

To Virgil Cameron and other signatories
21 April 2020

Dear Virgil

Thanks for the letter to School Council and leadership on 11 December 2019 regarding the decision-making process about the synthetic Oval and associated communication. This letter is a response from School Council (SC).

Firstly, the reason for the long delay in responding to your letter.

The December SC meeting was approx. 15 minutes long and we didn't have any space to discuss any business other than some basic routine motions. Council also met on an extraordinary basis in early February to be briefed on the Principal Selection Panel process, and again we did not have any items other than 5 minutes of routine motions. Given the Oval decision was taken in May 2019 then confirmed in September 2019, it wasn't evident that anything new could come of further discussion at SC level.

We note the long meeting Maya and Cath had with yourselves over the summer holidays, the extensive discussions held in Communications Sub-Committee about the best way to engage the whole school community in informing and consulting over key decisions, and the effort by our Acting Principal early this year to test a community forum format to bring interested people to the table to discuss projects offering greater lead time and more opportunity for community autonomy. It's fair to say that the school has been attempting to take on the key points of your letter albeit without a formal response.

Given your request for a formal response, we tabled your letter at the 26 March SC meeting and had a significant discussion.

Rather than re-litigate the issue in detail, and in line with your request to have a thorough consideration of the issues associated with the decision, we as School Council each read the correspondence and considered three questions: what we have learnt as a result of the dispute over the Oval; what actions or processes do we want to take or do differently; and what is an appropriate response to yourself and the other signatories on your letter.

A key theme that came to the fore for SC was to acknowledge the depth of feeling that this issue has elicited from members within the school community. It became a divisive issue and caused alarm, not just for the main activists, but also for students and families who were shocked by the level of vituperation expressed by fellow school community members.

Upon reflection, the SC's role in supporting and facilitating multi-way communication and engagement did not meet expectations, despite the best efforts of those involved in preparing newsletters and other communication material. The differing roles of Leadership and of SC are not well understood within the school community and we are looking at ways to describe these roles more clearly so that this problem is addressed. The SC agrees that we need to be more active in communicating issues that are coming up ahead of time to

facilitate input in decision making by the community, and also in describing the reasons behind decisions made to ensure that the stakeholders know that their views are respected and valued and that they remain engaged contributors in the future.

In terms of actions, the SC will continue with its active Communications Sub-Committee, which, together with the Buildings and Environmental Sustainability (BES) Sub-Committee, will consider the notes from the recent community forum to generate a work plan and recommend priorities for the school. One example was the idea to bring class carers together more actively with the Principal and another was to be clearer on annual priorities so people can participate in discussions if they wish to.

The standard approach, which assumed people will participate in relevant sub-committees if they have an interest, has clearly not been adequate.

A report from the recent communication survey will be completed soon and there will be consideration of how we communicate with our diverse community, including with those families who don't speak English at home and those who may not access electronic communications.

We are lucky to have a vibrant and highly mobilised school community. At this time of trouble in the wider community, with a reinvigorated School Council, we seek to respond to current changes and understand and govern our school as well as possible.

Please don't hesitate to use existing channels to engage with the vision and direction of the school, such as via the parent reps on SC, the sub-committees, forums and class carer communications. And as we trial different approaches, we welcome suggestions on methods or processes to better engage and communicate with our diverse and dispersed community.

Warm regards,

Cath Smith, SC President
On behalf of Collingwood College School Council