

School Trustees

Helping you ask the right questions



Who is this booklet for?

The Education Review Office (ERO) has written this booklet for boards of trustees. It is one of many tools available to help you in your role as a trustee. It focuses on student achievement and welfare, and the role the board plays in these two areas. The booklet includes questions and information that will guide you in your discussions with school leaders and as a trustee.

Trustees have many roles, including personnel, property and financial management. This booklet emphasises trustees' important role in asking about student achievement. It also includes a section on student welfare, ERO recognising that a safe learning environment also supports students' learning.

This booklet contains questions trustees can ask and aspects of good practice ERO has observed while reviewing in schools.



Boards and school leaders working together

Successful boards work in partnership with school leaders and staff for the benefit of students. Each have their respective roles and responsibilities but are dependent on working cooperatively with the other to be able to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Good communication is an important part of being on a board. Trustees need to be able to talk to one another, share information and ask questions. In doing so, trustees develop relationships based on trust and work effectively together as a board.

Where does ERO fit in?

The Education Review Office reviews all schools in New Zealand and publishes education reports on its website: www.ero.govt.nz. As part of its review procedure, ERO looks at how effectively school governance contributes to student learning – engagement, progress and achievement. In doing so, ERO wants to know that boards focus on student achievement and use achievement information to guide their decision making.

Trustees need information

A board's main responsibility is to ensure that all students at their school are achieving well. Part of this is to ensure that the principal and staff are supported and resourced to achieve high quality teaching and learning. To do this, trustees need reliable and detailed information from school leaders about the learning and welfare of children at their school.

As a trustee, this information will help you understand:

- what is working and what is not
- which groups of students have particular needs
- what the school is doing to address those needs
- if students are safe
- if the curriculum suits all students
- which groups of students are missing out
- what resources are needed to teach effectively
- where money needs to be spent.

Trustees should ask questions

You have a responsibility to look carefully at this achievement information. You should ask what it means and how you can use it to make decisions. If you need more information to understand how well children at the school are achieving, ask the principal. The board's role is not to 'rubber stamp' recommendations but to make sure, through questioning, that they are the right recommendations.



The Six Dimensions of a Successful School

ERO uses this diagram when it reviews schools. It shows how all aspects of a school relate to each other and have an impact on children's learning.

Teachers are confident in teaching the curriculum, manage classrooms well, and report to parents or caregivers through individual portfolios, written reports and parent interviews.

The school communicates well with families and values their input. Parents, caregivers, whānau and aiga take an interest in how their child is doing at school.

School leaders analyse student achievement information and use it well to identify targets. They have high expectations for all students and support and encourage staff to promote high levels of student achievement.

SCHOOL CULTURE

School staff and students are respectful and work together. Children are happy and settled. Different groups of children in the school are accepted and valued.

GOVERNING

School leaders give the board well-analysed student achievement information. The board uses this to set targets for improving student achievement. Trustees also develop policies and budgets that support student achievement.

ENGAGING FAMILIES

TEACHING

LEADING & MANAGING

STUDENT LEARNING
- engagement, progress & achievement

QUESTIONS ABOUT GETTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INFORMATION

What achievement information should the board get?

School leaders should regularly provide reports to the board on students' achievement and progress:

- in relation to National Standards in literacy and numeracy (primary schools)
- in other curriculum areas you want to focus on
- for all age groups across the school
- for Māori, Pacific, students with special needs, and those from other cultures
- in national qualifications at secondary school level.

The reports should contain well-analysed data and comments explaining success and issues that need attention. Most importantly, it should be clear which groups of students are at risk of not achieving and how the principal and teachers intend to support these students.

How often should boards receive this information?

- The board should receive regular achievement reports.
- The frequency may depend on the nature of the information. The board and the principal may decide to focus on a learning area, or may agree to focus on different groups of students at each board meeting.
- If the board is monitoring progress towards meeting targets it is likely to need more regular information to decide if extra resources are required.
- If extra resources have been approved the board needs to know what has changed for students as a result of the spending.

What counts as student achievement?

- As well as *The New Zealand Curriculum* learning areas, parents and teachers value different types of achievement. These are often highlighted by boards in their charters.
- Boards may have prioritised areas such as sports, cultural activities, activities that develop children's leadership potential, community service etc.
- You may want the principal to report on how many students are taking part in specific programmes. These reports should also tell you how well students achieved or made progress.

Who can help trustees understand achievement reports?

- The principal and senior staff can help trustees understand their reports on student achievement. Many trustees find it helpful if they are given achievement reports before meetings so they have enough time to read them and think about what the report means.
- You can ask leaders and senior staff to give the board some training so you can better understand the assessment terms they use.
- The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) provides useful training for trustees through workshops and webinars.



USING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INFORMATION

What should the board do with student achievement information?

- Boards are regularly asked to approve expenditure for books, technology, professional learning and development, and equipment that helps children learn and be safe. Student achievement information should be used to make these expenditure decisions.
- You are expected to know how your school is supporting students who have special needs, including gifted and talented students. The board is dependent on the principal and teachers to give it this information. As a trustee, it is part of your role to discuss and approve strategies to help these students.
- You need to ask why leaders believe the proposed expenditure will improve teaching and learning. These reasons may be based on particular research, or prior experience with the resource or programme. The board needs to be sure that the money will be effectively spent on those children who need help the most.
- If the board is asked to approve extra funding for teachers or teacher aides, you should ask whether it would be better to have the more experienced classroom teacher working with children needing additional support rather than a teacher aide.

How does the board know if the school's money was well spent?

The board should get a report about how well the funded resources worked. Did the targeted learners catch up to their year level? What were the achievement levels before and after the new resource was used?

SETTING TARGETS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Why have these children been chosen as a target group?

- As a board you set and approve targets each year to raise student achievement. These are mostly for children who are not doing as well as they should in areas such as literacy or numeracy, or for those that will need extra help to achieve a National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualification.
- You may also set targets for a group of very capable children who are able to achieve at an even higher level.
- There may be a school-wide target to focus on a particular curriculum area.

How can trustees be involved in setting targets?

Two ways:

- The board may receive a report from the principal with recommendations.
- Trustees can use the student achievement information reports to identify areas or groups where achievement is a concern. You can refer to these reports and ask what is happening for these students and whether a target is needed.

How will I know whether the target groups are appropriate?

- The board should be provided with achievement information that supports the principal's recommendations. The information should explain the reasons for the targets.
- Targets should be achievable but should challenge both students and staff.
- The board should receive reports on progress towards meeting the targets (once a term) and at the end of the target period. You need the ongoing progress reports to check that the end of year target will be achieved.
- You should ask whether, even with these targets, there are any children who need particular attention but who are still missing out.
- You should ask whether any teachers will need professional learning and development (identified through their appraisal) to support the achievement of the target.

QUESTIONS ABOUT

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS, WHĀNAU, AIGA AND IWI

What information should we give our community about student achievement?

- You should give your community information about student achievement patterns across the school. In primary and intermediate schools this would be particularly in literacy and numeracy in relation to the National Standards.
- At secondary school you would report on NCEA results, but also achievement patterns for Years 9 and 10.
- You will also need to report to Māori and Pacific families, as well as those from other cultures about the achievement of their children. In small schools you will need to be careful that individual students are not identifiable because of the small numbers.

How important is it that we find out parents' views about children's learning and safety at school?

- You should talk with parents, whānau and aiga about what they want for their children. They will help you to identify the priorities for your school's curriculum and future goals for the school's development.
- You should be particularly aware of, and seek, the aspirations of distinctive groups within your school community such as Māori, including iwi, Pacific and groups from other cultures.

Do parents, whānau and aiga have enough opportunities to be active partners in their child's education at the school?

Parents should feel welcome to visit the school and take part in school activities. School reports should provide parents with information that clearly explains their child's progress and level of achievement. Parents should:

- be confident about approaching their child's teacher for further information on their progress
- be active participants in setting their child's learning and social goals, in partnership with their child and the teacher
- be shown ways they can support their child's learning
- have sufficient opportunities to express their views about the school.

The principal should give trustees information about the level of parent involvement in the school, such as attendance at Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and parent help in the classroom and on school trips. The board may want to collect information about whether parents are satisfied about their relationship and involvement with the school, through written or telephone surveys, consultation meetings and other community events.



TEACHER DEVELOPMENT AND PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL

What part do trustees play in making decisions about teachers' professional development?

- Targeted, professional learning opportunities for teachers can help them improve their ability to raise student achievement.
- Boards usually set a budget for teacher professional learning and development. During the development of the budget you can ask what the development priorities are. Professional learning and development should align with priorities identified in the board's annual plan. You can also see how the priorities are connected to the achievement information you have received during the year.
- Often there will be some particularly skilful teachers within a school. Other staff members can benefit by drawing on their knowledge and experience. As a board, you may decide to help this by providing resourcing so that a teacher can be released from class to watch and learn from another teacher in action.
- Trustees may receive requests for additional funds for such things as conferences. Teachers and leaders should be able to explain how they think the conference will benefit students at the school. Such conferences often provide opportunities for teachers and leaders to share ideas with, and learn from, their colleagues in other schools.
- You should receive feedback about the impacts on teaching or student achievement from any courses or conferences the board has funded.

How should trustees monitor the principal's performance and progress with improving student achievement?

- As trustees you are responsible for making sure that the principal's performance is appraised each year. You may employ an outside consultant to do this.
- The appraiser will report back to you, in committee, as to how well the principal has achieved their goals for the year. This can be done in writing as a full report or as a summary of the appraisal report, as per the board's appraisal policy.
- The board should have input into the goals that are set as part of the principal's performance agreement. These should link to the board's goals and will probably include goals to raise student achievement. Achievement targets that the board has approved should be included in this performance agreement.
- The board's policies should include information about the principal's right to speak to the appraisal report. It should also be clear that the board is able to hold board discussions about the principal's employment, or anything related to it, including the appraisal report, without the principal being present.

Are trustees responsible for using student achievement information to set performance goals for teachers?

- The principal is responsible for appraising all staff. She/he should report to you when appraisals have been completed for the year. You should receive general feedback about school-wide teaching successes and next steps.
- Some schools include aspects of strategic goals and student achievement targets into individual teachers' goals and report to trustees on the outcomes of these for teachers as a whole.

STUDENT WELFARE AT SCHOOL

What sort of information should the board receive about attendance, stand-downs and suspensions?

- The board should get information on patterns of attendance, and the numbers of stand-downs and suspensions. There should be a comparison of your school's data with the national norms and expectations for your type of school.
- These figures should be further broken down for Māori, Pacific, year level, gender and other cultures to check that your school is doing well for these students.
- You should be kept informed about the impact of initiatives to improve attendance or reduce stand-downs and suspensions.
- You may want to set targets in relation to improving attendance and reducing stand-downs and suspensions.

What sort of information should the board receive about bullying?

- Your school should have a policy regarding student safety, both physical and emotional, and procedures regarding bullying.
- Schools investigate bullying in different ways. Some conduct regular (at least annually) anonymous student surveys on the amount of bullying and report the outcomes to the board.
- Boards should also receive reports containing information on trends and patterns, and indicating the number of bullying incidents handled.
- Serious bullying incidents may be discussed fully by the board, in committee, as part of disciplinary procedures.
- You should expect reports about how effective anti-bullying programmes have been.

Should the board receive any information about complaints made against staff or children?

- Your school should have a readily accessible complaints policy and procedures that clearly outline channels for communication.
- The principal would not normally report the details of day-to-day complaints to trustees unless they require a board decision, or impact on board policy, such as a complaint about a suspension. You may receive reports on the numbers of complaints received and whether they were resolved.
- You should be informed about any complaint made against a teacher that is likely to result in disciplinary action. This would be discussed in committee.
- If a complainant is unhappy with the way the principal handled the complaint, they can raise their concerns with the board. If you are approached by a parent who has a complaint, check with them that they have first followed the procedures laid out in the school's complaints policy.



MORE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT QUESTIONS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Does the board need to know about achievement at all secondary year levels?

- You should receive achievement reports for all year levels including Years 9 and 10.
- You should expect reports about the progress and learning of all students. This includes information about particular groups such as Māori and Pacific, students with special learning needs and students from different cultures.
- You should also receive information about international students and students in attached units such as alternative education, activity centres, service and trades academies, and teen parent units (if you have such students at your school).

What information should the board get about achievement in NCEA?

- You should receive a report on the NCEA results that includes:
 - how many students got NCEA Levels 1, 2 and 3
 - the numbers of students who met the literacy and numeracy requirements at NCEA Levels 1 and 2
 - the achievement in individual NCEA subjects
 - achievement broken down according to gender
 - the achievement of Māori, Pacific and students from other cultures in all of the above.

What should I be aware of when interpreting NCEA data?

- You need to be clear if the figures you receive relate to all the students who enrolled for a course at the start of the year, or only to those who actually sat the examination. If the report shows only the latter then achievement levels can appear more favourable.
- Numbers of students in senior school subjects can be small so a change in results for one student can have a significant effect on the achievement percentages.

Should the board know about students who leave school before they achieve national qualifications?

- You should receive information about the numbers of students who leave school without formal qualifications. This information should be broken down for groups of learners, including Māori, Pacific and other cultures.
- A significant drop-off in the numbers attending between Years 9 and 12 may indicate that the school's curriculum is not meeting the needs of groups of students. You should then focus on this area.

Would it be useful for trustees to know what happens to our students after they leave school?

- The board should get information about how many students went on to further education or employment. This information should again be broken down for groups of learners, including Māori, Pacific and other cultures. You should be concerned if many students are leaving school with no employment or future education plans.



PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Does the board help shape the school's curriculum?

- The board, through the principal and staff, is required to develop and implement a school's curriculum.
- *The New Zealand Curriculum* sets the direction and provides a framework from which your school can develop its own curriculum. As a trustee, you agree on the learning priorities for the children at your school and make sure that the curriculum continues to meet the children's needs.

What role do trustees have in planning the long-term direction of the school?

- The board is responsible for setting the school's strategic direction.
- As a trustee, you have an important role in identifying the key goals that the board can work towards. The principal and staff will advise you about actions that will help to achieve these goals.
- The decisions that you make about resourcing and improving teaching will help support this ongoing improvement.

How should the board respond to the issues raised in ERO's last report?

- When areas for development are raised in the school's ERO report, the board has a role in ensuring these improvements are made.
- You should help decide how the school will respond to matters highlighted by ERO. You should also expect regular reports on how the initiatives you approve are improving student achievement.



Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa The Child – the Heart of the Matter

Other useful resources

→ EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE

For individual school reports, national reports on education issues and information about the review process.

National Office, PO Box 2799,
Wellington 6140
Email: info@ero.govt.nz
Phone: 04 499 2489

- ☰ How is my child doing?
Questions to ask at school (2012)
- ☰ Evaluation Indicators for Schools (2011)
- ☰ Guidelines for Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists
- ☰ Assessment in Primary Schools:
A Guide for Parents (2008)
- ☰ Safe Schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying (2007)

→ NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION

For information and resources for boards

www.nzsta.org.nz
PO Box 5123, Wellington 6145
Phone: 04 473 4955

→ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

For information and resources for boards, go to the Ministry website and click on Boards

www.minedu.govt.nz
National Office, PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140
Phone: 04 463 8000

→ NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

For information about NCEA

www.nzqa.govt.nz
PO Box 160, Wellington 6140
Phone: 0800 697 296

www.ero.govt.nz