

Running the meeting

The key to success is keeping control of the meeting.

- stick to the agenda (but you may swap items around if necessary)
- manage the relationships and personalities
- concentrate on outcomes.

Meetings must have a purpose. Every item should have a purpose. Remind yourself and the group of the required outcomes and steer the proceedings towards making progress, not hot air. Don't support a side – if necessary, ask somebody else to raise issues for you.

Be confident in handling the meeting.

- politely suppress the over-zealous
- encourage the nervous.

Beware of politics and don't allow opinion to be misrepresented as fact. Personal agendas often have a negative effect. Adopt a positive attitude and body language and the meeting is likely to mirror this. Always try to look at how people are behaving in meetings - look for signs of tiredness, exasperation, and confusion, and take necessary action.

The Parent Council members may discuss their own ideas and issues but representation must be agreed. Remember that the Parent Council function is to support the school.

If you find yourself taking over the chairmanship of a group which produces little other than minutes, then change things. Concentrate on achieving the outcomes you set the meeting when you drew up the agenda. Avoid racing away with decisions if your aim was simply discussion and involving people. Avoid hours of discussion if you simply need a decision.

Take your own quick notes as you go, recording the salient points and the agreed actions, with names, outcomes and deadlines.

Defer new issues to another time. Practice and use a phrase like 'You may have a point, but it's not for this meeting - we'll discuss it another time.' (And then remember to do it.)

If you don't know the answer, say so - be honest - don't waffle - say that you'll get back to everyone with the answer, or append it to the meeting notes. If someone persistently moans on about a specific issue that is not on the agenda, quickly translate it into a simple exploratory or investigative project, and bounce it back to them, with a deadline to report back their findings and recommendations to you.

A meeting should be run with authority, flexibility, impartiality and maturity. At the end, review the follow-up actions and make brief, positive remarks.