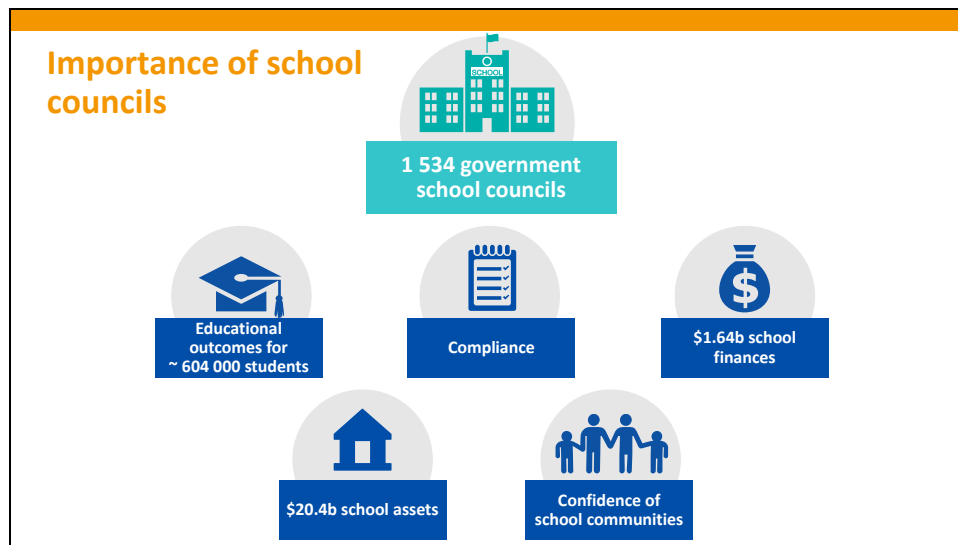


Slide 1

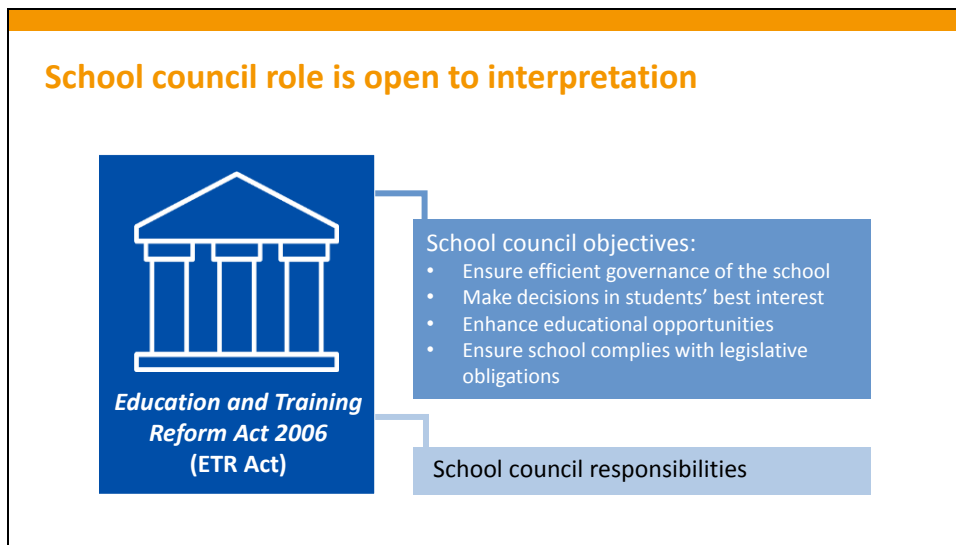


This presentation provides an overview of the Victorian Auditor-General's report *School Councils in Government Schools*.



School councils operate in every one of approximately 1 500 government schools in Victoria. These schools educate more than 600 000 students annually.

School council's role within government schools is not insignificant. They support their school to educate students, and have an influence over school compliance and management of school finances and assets. Importantly, they can influence the confidence of school communities in their schools.




The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (ETR Act) establishes the governance framework for Victorian government schools. This framework is complex and unique.

It outlines the school council's role through four objectives. These include to ensure efficient governance of the school, make decisions in the students' best interest, enhance educational opportunities and ensure the school complies with its legislative obligations.

The ETR Act also specifies school council's responsibilities, which include strategic planning, financial administration, overseeing assets and reporting on school performance.

The ETR Act also specifies the Department of Education and Training's (DET) role in overseeing school council activities and reporting on them to the Minister for Education.

Focus of our audit



Objective: To determine whether Victorian government school councils are meeting their objectives under the ETR Act.

In scope ✓	Areas examined
Victoria's government school councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarity in roles, responsibilities and accountabilities• Department of Education and Training's (DET) oversight and support
Out of scope ✗	
Catholic and independent schools	

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In this audit, we examined whether school councils in government schools are meeting their objectives under the ETR Act. We also considered whether DET effectively oversees school councils and reports to the minister on their performance.



We found that school communities cannot be assured that all school councils of government schools are meeting their objectives.

This is because their objectives are open to interpretation and DET has not clarified the role of school councils in government schools. As a result, there is ongoing confusion over the role boundaries between the principal and the school council. They each rely on the willingness of both parties to work together.

Our survey of 1 004 participating schools found wide variation in how school councils understand their role. Respondents identified challenges in decision making as one of their most significant issues. Such challenges can lead to disputes that are difficult to resolve.

Neither school councils nor DET are able to determine whether school councils are meeting objectives. As a result, DET is not able to, and has not informed the minister on their performance.

DET's guidance to school councils



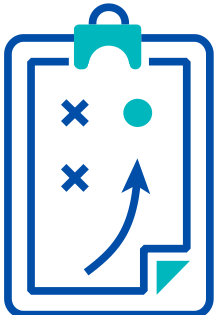
✓	Responsibilities
✗	Role
✗	Accountability
✗	Decision-making authority

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DET has improved its guidance to school councils through a dedicated guide. It also provides training—at no cost to the school.

However, there are still gaps in DET's guidance. While it explains school council responsibilities, these can be difficult to find on DET's website. DET's guidance has not explained the school councils' role, their accountabilities and their decision-making authority. There is little awareness among school councils of the additional assistance DET makes available to them.

Lack of performance evaluation



✓	Assurance over financial activities
✓	Assurance over operational activities
✗	Efficiency and effectiveness reviews

DET has a risk-based process to assure school councils are complying with their financial responsibilities. However, it only partially assures their operational activities. DET has not used its power to assess their efficiency and effectiveness.

Self-assessment is the only form of performance review in place. DET provides a self-assessment tool to school councils, however it lacks performance measures or benchmarks to assist them in making conclusions about their performance. Our survey results revealed that only 33 per cent of school councils conducted self-assessments.

Recommendations

5 recommendations for DET

1. Interpret policy intent of school councils
2. Update guidance and training
3. Implement support strategy for school councils
4. Identify assurance requirements and implement additional measures as required
5. Annually report to the minister on school council performance

We made five recommendations to DET around providing guidance and training, support and assurance, and performance reporting. DET accepted all of our recommendations.

For further information, please view the full report on our website:
www.audit.vic.gov.au

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