



Board News Update – April 2017

In the March Board News we indicated our intention to select Mark Palmer to join the Board at the end of September when Robert Stewart stands down. Thank you to all of those parents that have provided feedback so far.

Back in March there was a lot of news to communicate to parents and the community, including the our new Charter (2017-2020), the resignation of Liz Millar as Principal, the process for appointing a new Principal, the reorganisation of responsibilities on the Board, and an update on the building of the new lower classroom block.

The purpose of this Board News update is to expand more specifically on our rationale for selecting Mark Palmer as a Board member.

The Role of the Board

The primary responsibility of the Board is to ensure that Ngaio School has good governance.

On a day-to-day basis, the Principal runs the school, with the support of the Associate Principals, Syndicate Leaders and Staff.

The role of the Board is to provide direction, oversight and accountability by:

- establishing the purpose and aims of the school, as set out in the school Charter;
- setting priorities and goals for the improvement of learning in the school;
- approving allocation of resources to ensure the best outcomes for our students; and
- reporting to both the school community and the government.

The Board consists of five parent representatives, the Principal, and a staff representative.

The composition of parent representatives

In our view, one of the key ingredients for success as a governance group is diversity of expertise and experience in management.

This means having a good mix of people around the table, with different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and roles within the community. When combined with a willingness to work as a team, this enables the Board to make sound decisions, in the best interests of our stakeholders. Our ultimate aim is the highest possible achievement for all learners.

Having worked together as a governance group for nearly a year, we are very aware of our strengths and weaknesses. Collectively we have a lot of governance, legal, regulatory, compliance, IT and finance experience. However, we are light on the practical experience that comes from working in a trade and having day-to-day exposure to the construction sector.

Robert Stewart has served on the Board for nearly 10 years and in recent years has led the property portfolio, overseeing a rebuild of almost the entire school. In any school, managing property and grounds is a complex task.

With Roberts's departure, we have a very specific need on the Board for someone with experience to serve in this property portfolio.

Last year's Board elections – Mark Palmer

At last year's Board elections, Mark Palmer received the sixth highest number of votes, narrowly missing out on one of the five parent representative roles.

Mark has significant experience in the trade and construction industry through running an award-winning painting and decorating business. He also has governance experience through his role as President of the Master Painters Association in the Wellington Region. Mark has a strong connection to the school including having a child at the school as well as his wife teaching at the school. At the time of the last election some parents may not have been aware that Mark is married to one of our teachers.

Mark has shown a clear interest in the governance of the school. Since June 2016 Mark has attended two or three Board meetings as an observer. He has also supported the Board by agreeing to oversee the new project of rebuilding of the school pool sheds.

In our view, by appointing Mark Palmer by selection, we are able to actively consider the skills required around the Board table, and select a Trustee who we know will complement the skills of existing Board members.

The alternative option of running a by-election

In coming to our recommendation, we also considered the option of running a by-election. We acknowledge that in Ngaio we are spoilt by having a strong parent community that is willing to participate and volunteer.

On balance, we favour appointing by selection, given the advantage of being able to appoint a Board member to fill a specific skills gap within an existing governance group.

There are sunk costs to running an election whether it is to fill five parent candidate positions or one position, so these costs are similar for a by-election or full election. The Ministry of Education has a process for the school to be reimbursed for the costs of running a by-election, so the majority of those costs are borne by the Ministry, not by the school. This is a correction to information provided in the previous Board News where it was implied that the costs of a by-election would be costs incurred by the school.

We considered that appointing by selection, which requires us to follow a formal notification process set out in the Education Act, leaves it open for parents to request a by-election if parents would rather the vacancy be filled by a member who has been elected by the community.

The Board also took comfort from the fact that the process of appointing by selection had been followed in the past. Lucy Elwood was co-opted onto the Board in 2012 before being elected in the 2013 and 2016 elections.

Managing conflicts of interest

The Board considered the fact that there is a potential for conflicts of interest, in a situation where a Board member is married to a member of staff. The Board is very mindful of the need to maintain the trust and confidence of the parent community and also the staff given our role as an employer.

We already have a process for managing conflicts of interest, which includes four steps.

1. As Principals, staff representatives and parent representatives, we acknowledge that we are all open to conflicts of interest at different times on different topics.
2. We actively review the agenda of the Board for where conflicts may arise. In large part the agenda of a typical Board meeting focuses on aggregate student achievement, standards, policies, finance and property - rather than issues around individual staff or students.
3. When there are conflicts of interest, Board members remove themselves from Board discussions. The obvious example of this is the annual performance review of the Principal. However, there have been other examples in the past 12 months.
4. A key part of the training of Board members is confidentiality. Keeping confidential information away from other family members is critical. This removes that risk of family members inadvertently disclosing private information and undermining the trust of the community.

The Board recognises that should the co-option take effect, there may be a small number of matters that Mark Palmer will not be able to be involved in or vote on because of actual or perceived conflicts of interest. It is timely that we review and publish revised policies for dealing with conflicts of interest (and our meeting processes) by the end of September 2017.

The Board also took some comfort from the precedent of conflicts of interest being managed in the past. Bernice Williams (who currently works as a Library Assistant at the school) was formerly Chair of the Board until 2008 as a staff member and community member.

Next steps

We hope that this April Board News Update helps provide more background on the Board's recommendation to appoint Mark Palmer to the Board by selection at the end of September.

Thank you to all of those parents who have provided feedback so far.

Please continue to email info@ngaio.school.nz to express either your support for the proposed selection or to ask us to hold an election.

We will hold an election if 10% or more of parents eligible to vote ask for an election **by 22 May**. Please note that this deadline has been extended from the 4 May 2017 deadline specified in the notice published in the The Wellingtonian.

Given the intervention of the school holidays, we want to make sure that parents feel they have had sufficient time to respond.

Many thanks,



Christian Hawkesby, Chair
Email: christian@harbourasset.co.nz Phone: 027 503 5401

On behalf of all of your Ngaio school Trustees – Amanda Frater, Christian Hawkesby, Jo Hughson, Liz Millar, Lucy Elwood, Mike Letts and Robert Stewart.