

## RESEARCH LIBRARY

Research has been undertaken in relation to the governance of independent schools. Examples of research papers, together with a brief summary of their content and why they matter, is provided for your information.

Key messages from the literature include:

1. Governance is complex and context-dependent. The role of the board differs significantly across school types.
2. Governance effectiveness depends on clarity, capacity and self-reflection. Boards that invest in their own formation, consciously evaluate their performance, and structure themselves well, tend to govern more effectively.
3. Autonomy brings opportunity and responsibility. The freedom independent schools enjoy demands strong, values-anchored governance to ensure identity, mission, accountability and sustainability.
4. Governance must integrate identity, mission and public good. For faith-based schools, boards carry the weight of not just internal performance, but also identity-keeping, community trust, and public accountability.
5. Volunteer governance works, but needs support, training and clarity. Most independent school boards rely on volunteers and, without clear roles, induction, ongoing support and realistic expectations, governance can drift or weaken.

- Austen, S., Swepson, P., & Marchant, T. (2012). [Governance and school boards in non-state schools in Australia](#). *Management in Education*, 26(2), 73-81.  
Explores how governance arrangements are formed, how boards view their role, and how external context (regulation, community expectations) shapes board behaviour. Documents the diversity of governance models and the challenges in aligning board vision with operational leadership. Highlights the necessity of a shared governance framework, especially in settings with diverse contexts.
- Bambach, M. (2020). [Maximising Board governance effectiveness in small and medium-sized Australian independent schools](#). Edith Cowan University.  
Identifies seven 'governance effectiveness factors' (GEFs) derived from literature on boards in small and not-for-profit organisations, including schools. Explores what makes a board effective, regardless of size or institutional complexity. Offers evidence-based governance principles relevant to small or mid-sized schools, helping shape board practices around accountability, capacity and sustainability.
- Leggett, B., Campbell-Evans, G., & Gray, J. (2016). [Issues and challenges of school governance](#). *Leading and Managing*, 22(1), 36-56.  
Explores recurring governance pitfalls in independent schools—spotlighting areas where boards must stay vigilant (strategic focus, participation, identity, leadership relationships).
- Loh, C. M., Unda, L., Gong, Z., & Benati, K. (2021). [Board effectiveness and school performance: a study of Australian independent schools](#). *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 32(4), 650-673.

Empirical evidence that board composition, practices and the board–principal relationship correlate with performance—reinforces the need for intentional governance design.

- Mifsud, D., & Wilkins, A. (2025). [A Systematic Review of School Governance Literature Between 2000 and 2023](#). *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 1–23.  
Shows governance is contested. Underscores the value of a shared, mission-anchored framework (like *Growing Deep*).