



Department of  
Education

Public education  
A world of opportunities

A photograph of a smiling female teacher with brown hair, wearing a white blazer over a dark top, leaning over a table. She is holding the hands of a young child with short brown hair, who is wearing a red shirt and looking towards the camera with an open mouth. The background is a blurred classroom setting with bookshelves.

# Our School - Our Voice

# Introduction



## From the Director General

Our public school system is committed to providing all Western Australian children with a high quality education that will assure them the best start in life and a bright future. This means ensuring each and every community has the best teachers and the best school leaders.

We all recognise that great teachers need to be led by great principals. Selecting a quality principal who is the best match for a school's distinctive context is a crucial decision. No one knows that context better than the people who live, work and raise families in the local community. That is why, as the Director General of Education, I am committed to ensuring the voice of school communities is a valued part of the process to select a new principal.

I am proud to partner with WACSSO in supporting school communities to understand how they can be actively and confidently involved in these decisions. This resource, developed in consultation with parents, community members and school principals is just one more expression of the powerful partnership that characterises public schools and their communities.



**Lisa Rodgers**  
**Director General** June 2019



## From the President, W.A. Council of State School Organisations Inc.

Effective school principals will have direct and measurable impacts on the lives and learning outcomes of students by shaping school culture and creating a shared vision. They affect teachers, school support staff, parents and members of their broader school community.

Principal selection is a rigorous process which carries a great deal of responsibility for members of the panel. Thorough, transparent and well defined selection processes increase the likelihood that the most appropriate candidates are appointed.

Parents and families are the first and continuing educators of their children. No one has a greater investment in young people than the parents who raise them and communities that nurture them. In recognition of this shared responsibility the voice of community members is an important element in the principal selection process. This resource has been developed for community members who have been invited to participate as a member of a selection panel. It seeks to inform and reinforce the roles and responsibilities of being an effective panel member. It is important to note that you are not on a panel representing the views of any particular group, your role is to select the best person for the job. The information is based on consultation and feedback from community members.

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia. WACSSO works tirelessly to advance public education in Western Australia, so that every student has the best chance to realise their potential and live the life they deserve. We are pleased to have had the opportunity to support the development of this important resource.



**Kylie Catto**  
**President** June 2019

# Getting it right: why principals matter

## What makes a great principal?

Successful principals understand the distinctive nature of their school and use this knowledge along with their skills, understandings and personal attributes to achieve the best possible outcomes for their students, teachers and school community.

Principals are the leading educational professionals in schools.

They are responsible and accountable for the development of children and young people so that they can become ‘successful learners, confident, creative individuals and active, informed citizens.’

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008)

## What do we want our school leaders to be able to do?

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has developed the Australian Professional Standard which sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to achieve excellence in their work.

Principals in WA public schools are selected based on their demonstrated ability to meet the criteria that are drawn from the Standard.

Successful principals understand that leading teaching and learning is their core business. They are adept at creating and sustaining the conditions under which quality teaching and learning thrive. In doing this they strive to ensure that each and every student is a successful learner.

Effective principals also engage and work closely with their school community. They develop and maintain positive partnerships with students, families and carers and all those associated with the wider school community.

Choosing the right principal for each school makes a critical difference to the lives of individuals, communities and to society, now and into the future.

**“Community representatives on selection panels provide current, accurate perspectives and understandings about the needs of their school and offer nuances that may not necessarily be obvious to other panel members.”**

(Regional Executive Director)



# Community voice: the critical ingredient

Every school community wants a principal who provides strong leadership and puts the needs of all students at the heart of every decision made about the school.

Communities expect principals to be educational leaders who set strong directions and communicate a compelling vision for the school. They are respectful, inclusive and listen to the voices of others to build shared ownership and commitment among their students, staff and community by making that vision a reality.

Schools are often the hub of a community so selecting the best available principal for your school is a crucial decision. Having local people actively involved in the selection of the principal provides a 'community voice' on the panel.

**“ My contribution to the selection process to appoint the principal was valued and I felt I had a considerable impact on the decision.”**

(Community member of a principal selection panel)



# How will our principal be selected?

The Department of Education recruitment processes, including the filling of principal vacancies, must comply with the Public Sector Standards and Commissioner's Instructions in human resource management. The Public Sector Standards and Commissioner's Instructions have been effective since February 2011 and set out the minimum standards required of all Western Australian public sector bodies and employees.

In applying the Public Sector Standards, the Department is committed to the principles of merit, equity and transparency in all employment related decisions, including in relation to the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff.

The selection panel chair (Regional Executive Director) is responsible for ensuring that the selection process adheres to the Public Sector Standards.

In applying the Public Sector Standards, panels will select the best available applicant for the school based on their merit, with consideration to their relevant skills, knowledge, ability and prior employment experiences, if these are relevant.

It is essential selection panels are impartial and free from bias, nepotism and personal benefit. Transparency confirms that panel decisions, when independently scrutinised, are capable of review and supported by clear and concise documentation.



# Principal selection: a step by step guide

## STEP 1

### Position advertised

The principal position is advertised and provides the school specific requirements of the role and the criteria for selection.

## STEP 2

### Selection panel formed

The Regional Executive Director forms a panel with the right mix of skills, knowledge and capabilities to ensure a good outcome.

## STEP 3

### Applicants shortlisted

Written applications are assessed and the panel reaches a consensus on which applicants are competitive. Competitive applicants are shortlisted for further assessment.

## STEP 4

### Further assessment

**Interviews conducted:** Interviews are conducted to provide opportunities for competitive applicants to demonstrate relevant skills, abilities and experience. Interviews also allow applicants to further claims made in their written application.

**Referees contacted:** Referees are contacted to validate an applicant's claims.

## STEP 5

### Consensus reached

The panel achieves consensus about the most suitable applicant by considering application ratings, interview ratings and referee reports.

## STEP 6

### Recommendation made

On completion of the assessment and reaching consensus regarding the most suitable applicant a selection report is prepared indicating the reasons for the decision. The panel makes a recommendation to the Director General regarding the most suitable applicant via the selection report.

## STEP 7

### Notification, feedback and breach period

All applicants are notified of the outcome of the process and are given the opportunity to seek feedback, within a breach period.

## STEP 8

### Appointment made

An offer of employment is made to the recommended applicant and if accepted they are appointed.

# Position advertised

## Advertisement:

Positions are advertised online at [jobs.wa.gov.au](https://jobs.wa.gov.au) and in The West Australian newspaper.

Information provided through the advertisement ensures that potential applicants have an understanding of the school, specific requirements of the role and the criteria for selection.

A closing date and time are always part of the vacancy advertisement.

All applications are received online.

Late applications are not able to be accepted by the panel.

## Selection criteria:

This is the knowledge, skills and abilities required to be a principal. There are five selection criteria for principal positions in WA public schools.

1. Effective leadership in teaching and learning
2. Developing self and others
3. Leading improvement, innovation and change
4. Leading the management of the school
5. Engaging and working with the community

## Eligibility:

Applicants will be required to:

- Provide evidence of eligibility to work in Australia for the term of the vacancy
- Hold a recognised qualification in teaching and be currently registered or eligible for registration to teach in Western Australia
- Obtain a current Department of Education criminal record clearance prior to commencement of employment
- Obtain or hold a current *Working with Children Check*



# Selection panel formed

The Regional Executive Director will form a panel with a gender balance and the right mix of skills, knowledge and capabilities to ensure the right outcome.

Selection panels usually comprise a minimum of three people, representing (preferably) a gender balance and include the Regional Executive Director as the chair, a principal and a community representative. The Regional Executive Director will determine the most appropriate person from the school community to be its representative on the panel. In the case of an Independent Public School (IPS), the community representative on the panel will be the board chair or a member of the board. For a non-IPS school, the Regional Executive Director may choose to invite a council representative or a community member to join the panel.

## **The panel chair:**

Provides leadership to panel members and manages the process so that it is efficient and effective. They serve as an equal member of the panel.

Some selection panels use the services of an executive officer or a consultant to record the work of the panel. They are not members of the panel.

## **Conflicts of interest:**

A conflict of interest is a situation where private or personal interests may influence a decision.

It isn't wrong or unethical to have a conflict of interest, what matters is how it is managed. It does need to be identified and will then be managed by the panel chair.

Panel members are asked to declare any perceived or actual conflict of interest as soon as applicants are known.

## **Confidentiality:**

There is a requirement to maintain strict confidentiality in relation to all aspects of the recruitment process.

This expectation of confidentiality commences as soon as you are selected to be on a panel and continues even after the process has concluded.

Selection panel members must not disclose any aspects of the process including details of applicants, interview preparations, panel deliberations, outcomes or the reasons for the panel arriving at those outcomes.

A confidentiality declaration and conflict of interest form is signed by all panel members to ensure the process is fair and transparent.

# Applicants shortlisted

## **Reading and assessing the applications:**

Applicants are usually required to address some or all of the selection criteria in a written application. They are also required to provide a Curriculum Vitae (CV) outlining their relevant work history.

The panel members need to read all written applications. They will then assess the applicant against the selection criteria.

## **Consensus meeting and shortlisting:**

Panel members will share their assessment of all the applicants. The panel will reach a consensus on their assessments and use this to identify those applicants who meet the selection criteria.

Only the most competitive applicants, who meet the selection criteria should be shortlisted for further assessment. Where appropriate, those applicants will be invited to attend an interview and/or further assessment.



# Further assessment

Following the assessment of the written applications, further assessment, usually in the form of an interview is undertaken.

## **Interviews:**

Interviews provide opportunities for competitive applicants to demonstrate relevant skills, abilities, experience and knowledge to strengthen the claims in their written application.

Any further assessment must be relevant to the selection criteria. If a panel chooses to use an interview, they determine the format of the interview, including the number and type of questions. Other forms of assessment may be used if the panel is of the view that they are appropriate.

## **Interview questions:**

Should be relevant to the position, the school context and the criteria. They should be designed to provide opportunities for applicants to demonstrate relevant skills, abilities, experience and knowledge.

## **Interview format:**

There are no set formats for interview. Some common models are:

**Model 1:** Reading time immediately prior to the interview where some or all of the questions are given to the applicant to make notes and prepare a response.

Interview: applicant responds to the given questions and panel members ask any clarifying questions.

**Model 2:** No prior reading time, questions are asked at interview without the applicant seeing them previously.

**Model 3:** Questions or a task are emailed to the applicant in advance of the interview.

Interview: applicant presents a response to the task or question at interview.

## **Referees:**

Information provided by referees is an important part of the selection process.

Referees are able to clarify or validate claims made by the applicant, they are not character referees.

Referees should be contacted at a point when their feedback will add most value to the process.

Referees can be asked to provide written feedback or verbal comments related to their knowledge of the applicant's work.

Referees are nominated by the applicant and may be a panel member. They are contacted by the panel chair or delegate (executive officer or consultant).

The panel is able to contact referees not listed by the applicant in order to further assess the applicant's suitability for the position. The applicant should be informed of any contact with referees other than those nominated.

Panel members who are also referees should provide their comments prior to reading applications.

# Consensus reached

At the conclusion of all assessment activities, panel members share their assessment of each applicant against the five selection criteria. The panel reaches consensus and selects the most suitable applicant by considering all information obtained from written applications, interviews, referee reports, and any other assessments undertaken.

# Recommendation made

On completion of the assessment a selection report must be prepared that identifies the recommended applicant and the reasons for the decision. The report must be accepted and signed by all panel members. The selection report and the recommendation are forwarded to the Director General.



# Notification, feedback and breach period

All applicants are notified of the outcome and have the opportunity to seek feedback.

Feedback is an essential aspect to demonstrate fairness and transparency.

The panel chair or their delegate will provide feedback to any applicant who requires it.

Feedback must be provided within a four day breach period and must include adequate detail to explain a decision.

Feedback should be constructive and relate only to the applicant and their competitiveness.

A four day breach period is provided to enable applicants to appeal if they believe the employment standard has not been met.

A breach claim must be lodged within four days of an applicant being advised of the outcome and must be about the process, not the outcome.

## Appointment made

Following the breach period, the Regional Executive Director will confirm the applicant's eligibility.

- A letter of offer is made to the recommended applicant.
- If the offer is accepted, the successful applicant is appointed to the position.

### **No suitable applicant:**

There are times when a panel reaches the consensus that no applicants are to be recommended as suitable. This may occur if a panel assesses all applicants against the criteria and determines that none meet all the criteria to the standard expected.

A selection report documenting the panel's assessment of each applicant is still completed. The selection report documents that the panel found no applicant suitable.

The usual processes following the finalisation of the panel's determination are still required. All applicants are notified of the outcome, feedback is still required and a breach period is still provided. The recruitment process is then considered to be complete.

The Regional Executive Director will make a decision in regards to how the principal position will be filled until the position is readvertised.

# Becoming a panel member: things to think about

## What would be my role and responsibility if I accept the invitation to be on a panel?

Following the closing date for applications, your role is to:



You will spend time reading and rating applications, participating in shortlisting meetings and attending interviews. The time commitment can vary according to the number of applicants and the nature of the interview process.

## Six things to consider when invited to be on a principal selection panel

The job of selecting a school principal is not to be taken lightly. We have provided some key questions you could ask yourself before you commit to being on a selection panel for a school principal.

This simple checklist is designed to help you with your decision. You should feel free to discuss these matters with the panel chair.



**1. Do I have the time to do this properly?**

.....



**2. Am I confident that I will be able to reflect the needs of my community?**

.....



**3. Can I work collaboratively with others to arrive at an agreed outcome?**

.....



**4. Will I be able to support the panel's decision in the community?**

.....



**5. Am I going to be available for all parts of the process?**

.....



**6. Do I feel I know enough about my school and its needs?**

.....

# Six tips for interviewing people



## **Be prepared**

Make sure you have read each person's application and have their CV close by so that you can remember important things about them. Be ready to answer any questions about the community and its expectations as agreed by the board or council.



## **Be welcoming**

Welcome the applicant with a smile. It helps them relax and show you the best they can be. Make them feel that they are able to ask you questions also. It helps to be aware of your body language so that the applicant feels comfortable talking and listening to you.



## **Listen carefully**

It is really important not to interrupt the applicant when they are talking. Usually the chair will ask each panelist if they have any additional questions or need further clarification when the interviewee has finished answering. Be careful not to display negative signals such as boredom or doubt.



## **Avoid assumptions**

Remember that all people are different in our diverse Australian community. Applicants may come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, abilities and experiences. Be careful not to stereotype applicants as this can stop us listening and hearing what they might bring to our school.



## **Watch out for halo effects**

This is what happens when you judge a person on the basis of a really good or really bad interview that went before them. It can mean you inadvertently lift or lower your assessment based on the applicant you heard previously. Focus your attention on the person speaking and rate their responses against the selection criteria, not against the previous applicant. At the end of the interview process you will compare all applicants objectively.



## **Don't dominate the interview**

This means that most of your time should be spent listening to the interviewee. This is the applicant's opportunity to make an impression; and for the panel to hear from the applicant.



