



Media Release – 2019 school trustee elections

Becoming a school trustee for all children

Frian had a long-term involvement with the local school that her children attend. When it came to school trustee elections back in 2016 she was encouraged by friends who are parents of children attending the school to join.

“I have three children with special needs who have attended Chaucer school, and I had to work closely with the school to ensure the school and our family were on the same page with regards to what inclusion meant for us and our children.” Frian put a lot of work and energy to ensure inclusion for her own children and supporting other families with children with special needs as well.

“I believe other parents felt because I was so proactive and vocal, I could help represent the community voices on the board. I saw it as an opportunity to promote and encourage inclusion at a governance and management level. I have previously been involved on a charitable parent’s support group governance committee for many years, and felt I had the skills to contribute to the school board.”



When Frian first became a trustee, it wasn’t what she expected. “I expected the board to work much faster and make clear, distinctive progress towards more inclusive systems, more community consultation and inclusion of community voices. In reality, I think it can be quite ambiguous for new trustees, especially if the handover is not well planned.”

“The slower pace at which everything moves has been the most frustrating challenge for me as a trustee. I’m usually a solution/action-oriented person and having to completely slow down and incorporate desired outcomes and goals into strategic plans, policies and consultations with board members within only two meetings per term can often slow things down. I also don’t think boards always have sufficient time to discuss matters, and at times I felt like things were being rushed through without giving the time they deserved.”

Boards have the important responsibility of working with principals and school staff, for the combined interests of students and community.

Succession planning is key to ensure that new boards and trustees can hit the ground running, and boards can access information on successful succession planning on trustee-election.co.nz. Frian felt that when she needed help, she could seek advice and support from NZSTA.

“Once you have more clarity about your role as a trustee in general, and also a good understanding of your contributions to the board, it is a lot easier to work together as a team, incorporating the various perspectives.”

One of the most rewarding outcomes for Friar has been the review of school policies. “I worked hard to ensure our policies are more inclusive, equitable and representative of staff and our communities. I feel very proud that this mahi will live on and benefit many children, families and staff long after I'm gone.

“I have also been very active in applying for grants to build a new playground for the school, and this is very rewarding because it is something the school community has wanted to achieve for a few years now. We had to do it in phases depending on how much money I could raise from grants, but we are nearly here now with the project due to be finished in September.”

Three years on and Friar says she has grown significantly in her understanding of governance, and effectively differentiating between school governance and management roles. “The experience has also given me an opportunity to network with other trustees at conferences, workshops and events, and highlighted to me the strengths and challenges of self-governing schools.”

Nominations for school trustees are open between 10 and 24 May. Parents, caregivers and people from the wider community can be nominated for election to a school board. It is important that the board reflects its community and has a balance of skills and experience.

“My message to interested candidates is, do not be afraid if you are the only trustee with a unique or differing perspective on the board. You may well represent an unheard and marginalised group within your school community. It is after all the diversity and varying perspectives on a board that give it strength and allow true community representation.”

“You should also make sure you have the necessary time to commit and upskill through the NZSTA professional development programme, so you are clear and familiar with your role as a trustee and what it entails.”

Anyone who is interested to be on the school board, can find more information on www.trustee-election.co.nz. The call for nominations for school trustees will be happening for most schools between 10 and 24 May.

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About the school trustee elections

School trustee elections are one of the most significant democratic processes in New Zealand and are a way that parents, caregivers and communities can make a difference to their local school. The New Zealand School Trustees Association runs the trustee elections on behalf of the Ministry of Education. NZSTA provides election resources and election advice to all schools to help run successful elections.

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