# AISACT Governance Article

# Contemporary Governance for Independent Schools

*Prepared by*
*Adrian Smith, Director, Management Partners Australia*

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**AISACT's School Governance Guiding Principles state:**

*Strong, effective governance practices are the foundation of a healthy organisation. Good governance is fundamental to:*
- *providing the foundation for a high-performing school*
- *preserving and strengthening stakeholder confidence, and*
- *ensuring schools are well placed to respond to changing environments.*

Contemporary governance empowers leaders with the **technology, insights,** and **processes** that are required to meet these guiding principles. Without these big three it is very difficult to maintain appropriate fiduciary and financial controls, ensure the capacity to plan for our future in uncertain times and, ultimately, to achieve strong governance outcomes that protect our schools.

The role of the Board is to ensure the school is being run well and in the right direction. Ultimately we need the **insights** which give us an accurate and deep understanding of the operational and strategic issues facing the school. **Technology** and **processes** are the facilitators that allow Boards to have the right information at the right time for effective oversight of our schools and the capacity to undertake strong evidence based and values driven decision-making.

**Insights**

Insights drive successful outcomes in all of the 8 Governance Principles of AISACT and its member schools.

For example does the Board measure and monitor its own performance? This is a critical governance practice and the insights the Board gains from this are vital to the wellbeing of the school as any breakdowns in Board performance inevitably risks breakdowns in such areas as:

- culture and codes of conduct
- school strategy and long-term planning
- organisational performance
- compliance
- risk management, and
- financial management.

So, in your school what technology and processes are in place to measure and monitor Board performance? Processes could be for example establishment of Board subcommittees with clear briefs to oversee risk registers and mitigators and monitor finance and audit activities with strong reporting lines to the Board. Technology should be an enabler for these working groups and will provide detailed financial reporting or exception reporting that highlights key variances from budgets and projections.

Also, it is critical that the Board creates a clear mission and set of strategies aligned to the school's vision. To do this the Board will need a range of insights about the world the school lives in. For example:

- Political factors – both big and small 'p' political forces and influences that may affect the performance of, or the options open to, the school.
- Economic influences – the nature of the economic drivers (educational, social, etc.) faced by the school for its services.
- Sociological trends – demographic changes, trends in the way people live, work and think; changes in their needs and expectations of the education system.

- Technological innovations – new approaches to doing new and old things.
- Environmental factors – the wider environmental system of which the school is a part and consideration of how the school interacts with it.
- Legislative requirements – relevant legislation to the school and the community.
- Education sector analysis – a review of the features, challenges, and attractiveness of the education sector of which the school forms a part.

**Processes and technology**

The question then becomes what processes are in place to facilitate the Board's understanding of these critical issues, for example who is charged with scanning the outside world?  What is their brief and how do they synthesise all this information for the board.  What part can technology play in this – both collation of the information and distribution in an impactful and efficient way?

A follow up to this is how the Board can then use processes and technology to share important information such as the mission and strategies with the various groups of stakeholders who have an interest in the school.  What processes are in place to engage parents?  How does the Board communicate key issues, strategies and decisions to staff in a meaningful way?  What role can technology play in this that is efficient, but has sufficient depth when needed, and clarity which is always needed?

The AISACT Governance Checklist has been developed to aid our Boards to bring the AISACT's guiding governance principles to life.  It is a self-assessment tool that schools use to assess how closely their current governance practices align to the 8 Governance Principles and to identify any gaps that may exist which could put the school and the board at risk.

Critically this checklist should be reviewed to ensure the **technology** and **processes** are in place to provide the range and depth of **insights** required by contemporary boards to meet their responsibilities to:
- provide the foundation for a high-performing school
- preserve and strengthen stakeholder confidence, and
- ensure their schools are well placed to respond to changing environments.

Whilst each school's situation is different and each may have different approaches to these types of questions, there is no doubt that focussing on insights, processes and technology will empower school boards to meet their objectives through contemporary governance practices.