes involvement from every part of the CMS community taking place every three years. In this way, we will always have at least 8 - 10 years of Strategic Plan ahead of us, depending where we are in the cycle.


Please note that the 2016 - 2025 Strategic Plan is currently in the process of final publication and will be launched to coincide with our new building opening. If you would like to discuss the new Strategic Plan prior to publication, please contact board.chair@cms.act.edu.au.

BOARD POLICIES

There are two sets of policies for the school; Board policies and Operational policies. The Operational policies deal with day-to-day operational issues; HR, enrolment, emergency management, health & safety, etc. The Board policies relate to the running of the Board and relate to issues such as responsibilities of the Sub-Committees, review procedures and so forth.

The Board Policies are available by contacting the Front Office of the school.
GENERAL REQUIREMENTS OF CMS BOARD MEMBERS

All Canberra Montessori Society Board members are required to sign a Role Agreement for Board Members once elected, before attending their first meeting and before being given access to any Board information. In signing the Agreement, Board members indicate that they will adhere to confidentiality requirements, commit to attending Board meetings, and commit to upholding certain standards while serving as a CMS Board member. Please read through the Role Agreement before nominating to ensure that you understand what these expectations are.

Sub-Committee members are also required to sign a slightly different Role Agreement before attending their first meeting or being given access to any Board information.

Additionally, it will be necessary to have access to a computer/tablet and the Internet, since much of the Board work is done electronically.
APPENDIX – FORMS & CHECKLISTS

The following documents are available from http://cms.act.edu.au/about-us/governance/annual-general-meetings/:

- Board Nomination Checklist
- Board & Sub-Committee Nomination Form
- Proxy Form
- Board & Sub-Committee Role/Confidentiality Agreement
  This is for your information only; we’ll provide these at the first Board meeting.

These references on http://www.communitydirectors.com.au provide valuable information on the roles and responsibilities of Board members. There are many resources available, but this page in particular will provide a great deal of useful information.

- Overview of your Board Responsibilities