School governance in New Zealand – how is it working?

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1. Introduction

The role and composition of New Zealand school boards of trustees (BoTs) was one of the most radical aspects of the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms in 1989. Few, if any, other national education systems have given the responsibility for the governance of each school to a largely parent-elected body on which parents of current students usually form the majority.[1] But this is not quite the autonomy that it may suggest on the surface. Our model of school governance reflects some of the contrary currents in the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms (Wylie, 1995a). On the one hand, there was a long-seated interest in bringing schools and their communities closer together. On the other, the New Public Management (NPM) approach that had remodelled the public sector was applied, providing for more localised decision making within accountability frameworks that theoretically would both safeguard the expenditure of public money for public purposes, and improve performance. These two currents give a complexity to the role of BoTs, and different criteria for judging how realistic this role has turned out to be, and how well our inclusion of a governance role at each school has worked.

In 1998-99, the Government undertook a review of the regulations around education, including the requirement for every school to have its own elected board. The consultation document suggested that schools could cluster together to reduce BoT and principal workloads, and to address the issue of inequities in the capability of individual BoTs to undertake the role envisaged under the *Tomorrow's Schools* and NPM framework.[2] But both trustees and principals showed little interest in a cluster model.

Our first NZCER national survey of the impact of the shift to school self-management was done in 1989 (Wylie, 1990), and we have periodically repeated and added to this national survey of primary schools since then. In 2003, we began to survey secondary schools. In these surveys, we seek the experiences and views of principals, trustees, teachers, and parents. On the whole, these surveys at both primary and secondary level show that BoTs have become a largely taken-for-granted part of the school world. Their role is not a major issue for principals, teachers, or parents (unlike funding levels). These surveys also show that trustees' focus is very much their own

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[1] Each board consists of five or more elected trustees, the principal, a staff representative elected by staff, and in secondary schools, a student representative. State-integrated schools (mostly Catholic and other originally church-run schools, as well as some special character schools such as Steiner schools) also include proprietor's representatives. Boards can co-opt members, and many do. Non-parents have been eligible for election since 1992, but few have offered themselves. Non-parents are usually members of BoTs through co-option or appointment.

[2] This review, called *Legislation for learning*, was shelved when the Labour-led Government was elected in late 1999.

school, and its students, staff, and parents; the Government is seen more as funder and provider of demands. Relationships between BoTs and principals are usually good: my estimate on the basis of the NZCER surveys has been that at any one time there would be difficulties in board–principal/staff relations at around 12–15 percent of the schools. These difficulties were not confined to a consistent set of schools: the schools where people said they had problems in one NZCER survey round were usually trouble-free in the next round. However, in a recent study of principal stress and workload (Hodgen & Wylie, 2005), the principal's relationship with the school's BoT made a separately identifiable contribution to principal wellbeing, though principal workload and role balance were by far the strongest contributors.

Other researchers have also raised governance-related issues, such as whether all BoTs have the knowledge needed to carry out their role, particularly in relation to principal appointments (Brooking, 2005), interpretation of student achievement data and strategic planning (Robinson, Ward, & Timperley, 2003; Springford, 2006), or parent or school community representation and consultation (Springford, 2006).

A comparison I made with three other school systems that had brought in school self-management at much the same time as New Zealand showed that while all four of these systems had realised that there were in fact leadership and support roles that government agencies needed to play—that schools cannot stand on their own for long if we are to see real gains in student learning —we continued to stand out as the system which was still grappling with redefining school–government relations (Wylie, 2002).

In the last couple of years, there have been two constant themes in both formal discussions and informal conversations in sector meetings in which I have participated. First are the consequences of poor board–principal relationships, the consequences of BoTs making the wrong decisions on principal appointments, and ignoring expert advice even though they had sought it. Second are the difficulties of providing timely support and advice from outside a school where boards cannot or will not carry out key aspects of their legal role. These difficulties were not confined to particular kinds of school: they occurred in high-decile, large, urban schools as well as low-decile, small, or rural schools.

In late 2006, the Minister for Education, Steve Maharey, indicated that there would be a government review of the role of BoTs.

This paper is intended to contribute to the discussion around the role of BoTs by:

(a) describing the reality of the role at the school level using some fresh material from NZCER's 2006 national secondary school survey, and looking back over time to see what has changed in school experiences of the role since 1989; and also looking at the closest national system to our own, England, to see whether there are similar patterns that we could ascribe to this approach to school governance

(b) drawing together national data from other sources on BoT performance.

This evidence of how New Zealand school boards are working is examined in relation to two questions:

1. How does this overall picture of how well BoTs are working fit with the (small) body of research about effective school governance—governance that makes a positive contribution to student performance?

2. How realistic are our expectations around BoTs carrying out their dual roles of bringing schools and communities closer together, while operating within government frameworks intended for larger organisations with boards whose members are appointed by government for their specialist expertise?

I start by looking at what we know about the gains for schools from having BoTs, and what we know about good school governance. Then I turn to recent NZCER research, and what it can tell us about current school governance in New Zealand. I add to this picture with a summary of evidence from other research studies and analysis and data from government agencies. I then conclude with an overview of what appears to be working well, and what needs attention and improvement in relation to our school governance system, with some suggestions to strengthen what we have.

2. What do we know about good governance?

How do we judge school governance? The original *Tomorrow's Schools* framework expected BoTs to bring schools closer to their communities, through parents taking a more active role in setting their school's directions, and parents electing those they trust with this responsibility. This framework also expected that the BoT role in setting school directions and principal appointment should make a contribution to school and student performance: that local voluntary governance of schools would be beneficial to schools and students. Underlying this are three assumptions: that parents or others in the community with relevant expertise would be attracted to make a contribution to the local school by standing for the board; that the parent community would be well represented—not just in terms of expertise, but also in terms of the school being able to take account of the range of backgrounds of its students; and that those who served on the board could work well together and with the school staff.

In this chapter, I make use of studies of school governance in England, Wales, and the US, as well as some New Zealand material, to see what we know about the contribution of school governance to student and school performance, and what this tells us about how school governance can work effectively. I then look at some issues raised in the research about variability in school boards, and the difficulties of their bringing both the kind of expertise needed in relation to their strategic role and in relation to the school's legal accountabilities to government, and the kind of community expertise that helps schools understand their students' strengths and needs.

What contribution to student performance can we expect BoTs to make?

There is not a wealth of research in this area. In their review of research on the effects on educational outcomes of different forms of school governance, ownership, organisation, and management, Rentoul and Rosanowski (2000) found "little or no sound evidence of a direct causal relationship between school self-governance and improved educational outcomes". Their survey of the then available research did not include a specific focus on the role of boards in school governance, probably because there had been so little research on this.

School effectiveness studies indicate that differences in school professional (principal) leadership account for 5–7 percent of the variation in student achievement between schools, about a quarter of the variation accounted for by all school-level variables. Statistical analysis of transformational school leadership shows some benefits, at a low effect size level, for student engagement in

learning. In their valuable discussion of studies of school leadership Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006) conclude that:

> …as a whole, … leadership has very significant effects on the quality of the school organisation and on pupil learning. As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. (pp. 14–15).

The forthcoming Best Evidence Synthesis on educational leadership – schooling (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd) shows much larger effect sizes from studies focusing on the quality of principal pedagogical leadership in relation to student outcomes, and identifies pedagogical leadership as the crucial dimension in principal effectiveness. The description of pedagogical leadership drawn from these studies in this Best Evidence Synthesis covers seven dimensions: establishing goals and expectations, strategic resourcing, participating in planning, coordinating, and improving teaching and the curriculum, participating in teacher learning and development, reviewing student progress, ensuring an orderly and supportive environment, and fostering a learning organisation.

It is harder to separately statistically size how school governors affect student performance, and I know of no studies that have attempted to do so. Their role is more indirect, and most likely to influence the ability of professional leaders to develop and sustain the school culture, capability, and capacity. The studies reported below are mostly small-scale. They certainly show some associations between governance quality or approach, and school or student performance. However, unlike the role of the principal, they do not show whether strong school governance is *essential* for good or better student performance and engagement in learning. Overseas studies provide comparisons within the one system only. Thus they cannot compare schools with governance layers, such as BoTs, and those without (e.g. having a principal accountable to a district office or central agency). Such a comparison would be useful in shedding some light on whether schools need a governing layer at all, and to clearly distinguish what they add.

In New Zealand, the gains from moving from school committees to school BoTs have largely been around their practical voluntary support, the opportunities for school professionals and members of their school community to learn from each other, and for school professionals to become more articulate about what they do, and why. In a 1997 national survey that just under half the country's primary and secondary board chairs took part in, the benefits of the *Tomorrow's Schools* devolution were seen mainly as allowing the school to meet community needs better, supporting community involvement, and the school being able to set its own priorities within its budget, and able to make its own decisions (Wylie, 1997). The drawbacks to the education devolution were seen as the BoT workload or responsibilities, trustees' lack of relevant knowledge, and lack of money: issues that continue today.

In a scan of recent studies in this field,[3] I found five studies of the relationship between school governance and school/student performance in England and Wales, which have a governance system most similar to New Zealand's, though school boards are larger, meet less often, and have a mix of parent-elected governors and local education authority (LEA) appointed governors. School boards in the US exist for districts, which usually encompass a number of schools rather than just one (the largest school districts are the size of the whole New Zealand system; but 80 percent consist of 3,000 students or fewer), and are usually elected by local citizens (not parents alone). However, there is one US study of relevance to the question of whether (and how) governance contributes to student performance.

Evidence of the relationship between good governance and student achievement from England and Wales

The main responsibility of school governing bodies in England and Wales is "to maintain and improve its school's standards of achievement" (Audit Commission/OFSTED 1995). A 2002 OFSTED[4] study of English school governance[5] and its role in the quality of teaching and leadership and management concluded that what it classified as good governance was associated with higher student achievement (as judged by OFSTED), and vice versa, but also that "there is a significant number of schools that are exceptions to these general trends, and good governance is no guarantee that a school will be successful" (p. 5). Student achievement was unsatisfactory in 37 percent of the primary schools with unsatisfactory/poor governance, cf. 11 percent of the schools with satisfactory governance, 3 percent of the schools with good governance, and none of the schools with excellent/very good governance. The pattern was similar for secondary schools (pp. 11–12). When OFSTED governance judgements are set alongside student results in national examinations there are similar trends, but a stronger demarcation between schools with excellent/very good governance and those with good governance (pp. 13–14).

The proportion of schools with unsatisfactory governance as judged by OFSTED was low overall. Of the English schools OFSTED inspected in 2000–01, only 8 percent of primary and 10 percent of secondary schools had unsatisfactory governance, in terms of fulfilling the governing body's responsibilities. But this proportion increases in relation to school socioeconomic disadvantage, using the indicator of the proportion of students receiving free school meals, to 17 percent in

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[3]   I have been keeping a watching brief in this area for some years, with a recent Internet search using the keywords: school governance effectiveness research and student achievement/performance/outcomes, with a focus on England and U.S. districts. This is not a systematic international review of all school systems and forms of governance.

[4]   The English school review body, equivalent to New Zealand's Education Review Office (ERO).

[5]   English school governing bodies are larger than New Zealand's, and often meet less frequently (twice a term rather than once a month). By the end of August 2006, all English school governing bodies had to choose and adopt a constitutional model; their minimum size was 9 and maximum 20. Headteachers are school governors as of right. Parents occupied 26 percent of the governor places in 2003, LEA appointments 18 percent, and co-opted members, 17 percent. Under the requirements now taking effect, a third or more of the governors on schools are required to be parents (Bird, 2003).

primary schools and 24 percent in secondary schools where more than half the students received free school lunches. Of the schools where 8 percent or fewer students received free school lunches, 30 percent of the primary governing bodies were judged as excellent/very good, compared with 14 percent of those serving schools where more than half the students received free school lunches.[6]

Thus we see, as we shall see later with the New Zealand data, variability in the quality of school governance associated with socioeconomic characteristics of the school community. Since student achievement also reflects these characteristics, it is unfortunate that OFSTED did not analyse the relationship between governance quality and student achievement *within* similar socioeconomic areas (i.e. comparing the student achievement of the schools judged as having excellent/very good governance and those judged as having unsatisfactory/poor governance within the set of schools where more than half the students had free school lunches), so some of the apparent relationship between good governance and student performance may reflect differences in student socioeconomic resources and experiences.

In 2006 the English National Audit Office identified five main reasons for schools failing OFSTED inspections: ineffective leadership; weak governance; poor standards of teaching; lack of external support (around half these schools had received no advice from their LEA); and challenging circumstances. It noted that these reasons were often connected; and also that "a school with a very good leadership team can still succeed in spite of a weak governing body" (National Audit Office, 2006). School performance, then, reflects a number of different factors, including its social context; it cannot be attributed to governance alone.

Earley and Creese (2003) summarise a 1999 study by Scanlon, Earley, and Evans that included a comparison of a group of schools deemed "very effective" by OFSTED and a group of schools deemed "less effective" (but not placed into special measures). The two groups were similar in respect to free school meals entitlement, size, phase, and denomination. Governance practices in the very effective schools had an average score of 3 on a 1–7-point scale (where 1 = excellent), cf. an average score of 4.8 for the less effective schools. Governors and headteachers' views of the effectiveness of their governing body were also relatively matched to the overall OFSTED judgement.

Earley and Creese suggest that "It may be possible to have a successful or effective school with an ineffective governing body but how much more successful might that school be with an effective governing body, working in close partnership with the school and the community?" (p. 2).

In this study, headteachers identified benefits from an effective governing body such as:

• a critical and informed sounding board for the headteacher
• offering support for the school

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[6]   There was no correlation between judgements of governance quality and the proportion of ethnic minority students in the school.

- helping to break down the isolation of the head
- being a link with parents and the community
- working with the staff to provide direction and a vision for the school
- providing a forum within which the teachers can explain their work
- bringing to the school a range of non-educational expertise and experience.

The Scanlon et al. study gave a summary of key aspects of how the highly effective boards in that study worked. These boards had:

- trust and support in the relationship between the head and governors, where governors could challenge and question where necessary; the relationship between head and chair is crucial
- a skilled and committed chair—generally these were highly qualified people, with experience outside education, able to build good relationships with the head, let other governors take particular responsibilities, but also ensure that the body worked as a team and all governors were involved in its work and decision making
- effective teamwork
- efficient working arrangements, to make the most use of governors' limited time; this would include organisational support
- high levels of commitment—often over years
- positive relationship with school staff—though this seemed the weakest area
- careful selection of governors
- stability of governing body
- governor training—but again an area that could be improved. While most had had some induction, almost half had had no further training. Governing bodies that had trained as a group were more likely to be rated as highly effective by school heads and chairs.

Conversely, what made it difficult for a governing body to be effective was identified by headteachers and governors as:

- lack of skills and knowledge
- volume and complexity of work
- lack of contact with the school
- lack of funding for the school and governing body
- poor preparation and management of meetings.

Suggestions to improve English school governing bodies' effectiveness included more training, payment or paid time off work, more support from the LEA, and members with skill and expertise.

Ranson, Farrell, Penn, and Smith (2005) undertook case studies of eight schools in each of 10 LEAs[7] in Wales. In 2001 they interviewed the headteacher and chair, and surveyed members of the governing body. They then used GCSE exam and Key Stage test scores 1998–2002 to

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[7] Local Education Authority; these are usually arms of local government, and support schools in their area.

categorise the schools in terms of student achievement: improving; declining; or "stuck" (a plateau). One important point from this analysis in relation to the reality of judging school performance—something that becomes important when we think of how to measure school accountability, look for changes in performance in relation to school goals in the NZ planning and reporting framework, or look for relations between governance and school performance—is that clear trends (rising, stable, or declining) in the aggregated student achievement over time were only evident for 44 of the 72 schools in their study. In other words, expectations that every school will show some discernible change in measurable performance may not be realistic.

The 39 percent of the schools in this study without clear trends in their aggregated student achievement data over time were not included in the Ranson et al. analysis of the relationship between governance and student achievement, which means that their picture is only partial.

Four kinds of governing bodies were hypothesised:

- a deliberative forum (where the principal is the authority)
- a consultative sounding board for the principal (again, authority remains with the principal)
- an executive board (a partnership; the board scrutinises performance as well as taking overall responsibility for "the business aspects of the school: the budget, staffing and the infrastructure of building"; likely to comprise professionals and business people) or
- a governing body (systematic scrutiny; strategic leadership of the school; head is a "strong professional leader" but does not lead the board).

Governing bodies were the authors' ideal, and were also the least common: 8 percent. All but one of these schools was a secondary school. A third of the governing bodies fitted the category of executive boards, with slightly less than that being consultative sounding boards. Just over a quarter were forums only. Rural schools were more likely to have forums.

Most of the primary schools whose student performance declined between 1998—2002 had boards that acted only as a forum for the principal. Most of the schools where student performance increased had boards that were either consultative sounding boards or executive boards.

The authors give the results for primary schools only, saying that the direction of analysis was similar for secondary schools. However, this means that the relationship between a board acting as (the ideal) "governing body" and trends in student achievement is not clear. One would like to know whether the five secondary schools with these boards did show improvement, or whether they did not show any clear trends—a finding that would be important in itself in terms of both what kind of governance is most supportive of improvements to student performance, and our expectations of changes in school performance over time.

It was interesting that two different board approaches, acting as consultative sounding boards for principals or as executive boards, were each associated with school improvement. This may indicate that school boards do not have to fit the ideal form to have some positive effect in a

school. They need to do more than offer a forum for the principal, but they do not need to be executive boards or governing bodies.

A study of 27 English schools identified as effective using statistical models of student progress between Key Stages 2 and 3 in relation to school resources and student social characteristics (Dadd, 2006) to find out what made these schools effective did not find a strong relationship between governance and school effectiveness. The author speculates that strong governance may have more of an impact, and be more important, in schools where the professional leadership of the school is not as strong as it was in these schools. Of interest is this comment, indicating the size and scope of what is a voluntary role, and the relative infrequency of individuals being able to offer what would be required for boards to act as "governing bodies":

> …there were many examples of very dedicated governors, and some examples of governors who had the necessary combination of time, experience and expertise required to provide an effective support and counter-balance to the school leadership team (Dadd, 2006, p. 17).

The suggestion that governing bodies' contribution may be more marked where professional leadership is less strong is echoed in Ranson et al.'s (2005) observation that school boards play a crucial role in the recovery of schools deemed failing after OFSTED inspection "by appointing excellent headteachers and also by introducing and strengthening practices of scrutiny and strategic management" (p. 321). However, it is important to note that in the English context, LEAs play a role in headteacher appointment, and they offer support for "failing" schools; thus these governing boards were not acting alone.[8]

Ranson et al. describe good governance as including:

- the valuing of governance and governors "because they provide a different voice and perspective, because they bind the school to the wider community, strengthen the corporate nature of the school and the public, collective stature of its decisions"
- governance that represented the diversity of its parent communities "Including the participation and voice of different parents helps the school to understand the variety of learning needs as well as securing their commitment to supporting learning in the home"
- partnerships between head and governors are of mutual support
- clarity of roles
- organised as an executive board or governing body: exercising functions of scrutiny, strategy, and accountability
- embodying the values and ethos of the school
- close attachment of governors to the life of the school
- close ties to the community.

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[8] One caution about this observation is that it raises the question of whether these boards that are playing a vital role in the recovery of their schools are the same as those who were involved as the school fell into the "failing" category.

Ranson et al. also observe that one of the benefits of good governance is that astute school governors can gain additional resources for their school from local authorities. This observation raises another issue, however. Such discretionary resources are generally finite. Thus, an effective board's actions on behalf of its school may mean that another school misses out. Do we look at effective governance in terms of gains for individual schools alone, or in terms of gains for the education system, and all the students it serves?

Issues in providing good governance in every school

There is some interesting material from England on the difficulties experienced in attracting school governors to the role. England also has increasing difficulty attracting and retaining headteachers. Both of these may occur partially because of a more performance-based managerialist accountability framework, including league tables and a "name and blame" approach which labels schools as "failing".

Around 10 percent of school governor places are always vacant, rising to 20 percent or more in some (poor) inner city areas. There has been a slight but steady rise in the vacancy rate in recent years. A 1999 national survey found 45 percent of schools experienced some difficulty in recruiting suitable people and 20 percent, difficulties in retaining governors (Scanlon et al., 1999).

This survey also found that 80 percent of school governors were in professional or managerial occupations; most were well qualified, and most were employed. Ellis (2004) noted that this pattern of under-representation of some social groups is also reflected in voluntary work in other sectors in England. She also noted a decline in the proportion of people undertaking any formal voluntary work in the UK between 1991 and 1997. Her recommendations for widening the range of people undertaking the role of school governor include support that may need to be given in relation to the personal costs of time and reimbursement of expenses, as well as ways to get beyond recruitment by word of mouth.

An OFSTED report in 2002 found three main reasons for difficulty in recruiting new governors: long meetings; time commitments; and large amounts of paperwork. These are also the things that governors dislike most. This report also noted that "while governors can identify strengths and weaknesses they may not always have the skills and experience to know how the schools should take improvements forward" (National Audit Office, 2006, p. 38). The National Governors' Council wants mandatory induction training for all new governors because of their "significant statutory responsibilities".

An interesting perspective on what accountability means in English schools, and the complexity of the headteacher's position is given in a recent report on school leadership:

> …whilst headteachers, like other public sector workers, are assigned targets, initiatives and resources, headteachers are not necessarily given the same level of support as other managers. An effective governing body may therefore provide headteachers with the necessary support that they need to fulfil their responsibilities. However, as an OFSTED report highlights, in order to be effective, the governing body needs good leadership from

the headteacher (OFSTED 2003a). Without strong leadership from the headteacher, therefore, governing bodies will not be effective in their strategic role (Stevens, Brown, Knibbs, and Smith 2005, p. 115).

Yet this report also notes that stress and an effective work-life balance were the two major concerns in both the 2001 and 2004 surveys in a continuing series on school leadership; and the study notes that the "demotivating" issues that can affect the retention of good headteachers and the recruitment of good senior managers to the headteacher role are "administrative demands and measures of inspection and accountability" (p. 160).

Earley and Cresse (2003) offer a range of suggestions to improve governance so that it supports ongoing school development, with quite an emphasis on team building and working in genuine partnership with school staff, and on the role of the headteacher in being prepared to share leadership. Nevertheless, they end by asking:

> Are the current responsibilities and expectations of governors simply unrealistic or too high? Is too much expected from a group of part-time (or more correctly, occasional time) unpaid volunteers? (p. 11).

US evidence of the relation between good governance and student achievement

The Iowa Association of School Boards funded a study comparing conditions for school renewal (improvement) in six small districts (ranging in size from around 1400 to around 5100). Three of these districts had one or more schools ranked highly for student academic performance and other indicators of school effectiveness over a four-year period and performing better than schools with similar student social characteristics, and the other three districts had one or more schools that had ranked very low in terms of these indicators over that time, also in relation to schools serving similar populations (IASB, 2000). Interestingly, the research team that interviewed district board members and professional staff to find out about their governance approaches did not know which category the schools were in when they undertook their interviews.

The two groups of districts were much the same in some respects: caring about children; fairly satisfied with their superintendent; and struggling to close the "learning gap" for students with special needs, living in poverty, or from minority groups attending bilingual schools. The differences came in their approach. In the districts with higher than expected performance, school board members believed that all students could achieve, no matter what their home background was, and both the school board and school professionals "viewed the school system critically and were constantly seeking opportunities to improve" (IASB, 2000, p. 4). School board members were knowledgeable about conditions for school renewal (this included good connections with parents and the community), and clear about what was happening to improve learning in the district. The study authors note that their research cannot demonstrate any causal link between school board approaches and student achievement, but that "the board's understanding and beliefs appeared to be part of a district-wide culture focused on improvement in student learning" (p. 5).

New Zealand evidence of the relation between good governance and school performance

We have yet to carry out a New Zealand study analysing quantitative data on student performance in relation to school governance.

Some qualitative evidence about the value that boards can add to schools comes from a study of 18 effective schools' (primary schools that were standing out and secondary schools with higher than average student retention and qualification rates for their socioeconomic decile) financial decision making (Wylie & King, 2004; Wylie & King, 2005), and a study of 10 primary schools that were successfully improving their performance (Mitchell, Cameron, & Wylie, 2002).

In the study of effective schools' financial decision making, boards and principals were operating as partners, respectful of their different roles, but sharing in key decision making around strategic planning. Working together around strategic planning helps develop shared understanding, openness, respect, and trust. In setting school budgets, the principal or other senior staff provided guidance and suggestions that the BoT discussed, and might modify. These suggestions often developed over time, through ongoing discussion between school professionals and board members. Board chairs saw the role of the BoT as being to robustly discuss the management plan and cases for change, with questions related to ensuring that new initiatives met real needs, were sustainable in the long term, were aligned with the school's strategic plan, and were consistent with what trustees were hearing out in the community. Principals generally welcomed this BoT role; and welcomed the opportunity to work with trustees who had more financial management expertise than they did (but not every board had members with this expertise). Boards varied in how active they were in raising revenue for the school (Wylie & King, 2005).

In the 10 primary schools studied to understand how schools improve (Mitchell, Cameron, & Wylie, 2002), the board chairs spoke very much in terms of partnership with school staff in a shared enterprise. Their role was to complement the professional staff: to provide different expertise; to provide ideas and resources; and to represent the school positively in the world beyond. The latter was particularly important for schools that needed to reclaim ground in terms of student numbers and reputation. In the four schools that had reclaimed ground after a crisis, new principals were appointed; in all cases one of their first actions was to develop constructive relations with the board chair, clarify respective roles, and ensure trustees had training for their role. Principals talked of how useful they found it to have support from the board, particularly where they needed to make marked changes in the school organisation or focus, and how the school had also gained by having strong links with parents, and being able to hear parents' views.

In a 1999 report on school governance and student achievement ERO noted that "Weaknesses in governance identified by ERO are often, but not invariably, linked to weaknesses in the quality of teaching performance" (Education Review Office, 1999, p. 7). No quantitative analysis was given alongside this conclusion.

ERO's Ministerial briefing in October 2005 makes quite a strong link between governance quality and its supplementary reviews (reviews that are carried out within 12 months of a regular review where the regular three-yearly ERO review has identified concerns about a school performance):

> Follow-up reviews result from failure by a board of trustees to carry out its responsibilities, and in particular those that have an impact on student achievement. In some of these cases boards do not take responsibility for learning about all their duties. In others they do not take the advice of the principal. In some instances the principal does not advise the board properly and in others the board becomes too closely involved in the day-to-day management of the school (Education Review Office, 2005b).

ERO is currently working on a report on school governance using a large number of its recent school reviews.

However, ERO's current focus in relation to supplementary reviews is student learning: "Most supplementary reviews focus on the quality of education provided for students. A few are more concerned with the governance performance of boards" (Education Review Office 2006a).

Thus one cannot necessarily use the incidence of supplementary reviews as an indicator of the level of boards experiencing problems with their role.

With that proviso, the proportion of schools that received supplementary reviews has remained much the same over the last three years. In its latest annual report ERO notes that 16 percent of its 764 2005–06 school reviews were supplementary reviews, much the same as the 15 percent in 2004–05, and 17 percent in 2003–04. Springford (2006) noted that the primary schools more likely to be judged by ERO as in need of a supplementary review were decile 1–2, which were 4½ times more likely than decile 9-10 schools to receive supplementary reviews, small, in rural areas, and/or with high proportion of Māori enrolment.

Of the schools with supplementary reviews in 2005–06, "nearly 80 percent [of all schools, including secondary] had made sufficient progress to be included in ERO's regular three-yearly cycle of reviews". This looks like a marked improvement on the figure of around half for primary schools that Springford reports for the 2004–05 schools with supplementary reviews (Springford, 2006). However, ERO notes that because it reviews only a third of schools each year, a comparison of single years may not provide an accurate picture of how schools make progress in relation to the issues identified in a supplementary review (Salt, personal communication).

Governance capability does not feature strongly in ERO's recent report on schools' use of operational funding (ERO, 2006b). The highest performing schools did have "higher levels of financial expertise on the board *or* [my italics] in senior management". They also used specialist accounting services and had higher levels of locally raised funds per student. But the lowest performing schools are not described as the reverse of this: the major feature of these schools was that they had "complex financial and educational contexts", echoing the English National Audit Office's conclusion that a range of factors is involved in poor school performance, including school external circumstances and support.

The ERO report on operational funding notes that a third of primary school boards and a quarter of secondary school boards reported major limits to their financial understanding. Primary principals reported a higher level of financial confidence than primary BoTs, but secondary principals' confidence levels were similar to secondary BoTs'. No cross-tabulation is given of this self-assessment and ERO's judgements about the soundness of financial systems, financial position, or sustainability of teaching and learning so it is not clear how these levels of financial understanding might affect school performance.

A complex ask

What do we know about good school governance? The available evidence gives some consistent indicators. Good governance contributes indirectly to the totality of school culture through a commitment to the school and its students, using knowledge about the school community and bringing other expertise to work with the school staff to make good decisions about the school culture, its direction, and its resourcing. Good boards work as teams, both within the board, and with the principal and staff. Where schools are struggling, boards have to be all these things, but at a deeper level, and with more time commitment.

But not every school has such a board, or can attract it, or retain it. Schools serving students in low socioeconomic communities find it particularly difficult to find the right mix of people. The role has rewards, but it is also demanding. The question for any system that relies on school governance by lay volunteers is whether the ask is realistic, and what can be done to support good school governance in all schools.

3. The current state of school governance in New Zealand

In this section, I use data from NZCER's 2006 national survey of secondary schools to describe the current nature of governance in New Zealand schools, and to see whether we have BoTs that are able to straddle their threefold responsibilities: to the students in their school, their community, and the Government.

The NZCER surveys include principals, trustees (in 2006, the chair of each school and one other chosen by the chair to provide a viewpoint that might differ from his or her own), teachers, and in a subsample of schools, parents.[9] Thus they enable us to see whether different groups do experience things differently, and to see how parents perceive the role of BoTs. The data also allow us to look at whether there are difficulties for BoTs in keeping a focus on student learning, and if so, where these difficulties arise, and how widespread they are.

NZCER will carry out its next national survey of primary schools in 2007. I have not used data from our last survey in 2003 in this paper for several reasons. First, one of the big changes since 2003 is that the planning and reporting framework has become a reality in schools (Hipkins & Joyce, in press). It has helped a greater focus on school and student performance. Second, too much detail could make it difficult to see the overall picture.

Third, a quick analysis of some of the comparable data from the 2003 primary and 2006 secondary trustee and principal surveys indicates that there is more similarity than difference between the two schooling levels in how governance is experienced, with two important exceptions. One exception is that primary principals in 2003 were more likely than their secondary counterparts in 2003 to think that the overall level of responsibility asked of BoTs was too great (61 percent cf. 48 percent of secondary principals), although primary and secondary trustees' views in 2003 were much the same (a third thought the responsibility was too much). Another important difference is that principal turnover is higher in primary schools. This means that primary boards are faced more often with the critical task of appointing a good school leader, and the higher principal turnover is probably not supportive of school development. In 2003, 40 percent of primary schools in the NZCER survey had had three or more principals in the last 10 years, cf. 23 percent of secondary schools in the 2006 NZCER survey. These two key indicators

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[9] The primary national surveys have been carried out on a stratified random sample of around 10 percent of the country's primary schools; the 2003 secondary survey was on a stratified random sample of 200 schools, and the 2006 secondary survey went to all secondary schools. The responses have generally been representative of the overall national school profile in terms of such characteristics of school decile, size, and location.

of the weight of the governance role may indicate that there are more issues for primary school boards than is evident in the following picture for secondary school boards. Our next primary national survey this year will allow us to see if this is so.

Trustee perceptions of their role

In 2006, the secondary trustees were generally positive about their role, with one noteworthy exception. In the 2003 survey, 36 percent thought the overall amount of responsibility asked of trustees was too much. By 2006, 61 percent thought they had too much responsibility.[10]

Yet secondary boards appear to be relatively stable. Just under half had kept their board intact over the previous year, and 34 percent had lost only one member. Seven percent had lost three or more of their members over the past year, much the same as the 10 percent in the 2003 survey. Trustees had an average of four years' experience in this role, again much the same as in 2003.[11] Just under half were intending to stand again as a trustee in the upcoming board elections in March 2007, and another 14 percent were undecided. Board chairs were as likely to be standing again as others.

Contributing to their community was the main reason for joining the board (84 percent), followed by wanting to help their own children (61 percent). Wanting to change things at the school was a motivation for 20 percent.

Just over half had been asked to join their school board. Many boards did seem to be keeping an eye out for likely recruits: 72 percent of the trustees said their board was taking action to encourage people with the right skills to stand for the board in the 2007 elections.

All the trustees responding felt they had gained something by their participation: the satisfaction of making a contribution to the school (92 percent); an increased knowledge of education (82 percent); an increase in their knowledge of other areas (64 percent)—an indication of the multidimensional role of school boards; an increase in their skills in working with others (51 percent); friendship and social support (35 percent); confidence to try new things (18 percent); status in the community (14 percent); and confidence to continue their own education (8 percent).

The average number of four hours spent each week on their trustee role was much the same as it had been for the 2003 survey respondents: so the change to the sense of having too much responsibility is not so much a matter of more time, as the nature of what is being asked of them. Chairs have a higher average number of hours each week on their role: 4.52 hours, with 28 percent putting in six or more hours (almost a day's work a week).

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[10] Secondary principals' views altered the other way: in 2003, 48 percent thought the trustee role had too much responsibility; in 2006, this had decreased to 35 percent.

[11] Youngs' (2005) survey with responses from 516 BoT chairs found that almost half had been in that role for less than two years. This may indicate that BoT chairs do not usually step straight into the role, but are chosen from among BoT members with experience on the BoT.

What would they change, then, in their role? Having more money to use for the school stands out: almost four-fifths want this, as they did three years ago. The pattern of other desired changes is also similar to three years earlier, and fits with the desire to be able to do more: to have more time to focus on strategic issues for the school, and less need to spend time and money on what are seen as outside demands that are not clearly related to their students and school.[12] There is a desire for more Ministry of Education support (other than for more money), and an increase in those who would like to work with other schools—but this interest in going beyond their own school to achieve goals for students is still low. Community consultation is not a large issue in itself. Nor is the distinction between governance and management, which has decreased substantially since 2003 as an area where trustees would like to see change in their role.

Table 1   **Features of their role that trustees would change**

Feature	2003 secondary trustees (n=180) %	2006 secondary trustees (n=278) %
Receive more funding for the school	71	77
Receive more support from Ministry of Education	35	41
More time to focus on strategic issues	n/a	39
Reduce compliance costs (education legislation)	n/a	37
Improve knowledge/training	40	32
Receive more support from parents	31	31
Increase payment for being a board member	25	26
Reduce workload/paperwork	22	22
Reduce compliance costs (health and safety)	n/a	22
Better information as a basis for discussion	n/a	22
More work with other schools	9	14
Have a clearer distinction between governance and management	24	13
Reduce the expectations for community consultation	n/a	9
More say over the curriculum	n/a	5
Better communication between board members	7	4
Other	3	

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[12]   In 1997, board chairs were asked to pick the three most challenging aspects of BoT work from a list; around half identified finances/budgeting and keeping up with legislation, or changes to the requirements of BoTs, and a quarter the paperwork and amount of work and time involved in the role (Wylie, 1997).

Board chairs were more likely to want to have more time to focus on strategic issues; otherwise their views were similar to other trustees (as they are on most questions we asked).

Are boards an issue for secondary schools?

Secondary principals and trustees are generally positive about their BoT, with principals slightly more likely to see some problems around the working of their BoT. Overall, the proportion of schools where there may be some issues around the BoT is in the region of 10–15 percent. This is on the whole consistent with earlier NZCER surveys. Thus there is no evidence that there is any large-scale deterioration in how BoTs work in schools, and how both school professionals and volunteers feel about this role of governance.

Most secondary principals and trustees thought that their board was either on top of its task (41 percent of principals, 31 percent of trustees), or making steady progress (57 percent trustees, 46 percent principals). Nine percent of trustees and 8 percent of principals thought their board was only coping with its role, and 4 percent of principals and 1 percent of trustees thought their board was struggling.[13] This pattern is much the same as it was in 2003; and it is better than it was for trustees compared with 1997, when 18 percent of board chairs described their board as coping or struggling cf. 10 percent in 2006.

Only some trustees and principals see the board of their school as a major issue for their school. Of the 24 items we asked trustees to tick if they thought they were a major issue in the school, the quality and role of the BoT were among the bottom three, at 4–6 percent. Continuity of the board did rate higher, at 17 percent, but well behind funding (74 percent), student achievement (45 percent), property development (42 percent), NCEA workload (33 percent), assessment workload (28 percent), and student behaviour/discipline (27 percent).

Of the 23 items we asked principals about, the three board-related items were among the bottom quarter. Board continuity was a major issue at their school for 10 percent, the role of the board for 7 percent, and the quality of their board an issue for 12 percent. Funding topped the list of issues identified by principals (81 percent), followed by student achievement (59 percent), assessment workload (55 percent), property development (53 percent), NCEA workload (47 percent), the quality of teaching (44 percent), assessment driving the curriculum (42 percent), ICT (40 percent), recruitment of teaching staff (38 percent), and student behaviour (37 percent).

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[13] Non-chairs were more likely to say their board was coping or struggling (13 percent cf. 6 percent, but the difference was not quite statistically significant using the $p <\!/= .05$ level ($p = 0.06$)).

What do BoTs focus on?

Trustees identified their boards' main achievements over the past year as making progress on strategic planning (69 percent), having a greater focus on student achievement (67 percent), and good financial management (62 percent).

The tasks taking up most board time fit with both these achievements, and the main issues identified for their school. Financial management took up most time, followed by strategic planning, monitoring school performance and discussing progress on school targets, and property. Policy decisions, curriculum, and personnel/industrial relations take up relatively less of their time.[14] Strategic planning and monitoring school performance were higher up on the list than they had been in 2003.

Seventy-one percent of the secondary trustees said parents had raised an issue with their BoT in 2006. However, these may not be everyday occurrences. Most trustees noted two or three issues raised by parents. Discipline, including issues related to the school uniform, was the main source of parental approaches to their secondary school board (43 percent). Dissatisfaction with a teacher was the second source, for 26 percent of the trustees. The other issues were wide-ranging, with most noted by less than 10 percent of the trustees.[15] Most of the issues that parents raised with a BoT were discussed at board meetings, though it was not common for parents to come to a board meeting to present their case (24 percent of those whose BoTs had dealt with a parent-initiated issue). The level of issues raised by parents has not increased since the 2003 survey.

After discussion at a BoT meeting, the most common outcome was for the principal to discuss the issue with the parents (59 percent), or for a BoT member to discuss it with them (37 percent). Boards also altered or developed school policy in response (22 percent). They were largely confident about dealing with these issues on their own (in contrast to seeking technical or professional help with employment issues or principal appointment and performance review). Only 14 percent sought external advice or help with responding to parent-raised issues, and 9 percent discussed an issue with the Ministry of Education.[16]

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[14] Trustees were asked to rank each of eight different areas. We used correspondence analysis to analyse the rankings of the amount of time board members spent on various tasks. This is a descriptive/exploratory technique designed to analyse simple two-way and multi-way tables containing some measure of correspondence between the rows and columns. The analysis was carried out using the `ca` package for R (R Development Core Team, 2006).

[15] Issues raised with the BoTs of 10–14 percent of trustees were NCEA, school finances or fundraising, the school enrolment scheme, student achievement, provision for students with special needs, transport, and subjects or option choices. Issues raised for 5–9 percent of the trustees' BoTs included health and safety, provision for Māori students, the school's future, school grounds or their maintenance, theft or vandalism, curriculum, homework, the school strategic plan, class sizes, and extracurricular provision. Issues raised for less than 5 percent of the trustees' BoTs included sex education, provision for Pacific students, provision for ESOL students, and targets in the school annual plan.

[16] Other responses noted by 10 percent or less of the trustees whose BoT had responded to a parent-raised issue were for the principal to take disciplinary action, to hold a discussion with other local schools, or a special BoT meeting, or a public meeting, to set up a BoT–parent committee, or to actively seek new funding.

Working relationships among the BoT, and between BoT and principal

Working relations between trustees on the board were generally judged by the trustees to be good (32 percent), or very good (60 percent). Seven percent thought that working relations on their board were only satisfactory, and less than 1 percent thought they were poor.

Most boards appear to act as governing bodies in the sense that the principal may be a member, but he or she does not dominate. Nor do secondary school boards appear to act coercively. Trustees are positive about the quality of information they receive from the principal. They see themselves regularly scrutinising school performance; they are divided about whether their main concern is also to support the school principal; and to a lesser extent, whether they mainly act as a sounding board to the principal.[17] Principals' view of the focus of their BoT gives a very similar picture.

Three-quarters of the trustees thought their board's relationship with their principal was very good; 18 percent thought it was good, only 5 percent described it as satisfactory, and 1 percent as poor. From the principals' perspective, the picture is very similar overall.

Where we had responses at the same school from both trustee and principal, we compared them to see if the views were the same. Bear in mind that we are comparing the views of an individual trustee, rather than the board as a whole; one would therefore not expect them to be exactly the same. Views were closest when it came to the overall board–principal relationship: 84 percent of the trustees whose school principal described the BoT–principal relationship as very good gave it the same rating. The similarity was somewhat less, between around 40–60 percent when it came to the other items both were asked, e.g. who (if anyone) had the strongest voice on the board, whether the board told the principal what to do, and how the board was doing. There was reasonable agreement between principal and trustee at the same school on whether the level of responsibility asked of the board was about right (71 percent of trustees agreed with their principal), but only 44 percent of the trustees agreed with their school principal that their responsibility was too much.

Levels of trust between principal and chair appear to be enough for good working relations.[18] Interestingly, principals perceive themselves as having a more dominant role in board transactions than do trustees—but trustees place more weight on supporting the principal.

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[17] These items about the approach of the board to their work were inspired by the English research on the relationship between school governance approaches and school performance, particularly the importance of scrutiny by governing boards.

[18] The same confidence in board chair–principal relationships is evident in a 2005 study of 512 board chairs, covering both primary and secondary board chairs. This study found a higher identification of areas in their role for which they felt the need for further development among chairs of rural and small schools, and those who had been chairs for less than two years (Cardno, France, Smith, & Youngs, 2005).

Table 2 **Secondary trustee and principal views of board–principal relationship**

Aspect of relationship	Trustees (n=278) % strongly agreeing or agreeing	Principals (n=194) % strongly agreeing or agreeing
Principal and board chair trust each other	93	89
Board regularly scrutinises school performance	85	76
Board's main concern is to support the principal	46	34
Board is mainly a sounding board for the principal	28	43
Chair is the strongest voice on the board	19	19
Principal is the strongest voice on the board	14	29
Board tells the principal what to do in all areas	2	n/a
Board does what principal says in all areas	n/a	2
The board chair and I have equally strong voices on the school board	n/a	52

While this is generally a positive picture, 44 percent of the secondary principals said they had struck problems in their relationships with board members at some time in their career as a principal:

- 7 percent of principals were experiencing major problems at their current school
- 31 percent were experiencing minor problems at their current school
- 4 percent had experienced problems at their previous school (since 73 percent were in their first principalship of a secondary school, this amounts to almost a fifth of those who had been at more than one school).

Principals who were currently experiencing major problems in relations with board member(s) were more likely to disagree that the board's main concern was to support the principal (46 percent cf. 26 percent of others), that the board chair and the principal had an equal voice on the board (38 percent cf. 21 percent of others), and, most interestingly in light of the Ransom et al. (2005) research stressing the value of scrutiny in the governance role, that the board regularly scrutinised school performance (31 percent cf. 5 percent of others).

They were also more likely to see their board as coping or struggling (31 percent of those who were having major problems, 18 percent of those having minor problems, cf. 7 percent of those who had never had a problem with a school board). Note however that the relationship is not total: in other words, relationships can be difficult while a board is nonetheless performing in the eyes of its principal.

There were other signs, too, that many principals manage to weather poor relationships with one or more BoT members. Principal morale levels were more related to their views of their relationships with teaching staff, and relations between teachers or between students than to their

relations with their board. Those experiencing problems with their board were more likely to disagree that there was trust between themselves and the board chair—but it is interesting that the proportion is still very low (7 percent cf. 1 percent of others). This may indicate that there are issues within BoTs which board chairs find difficult to resolve.

Principals who describe their relationship with their board as a whole as (at best) satisfactory or poor (only 4 percent), or working relations between board members as satisfactory or poor (10 percent) were more likely to also have morale levels that were less than good, but that was not the case with those who thought their relationship with the board chair was satisfactory or poor (only 5 percent).

Board members said they usually got information they needed, in a form that was understandable. However, 23 percent of trustees felt they did not have all the information they needed to make good decisions (some of this information may have been unobtainable by principals), and 12 percent noted they got information at the last minute. Two-thirds of those who said they got information at the last minute also said they did not get all the information they needed to make good decisions. Thus, in total, around 27 percent of the trustees had some problems with the information they needed for their role. Sixteen percent of the principals thought it took too much time to adapt and assemble information required by their BoT.

Table 3   **Secondary trustee views of the quality of information from their principal**

View of quality of information	Trustees (n=278) % strongly agreeing or agreeing
Information from the principal is easy to understand	88
Board gets all the information needed to make good decisions	77
Board gets information needed at the last minute	12

Chairs were somewhat more likely to agree that their board got all the information it needed to make good decisions (83 percent cf. 70 percent of other trustees).

Parent perceptions of the purpose of the BoT

Do parents see the board of trustees as representing them? Yes and no. They don't see this as the main feature of the trustee role: providing direction for the school takes precedence. Representing parents comes next—along with partnership with school staff. This is not a cut-and-dried model of governance. Trustees' views give a very similar overall picture, and that picture has remained stable since we first asked about it (1996 for primary schools, 2003 for secondary schools). Very few trustees or parents see that board of trustees' main role is to be agents of government.

In 2003, when we asked people to choose only one main element in the role of the school trustee, only 23 percent of primary parents saw parent representation as the main element in the role of the school trustee; as did 23 percent of trustees. That had decreased from 41 percent in 1999, indicating that this aspect of the role is less prominent than it was at the start of school self-management and the board of trustees' role.

Strategic direction of the school was most likely to be seen as the main element in the board role by 40–50 percent of both parents and trustees. Another fifth of both groups thought that partnership with school staff was the main element. It seems likely that this range of views (and the 3 percent in each group who thought the main element was to employ school staff) reflects different understandings of the survey question as much as anything else: e.g. those who were thinking about what makes the role work might be inclined to think of partnership with school staff, in contrast to those who were thinking of "the main element" in terms of its main purpose.

We let people choose more than one key element in the 2006 secondary national survey. Here are the 2006 results. Parents give slightly more weight than trustees to parent representation, and to employing and overseeing staff. But overall, the Government's desire to have boards provide strategic direction is reflected in this being given by far the most weight, and at a higher level than three years earlier.

Table 4 **Secondary parent and trustee views of the key element in the role of the board of trustees 2006**

Key element	Trustees (n=278) %	Parents (n=708) %
Strategic direction for school	75	75
Partnership with/support of school staff/principal	52	47
Represent parents	46	56
Scrutiny of school performance	34	39
Employer of school staff	12	27
Oversee principal	12	21
Agent of government	2	12

Board chairs' sense of the key element in the board role is much the same as others, though they and deputy chairs were more likely to mention overseeing the principal (17 percent).

Parent contact with their school board

Parent contact and engagement with school board activities is limited; around half say they have had some contact with their school board, and around a third of parents would like more contact.

Trustees also express some frustration around the engagement of parents; they also seek more practical parental support for their school. This picture has been consistent for the last decade in primary schools, too, indicating that this may not change unless other things change, such as in how schools operate, or in the work–life balance for parents and trustees.

Parent perspectives

Only 19 percent of the 2006 survey's secondary school parents read their school's annual report, and most relied on newsletters for information about the school, including the board. Just over half the parents responding said they had no contact with their school board, lower than the 73 percent who said they had no contact in 2003.

Around a third of parents thought they did not have enough contact with their school's BoT in both 2003 and 2006. These parents were also much more likely to feel they were not genuinely consulted about new directions or issues (47 percent cf. 9 percent), that there was an area of the school where they would like to have more say (34 percent cf. 12 percent of those who felt they had enough contact with their school board), to want more input into the school charter (8 percent cf. 1 percent), or to want information from the school that they did not have (38 percent cf. 12 percent). The group who wanted more contact with their school BoT were slightly less likely to see giving strategic direction to the school or partnership with school staff as key elements in the role—but no more likely to see their role as representing parents.

Primary parents do not have more contact with their school BoT, even though primary schools are smaller. Just under half the primary parents in the 2003 NZCER survey had no contact with their school board, and 27 percent said they did not have enough contact with them. Parent–trustee contact was higher at the start of school self-management, but even then active parental engagement with the board's core work was limited: the 1990 survey found 16 percent of parents taking part in discussions of school policy (cf. a consistent 4 percent since 1996), and 16 percent who had attended a board meeting (cf. 6–7 percent since 1996).

Around 45 percent of the secondary parents thought they were genuinely consulted about new directions or issues, or were satisfied with how the school had developed its charter and annual plans. Many do not know what is happening or are unsure about these things. However, only 4 percent of the parents responding wanted more input into their school's development of its charter and annual plan.

Are parents happy with their boards? When asked to identify the major issues facing their school, parents rarely mention the school board itself: only 4 percent identified the role of their school board or its quality, and 3 percent continuity on the board. The main issues identified by parents were funding (41 percent), student achievement (37 percent), student behaviour (36 percent), and the quality of teaching staff (33 percent).

Trustee perspectives on contact with parents

Around a third of the secondary trustees in the 2006 survey would also like more contact with parents themselves, slightly more than in 2003. Fourteen percent said they had no or little contact with parents. Half had four or more different kinds of contact with parents, both informal and formal, and often at an individual rather than group level. The higher the number of different kinds of contact trustees had with parents, the more satisfied they were with their level of contact (increasing from 40 percent of those who had one to three kinds of contact, to 63 percent of those who had seven or more kinds of contact).

As in 2003, they were most likely to have informal discussions with parents who were also friends, or to talk with individuals who contacted them over policy. But they also represented the school at meetings with different groups within the parent community. Trustees were making connections within the parent community, hearing views formally and informally: thus there is some evidence that they were able to both provide a perspective on what parents were thinking and seeing to use in their board work, as well as provide parents with a perspective on the school's emphases. This kind of interconnection is generally thought to be important in the literature on social capital, and the support and exchange of information that organisations can both give individuals, and draw from them for the benefit of the whole.

Table 5   **Secondary trustees' contact with parents**

Contact	(n=278) %
Informal discussions with parents who are friends	62
Represented school at functions for parents (e.g. open evenings)	59
Talked at school functions to individual parents trustee had not met before	49
Individual parents contacted trustee concerning school policy	46
Individual parents contacted trustee concerning their children	39
Through BoT consultation with parents on strategic plan	30
Parents come to board meetings	30
Attended meetings of PTA/Home and School Association/School Council	28
Contacted known individual parents to seek views	23
Attended whānau/Pasifika support/other meetings	22
Attended whānau/Pasifika support meetings	21
Consulted with parents to develop board policies	18
Discussed student achievement in the school with parents	18*
Helped/worked at school	17*
Discussed ERO reports with parents	16
Discussed progress on planning and reporting targets with parents	10
Contacted groups of parents about school policy	10
Contacted unknown individual parents to seek views/invite to meetings	7

Parent satisfaction with schools

Parent levels of satisfaction with their child's quality of education are high: 79 percent were generally happy, much the same level as 2003. Twelve percent were unsure, and 9 percent were critical of the quality of their child's education.

Parents did raise issues or concerns with their child's secondary school: 46 percent had done so in 2006, much the same as in 2003. These issues are wide-ranging; the main issues are bullying, a concern about a teacher, or what to do about a student's behaviour or attitude to school. Three-quarters of the parents who had raised an issue or concern with their child's school felt they had been fairly listened to, and half thought the right action had been taken as a result; another 19 percent of this group thought the right action had been taken, but too slowly or not enough.

Just over half the parents (54 percent) also had views on what they would like to change at the school. These are wide-ranging: the most common are to get more individual help for their own child (32 percent), and not unrelated, to have smaller classes (26 percent); to have more communication about the school programme (26 percent), and more information to support their child's learning at home (25 percent). Between 12–17 percent would like to see more interesting or challenging work, more teaching resources, more emphasis on academic work, and on values; and while some would like to see more strict discipline, others would like to see more emphasis on student peer support.

Around a fifth of the parents in the 2006 secondary survey would like more information from their school, or to have more of a say in a particular area of school life. This is about the same as the proportion of secondary parents (25 percent) in the 1989 Heylen national opinion poll just before the start of *Tomorrow's Schools* who were dissatisfied with the level of involvement that parents could have in the running of secondary schools.[19] This might indicate that simply having a layer of school governance coupled with self-managing schools does not (cannot?) eliminate the desires of a minority of parents at any one time to have more say over their child's individual experiences of learning.

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[19] This compares to 16 percent of primary school parents in 1989, though primary school committees actually had less responsibility than secondary school boards. The Heylen poll was a telephone opinion poll of a national sample of 403 (largely representative in terms of family income) (Heylen Research Centre, 1989). It also found that 45 percent of primary parents (n=155) and 66 percent of secondary parents (n=107) said they were "hardly involved at all" in their child's school. Around half of the parents thought that parents did not need special skills to be on the school board (as it was then outlined), and somewhat more than half that being on the BoT would not interest most parents.

In 2006, 45 percent of the secondary school parents taking part in NZCER's school survey said they had some involvement in their child's school—mostly in sports (29 percent), fundraising (19 percent), school trips (16 percent), or cultural activities (10 percent). Sports and cultural activity involvement by parents can be a very helpful way to improve the social capital and support available both within the school community, and for individual students' wellbeing and identification with the school.

Community consultation

Ninety-one percent of the trustees said their board had consulted its community in the last 12 months, mostly using two or three different methods to reach people: mainly parents. Like most public organisations, the methods used are a mix of asking people to respond to written material, and holding meetings for those interested and able to attend.

Table 6 **Methods of community consultation in secondary school boards 2006**

Methods of school community consultation	Trustees (n=278) %
Newsletter	75
Written questionnaire	57
Public meeting/workshop at school	45
Parents specifically invited to BoT meetings	26
Hui	23
Public meeting/workshop in the community	14
Specific groups meet with BoT	10
Email survey	7
Home/cottage meetings	6
Phone survey	5

The main issues that secondary boards consulted on with their community were the strategic plan/charter (49 percent), curriculum or subject areas (35 percent), student achievement (31 percent), provision for Māori students (28 percent), policies (25 percent), student behaviour (22 percent), property (21 percent), the school enrolment scheme (18 percent), student health and safety (17 percent), setting targets for the annual plan, and extracurricular activities (16 percent each).[20] A similar set of issues were the topics of BoT consultation in 2003.

The response rate from parents is probably also typical for other public organisations (unless there is a single issue that people feel strongly about). Thirty-nine percent of the trustees whose boards had consulted their community estimated that less than a tenth of parents took part; another 20 percent estimated between a tenth and a quarter, and 10 percent, between a quarter and a half of their parent community. Eight percent estimated more than half had taken part. And a fifth of the trustees did not know what proportion had taken part in their school's community consultation.

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[20] Other issues raised with school communities and reported by 8–12 percent of trustees included: funding; provision for a particular group of students; progress on annual plan targets; sex education; provision for Pacific students; and provision for students with special needs. Four percent consulted on provision for ESOL students, and 3 percent on school mergers.

Only 14 percent of the trustees whose BoT had consulted its community judged its methods of consultation to have failed, although 42 percent thought its methods had worked for some issues only. Thirty-eight percent thought the methods of consultation were generally successful.

Most of the secondary trustees (86 percent) said their school had an identifiable Māori community, and most of these said this community had been consulted over the last year—mainly through a school whānau group (59 percent of trustees whose BoT had consulted its Māori community), through ongoing discussions (53 percent), through a board member with responsibility for Māori liaison (44 percent), or asking Māori parents as a group (41 percent).[21]

Consultation with Māori in 2006 covered more issues and was focused more around student achievement than it was in 2003. Māori student achievement was reported as a topic in consultation by 59 percent of trustees (increased from 41 percent in 2003), the school programme in general and parents' expectations (40 percent), parent support for student learning (33 percent), community involvement (29 percent), student behaviour (26 percent), and around 20 percent each on the school charter, the targets in the annual plan, or a particular programme.

Though BoT consultation with Māori uses different methods, trustee views of their BoT's success with these methods give a similar picture to their views of the success of their general school community consultation. Eleven percent of the trustees whose BoT had consulted its Māori community thought its methods were unsuccessful, and 31 percent that it was successful for some issues only. Forty-three percent thought the methods of consultation were generally successful.

In 2006, boards were also more likely than in 2003 to be consulting with Pacific communities (25 percent cf. 17 percent), though their levels of consulting with Asian communities were lower (6 percent in 2006 cf. 11 percent in 2003), as was their consultation with particular religious communities (6 percent in 2006 cf. 9 percent in 2003). Consultation with refugee communities occurred at much the same rate, and was 3 percent in 2006.

A third of the secondary trustees identified issues for their BoT around community consultation: twice the proportion as in 2003. Lack of community interest or response was the main issue for half of these. Around a fifth felt that their BoT methods could be more effective, or wanted to get a wider range of views, or felt there was some difficulty in consulting with Māori in their community.

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[21] Other methods included individual trustee discussions with individual Māori parents, asking individual Māori parents for their views, close relations with a local marae, meetings with local iwi, and putting on a school event for Māori parents and whānau (between 17–25 percent), and some contacted all local iwi, or sponsored a hui (9 percent each).

BoT capability

Most trustees and principals thought their board lacked some expertise (71 percent of trustees, and 79 percent of principals). Generally, principals saw a higher level of need than did the trustees.

Strategic planning and legal skills were among the top three areas of need identified by both groups.

Table 7   **Secondary trustee and principal views of experience needed by their board**

Area of experience	Trustees (n=278) %	Principals (n=194) %
Community consultation	24	21
Legal	21	32
Strategic planning	20	35
Understanding assessment data	16	n/a
Fundraising	16	17
Financial	15	24
Public relations	15	16
Industrial relations	14	23
ICT	13	18
Governance	13	21
Educational	10	22
Human resources/personnel	10	20
Property maintenance and repair	9	20
Business	8	n/a

Comparing principal and trustee responses for the same school showed much lower agreement on the kinds of expertise needed for the individual school board—the highest was in relation to legal and strategic planning (around 30 percent of trustees agreed with their principal that a need existed). Only 29 percent of the trustees agreed with their principal that no additional expertise was needed.

BoT use of external advice and support

The Ministry of Education supports boards through

- a contract with NZSTA to provide advisory services – these include advice on individual issues and problems as boards encounter them, as well as written and Internet advice in the form of handbooks and templates (e.g. on principal appointments and appraisals)

- contracts with NZSTA and other providers to provide training for boards
- a contract with NZSTA to help boards prepare for triennial elections
- inclusion of a small sum in school's operational funding to contract in expertise to assist the BoT with its appraisal of the school's principal.
- provision of written advice on its websites and on paper
- provision of advice and support when BoTs request it
- indirectly, through its negotiation of national collective employment contracts.

Most trustees (81 percent) had received some form of formal training for their role over the past year. This training included individual-school focused sessions with the whole BoT (around 40 percent), sessions bringing different boards together in cluster training (56 percent), and sessions focusing on individual roles on the BoT (24 percent). A quarter had attended trustees' conferences, and 13 percent were in schools that had had ERO post-review assistance.[22] Seventy-two percent of those who had had some training said it had met their needs, indicating some scope for development of existing training approaches. Just under half the trustees would like more training or development for their role as trustee, with another 15 percent unsure.

Most trustees were also accessing advice and support from at least two other sources, usually from individuals within the school, and beyond, from printed material more than Internet material. Just over a third had had some individual contact with NZSTA, and a fifth, discussions with the Ministry of Education. Around a fifth also had regular contact with other school BoTs.

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[22] ERO offers schools where it has decided to undertake a supplementary review post-review assistance meetings with the school BoT to facilitate discussion to help the BoT develop an action plan to address issues raised in the ERO report. These meetings are often attended by Ministry of Education staff with responsibility for ongoing support. Schools can decide whether to have these meetings, and in 2005–06, ERO provided 65 of these meetings, a take-up rate of 44 percent. Interest in these meetings has declined in five years since they were first offered. Take-up rates may reflect either growing school confidence, other sources of advice, or uncertainty about the relevance of ERO advice (anecdotal evidence suggests there is still a variability among ERO reviewers; and schools may assume that a reviewer who has not been a manager at their school level (e.g. an ex-primary teacher reviewing a secondary school) will not have sufficient experience to offer viable advice).

Table 8   **Secondary trustee sources of advice and support for their role**

Source	Trustees (n=278) %
NZSTA—printed material	84
Guidance and information from principal/school staff	68
Ministry of Education—printed material	63
Regional STA—material/advice	48
Other BoT members—guidance and information	45
NZSTA—contact	38
ERO—material	38
NZSTA—Internet material	36
Ministry of Education/TKI—Internet material	29
Ministry of Education—discussions	21
Regular contact with other BoTs	19

Principal appointments, appraisal, and salary negotiations

Appointing a principal is probably the most crucial decision made by boards. Most trustees would not have much experience of this: 32 percent of the principals said they were the only principal the school had had in the past 10 years, and another 43 percent were the second principal in that period. Nineteen percent of their schools had had three principals, and 4 percent had had four or five.

Twenty-six percent of the schools represented by the trustees participating in the survey said their school had appointed a principal in the last three years. Just under half the trustees whose school had appointed a principal were pleased with the quality of those on their shortlist; but 32 percent described them as all right, and 18 percent as patchy or disappointing. Individual boards make the decision, but they cannot take responsibility for the calibre available, or if the school is facing serious issues, make the school more attractive. The quality of the pool from which BoTs can make appointments is a government and professional issue. At present, there are no formal requirements for principals other than that they be a registered teacher, though boards usually specify the skills and experience they are looking for.

Usually, school boards do not make major decisions like this without external advice (over and above the written guidance on legal responsibilities, processes, and what to look for in a principal that is provided by the NZSTA guidelines. These guidelines state that "it is important to have within the [appointment] team someone who can test the professional aspects of the applicants", but also indicate that this may not mean that this person forms part of the interview panel (NZSTA 2005a).

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Only four percent of trustees said their decision was made with no external advice. Most common was input from the school staff (47 percent), from a human resources consultant (45 percent), or another principal (43 percent). It was not common to have input from the current principal (11 percent).

Boards are also responsible for principal performance management, and must undertake an annual appraisal. The Professional Standards for Principals must be included in the criteria for assessing principal performance. The NZSTA guidelines for boards note that "with the introduction of professional standards, a number of Boards have expressed the concern that they feel ill equipped to make judgements about performance on matters "educational" (NZSTA 2005b). Advice is given on how to select a good consultant, noting that they should be able to advise both the principal and BoT on how to address areas needing development, and that boards should work with the consultants not least to "gain knowledge and expertise in appraisal".

Fifty-six percent of the trustees said their board had also used an independent person for the principal's last performance appraisal, and a further 7 percent were unsure. They were most likely to use an individual education consultant (44 percent); with 7 percent using another principal, and 3 percent a human resources consultant. Half the trustees said this performance appraisal had a lot of use for their principal's professional development, rather lower than one would expect from performance appraisal.

One interesting point of difference between schools and other crown entities is that principal salaries and conditions are negotiated at the national level, and, like teacher salaries, the actual amount paid centrally. Consistently the NZCER surveys have shown trustees' reluctance to take on the role of setting employment rates and conditions for their own school. In this, they have shown themselves to have some sense of belonging to a wider system than their own entity—or to be concerned about new costs for their already pressured operational funding. In 2006, about half remain opposed to this, with about a third showing interest in the role only if the Ministry of Education was to cover the cost of what was negotiated by each school board.

Table 9 **Trustee and principal views of BoTs taking over responsibility for negotiation of principal salary and employment conditions**

View	Secondary trustees (n=278) %	Secondary principals (n=194) %
BoT should not have this responsibility	46	47
BoT should have responsibility if Ministry of Education pays	30	39
Not sure	15	8
BoT should have responsibility if operational funding used	8	5

Principals' main reasons for not wanting boards to have this responsibility chosen from the list given were that it would increase inequities between schools (45 percent), that this responsibility belonged at a national level (43 percent), that it would have a negative impact on BoT–principal relations (37 percent), that BoT lacked the necessary expertise to undertake this responsibility (35 percent), and that it was inefficient to pass this responsibility to separate BoTs. Reasons in support of boards negotiating with principals (with the Ministry of Education paying what was agreed) were that the BoT was ultimately the principal's employer (44 percent), and that it would allow local conditions to be taken into account (37 percent).

The trustees' reasons around taking on the responsibility of negotiating principal salary and conditions were very similar: the only differences were that they were more likely to feel they lacked the expertise to do this (45 percent), and to feel that it was inefficient to give them this role (24 percent); but they were slightly more sanguine about it having a negative impact on their relationship with the school's principal (31 percent).

Interestingly, principals who were experiencing problems with one or more members of their board were no more likely to be against school boards making this decision than others.

Personnel/industrial relations issues

Over the last 10 years, there has been a marked increase in the number of personnel/industrial cases where NZSTA has provided advice to schools, more to principals and senior management than to trustees. In 1995, NZSTA provided advice or support for 390 cases, and in 2005, 1304 (around 2 percent of the school workforce). These cases are largely to do with school staff, rather than issues between principals and boards. In 2005, NZSTA provided advice in relation to 36 continuing or started principal competency cases, 8 principal disciplinary cases, and 17 other principal cases.

If we estimated each one of these cases as involving only one school (a liberal estimate), then there were industrial relations issues requiring some external expertise in 15 percent of schools in 1995, and 53 percent in 2005. NZSTA notes that it worked for more than a few hours with 900 schools, or 36 percent of all schools, in 2005 (Davies personal communication). The figures of the schools that sought NZSTA advice is reasonably consistent with the 64 percent of secondary trustees who said in the 2006 survey that their BoT had faced an industrial relations issue in the last three years. Almost all sought advice outside the school—some free, such as that from NZSTA (50 percent), regionally-based NZSTA staff (24 percent), [23] PPTA (19 percent), or the Ministry of Education (18 percent), and some needing to be paid for (43 percent used legal

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[23] NZSTA is funded by the Ministry of Education to provide schools with industrial advice; regional school trustees associations are not. It is likely that (an unknown number) of those who ticked the regional STA option here were in fact referring to NZSTA services, which include local staff. It is possible that regional STA officers have provided industrial advice, unfunded by government.

advice, and 8 percent employed a private consultant or firm). Most of this action solved the problem, but 15 percent reported only a partial solution.

Local Ministry of Education support

We asked both principals and trustees to say what support they currently had from local Ministry of Education officers, and what support they would be interested in having. First, principal views are given. Around half the secondary schools were already getting advice if they encountered a problem, and support with property work. The property role has remained with local Ministry of Education offices throughout decentralisation, while other supporting roles such as providing advice on school management were minimised to support the principle of the self-managing school. Boards are required to discuss major property work with the Ministry of Education.

Two-fifths of the principals said their school had received support if they encountered a problem. The table below shows an interesting split between principals who have embraced a literal version of school self-management, or who do not believe that the Ministry of Education has expertise they need—and those who would like more external support. This is particularly evident in relation to principal appointments, discussions around the school's plans and targets for student achievement, and support for any issues encountered, or to work more with other schools.

Table 10 **Principal views of local Ministry of Education role in supporting schools**

Role (n=194)	Happens now %	Desired %	Not desired %
Advice if we encounter a problem	55	39	3
Advice on property work	53	32	9
Support with property work	47	38	9
Support if we encounter a problem	43	4	49
Consultation on any local/regional changes that could affect our school	37	58	3
Support for schools to work together professionally	31	12	52
Allocation of discretionary funds	19	57	15
Professional discussions on school's annual reports and targets to feed into school discussion of strategies related to student achievement	19	35	42
Discuss any major national changes with BoT	16	52	27
Advice to BoT on appointing principal	10	28	52
Support for BoT in appointing principal	9	38	43

There was a trend for principals who were currently experiencing problems with their board to want more Ministry of Education involvement in professional discussion on annual reports and targets, and advice and support to the board in appointing a principal, but the differences were not statistically significant.

Around three-quarters of the trustees said their board had had some contact with their local Ministry of Education office (12 percent said it had not, and 11 percent did not know). Property was the most usual reason for contact (45 percent), closely followed by funding and resourcing (39 percent). A third of the trustees said their board had met with the local Ministry of Education staff to discuss issues for the school. Eighteen percent had had general information about policy changes, and 14 percent discussions on their charter and annual report.

However, trustees were somewhat less aware of the role that local Ministry of Education officers played in working with school management. They were more interested in having discussions around the school's annual plan for student performance than principals. There were similar proportions of trustees who did not want Ministry of Education involvement in making this decision, and those who already had it, or would like it. There was also a reasonable minority who did not know what role the Ministry of Education currently played, or what role they would like it to play in supporting them.

Table 11 **Trustee views of local Ministry of Education role in supporting schools**

Role (n=278)	Happens now %	Desired %	Not desired %	Don't know %
Advice on property work	33	34	13	8
Advice if we encounter a problem	29	54	3	5
Support with property work	28	40	11	9
Support if we encounter a problem	21	60	3	6
Support for schools to work together professionally	17	55	4	13
Consultation on any local/regional changes that could affect our school	15	68	2	6
Professional discussions on school's annual reports and targets to feed into school discussion of strategies related to student achievement	11	42	21	17
Discuss any major national changes with BoT	10	60	8	14
Allocation of discretionary funds	10	56	10	14
Support for BoT in appointing principal	9	28	33	15
Advice to BoT on appointing principal	8	23	40	15

Is governance a harder ask for some schools?

The English data indicates that school governance is a harder ask in schools in low socioeconomic areas. In New Zealand, ERO's comparison of low- and high-decile schools in 1998 pointed to a similar trend. Around a fifth of the decile 1 school boards were struggling in their role (Education Review Office, 1998).

Table 12 **ERO ratings of governance in decile 1 and 10 schools, 1998**

Informed and effective governance level	Decile 1 schools (n=236) %	Decile 10 schools (n=231) %
Strongly evident	42	66
Evident	41	31
Inadequate	18	3

Youngs' (2005) survey found that rural and small school (< 150 students) board chairs and principals were more likely to identify needs for further board chair leadership development, as were principals from decile 1–3 schools—but not the decile 1–3 school chairs.

We cross-tabulated 2006 NZCER secondary school responses with the school socioeconomic decile,[24] school size, and school location to see what trends there were related to differences in school characteristics. There are some correlations here: low-decile schools tend to be smaller on average than others. There are certainly trends in relation to principals' views of board capability, how well the BoT was doing, and the key role of the BoT. These were mainly related to school decile.

Differences related to school decile

Sixty-five percent of the high-decile school principals thought their school BoT was on top of its task, cf. only 23 percent of low-decile school principals and 38 percent of mid-decile school principals. Thirty-one percent of the low-decile school principals thought their board was coping or struggling, cf. 10 percent of mid-decile school principals and 6 percent of high-decile school principals. Low-decile school principals were less likely to see a key element of their board as supporting the school staff or principal (65 percent cf. 84 percent of mid- and high-decile school principals), or undertaking oversight of the principal (27 percent cf. 41 percent).

Board experience and skill were also rated much lower by low-decile school principals. For most of the areas asked about, they were only half as likely as principals of mid- and high-decile schools to say their board had these skills; and 15 percent said their board had *none* of the skill areas asked about. Whereas 41 percent of the high-decile school principals said their board had all the expertise needed, only 19 percent of mid-decile school principals and 4 percent of low-decile school principals said so.

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[24] Because some school funding is related to the socioeconomic profile of the school's community, all New Zealand state and state-integrated schools are ranked, and these rankings divided into deciles; decile 1 includes the 10 percent of schools with the lowest rankings on a set of socioeconomic indicators, and decile 10, the 10 percent of schools with the highest ranking on this set. Decile 10 schools receive no additional funding of this kind. What started as a rational approach to providing additional resources for schools in poor communities (decile-related funding was originally aimed at only the three lowest deciles) has been picked up in and outside education as a presumed indicator of school worth, with decile 10 schools presumed to offer higher quality.

Table 13 **Principal views of experience needed by their board—by decile**

Area of experience	Low-decile (1–2) (n=26) %	Mid-decile (3–8) (n=134) %	High-decile (9–10) (n=34) %
Strategic planning	62	34	15
Financial	50	24	9
Governance	42	18	15
Legal	39	31	32
Industrial relations	35	22	12
ICT	35	16	12
Educational	35	22	12
Human resources/personnel	35	17	21
Property maintenance and repair	27	19	18
Community consultation	23	22	15
Fundraising	19	18	9
Public relations	15	17	9

Yet low-decile principals were no more likely than others to think that the overall responsibility asked of school trustees was too much. School decile was also unrelated to principal morale, job satisfaction, or problems in relationships with the BoT. But there was higher turnover of principals in low-decile schools, which would affect school development. Half the low-decile schools had had three or more principals in the last 10 years, cf. 19 percent of mid-decile schools, and 15 percent of high-decile schools.

High-decile school principals were much more likely to think they could attract good teachers to the school (91 percent cf. 72 percent of mid-decile principals and 53 percent of low-decile principals—but the latter were just as likely to think they could retain good teachers at their school).

As in England, trustees tend to have higher qualification and occupational levels than parents. This was true even in the low-decile schools. (It is probably the case with the governing bodies of most public organisations.) There were some decile-related differences: some around board capability, but others indicating a particular kind of calling and commitment for some trustees in low-decile schools. They were more likely to be employed in the education sector, less likely to be thinking of not standing for the BoT again this year (17 percent cf. 36 percent of mid- and high-decile school trustees), and to have similar years of experience in their role as those in higher-decile schools, and they were more likely to join the board to change things.

Table 14 **Secondary trustees—school decile differences**

Aspect	Low-decile trustees (n=30) %	Mid-decile trustees (n=195) %	High-decile trustees (n=53) %
University degree/postgraduate degree or diploma	50	54	72
European	57	90	96
Female	57	47	40
Aged less than 50	63	58	49
Employed in education sector	27	18	11
Manager	30	32	34
Professional	30	36	55
Joined BoT to change things at the school	37	20	11
Joined BoT because felt school leadership was lacking	27	5	5
Would like more experience on the BoT	83	72	58
Would like more knowledge and training for their role	50	28	36
Would like more parental support	47	31	23
Gained more status in community from being on the BoT	7	12	23

As well as wanting more training, the low-decile school trustees were two to three times more likely to have had some formal training and support for their role over the past year as had others (including ERO post-review assistance—23 percent cf. 13 percent mid-decile school trustees and 8 percent high-decile school trustees). They were also more likely to use an independent person for their principal's appraisal (77 percent cf. 55 percent mid-decile and 49 percent high-decile schools).

More had had discussions with the Ministry of Education: 60 percent mentioned discussions on issues for the school, on property, and 30 percent the school charter and annual report. But their views on the role of the local Ministry of Education office were no different from others.

Their views on their board progress and relations, and relations with the school principal were also no different. Turnover levels on the low-decile school BoTs are no higher than for other schools. Low-decile school trustees did have more contact with parents around individual parents raising issues to do with their child, discussions on progress toward planning and reporting targets, and student achievement in school, and attending whānau/Pasifika support meetings. However, they were less likely to have parents raising (wider) issues with the BoT (50 percent cf. 73 percent of others). When parents did, they were more likely to be raising issues around student achievement, funding, and spending. High-decile school trustees were more likely to have parents concerned about the school enrolment scheme (23 percent cf. 7 percent of low-decile trustees).

Low-decile school trustees were more likely to have community public meetings or workshops in their consultations with their school community, with consultation topics more likely to include extracurricular activities (37 percent cf. 14 percent of others); and provision for Māori, Pasifika, and students with special needs. Yet the proportion of parents taking part in community consultation was similar for different deciles.

The issues for low-decile school trustees were much more likely to be student achievement, achieving school targets, recruitment and retention of teachers, a declining school roll (a problem facing only 6 percent of high-decile trustees), and getting parent–community support. High-decile school trustees were more concerned with NCEA workloads.

From the parent perspective, there was more interest among low-decile parents in some change, and probably therefore a greater sense of wanting more contact with their school BoT. Low-decile parents were more likely to say there was an area of school life they would like to have a say in and felt they could not (28 percent, decreasing to 16 percent of high-decile school parents). Student behaviour was of most interest to them (22 percent, decreasing to 5 percent of high-decile school parents). Although patterns of contact with the BoT were similar for low- and mid-decile school parents, it was the low-decile school parents who were most likely to feel they did not have enough contact with their school's trustees (52 percent cf. 31 percent of mid- and high-decile parents). But this is not because they were more likely to see that representing parents was a key element in the BoT role.

Low-decile school parents were more likely to mention student achievement (52 percent cf. 37 and 27 percent of others) and parent and community support as an issue for their school (30 percent, decreasing to 9 percent of high-decile school parents). Fourteen percent of low-decile school parents were generally unhappy with the quality of their child's education cf. 9 percent of mid-decile school parents, and 2 percent of high-decile school parents: they were more likely to mention poor student behaviour, and a desire for more choice of subjects, extracurricular activities, and individual attention. High-decile school parents less likely to want to change anything at the school (43 percent cf. 55 percent of mid-decile school parents and 60 percent of low-decile school parents). The low-decile school parents were more likely to want more interesting or challenging work, more individual help, more emphasis on values, more teaching resources, and more emphasis on academic work. But they didn't ask for more communication about the school programme.

Taking these decile-related differences together, one sees some problems with BoT capability, but not commitment. But one also sees that that these boards are facing a deeper and more complex set of challenges than other schools,[25] with more limited access to some of the networks and expertise that are most likely to be found in high-decile school boards and communities.

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[25] This is consistent with the picture from the 2003 NZCER secondary national survey (Hipkins, with Hodgen, 2004), and with data on student engagement with school from the longitudinal Competent Children, Competent Learners study (Wylie & Hipkins, 2006).

School size

Differences in school size were not generally associated with differences around issues faced by boards, their capability, or expectations of school communities. Here the main trends were a tendency for principals and trustees of larger schools to be more confident about their school and its governance, and therefore less concerned about reducing paperwork or getting more training or development for the governance role. Interestingly, while trustees in the smallest secondary schools (< 250 students) were most satisfied with the level of contact with parents, they have similar proportions of parents taking part in their consultations, and they use similar methods—including questionnaires and newsletters.

School location

There are signs that there can be more tension in the governance–management relationship in rural schools, but that there are also issues around attracting school staff.

Trustees in small town and rural schools were more likely to have gone on their school BoT because they wanted to change things at the school. Rural trustees were most interested in improving their knowledge or having training (61 percent cf. 29 percent of trustees in other locations), and having a better distinction between governance and management (28 percent cf. 12 percent in other locations). However, they were as likely as others to have had formal training and support, and to use a range of sources of printed and Internet material. They were less likely to use an independent person for their principal's last appraisal. A third of the rural trustees worked or helped at their school cf. 15 percent of trustees in other locations.

Rural trustees were more likely to discuss progress on planning and reporting targets (28 percent cf. 9 percent of trustees in other locations) or the school's ERO report (28 percent cf. 17 percent of trustees in other locations). There was a higher level of parent participation in rural school consultation of its community: only 17 percent of rural trustees said it was less than 10 percent, cf. 41 percent of urban trustees. However, views on the success of community consultation were similar. Rural trustees were least likely to think they had all the experience they needed on their BoT (11 percent cf. 30 percent of trustees in other locations). They were more likely to see the need for financial, legal, and industrial relations expertise.

Rural principals were most likely to say that employing school staff was a key element of the BoT role (62 percent). Twenty-three percent of rural principals said they had major problems with members of their current board. They were more likely to see the need for financial, ICT, strategic planning, and PR experience on the board; and to think that the overall responsibility asked of BoTs was too much (53 percent cf. 33 percent of principals in other locations). Yet they were no more likely to think that the role, quality, or continuity of their BoT was a major issue at their school. They were more likely to note as a major issue their ability to attract good teachers, and less likely to think that there was adequate career progression for principals in New Zealand schools.

4. How effective is our system of school governance?

In this section, I bring together a summary of the picture of current secondary school governance just given, and other available research and information, largely from government agencies, covering both primary and secondary schools, to estimate how effective our system of school governance is in bringing schools and community together, and contributing to good school and student performance.

This shows that there are some ongoing issues with our system of school governance, and that these issues are worth addressing because they are likely to distract from schools' core work when they occur. Some suggestions are made to strengthen our system in the final section of this paper.

Evidence from research

The 2006 NZCER national secondary survey

While BoTs are seeing their role largely as government would want them to, giving top priority to providing strategic direction, and focusing on student learning and performance, some widespread frustration is evident that in fact financial issues tend to dominate. While trustees see benefits from their work for the school, 61 percent are now thinking that boards have too much responsibility, and they show no signs of wanting to take on any more responsibility.

On the whole, BoTs appear to be taken for granted by parents. There is no widespread parental discontent with BoTs—or with schools. Thus parent interest in elections may not be high because there are not strong issues around which candidates could take opposing views. Around 10 percent of BoTs appear not to consult their communities, or try to engage with their parents.

A global estimate of issues with governance from the 2006 NZCER national secondary school survey would be that at any one time, there would be issues with board performance as a whole in around 15 percent of schools. There would be issues with board stability in around 7–10 percent of secondary schools. There is some gap in desirable expertise at around 70 percent of boards (but usually in only one or two areas for any one board), with strategic planning being a prominent area where more expertise is desired. Issues in principal–board relationships would exist in around 10–15 percent. Around 25-27 percent of boards would have insufficient information to make their decisions. Around 20 percent of boards face a patchy or disappointing quality of applicants on their shortlist for their principal's position. (It is harder to estimate the schools in which BoTs have made poor decisions from what seemed to them like a reasonable shortlist.)

There are more issues around board expertise in decile 1–2 schools, but also deeper and more complex challenges in these schools.

Boards are largely confident, but they are not trying to go it entirely alone. They are making use of external expertise, particularly with regard to property and personnel/industrial relations issues, and principal appointments, and to a lesser extent, for the principal's appraisal. Views on having more Ministry of Education advice and support in relation to principal appointments, discussions on the school's annual report and development, and support for schools to work together show more interest in this, and a more even split between those interested or already experiencing these discussions and support, and those opposed, than one would have predicted a few years ago.

Principal–board of trustees relationships

The 2005 Principal Stress and Wellbeing study (Hodgen & Wylie, 2005) gives a largely positive picture of principal–BoT relations, though also an indication of the active role that principals take with their BoTs:

- Six percent of principals indicated a negative relationship with their BoT. Around a third said it was a good, professional relationship, and 59 percent said "happy, relaxed, but I do most of the work".
- Board competence was a source of high or breaking-point stress for 13 percent of principals.
- Board involvement in the management of the school was a source of high or breaking-point stress for 11 percent of principals.
- Employment issues between principal and BoT were a source of high or breaking-point stress for 7 percent of principals.

Principal appointments

Brooking (2005) raises questions of the viability of the board role in appointing principals, arguably the most important decision they take. She notes that New Zealand is alone in the countries with similar levels of school self-management in leaving this appointment to individual school boards, acting on their own. Other countries include (often local) government or teacher union representatives to "monitor and moderate" the process, and require a report on the grounds for the appointment. She links the New Zealand BoT autonomy in the matter of principal appointment with the statistics showing an over-representation of males among principals,[26] and notes that "it is not uncommon for young, inexperienced, underqualified male teachers to apply for and win principal positions". She also notes high turnover of principals in some schools, particularly rural and small. Her qualitative study suggests that boards often perceive that male

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[26] Sixty-one percent of primary principals are women in England, where the LEA is involved in principal appointments compared with 43 percent here. There are somewhat fewer male teachers in England (13 percent cf. 19 percent here), but that lower proportion does not account for the difference. In 2004, males had 14 percent of teaching positions, 20 percent of management positions, and 57 percent of principal positions in primary and intermediate schools.

applicants provide the best fit for their local community, though if they appointed women, they were usually pleased with the appointment. Boards were also not always using nationally approved or consistent appointment procedures (though this guidance was available to them in written form) Generally, boards were aware that they needed external educational expertise to advise them, and there was evidence that poor appointments were most likely when they did not use this expertise (either not asking for it, or ignoring it). This is consistent with anecdotal evidence from people who have served as advisors to boards in their appointment of a principal, who have noted that if boards do not have people who are used to making employment appointments, they may be over impressed by people who interview well, and not give sufficient weight to their pedagogical leadership experience.

BoT capability

Robinson et al. (2003) undertook two small-scale studies with board chairs in a low-income area. This showed that their confidence levels were not in fact commensurate with their ability to understand their school's aggregated student achievement data, or respond to a set of four scenarios depicting educational-related governance tasks.

Springford (2006) reported that of the 19 percent of primary schools reviewed in the 2004–05 ERO round that needed a discretionary or follow-up review, around half did not address the issues ERO found fault with within a year of their usual review, a proportion that had remained much the same over the last five years. She read this as an indication of governance failure, in around 10 percent of primary schools in any one year.

Participating in school governance

Springford (2006) shows that almost half the primary boards did not require an election in 2004 (almost double the 25 percent in 1998). The proportion of boards where there were fewer candidates than vacancies on the board is increasing over time (13 percent in 2004, 6 percent in 1998). This may indicate both that there is not an unlimited pool of parents (and others) willing to take on the trustee role, and that parents may need a personal approach to put themselves forward (as we found in the 2006 NZCER secondary survey, with almost half having been asked to stand. She also notes low parental interest in BoT elections. One estimate is that only a quarter of parents voted in the 2004 trustee elections.

ERO

The ERO 2005–06 annual report does not give any indication of concern with school governance *per se*. ERO's main concern in its annual reports of the last few years has been school use of assessment data to identify learning needs and respond to them so that levels of achievement and engagement in school are improved, particularly for Māori students, and those with low achievement levels.

Auditor-General

The Auditor-General reported on how well schools, as public entities, complied with the financial legislation applicable to them. They found that most schools complied; where there were breaches, they were mainly minor, and had usually occurred because schools were unaware of the legal constraints on their financial operations. Non-compliance was found in 32 schools in relation to borrowing money, 22 schools in relation to investing money, 4 schools in relation to land purchase, and five schools in relation to conflicts of interest. They noted that to reduce future incidences of non-compliance "is a challenge, given the number of schools, the relative inexperience of some trustees, and the range of legislation to which schools are subject" (Office of the Auditor General 2004, p. 85).

Parental or student complaints or support sought from independent government agencies

Complaints about schools to ERO[27] increased markedly from the 218 in 2001–02 to 411 in 2003–04 (360 about schools), but show no increase since: in 2004–05 there were 336 (299 schools); and in the first six months of the 2005–06 year, there were 154 complaints (137 schools). Complaints cover a wide range of areas, including suspension and exclusion processes, enrolment practices, lack of regard for special needs, board processes; they usually come from individual parents, about different schools (Canning, 2006). If, as before with other aggregated sources of information about schools with issues, we take a liberal approach taking each complaint as occurring at a different state or state-integrated school, then the rate in 2004–05 was 12 percent.

Student suspensions and expulsions are the main reason for complaints to the Ombudsman. In the year 2005–06 there were 45 complaints about BoTs, much the same number as the previous year, but more than the 32 complaints over the 20-month period July 1997–February 1999 (when different regulations applied) noted by Walsh (2002). If we take each of these as concerning a separate school, then this gives a rate of 1.8 percent of schools where parents or students feel sufficiently aggrieved or desperate to seek an independent finding from the Ombudsman's office—which schools do not have to accept. This office's 2005–06 annual report also notes the overlap of its responsibility in this area with the Ministry of Education, Education Review Office, Human Rights Commission, and the Children's Commissioner, and its meetings with representatives of these other agencies to work out ways when inter-agency consultation could

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[27] ERO does not have the responsibility of investigating or resolving any complaint; its interest is in how schools manage complaints, and whether schools have followed their own complaints policy and procedure (ERO, 2005a). In the original *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms, a Parent Advocacy Council was established to provide parents with an avenue of independent investigation, as well as investigating more general issues. This was abolished in 1991, within a context of government cost-cutting, and a view that parents could turn to the Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission, the Ministry of Education, and the media (Butterworth, 1998, pp. 181–182).

"benefit schools, students and parents by identifying alternative ways of resolving the issues that arise" (Office of the Ombudsman, 2006, p. 17).

The office of the Commissioner for Children's enquiry line received 167 calls about education in the 2005–06 year, 34 percent of the calls that were not related to Child, Youth and Family. Most of these calls were about "the process used in suspensions, stand-downs and expulsions and bullying and the devastating effect this can have on children" (Office of the Commissioner for Children, 2006, p. 13). If we take each of these as representing a single school, then we have an estimate of 6.7 percent of schools for which parents or young people sought independent advice to resolve their issues.

Cases raised with the Youth Law Centre

School boards have responsibility for disciplinary procedures taken against students. Walsh (2002) noted a doubling of the number of suspensions by schools between 1992 and 1996, which he attributed to a number of sources, including both "a general breakdown of social order in society reflected within schools" and "greater competition for students by schools and hence pressure on Boards to market their schools as well-disciplined and safe environments free of drugs, violence etc. He endorsed the Youth Law Centre's call for ways to respond to parental and student unhappiness with school board decisions that were quicker than the Ombudsman, and cheaper than recourse to legal review. The lack of other avenues meant it was likely that the number of complaints to the Ombudsman was a minority of the unresolved issues that parents and students had.

Hancock and Trainor (2003) also note a doubling in school suspensions and stand-downs between 1996 and 2000 that they do not think is attributable to either changes in definitions, or increases in student enrolments. However, their figures for 2000–02 show no further increase, possibly reflecting some gains from the Ministry of Education's Suspensions Reduction Initiative.[28] Their own analysis of their experience representing parents and students is that "the principal's decision to stand a student down does not always reach the statutory threshold necessary to justify that stand down". Other prime difficulties arising from school decisions that affect individual student rights to education occur for students with special needs, and in interpretation of enrolment schemes. A prime difficulty, however, in gaining redress is that school boards do not have to take note of either Ombudsman or Ministry of Education recommendations. Hancock and Trainor also recommended an independent education review authority for school board decisions affecting students, noting that these exist in the English self-managing schools system.

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[28] The Ministry of Education's 2005–06 annual report indicates a 7 percent decrease in exclusion rates from 1999–2000, and a 10 percent decrease each for expulsions and suspensions over the six-year period. The rate of Māori suspensions in the 86 schools that participated in the Suspension Reduction Initiative decreased by 43 percent between 2001 to 2005–06 (Ministry of Education, 2006a, p. 17).

The Youth Law Centre's 2004–05 annual report notes that educational cases comprised 47 percent of its case work, or 900 cases. This work included advocacy at BoT hearings, and oral advice and assistance. Main issues were related to discipline, special needs not being met, and failure to address bullying (by other students or school staff). If we estimate that each of these represents one school (a liberal interpretation), then this represents a student experiencing sufficient difficulty at around a third of the country's schools. The rate is not high in terms of numbers of students (0.12 percent).

Statutory interventions in schools

Statutory interventions in schools were made possible by legislation in late 2001. These interventions allow the Ministry of Education to find solutions to serious problems (or "risks" to school quality and sustainability) that BoTs are experiencing. They are not expected to be permanent interventions: there are no Ministry of Education schools (taken over from BoTs).

Between late 2001 and the end of 2005, 230 interventions were initiated, of which 95 were current in 2005, in around 4 percent of the state and state-integrated schools. Just over half of the 55 interventions initiated in 2005 were requested by BoTs. Half of these schools had a limited statutory manager, taking over some board powers while the board continues to take responsibility for other areas. Limited statutory managers deal mostly with employment issues (often related to the principal, or principal–board relations) or financial management (Minister of Education, 2006, p. 52). The other main interventions are to require a BoT to engage the help of a specialist adviser (19 percent of the 75 interventions current in 2004), and to dissolve the board, putting a commissioner in place (29 percent of the 75 interventions current in 2004). It would seem that at some schools the intervention is relatively short; but there also appears to be a small group of schools whose issues take several years of additional support to resolve.

The number of commissioners increased from five in 2002 to 22 in 2004.[29] This may reflect either that other forms of intervention were tried first, or that the experience of intervention is giving better understanding of the situations in which the BoT clearly lacks the necessary capability for its role, or will be unable to be effective due to personalities or interpersonal conflict. If we take the removal of a board as a sign of its being completely dysfunctional (for whatever reason), then very few boards fit this category: 0.9 percent.

Representing the owner of schools, the Government, the Ministry of Education also identifies schools in "high-risk" situations in relation to ongoing strategic capability and financial viability. Its 2005–06 annual report (Ministry of Education, 2006a) notes its estimate of 600–650 school BoTs with a working capital deficit for the most recent year, or an operating deficit two years running; and this estimate was close to the number in this position 2005–06: 637 (26 percent). It also estimated that 300–360 BoTs would show nine or more of the 17 adverse indicators used in

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[29] Beehive (2005).

the school sector monitoring system, with 330 found (13 percent). There is some overlap of these two sets, but figures for this are not given in the Ministry of Education's annual report. The Ministry of Education notes of these two indicators of "a very early signal of potential financial and capability risk to schools" that "the impact of these indicators can be very small and the Ministry's response would depend on an assessment of the relative risk of these or other factors—in some cases the Ministry of Education may not need to take any action." The Ministry of Education estimated that 100–200 of these schools would need school support: 98 school support actions were initiated in 2005–06.

5. What can we expect of school governance?

The overall picture from research and figures from government agencies and the Youth Law Centre does show some issues with our school governance system that are persistent, and should be addressed. But they do not show that issues around BoT capacity and capability are so deep, widespread, intransigent, or costly to student learning that one would want to either move to another form of school governance, or ditch the governance layer completely.

To put it another way, the issues around student learning and engagement in learning, the different patterns of educational success that reflect (and entrench) existing social inequalities, including the negative legacy of colonisation for indigenous people, access to good education for students with special needs, and the issue of how to move from an "industrial" model of school provision to one more focused on the mix of cognitive and new skills that we need in the 21st century that we grapple with in New Zealand are not unique to our self-managing schools system, with its parent-elected BoTs. They occur in systems of self-managing schools where school BoTs are a mix of appointed and elected members, or where parents may advise, but not govern. They occur where the only governance layer is remote from individual schools. Thus governance on its own is unlikely to be a make or break factor in our ability to make progress on these essential issues.

Other forms of governance also have problems, with no guarantee that trying to remodel school boards along private sector or large crown entity models would improve performance. McKinlay (2003) notes some of the difficulties experienced with these forms, and rather than attribute them simply to those on the boards (their capability), points to the importance of the conditions under which boards operate,[30] and the greater value for government to have models of governance that operate within frameworks that are aligned with its objectives, and promote trust,[31] rather than reacting to difficulties by increasing controls or detailed accountability, "whose underlying premise is one of distrust". It seems to me that the current planning and reporting framework in

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[30] Some of these conditions include training, support, and remuneration: "With the emphasis now coming through on devolution, the demands on governance skills, in a society that is manifestly short of them, will increase dramatically. It is simply counterproductive to government's own objectives to proceed on the assumption that there will be good people available, often at a voluntary or highly discounted rate, to carry out the critical role of governance" (McKinlay, 2003, p. 10).

[31] In an interesting comparison of the boards of three commercial New Zealand companies Erakovic and Goel (2004) also emphasise the importance of trust-based relationships between management and commercial boards, built on "board members' knowledge of the firm and its context, and their involvement in the process of governance". Effective boards were not distant from the firm, and they needed to work together as a group, able to debate issues robustly; and they needed to be active in strategic planning, not simply monitoring.

education is in the former category, since it does not prescribe to schools, but does ensure that school, parent, and government interests in student achievement and engagement in school are aligned.

The existing research base around the contribution of school boards to school performance is slim. It does indicate that school boards can add value through combinations of challenge and support, by embodying the values that are important in the school, and linking parents and professionals, the world beyond the school and the focus within it. To this we can add from the New Zealand experience the BoT role in securing funds from community sources to use for their school.

These interconnections would be difficult for school boards constituted along commercial or larger crown entity models (even if the large additional costs of such board members were affordable), and would probably be difficult if the BoTs were abolished altogether,[32] unless there was an extension of other models of home–school connection, such as the Home–School Partnerships scheme that the Ministry of Education has supported in some schools.

The existing research suggests that there are ways boards work that are not helpful (e.g. micro-managing, overly focusing on small matters at the expense of attention to large questions, or at the other extreme, showing such indifference or awe that the principal and school staff are neither supported nor challenged); but it does not provide a guaranteed recipe for how boards should perform. It seems likely that the specific nature of school board activities reflects the different need of individual schools, and that the role a board might play in returning a disheartened school to health, or providing a strong programme for students from families who have previously gained little from education, is likely to be different from the less demanding role for a board working with a school in safe circumstances—though even schools in what seem to be safe circumstances face hard decisions about both current provision and future positioning (Wylie & King, 2005).

In its 1999 paper *School Governance and Student Achievement*, ERO queried whether it was either feasible or desirable to make a wholesale shift from the BoT system. It noted that to do so "would send negative signals to parents and school communities about the importance which the Government attaches to their involvement in schools"… and "would cut off many of the benefits which the current system is starting to deliver" (p. 14). It argued for the kind of intervention approach that became law in 2001, with this proviso: "Any changes to governance should be made not because governance does not conform to a particular idea or model but because it is demonstrably hindering student achievement" (p. 15).

This criterion for considering any change in school governance makes sense. Arguably, the current intervention approach is identifying most of the small minority of schools where student

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[32] Springford (2006) suggests ending the BoTs. Schools would remain self-managing, but within clusters of around 10–15 schools, headed by an Ministry of Education-appointed and accountable cluster principal who is responsible for appointing, supporting, and developing each school principal, and ensuring that each school's strategic direction was developed in consultation with the community, and based on student achievement data. One or two parents from each school could be elected to an advisory group for the cluster principal.

performance is clearly negatively affected. The difficulty is that our expectations for the system as a whole have grown higher: we would like not just to avoid situations that actively damage student achievement, but promote those that will improve it. We have realised that there needs to be some more connectivity in our educational system for this to occur: that schools are not islands, and that government leadership and support is needed to nourish them. The responsibility for improving student achievement overall and reducing the disparities of educational achievement needs to be shared if we are to make real headway.

> The hard question is how to find the kinds of connectivity that support schools to make good, well-informed and ethical decisions about their provision, respect their decision-making responsibility, and support their capacity and capability to make good decisions.

Increasing connectivity and realistic expectations of BoTs

Tomorrow's Schools had high expectations of voluntary boards: to meet local needs while meeting government accountability requirements, and to make decisions that would affect their school's educational provision without much professional knowledge or experience of their own.

There is a good case for continuing to enlist parents—and others—to work together as a team of volunteers to work with school professionals for the good of individual schools. There is more awareness now on the part of BoTs and the Ministry of Education that this is a demanding role, and that BoTs are teams, who need to recruit the right mix of skills, as evidenced in the material and seminars around the current BoT elections, and the emphasis on succession planning.[33]

But we also have to ensure that what we ask of these volunteers is realistic, and that we provide more appropriate and targeted support. There are small numbers of schools that find it difficult to recruit a full slate of trustees (though we do not know how essential it is that every school board has five trustees). While the secondary trustees in the 2006 NZCER national survey were largely positive about their role, nonetheless over half saw it as carrying too much responsibility. We have had 16 years of school self-management, long enough to show consistent trends in the commitment that voluntary trustees are able to make, and the ongoing patterns of issues for schools. While these issues are clearer in schools facing the most challenges (decile 1–2, and to a lesser extent, rural schools), they are not confined to those schools, and therefore some more systemic developments are called for.

Being more systemic does not mean being bigger, or making large structural alterations, such as grouping schools into geographical clusters. There has never been strong interest in this, and

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[33] NZSTA through its contract with the Ministry of Education has produced a guide to succession planning; as well as a general guide to the role of trustee, it has also produced a booklet on "Boards leading change—the case for continual improvement", and in its monthly STANewsletter, included advice (and encouragement) related to strategic planning.

although schools do have more experience now of working within clusters, these are usually for the purposes of gaining resources or professional development for each school to use individually, not for the purpose of making collective decisions. Individual school buy-in to some clusters that have been formed to tackle local issues, and competition between schools, continue to be challenges for those seeing value in schools working together.

I have five main suggestions to build on our experience of school self-management. These suggestions are based on the consistent evidence that we have been asking too much, without giving school self-management adequate support. The suggestions also take into account our persistent and deepening desires to improve educational opportunities and achievements. Improving support for good governance cannot be done in isolation from the other supports and frameworks that allow schools to tackle the important issues.

1. Making the ask more realistic

In framing our expectations of BoTs, we should remember that on average trustees are able to commit to around four hours a week—and no more. If we want boards to focus more on strategic planning, and the analysis of student and school performance data, we need to look at the tasks that can make this difficult and what can be done to reduce the attention they take, particularly the issues around funding levels, including the employment of administrative staff, identified in ERO (2006b), Ministry of Education (2006b), and Wylie and King (2004, 2005) or the issues around student discipline.

We also have to bear in mind that principals are grappling with similar tensions. The 2004 Principal Hauora survey and NZCER surveys show that while principals on the whole have high job satisfaction and morale, they suffer from higher stress levels than other occupations, work longer hours than many, and have difficulty balancing their work and personal life. They express an ongoing frustration that administration trumps what should be their key role in a school: the leading of learning.

If we are going to see real change in New Zealand's schools, it will be because the school professionals and governing bodies can focus on student learning. It would be unfair to castigate schools in a few years time if student learning and engagement in school looked much the same as it does now if the government does not better support the ability of schools to employ administrative staff to service school managers and governors, e.g. by preparing the reports they need to make good decisions (around 27 percent of the trustees thought they were not getting the information they needed here), organising contractors and meetings.

The other side of the support coin is to make the ask on schools easier. It is unlikely that schools can or should be unaffected by well-thought-through legislation that affects all enterprises (e.g. health and safety). But what would help schools would be to reduce their need to invent their own solutions, and reduce the time it takes to come to grips with legal or regulatory changes that affect their operations, or become expert very quickly when a new situation confronts them. We cannot expect every school to have this expertise. It should be possible for the Ministry of Education to

either provide or contract a reliable 'helpdesk' network, so that the right person with the right expertise can be quickly identified and used by schools. Written advice and new policy template options for different circumstances could be field-tested with people in schools. A further test for any policy change would be: does this increase school workloads? If so, is that warranted by the gains for schools in terms of improving their capability in relation to student learning?

2. Understanding and making good decisions around performance data

School professionals and their boards need the time to make good decisions in relation to meeting student learning needs. Boards therefore need good analysis of school performance data from their principals, in order to ask the right questions.

"Analysis of student and school performance data" can trip lightly off the tongue, but in fact this is not a straightforward area, and has many traps for the unwary (and indeed, for many who think they understand, but who may only know part of the complex picture). The Ministry of Education has made a concerted effort in the last few years to develop professional capability in this area, and provide teachers with new tools and information about strategies about "the next step". This effort needs to not only continue, but widen. NZCER's forthcoming report on school experiences with the planning and reporting framework that was introduced in 2003 shows that schools are finding this framework useful, but also that they need more support to make the most of it (Hipkins & Joyce in press).

It is important to address the needs of school boards in relation to their role in monitoring school progress and their role in decisionmaking about school goals and allocation of school resources (both time and money). One of the strengths identified in effective commercial boards is board members' professional expertise that they can bring to bear on both monitoring performance and developing strategy. Since school boards are not made up of educational professionals, it becomes even more important that the Government supports the capability of boards in this regard.[34]

Trustee training does not reach every trustee: it can be difficult for volunteers to make time or to be available at the time when training is offered, even though most training is offered at times to suit those with paid employment. That means that there can be uneven understanding in any board. My suggestion here is not for more training, per se, but for the Ministry of Education to fund the development and dissemination of material that can be used in board sessions focused on school strategic planning or review. Paths forward here might start with a small number of teams bringing together school professionals, board members, assessment experts, and professional development providers to work together to develop some strong practical sessions presenting information, issues, and strategies that would work for school groups of school staff working with

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[34] "The crucial test of governance capacity is whether a board can make an *independent* judgement about the information and explanations provided by those whom they hold to account. We have argued that this standard entails not just a knowledge of the community's goals and interests, but, in addition, a sufficient level of technical expertise to judge the reasonableness of both the proposed objectives and the proffered explanation of the outcomes" (Robinson et al., 2003, p. 277).

their board of trustees to develop shared understandings, and the kinds of questions that BoT members should be raising. These sessions need to go beyond written materials; for example, they could use video clips of productive discussions around some worked examples of useful and meaningful data presentations that principals can give to boards.

There is also reasonable interest among secondary trustees in professional dialogue with their local Ministry of Education office about assessment data and school targets, and thus there is opportunity there to provide boards with more support.

3. Principal appointments and appraisal

If we are serious about improving student learning and reducing educational disparity, then we need to ensure that all schools can appoint good quality principals, and keep them. It is concerning that around 20 percent of secondary trustees whose boards had made recent appointments felt they had had a patchy or disappointing quality of applicants on their shortlist. It is also concerning that 17 percent of primary schools and 4 percent of secondary schools had four or more principals in the last decade: this turnover rate looks too high for sustainable development and high-trust school cultures. There is some evidence that schools experiencing difficulty are more likely to appoint first time principals, who can then struggle with what would be a demanding situation for experienced principals, and opt for quitting either the school or the role, leaving such schools with continuing instability of the leadership they sorely need. (Brooking forthcoming). There is also evidence to indicate that even when boards have a good shortlist, they may not always appoint applicants who have the pedagogical leadership knowledge and skills they need for the role.

It seems to me that the time has come to bring together the work done in the last few years to give new principals and aspiring principals the development they need for their multifaceted roles and to ensure that boards can in fact recruit and retain principals, with better support for the infrequent, but crucial, BoT decision on principal appointments.

The greater attention being paid now to ensure that we have sufficient numbers of aspiring principals, and that new ones are supported while they learn the ropes, should mean that we have reasonable supplies of principals in a few years. It is therefore time to move to allow principals to be appointed only if they have been accredited or meet some performance standards related to student learning and teacher capability.

It is also time to ensure that all BoTs have access to good advice in making their choice, and that they all use good advice. The suggestion that follows aims to steer a middle passage between respecting the principle of school self-management and providing a safety net, and also to allow a quicker identification of any local and systemic issues and therefore quicker action on addressing them.

I suggest that BoTs appointing a principal are required to include a member of a local team of accredited education professionals contracted by the Ministry of Education in their principal

appointment process. This person would use their expertise to ensure that the BoT has followed its own processes and criteria, that these criteria do fit with what the BoT has identified as its priorities in terms of its strategic plan and that these priorities are important ones (they relate to student learning). They would also ensure that telling questions are asked in interviews and the information gained from applicants' answers is understood and used. This person would be required to raise any doubts they have about the process or preferred candidate with two other members of this accredited education professionals team before the BoT makes any offer. If these two others agree that there are issues with the choice, a meeting is held between all three team members and the board to discuss the reasons why, and if a consensus cannot be reached between the team and the board about who is the best candidate (or whether the position should be readvertised or continued as acting), this local team becomes responsible for finding a suitable person to appoint, and that person is appointed.

I also suggest that BoTs should be required to use one of this local team of accredited education professionals to work with the board chair in undertaking the principal's appraisal. Again, many boards are already using external expertise: this requirement would ensure that all boards benefit.

Kerry McDonald (senior executive of Comalco, a director of a number of companies, and chair of the State Sector Standards Board in 2001 and 2002) has expressed criticism of the fact that SSC reviewers of public service chief executives' performance lacked the background to challenge them sufficiently. Boards of schools seem to me to be in much the same position with regard to the appraisal of their principal:

> The whole essence of performance management review is having someone experienced and capable, at least at the same level of management and preferably one above, reviewing performance, with an understanding of the complexity and challenges of the role and able to realistically criticise, guide, encourage and praise (Norman, forthcoming).

Having a local team of accredited education professionals to work with boards, rather than leaving it to the chance of who they or the principal can find, or know, should improve our education system and our support for BoTs by providing more knowledgeable support for boards and principals, and, one would hope, allowing ongoing relations of both trust and challenge: the critical friend so often mentioned in the research on school improvement.

Taking this kind of approach also helps ensure more connectivity for the system as a whole: at the moment, there is no system-learning from the individuals who work with BoTs on principal appointments or appraisals, and thus no way of identifying systemic issues that need addressing by government.

Why suggest a local team of accredited people contracted by the Ministry of Education, rather than Ministry of Education officials? The biggest reason is that the "hands-off" period of the 1990s, when schools were left to their own devices, has left us with a legacy of schools used to making their own decisions, and many suspicious of "bureaucracy". This suggestion allows schools to still select their external support—and challenge—but within the kind of more

systematic framework that is found elsewhere in local layers of government (such as LEAs and school districts, which we do not have in New Zealand).

Such an approach would also provide other career avenues for principals who would like to try something else before moving on to another principalship, or who wish to move on from being principals, but who want to keep contributing to education, without moving into the government agencies. We need to make sure that we make as much use as possible of our educational expertise. I would recommend, however, that these teams include others who are knowledgeable about education and the ways to make the most of performance review for institutions as well as individuals, so that the teams avoid any insularity. There should also be a systematic induction and ongoing professional development for these teams to ensure that their mix of challenge and support for schools is well-informed and creative.

4. Connections between boards and parents

The NZCER survey data shows that while parents largely entrust their school board with focusing on the direction of the school, a reasonable proportion would like more information. The trustees themselves show a reasonable level of individual contact, and board efforts to reach parents and consult are also reasonable, particularly when one considers that board members are given only a token financial recognition of the hours they give. In keeping with the earlier suggestions about reducing other demands to enable boards (and school staff) to focus on student learning, one suggestion would be for boards to review the value of their current ways of connecting with parents, and rather than try to use every avenue and talk about everything, focus on those opportunities they have to communicate with parents about the school's goals and programmes, and the ways that parents can support their children's learning.

5. Educational disputes resolution process for parents and students

While the agencies whom parents call for help with issues related to student discipline and entitlement agree that there needs to be at least some clarification of their roles, it is also clear that this would not by itself resolve the ongoing difficulties that arise.

It is time to set up a well-publicised educational disputes resolution process for individual parents and students, with the dual aims of providing quick resolution to keep students as much as possible engaged in learning, but also tracking issues that need more systemic responses. This process could be undertaken by local Ministry of Education offices, or again, through accredited local teams.

Strengthening and connecting

There are good reasons to further build the BoT governance system that was introduced to provide self-managing schools with both local support and monitoring, and to better connect parents and schools. There are no obvious alternatives—certainly none that are likely to be as cost-effective.

But the time has come to directly address some of the issues that are evident around school governance, and to build trust between schools and government through finding new ways in which they can work together, sometimes directly, sometimes through intermediaries such as the suggested local teams of accredited education professionals. The provision of good quality learning opportunities is a collective responsibility. Schools cannot operate as effectively as we would like them to—and our expectations keep increasing—unless they are provided with realistic support, understanding, networks and accountability frameworks that motivate schools to keep developing and challenging themselves.[35] Equally, good support for schools cannot be provided by or through government agencies if schools operate in an insular fashion. It is time to think creatively about how to better connect schools and government.

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[35] In this respect, New Zealand is fortunate not to have followed England and the USA, where rigid frameworks and targets have initially raised test performance, then been followed by stubborn plateaux, but without reducing inequalities in educational performance, and at substantial costs.

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