



## Staff Advisory Council (PAR)

### 1. Introduction and background

The Staff Advisory Council (PAR) was set up in response to the need felt within the Wolfert van Borselen school group to develop school policy and school organisation not only in the Participation Council, but also at the level of the separate schools. Our experience of staff participation in the 2015 debate on adjustment of Planning Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time was the decisive factor. At a number of Wolfert schools, the management team worked with a sounding board group of teachers to draft proposals on both procedure and content. At the schools where cooperation between the management team and the sounding board group ran smoothly, decisions could count on the support of the rest of the staff.

There was also a need for an advisory body at school level to deal with everyday practical matters, or matters needing immediate care or attention. In these cases, the members of the PAR sound the alert and, in close consultation with the school management team, ensure that minor problems do not escalate into conflicts.

The PPA time sounding board groups functioned so well that the Participation Council (MR) asked the management board to give the PAR a place in the school organisation. We did so. Every Wolfert school now has a PAR, the members of which have been given a task time allocation for their work.

The aim of the PAR is to provide the school management team with solicited and unsolicited advice. This calls for an open and transparent attitude on the part of the management team, with the will to follow up on issues that are generally felt to require attention. Members of the PAR should have a broad support base among the staff, and should understand, appreciate and be able to voice their colleagues' concerns.

We have consciously chosen not to draw up regulations for the PAR, since it is precisely its informal nature that has led to productive cooperation based on respect for each other's viewpoints. We believe that regulations would politicise the relationship between the staff and the school management team and would bring less added value to the cooperation. Nonetheless, the question has arisen as to whether there may be a need for some regulation of the PAR. In response, we have decided to draft a descriptive memorandum setting out a few basic principles and frameworks to provide members of present and future school management teams and PARs with guidelines on the relationship between the two bodies and the work of the PAR. This memorandum therefore meets the need identified above.



## 2. Guidelines for participation

### 2.1 PAR: role and responsibilities

From the start, we intended the PAR to function openly and on an equal footing within the Wolfert school. This calls not so much for regulation as for a professional attitude on the part of each party. For this reason the PAR functions well at a number of Wolfert schools, where cooperation with the management team produces considerable added value.

The role of the Staff Advisory Council is expressed in its name. It reflects the composition of the staff, and it advises. The professional attitude of the MR gives this role an added boost.

The PAR's role is thus twofold:

- a. Advising on policy proposals
- b. Advising on the running of the school in the widest sense.

### 2.2 PAR: relationship with the MR

The MR represents interests at school group level, but also focuses on the specific circumstances of each of the six Wolfert schools. In order to fulfil these formal responsibilities, the MR establishes whether the staff and/or PAR has been adequately involved in discussions and decision-making processes at each school. By gaining this assurance, the MR can acquit itself properly of its responsibilities.

If there is a lack of clarity, or a cause for concern, it is advisable for the members of the MR and the PAR first to ask the head of school or school management team for an explanation.

### 2.3 MR

The MR has formal advisory rights and rights of approval. Its current role has its basis in the Participation (Schools) Act (WMS). Prior to the WMS, decisions in schools were largely taken in plenary staff meetings, occasions on which the school management team communicated with the entire staff. When the WMS came into force, the MR acquired the formal position of decision-making body, taking over this role from the plenary staff meetings. These meetings are still held, but usually serve to inform members of staff of new developments or to celebrate a particular event.

For the MR to exercise its formal advisory rights and rights of approval, liaison with each of the six Wolfert schools is an absolute prerequisite. The MR comprises members from each of the Wolfert schools. Preferably, each of the schools should ensure that the MR member is also a member of the PAR, or in any event is in close contact with the PAR and the school management team. For the record, members of the MR function and reach decisions independently.



## 2.4 PAR: responsibilities

The PAR functions on the basis of the following guidelines.

- a. Each PAR has at least four members.
- b. Members sit on the council for a maximum of three years. In the interests of continuity, resignations will be staggered according to a set schedule, so that members do not all step down at once.
- c. Ideally, the PAR comprises members from both the teaching and support staff.
- d. The PAR represents the team across the full range of age and experience.
- e. The PAR consults with the school management team four to six times a year, or more often if needed.
- f. PAR members are facilitated through a task time allocation of at least 15 hours per person per year.
- g. One of the Wolfert school's MR members is also a member of the PAR or attends meetings between the PAR and the school management team as an observer.
- h. The new PAR commences its activities at the start of each school year, so that facilitation can be included in policy on tasks.

## 2.5 PAR: profile of the members

PAR members and candidate members need to meet the following criteria.

- a. PAR members are expected to be able to talk about all kinds of matters affecting the school, without regard for their own personal interests. This calls for wisdom and the ability to step back and examine complicated issues objectively and in the general interest. A far-reaching vision of the school's development is needed for this.
- b. PAR members are highly respected members of the school group and can count on a wide support base.

## 2.6 School management team and the PAR/MR

To ensure full participation within the Wolfert, a considerable degree of professionalism is also expected of the school management team. The following principles apply.

- a. An open and transparent attitude is expected of the school management team, with the will to follow up on the issues that are generally felt to require attention.
- b. We aim to generate widespread support for policy proposals. This means that major proposals for which the MR's approval will be sought should be put to the PAR.

Rob Fens

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