



NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL  
OF THE POST PRIMARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

## **Secondary Principals Council Submission on Tomorrow's Schools**

**August 2018**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In the late 1980's New Zealand moved to a self-governance and increased school choice model, a move that largely mirrored a changing mood internationally. The notion was that education would be best delivered if the users of that service, the consumer, exercised personal choice.

*“Public services should develop in response to individuals acting as consumers to express their rights and interests in a market place that allowed them to choose between services. Such competition, rather than provider control and judgement, would be the most effective means of improving the quality of public services.”<sup>1</sup>*

1.2 While there was criticism and concerns expressed at the time about what was a major experiment in education the overriding assumption in the self-managing schools model, that greater autonomy would result in improved educational outcomes, became the accepted orthodoxy and it was enthusiastically adopted by many principals and boards.

1.3 There is no doubt that the changes brought about by Tomorrow's Schools have been substantial and sustained. This submission focuses on school governance, but it should be noted at the outset that it is very likely the mechanism of school choice has been at least as influential as the change to governance structures. What the governance changes did was to separate each school from the wider network and therefore make the negative consequences of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms more unavoidable and substantial.

1.4 While the intention was to force coasting schools to up their game and to ensure more responsive school practices, the downside has been that in every jurisdiction where choice and increased autonomy for schools has been introduced as a mechanism for improvement it has led to increased segregation on ethnic and socioeconomic lines. <sup>2</sup>

1.5 In New Zealand it has also led to the distortion of educational practices as schools in a competitive market worked to ensure they were seen to be meeting accountability targets and figured positively in the resultant media league tables. Not surprisingly this has, in

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<sup>1</sup> (Ranson, The Changing Governance of Education, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> (Roda & Wells, 2013). (Goyette, 2008)

New Zealand, as it has in the U.K and the USA, led to eroded trust and confidence in the school system.<sup>3</sup>

- 1.6 As Fisk and Ladd put it, “Once the dust settled on these sweeping reforms, it became clear that New Zealand’s mixture of school-based governance and parental choice had some un- welcome side effects.”<sup>4</sup>
- 1.7 Whatever the initial intention, most commentators and participants now believe that the Tomorrow’s Schools model is due a substantial review.
- 1.8 There are three key reasons. The first is to address the negative, if unintended, consequences of the 1989 reforms. The second is to create a system that is more responsive to ongoing economic and social changes. Finally, there is system-wide need for increased collaboration between schools.
- 1.9 While the terms of the review are wide ranging this submission will focus on the governance arrangements. The first part examines in some depth the fundamental problems with the current model. The second outlines alternative governance models and recommends changes that should be considered.
- 1.10 In Part One there are five focus areas:
  - 1 The quantum and complexity of responsibilities that the legislation places on elected boards of trustees.
  - 2 The composition of boards and the nature of the process that establishes them.
  - 3 The capacity of boards to manage the quantum and complexity of the tasks that confront them and the subsequent mismatch between what is required and what can actually be delivered.
  - 4 The impact of on school leadership and the ability of schools to meet their accountability requirements.
  - 5 The impact on meaningful collaboration and a lack of responsibility for the network of schools.

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<sup>3</sup> (James, et al., 2011)

<sup>4</sup> (Fiske & Ladd, 2017)

1.11 The submission concludes with a review of potential alternatives to the current governance model.

## **1 The quantum and complexity of the responsibilities that the legislation places on elected boards of trustees**

There can be no question that boards of trustees have a very substantial number of legislated responsibilities. If, as this submission recommends, the range of board responsibilities is reduced then it is important to give some sense of just how unmanageable the responsibilities are.

The role and responsibilities of a school board are set down in legislation and promulgated by the Ministry of Education. A 2017 statement from the Ministry of Education starts by reminding boards, that the legislation requires them to ensure *“that every student at the school is able to attain his or her highest possible standard in educational achievement”* and ends with *“comply with all of its other obligations under this or any other Act.”*

For Volunteer boards understanding how to manage the task confronting them is further complicated by very vague guidance as to how boards need to operate. *“A board has complete discretion to perform its functions and exercise its powers as it thinks fit, subject to this and any other enactment and the general law of New Zealand.”*

Adding to the complication and confusion, the Ministry remind boards that the legislation allows them to define their own role and choose their own style of governance as there *“...are neither right solutions nor one model of governance that must be followed by all boards of trustees ...”* If boards are not confused it would be surprising and it would be equally surprising if many boards were even aware of the flexibility afforded to them.

Boards have to be familiar and able to deal with a very wide ranging and encompassing portfolio of responsibilities. Taking property as an example, the Ministry outlines on their website the responsibilities entailed:

*To manage property at your school, you must:*

- *maintain your school property (see: Property maintenance)*<sup>5</sup>
- *upgrade and modernise your school buildings (see: 5 Year Agreement funding)*
- *plan for whether you will need new capital works (new buildings and services) at your school (Contact us).*

They then advise boards of their responsibility for:

- Ensuring the school charter outlines how school property will contribute to raising student achievement.
- Developing a 10 Year Property plan.
- Managing capital building projects - while meeting the Ministry's project management requirements.<sup>6</sup>

In a great many instances it must be questioned if board members are even aware of how much they are responsible for.<sup>7</sup>

Recent legislative change was described by the Ministry of Education in the Regulatory Impact Statement. Board of Trustees Roles and Responsibility<sup>8</sup>, as intended to make the role of boards more transparent by providing more clarity. However, even if that objective was achieved, which in the opinion of this submitter it was not, it would count for little if the number and nature of responsibilities remains unchanged.

The point here is not that the Ministry are not doing their level best to support boards but rather that the complexity of the task is simply too great.

The Education Review Office also works to provide guidance and issues regular reports to assist. Once again, these are designed to help but also powerfully illustrate the responsibility overload on boards.

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<sup>5</sup> This one subsection contains another six sub headings each with multiple responsibilities under them. Those range from making sure the gutters are cleared regularly to boiler maintenance. As events at Orewa College showed, just one these multiple responsibilities [boiler maintenance] can have a profound effect on a school.

<sup>6</sup> Included in that list is the statement, "*make sure property work that you commission complies with all legal and Ministry requirements.*" That requirement on its own adds a further myriad of requirements including; hiring the right people, making sure that the people hired meet all legal and Ministry responsibilities, have an appropriate level of skill for the job, and are working in a healthy and safe environment.

<sup>7</sup> One simple example is the area of School Records, Retention and Disposal. Most Boards would have been completely unaware of *Circular 2006/19. Category - Governance* yet the information that outlined what is required of schools runs to 43 pages.

<sup>8</sup> 5 May 2016

The latest iteration of the Education Reviews Office's 40 page, School Evaluation Indicators. Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success. [July 2016] has four outcome indicators with 34 statements about what students should be able to do.<sup>9</sup>

Those four are followed by six process indicators (for example Stewardship) which have a further 121 statements (plus an additional 35 sub statements) about what the indicators mean in practice.<sup>10</sup>

Quite aside from the sheer number of sets and indicators, the situation is further complicated by the fact that many are not actually specific to the work of boards. This does not help their understanding of their role or what makes for effective governance.<sup>11 12</sup>

Very significantly, neither document gives guidance as to which of the process indicators and the statements about actual practice boards should focus on. Faced with a lack of any order of priority, boards and principals are unsure, something that becomes more pressing when there is an impending review, especially as ERO states they "*may focus on any combination of the indicators and statements about good practice when conducting a review.*"

No discussion of the complexity of the role would be complete without reference to the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) to which around 80% of all boards belong. NZSTA has a mandate to support and enhance governance capability.. Trustees receive multiple contributions to board support and training by way of regular newsletters, an annual conference, board training sessions, publications, and industrial support. NZSTA also has an active online presence.

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<sup>9</sup> These range from the more concrete; "*in post primary education achieve success at levels 1, 2 and 3 of the national certificate of educational achievement*" to the much less clear but much more aspirational, "*are ethical decision makers and **guardians of the world of the future.***" [Emphasis mine].

<sup>10</sup> Again, those range from quite basic operational requirements such as having efficient and equitable management routines are in place to the much more demanding expectation that students, parents, teachers and whanau will have a shared understanding of both the curriculum goals and the teaching and learning process.

<sup>11</sup> (Placeholder3; Puaca, 2014; Vester, 2016)

<sup>12</sup> ERO clearly recognise that the evaluation indicators will provide challenges and so provide guidance in the form of a further publication Effective Internal Evaluation for Improvement, (a 16 page guideline published in 2016).

Similar to advice from the Education Review Office, in order to cover the requirements adequately, NZSTA's publications are often long and detailed.<sup>13</sup>

On their website (June 2018) they write to new board members and state; *"It may seem rather daunting to start, with all the terms and processes which can seem so foreign and difficult to grasp, but we have good news! We are here to help and support you and your board of trustees. Explore our website it is packed with information..."*

And packed with information it certainly is. Just one of the helpful resources, Making a Difference. Trustee Handbook, is 17 pages.<sup>14</sup>

That such a range of detailed support is needed serves to demonstrate both the range of and complexity of the governance role.

It has been argued that boards are not complaining about this complexity. Evaluations of the extent to which board members feel they have a grasp on the role are self-evaluations rather than some more objective test. This makes it quite likely that the results of surveys greatly underestimate the gap between positive beliefs trustees have about their grasp of the total task and actual understanding. One logical explanation of this mismatch is that the complexity is so great and the task so large that many board members are unaware of the fact that they do not have a complete picture.<sup>15</sup>

As many board members will admit, in lots of cases they simply don't know what they don't know.

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<sup>13</sup> Their 2013 PDF version of Guide to Trustees for example, runs to 43 pages. This year they have produced a comprehensive document, Governance Framework 2018 that has details on 4 annually updated policies, 9 governance policies, 16 process and development policies and 14 operational policies.

<sup>14</sup> The online members toolkit covers four areas from accountability to leadership with each of those four focus areas having up to 9 subheadings. Those are often very substantial pieces of work or responsibilities including Funding and Finance and Health and Safety.

Further advice can be found in the School Trustees Booklet - Helping you ask the right questions. This is a well organised and presented guide. It covers getting information on student achievement, using information on student achievement and setting targets for student achievement. But on its own it runs to 24 pages.

<sup>15</sup> Research has found that while self-evaluation by school and college governing bodies may be a worthy notion it is probably over rated in its likely impact and that in any case, self-evaluations in the governing bodies that were observed was not effective in improving governance. [Ranson et al, 2005].

The unrealistic size of the school governance role is not restricted to New Zealand; a 2008 school governance study in the U.K. reached three conclusions that can equally be applied here. Governance is:

- overcomplicated – the task of governing is highly complex
- overloaded – school governing bodies are responsible for too much
- overlooked – school governing does not receive sufficient attention and recognition.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Recommendations:**

- The responsibilities that boards have need to be reviewed with the intention of reducing them.
- Where roles and responsibilities can be transferred to an alternative person or group [see final recommendations] that should occur.

## **2 The composition of boards and the nature of the process that establishes them**

The board of trustees system as it operates here is a stakeholder model. The central tenet of this is that institutions such as schools should be strategically led by individuals who are representative of, and drawn from, the stakeholders, who are parents in the case of schools.<sup>17 18</sup>

An alternative model used in many jurisdictions is a skills-based one that rests on the notion that more effective governance can be provided by a board composed of people with requisite skills. In most countries school boards are made up of a combination of elected parents and appointed 'experts'. In some instances that includes appointed representatives from local bodies or other groups.

Because the stakeholder approach is central to the current review it is worth considering the five assumptions upon which it is based:

- 1) That it is straightforward to identify the stakeholders;

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<sup>16</sup> (Balarin, Brammer, James , & McCormack, 2008)

<sup>17</sup> (Connolly, Farrell, & James, 2017)

<sup>18</sup> Our system, along with many other jurisdictions has a teacher trustee /board member but unusually ours also includes a student elected trustee in the case of secondary schools. Those positions while adding an opportunity for "student voice" are generally only single year positions and students often report feeling overwhelmed.



- 2) That the stakeholders' interests can be identified and that all stakeholders have the same opportunity to indicate their interests;
- 3) That once the range of interests is identified they can in some way be prioritized;
- 4) That the prioritised list can be responded to and that the representatives of the stakeholders have the authority and resources to respond; and
- 5) That the election process implies that the elected representatives actually know about and can represent the views of the voters.

In practice, while the first assumption can be met in a school setting, the final four assumptions are all problematic.

A large body of research identifies the unevenness of opportunity as parents come from such different social, cultural and educational backgrounds.

Given the asymmetry of opportunity and influence and questions about available detailed information, creating some sense of priority of interests is very difficult.

While school boards are vested with considerable responsibility, access to many of the resources needed to discharge those responsibilities is through and controlled by the Ministry of Education.

Finally, there are no formal mechanisms in place for board members to ascertain the views of the other parents and no requirement that they do so. Board elections may have many or few candidates, voter knowledge about each candidate is often restricted to the 400 words candidates are able to write about themselves and the process can turn into something of a lottery. Despite that, the assumption is that because trustees are parents, they will be able to represent the views and priorities of the wider parent body.

Each election cycle is a time of uncertainty for school leadership. Boards are charged with multiple responsibilities yet there are no qualifications or experience requirements and given the regular turnover on boards it is quite possible that a school will have few, if any, returning board members. Each three years can result in a new and inexperienced board. Schools are then in the unusual situation that the executive of the school is effectively charged with the training of their employer.

Principals mitigate the risk by “encouraging” some parents to stand or for “good’ members to remain on the board. An experienced board member of a large high decile school commented that principals “are likely to set in place a core group of subtly promoted ‘friendlies’ that continue through election cycles and are equipped with knowledge of procedures that enable them to control the key power roles to mitigate the risk of disruption to administrative intentions.”

In effect the principal is not only the manager of the school but also the coach and manager [and sometime the recruiter] of the elected parents.

In the initial documentation for Tomorrow’s Schools there was emphasis on the role of parents in the governance of schools. From the start this has conflated parent’s understandable interest in their children’s education and therefore the school they attend, with a desire to take a major governance role. As Wylie notes, when the first of the Tomorrow’s Schools boards were elected “Most trustees saw their role as supporting the school, making common cause with the professional leaders to gain what they needed in the way of funding and a good review from ERO.”<sup>19</sup> She goes on to say, “few trustees had taken on the role because they sought major change in their school.”<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with the international research especially where it relates to the “lay”, (parent elected) members.

Background research and interviews with current principals and boards shows that not much has changed. One principal noted that while parents wanted to be on the board to contribute and make a difference and were very supportive, “I don’t think they really do anything to be honest.” When questioned further it became clear that trustees were really most comfortable and engaged in “projects”, - mostly those focused on the physical environment. In England where there has been a recent move to set up parent councils, parents are saying that what they really want to achieve is to improve communication channels, hold more consultative meetings on things such as homework and be actively involved in supporting their child’s education.<sup>21</sup> Would things be so different here?

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<sup>19</sup> (Wylie, Vital Connections: Why we need more than self managing schools., 2012)

<sup>20</sup> (Ibid, 109)

<sup>21</sup> (Carnie, 2006)

Even if a desire to change the school is a driving force for a board, the minutiae of their multiple responsibilities overtakes time and energy.

It must be noted that parent enthusiasm for participation via being on a board membership or by casting their vote in the board election may well be something of a myth in any case. The numbers of parents voting, the number of schools that get insufficient candidates and the level of turnover of board members [especially in the two year intermediates] shows that engagement levels are low.<sup>22</sup>

Anecdotal reports suggest that voting rates will be higher when there is a galvanising issue. In some schools that can a desire to have the principal removed or an organised attempt by a special interest group of parents to gain control of the board. Certainly, there are many instances of “single issue” parents or groups seeking election who, after being elected and achieving their objective or finding their way blocked by the democratic process, do not see out their term.

NZSTA (May 2018) in a report entitled “Connecting with Māori communities: Whanau, Hapu and Iwi”, reproduce a graph about what school-home interactions make the greatest difference to student achievement. Of 19 factors, ranging from parent and teacher intervention [most effective] to teacher-parent relationship less than good [actually harms achievement], parent role in governance came in as number 15 and was rated as making no difference.

Parents can be, and are, active where there is something to be active about. This shows up most obviously when the question of school closure comes up. Providing that things are going along smoothly most parents have neither the time nor the inclination to become involved.

We should not see this as a failure of New Zealand parents to take an interest in their childrens education. The issues that New Zealand schools face in terms of voter

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<sup>22</sup> In the June 2016 elections, of 2414 schools, 43% did not require a vote to be held as there were insufficient or only just sufficient candidates to make up a board. Of the 755,743 voting papers issues only 22.2% were returned. Auckland turnout was lower at just under 18% with Auckland Intermediates faring even worse with only a 12.9% voting rate. Of Auckland’s secondary schools, sixty needed to hold a vote and in twenty six of those schools less than 10% of eligible voters actually voted.

turnout, numbers standing for positions, board turnover and even attendance rates are experienced elsewhere.

A key reason behind an elected board made up primarily of parents was to give real connectedness to community. In some communities, in particular lower socioeconomic ones, that sense of board members having real connections or local mana can be relatively strong. In other communities researched for this submission there was little sense that board members were in fact significantly connected to their communities or really representative of them.

### **Recommendations:**

- That independent research is undertaken into the aspects of school governance that parents are actually interested in.
- Rather than try to up-skill each successive board to be able to deal with the myriad of responsibilities, align the key responsibilities they do have to their skills, interests and time. Training would still be required but that could focus on fewer governance tasks.

### **3 The capacity of boards to manage the amount and complexity of the tasks that confront them**

At the outset of this discussion care does need to be taken not to overstate the importance of governance. As Wylie notes, “*Both the English National Audit Office and OFSTED analyses concluded that schools could function well without effective governance as long as they had strong professional leadership and teaching quality.*”<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein research from the U.K. has concluded that the role of parents is recognised but the contribution to governance continues to be uncertain.<sup>24</sup>

There is no shortage of research and advice on what constitutes good governance and what the characteristics of capable governors/ board members are.

In many other jurisdictions (England, Scotland, USA, Ireland) boards are composed of elected parents [often referred to as lay board members] and appointed people,

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<sup>23</sup> (Wylie, 2014)

<sup>24</sup> (Ranson, Farrell, Peim, & Smith, 2005)

often with a particular skill or connected to an external body or agency. However, in the New Zealand system of elected volunteers there is no way of ensuring that any board actually attracts, and has elected, those candidates.

The potential skills and task mismatch shows up in many areas. Three representative areas: engagement with student achievement data, principal appointment and strategic planning are discussed below.

In recognition of the centrality of student achievement, boards are being encouraged to give greater focus to student achievement data. Laudable as that may be it appears to fail to recognise that:

- Student achievement data is hugely nuanced. Even in secondary schools where much of the data is effectively nationally referenced, engaging with it is difficult. An additional complication is seen in primary schools where national standards data is neither national nor standard.
- Boards rely on principals to provide the data. This means that if they are not to be swamped with detail the data they do get will be filtered and possibly massaged by the principal. New Zealand research and Ofsted's work in the U.K. indicate that the ability to engage with student achievement data is an area that both boards and principals recognise as a problem.
- Once patterns are identified in achievement data, the factors behind those patterns need to be explored, and with changing student cohorts, movements in the courses students take and the standards they are assessed against, that opens up a vast array of possible explanations. Even if the underlying causes behind the data can be identified, understanding the raft of possible responses is another major leap.

One of the most important tasks boards undertake is the appointment of a principal so it is of concern that there are so few controls as to how that must be done. This is compounded in New Zealand in that we, unusually by international standards, have no requirement as to the qualifications or experience appointees must have except teacher registration.

For most boards appointing a principal is a rare event yet there is no requirement that they must seek professional advice in the process. Many in fact do employ

consultants to assist, though that tends to be limited to assisting with advertising and reference checking, leaving the board to make the final decision. In the research for this submission a concern was expressed that some consultants, who also were involved in appraisal, were guiding boards towards people they were already working with: a clear conflict of interest.

Given that the strategic direction of the school is set down as a core responsibility of the board, the feedback from a majority of schools is that the strategic process which is set down as a board responsibility is actually driven by the principal. That is, in many cases the main bones of the strategic plan are developed for the board rather than by the board. With an increased focus on the annual plan which of necessity has a more operational orientation, it is likely that that pattern will become even more pronounced.

Schools engage in strategic planning consultation, but the final plans tend to fall out of the information in front of the board. That information predominantly gets to the board via the principal and the senior leadership team. In almost all cases principals reported that boards would respond to material presented and ask questions of that material, but almost never requested information on things that had not been presented. *‘Most of our meetings are about giving governors information so that they can take decisions that they never have quite enough information to take.’*<sup>25</sup>

A principal from a well-regarded school, in response to a question about the role of the board answered, *“Do they make one iota of difference to the school? No they don’t.”*

The quantum of the task, the process of establishing boards and the variable skills and experience of elected parents combine to create a situation where there is a mismatch between what is required of boards and what they can realistically deliver.<sup>26</sup>

Experience or skills that are lacking ranged widely, again indicating particular local contexts and board composition, but the 2016 NZCER report did identify strategic

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<sup>25</sup> (Baxter, 2017)

<sup>26</sup> The size and complexity of the task is one that is recognised by trustees. NZCER in their 2016 report noted that, *“Twenty percent of the trustees said their board had all the expertise it needed.”* This translates to eighty percent thinking their boards did not have all they needed. They were looking for *“a better match of time and expectations to what they can achieve.”* [2016, 3].

planning, community consultation, understanding achievement data and links with local employers and property. Other research has identified principal appointment and the ability of the board to effectively separate their governance role from management decisions. In addition, with nearly 1000 schools having a net operating deficit for 2016 questions might also be asked about boards' ability to manage finance.<sup>27</sup>

The network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations is referred to as governance capital.<sup>28</sup> Most research concludes that governance capital is likely to be hardest to find in those communities where it could be argued the need is greatest. Lower socioeconomic communities, lower academic results and poor public perceptions of those schools can in turn make it more difficult to attract trustees — something that can create a cycle of decline, or what has been referred to as an amplifier effect.<sup>29</sup>

It would be wrong to conclude that problems are confined to lower socioeconomic communities and it should be noted that problems occur even in those communities where one might expect the skill levels to be higher. That shows up in the intervention statistics where problems, while more prevalent in isolated and low socio economic communities, also manifest themselves in more advantaged settings.<sup>30</sup>

NZCER have reported that trustees overwhelmingly felt they had gained something by their participation including: making a contribution; an increased knowledge of education; skills in working with others; friendship and social support and the confidence to continue their own education. These findings are consistent with reports from both the UK and the USA.<sup>31</sup>

Across the profession there is a strong view that very often statements that “the board is responsible for” or “the board shall...” actually means the principal is responsible for or shall. One experienced primary school principal commented “There is a whole lot for a principal to do in the name of the board.”

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<sup>27</sup> In case we are tempted to conclude that these areas are peculiar to New Zealand an Ofsted report identified a very similar list.

<sup>28</sup> (James, et al., 2010)

<sup>29</sup> (James, et al., 2010)

<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly the same occurs overseas. Warwick Mansell of The Guardian [March 12, 2013] under the headline “**The crème de la crème of academy governors?**” Reported that one of the academy schools that had just received a warning letter from Ofsted despite having a board line up that other schools would envy.

<sup>31</sup> While a positive outcome for the individual trustees is a valuable consequence of board membership that was not why our governance structure was established. Great for the members but does that mean great for the school?

*“whatever your day job, being a governor takes time. Whatever your day job, governing is a different thing. It’s just not like anything else.” [“The Hidden Givers”.]*

**Recommendation:**

- That a model is put in place that guarantees at least some board members being specialised in school governance.

**4 The impact of that on school leadership and the ability of schools to meet their accountability requirements**

If, as is argued above, the amount and complexity of the governance role is not aligned with the level of experience and skill on school boards then the load has to be picked up elsewhere in the system. In practice that means the principal and senior leadership team. In a chapter entitled “Who is really in charge,” Haque neatly captures the thoughts of many principals when he questions the reality of board involvement in the big picture and overall policy direction.<sup>32</sup> On the ground that translates to the principal being both the employee of the board but also very much its guide and mentor. As noted previously a great deal of those responsibilities that are written as, “the board is responsible for’ or “the board shall...” actually translate to “the principal shall.”

Ensuring that all trustees are well prepared and able to engage is an ongoing issue and all the schools contacted for this submission noted that some board members attended well but made few, if any, contributions. Likewise, principals report that some board members seldom appeared to have read the meeting notes before the meeting even when they were issued some days before the meeting.

This was a refrain also found in the literature. *The Hidden Givers* quotes a head teacher who, when referring to the parent members of the board said, “*I can’t understand the governors who come to meetings and say nothing, whatever I try to get them to contribute.*”<sup>33</sup>

What is clear is that the store of governance capital available to a school is central to the ability of a board to successfully engage with the role and contribute to the

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<sup>32</sup> (Haque, 2017)

<sup>33</sup> (James, et al., 2010)



school's success. That store of capital is variable between boards and across time. The responsibilities that apply to successive boards do not change with each election and therefore the professional staff in schools must pick up the vast bulk of the role. To make matters more difficult, because boards need to be included in the process even when it is really beyond them, a great deal of time can be taken working to present material in a form those boards can engage with.<sup>34</sup>

## **5 The impact of the current model of governance and self-managing schools on meaningful collaboration and a lack of responsibility for the network of schools**

In all jurisdictions where school choice was introduced as a way of improving educational outcomes the result has been an increasing segregation of students along social status and or racial lines. Paradoxically this has occurred even when one of the intentions of the policy was to enable students from lower socioeconomic groups to access schools in higher socioeconomic areas.

In addition, the free movement of students can only occur when there is space in those higher decile schools, a willingness by those schools to accept them and families that have the knowledge, the capacity and the means to overcome the distance and cost barriers.

Furthermore, where students from lower socioeconomic areas do access schools in higher decile areas, that results in changes in the size and student profile of the schools they leave behind. In every community studied for this submission the lowest decile school in a community is also the smallest, has the highest proportion of Māori and/ or Pasifika students and is the most likely school to have a falling roll. In Napier for example, the three decile 6 or 7 schools have an average roll of over 1000 while the two decile 2 and 3 schools have secondary rolls of around 250. This is a pattern repeated in all communities where there is a realistic choice of schools.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> That workload can increase markedly when there is a vexatious board member, one with a single agenda and/or a board chair who cannot manage those. Reports of principals spending two days or more a month preparing responses for one problem trustee circulate in the profession.

<sup>35</sup> It is a pattern that can be seen even in high decile communities. On Auckland's North Shore the 8 decile 9 or 10 schools have average roll sizes of 1900 while the two decile 6 schools have between 450 and 680 students.

There is some evidence of the “arrangement” of school zones<sup>36</sup> to advantage students from wealthier communities and there is anecdotal evidence of schools applying their entry processes to maximise the chance to enrol the more able students from less advantaged communities.

It is not possible to say conclusively that those patterns of decile and roll are the result of the governance arrangements. It is as likely that the self-managing model and the associated retreat of the Ministry, post Tomorrow’s Schools, has enabled the pattern to become pronounced and embedded. Principals and school boards have behaved as the Tomorrow’s Schools legislation intended them to, and the absence for a long time of any central oversight has led to imbalanced school rolls and ghettoization of some schools.<sup>37</sup>

As research from Scotland, England and the USA shows, policy makers need to take into account the effects of parental choice on the entire school “community”. If, as it appears, the schools which enroll the already advantaged students are also going to benefit the most from choice then the gap between schools will continue to increase. Certainly, it would be very hard to argue that the current arrangements promote equity, even if some might argue they promote excellence.

Following the 1998 changes, capital expenditure for school growth was blind to where the students behind that growth resided and the Ministry was largely impotent when it came to resisting board’s requests to expand or change their school zone. Those issues have been addressed, but despite that, the Ministry continues to struggle to initiate changes in communities including the closure or amalgamation of schools, even when that looks to be better for students and the local network of schools.<sup>38</sup>

There have been efforts to get schools to work together and collaborate - ICT clusters, Extending High Standards, LCN clusters and IES. This later effort is the first

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<sup>36</sup> (Lubienski & Dougherty, 2009)

<sup>37</sup> From the view point of the efficient management of the network of schools it is also a problem. Schools bursting at the seams and pushing [often very publicly] for increased capital spending, while their neighbours have significant levels of spare capacity.

<sup>38</sup> More recently the Ministry of Education has changed the capital spending policy so schools now only get capital funding for roll growth from within their zone. That reduces the incentive to bus students in from distant communities, something which was very obvious in Auckland central isthmus and the North Shore. At the same time the Ministry has been able and willing to push back on school zone changes that would further exacerbate the current issues around network capacity.

to place any focus on boards working together. However, anecdotal evidence is that even in the clusters that are underway, active and engaged inter-board collaboration is largely non-existent.<sup>39</sup>

Schools routinely make decisions about student enrolments, staff appointments and resource acquisition that take no account of those actions on neighbouring schools or the health of the system as a whole. Nor should they according to the current model. It could be argued that, in fact, principals and boards are acting exactly as they should as their responsibility is to their school, not the total school population in their community.

Board training and leadership PLD are both policy levers that could increase inter-school collaboration. In reality, however, the training that is available for boards has a focus on the things they need to master to be active and engaged for their school. Likewise the PLD accessed by principals has no focus on the wellbeing of the network of schools and is oriented to those skills and understandings required for professional growth and individual school leadership. In contrast, public agencies and organisations with interests and responsibilities across the system generally don't have decision making powers at the local level.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO SCHOOL GOVERNANCE**

2.1 Finding fault with the current governance arrangements is not difficult.

2.2 Most jurisdictions see value in parental representation in governance arrangements and the research strongly supports family - school partnerships. Arguments for parental participation in some form include a greater sense of shared responsibility, improved transparency, better adjustments by schools to actual family needs (and because it can be highly effective in combatting early school leaving.)<sup>40</sup> New Zealand has a long history of parent involvement in governance, most notably in secondary schools, and it is very likely that there will be pressure from parents and their representative body to maintain representation.

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<sup>39</sup> There are many possible explanations: boards are too busy, they are unaware that they are even supposed to be working together, and in some communities the reluctance stems from the fear that the initial collaboration is a plot to combine boards under a 'super-board' model.

<sup>40</sup> (European Toolkit for Schools.)

2.3 What this submission is proposing is retaining a system of elected parent trustees but making that position both more manageable and more aligned to the enhancement in educational outcomes across the wider community by:

- Reducing the number of things a board is responsible for.
- Establishing parent trustee responsibilities that are better matched to their interests, available time and capabilities.
- Including “professional” board member/s on all boards.
- Increasing the focus on the network of schools by building that into the governance structure.

#### **1 Current model but with increased trustee training**

Research both nationally and internationally shows that there is a link between governance training and board effectiveness. In this model the emphasis is on ensuring all trustees are adequately equipped for the role so that all boards have the requisite level of skill. This should include:

- an induction program for all new trustees and a mentoring scheme to ensure that they become familiar with the school and their role/s at an early stage.
- mandatory attendance at new trustee courses run by NZSTA.
- annual assessment of training needs for each board of trustees based on their stage of development and linked to school improvement initiatives. In other words, trustee training would be aligned with any strategic directions they had determined as required for the school.
- Whole board training on those aspects of school operations that impact on the wider network of schools.

It might also usefully include a compulsory session for all parents considering standing for a board on what being a trustee involves, what the responsibilities are and what the workload and time commitment for a fully engaged trustee is.

Opportunities are already available for some of the above and as noted previously NZSTA do offer a significant range of training and materials for trustees. Other jurisdictions also see value in governance training and education. In California, for

example, there is a Masters in Governance program designed for school board members and in the UK governors have the option of undertaking a program leading to national accreditation.

The weakness in all cases is that there is no requirement that trustees actually undertake any training. In New Zealand the total time spent in governance training is generally limited to a few hours in any given year and furthermore training that is undertaken is often in response to current imperatives. Certainly as noted previously none is aimed at those things which work to build collaboration between schools or have a focus on the health of a network of schools.

There is little doubt that mandatory mentoring and some form of accreditation would improve the standard of governance and thus the ability for all members to actively engage in the process. The downside of training being made mandatory for all new and existing trustees would be a significant reduction in numbers willing to put themselves forward for election and potentially, significant defections by those already on boards.

However, if the current make-up of boards is to be retained, improving the quality of governance is vital. This will not be cost-free. At the same time simply continuing as we are also carries significant cost.

## **2 Maintaining the current structure but putting in place additional support for boards**

NZSTA already provide support for boards who have been identified, most commonly by ERO, as needing additional support. What this model proposes is that rather than wait until a concern arises it makes sense to ensure that there is the appointment of two or more semi-professional board members to each board as a matter of course.

These would be people with skills and experience in education and on school boards or with specialist skills (eg. financial skills) where such issues have been specifically identified.

This is a model more in line with the system in most jurisdictions including for example, England, Wales, Scotland, some parts of Switzerland, and Australia.

Results from a study carried out in New Zealand argued for the mandatory appointment of appropriately qualified advisors to board recruitment and selection panels for the appointment of principals.<sup>41</sup> There is no reason that the same approach not be taken for other key board responsibilities. However, because this will reduce the autonomy boards currently have, it will be resisted by many trustees and the representative body.

Clearly there are cost implications. Payment rates for those appointed members are typically more substantial than for the parent appointed trustees. Secondly, care does need to be taken in terms of the ratio of appointed to elected parent trustees. Experience elsewhere shows that depending on the ratio and role the nature of boards can change quite significantly, lay parent members can feel shut out by the educational jargon and the greater experience of the professional members can shut down parent voice.

### 3 **Executive board and non-executive board**

In this model a small **executive board**, comprising three or four trustees and/or semi-professionals chosen on the basis of their skills and experience, would be appointed to assume responsibility for some key strategic and statutory functions.<sup>42</sup>

A larger **non-executive board**, made up of elected parents and staff as currently occurs would be involved in those activities more closely aligned with parents' interests. In the areas that they did have direct interest in and budgetary responsibility for, providing that was not in conflict with the wider strategic direction of the school and was within current regulations, the expectation would be that the executive board would act on it.

The rationale for this mix of "skilled" and "stakeholder" approach is to deal with the level of responsibility and workload that volunteer parents are faced with while retaining parent input and influence in those areas that parents are actually most interested in and most equipped to deal with.

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<sup>41</sup> (Morrison, 2013)

<sup>42</sup> (Evans)

#### **4 Reducing the bureaucratic burden on boards by mandating an enhanced executive officer position on the board**

Based on the UK “clerk” model used in senior high schools the “enhanced executive officer” model would involve a professional position with a mandatory qualification and a consequent career structure. The role would become the governing body’s lead officer for ensuring proper, clear and regular accountability with specific responsibilities for:

- Collecting and collating relevant data,
- Health and safety,
- Ensuring that all statutory responsibilities are met,
- Setting standing items for the agenda,
- Board self-review,
- Writing and publishing of reports, and
- Other responsibilities as appropriate.

This would have a number of benefits. It would free up school administration and trustees from some of their more mundane operational and compliance-monitoring activities in order to help them focus on their strategic role. It would also lead to more effective governing body practices and ensure the legality of all decisions and practices.

A spinoff benefit would be the creation of an attractive career path, thereby attracting skilled people into school administration. In New Zealand there is currently no specific training for such roles but with a large number of schools it would seem likely that one of the tertiary institutions would be interested in creating an appropriate level online/ distance education program.

One potential barrier is the large number of small schools where the economies of scale simply don’t make an Enhanced Executive Officer position viable. This would require smaller schools in a geographical area to have a shared position. There is a sense that some principals and boards are concerned that such an arrangement would be a “Trojan horse” for subsequent combined boards and school amalgamation. The large number of small schools, even in communities where

geography and distance is not a barrier to amalgamation, can be shown to be a drag on the whole network of schools and that amalgamation can bring significant benefits.

## **5 A board comprising parent elected trustees and one or more appointed “expert” board members**

This model is a form of “stakeholder plus” and resembles model 2 above. Where it differs is that all schools in a network of schools between them chose a common “expert”.

In this model a board of four or five parents would be elected as currently occurs. Each school in an identified geographical area (or according to some other accepted grouping of schools) would need to meet and negotiate as to which “expert’ board member or members they would all share from a panel of “expert” board members. What they would not be able to do is to choose to have no one.

The rationale behind this proposal is fourfold.

Firstly, all schools will end up with one or more members who have had a significant involvement with schools and who has undertaken a formal level of training for the position.

Secondly, those people will be part of a wider network of experts who are able to share training and Ministry briefings, compare experiences and importantly advocate for the network of schools in a way that individual board members cannot do.

Thirdly, because each “expert” would be accessing a group of schools they would have a much more complete view of what is happening in that network. That opens up the possibility of a “critical friend” or mentor. It will assist with the sharing of local initiatives and would be a conduit to collaboration and sharing.

Finally, this person will ensure that no one school board can make a decision that will impact on the network of schools without at least being made aware of the impact of that decision.



As noted previously, the main pushback to this model will come from schools where the individual school/ competitive model is embedded or where it is seen as the first step in combined boards and possible school amalgamation.

## **6 Combined Boards**

The very large number of schools, many of which are small and serve small communities, means that at each election cycle schools will be looking for upward of 12,000 trustees in total.

That number poses problems. Firstly, particularly in relation to smaller or more disadvantaged communities, there has to be sufficient suitable and willing candidates. Across New Zealand there are many schools that from time to time do not attract sufficient candidates to require an election or in some cases, form a board. Small fields and significant variability across areas (with lower socioeconomic communities coming off worst) can set up schools for doubtful decision making and ongoing governance issues.

Secondly, because the evidence points to a link between trustee skill and experience and board effectiveness there is clearly a need for trustees to undertake more training in governance than has been the case up until now. The very large number of trustees currently makes that more difficult, aligned to the fact that placing a greater training requirement on trustees means it is likely to be even more difficult to attract parents to the role.

Thirdly, a smaller number of more highly trained board members does mean that more can be expected of those members and increases the possibility of some moving into wider leadership roles in education.

Finally, if greater collaboration between schools is a desired goal then any policy lever that leads to the sharing of personnel and experience will increase the chance of achieving that. Having boards that are focused on more than one school does move away from the notion of a school as the locus of control to a wider network view.

## **7 Maintaining the current model but in situations where a board is not coping, replacing the whole board with an interim executive board**

This is effectively what happens currently when a commissioner is appointed, except in this case, rather than there being a wholesale replacement of trustees, elected parents would be added back onto the executive board, with executive members dropping off as the situation at the school improved.

In this model the replacement process is staged and the executive board effectively become a “shadow board” enabling parents to learn in the role and gradually assume more responsibility. This model does not replace the existing model or any of the suggested alternatives and could work successfully alongside any model.

### **3. CONCLUDING RECOMMENDATION**

3.1 In deciding on a final model there are four vital imperatives that must be addressed:

- Connections between schools are built into the systems design. This reduces isolation and also ensures that the needs of a network of schools is also factored into decision making.
- The workload and responsibilities assigned to boards and, in particular, parent trustees are reduced and better aligned to the interests and skills set of those trustees.
- The input of parent stakeholders is retained.
- Any system must set in place policy levers that will support leaders within schools while at the same time providing a pathway for the development of leadership at a wider systems level.

3.2 The recommended model would involve:

- Parent elected trustees as currently occurs. This number could be reduced to three or four.
- Those elected trustees, in conjunction with other boards in a designated community of schools, would select and appoint one or two, expert trustees from a panel of people assembled by the Ministry of Education and NZSTA.

- Each board (or combination of boards depending on school size) would be funded to employ an appropriately qualified person, (“enhanced E.O.”) who would take responsibility for a designated set of tasks that currently are covered by the boards and/or principal.
- 3.3 There are both training and cost implications of this model. “Expert trustees” will require a fees structure that is greater than the rates currently applying to volunteer members but in many cases those people will be shared between small schools and meeting numbers are not great.
- 3.4 Secondly, there will be costs associated with the enhanced E.O. position. However, that position has the potential to not only assist boards but also reduce principals’ workloads freeing up time for a greater focus on teaching and learning, something principals consistently say they want.
- 3.5 If there is a serious intent to strengthen the quality of governance, the connections between schools and to build school and systems leadership, it is a worthwhile investment.
- 3.6 In the years since Tomorrow’s Schools the educational landscape has changed. Consistent with the overseas experience, self-governance and school choice has led to major changes in the nature of our school system. Low decile schools serving lower socioeconomic communities have tended to get smaller, the proportion of the roll made up of Māori and Pasifika students has greatly increased, the mix of subjects and standards assessed against have diverged and the range and quality of the infrastructure available for students has diverged.
- 3.7 School choice and self-management has been a very important factor in that divergence. The proposed model aims to maintain the positive outcomes that have come from the flexibility and responsiveness of school-based decision making while putting in place those changes needed to ensure that we do not continue to have decisions being made that, while good for the individual school, are demonstrably bad for the wider educational network.

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