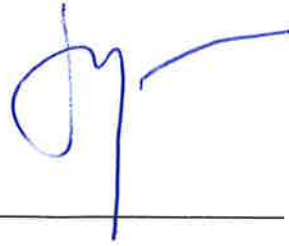


Newtown School Board of Trustees

Meeting minutes

Wednesday 26 August 2020, 6.30 pm



Present: Jess Gorman, Nick Booth, Haidee Westwater, Amelia Handscomb, Yadana Saw, Victoria Esson, Mark Brown, Nicki Read, Tom Hovey (item 6) and Jo Gould (minutes).

Apologies: Louise Conwell

1. Karakia

2. Previous minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on 29 July 2020 were approved and the actions items discussed and updated.

For the action item on the refurbishment of the carvings near Ngati Kotahitanga, Victoria reported that she had been advised that the carvings will need to be removed from their current location so that their condition can be assessed and a plan for their refurbishment developed. The carvings would need to be stored flat in a dry location after their removal. Victoria will work with Mark around consultation and engagement with Ngati Kotahitanga on the process, and communications with the wider school community.

3. Conflicts of interest

None declared.

4. Principal's report

Mark tabled his report. Items discussed included:

- The school transitioned to Alert Level 2 well, with the school community willing to comply with the various requirements at this level. Mark observed that the Ministry has updated its guidance

around Level 2 requirements. The school had made preparations in case the alert level was increased, but fortunately this didn't eventuate.

- Following ERO's recent meetings with Mark and Jess, ERO will return to meet with other members of the school's leadership team and a small group of teachers. ERO will discuss students' attendance, engagement and learning in the Covid-19 context, and consider how Covid-19 has impacted on the school's strategic and annual plans going forward.
- The parent information sessions earlier in the month had been well attended, with positive feedback received. Another parent evening will be held in week 9, aimed primarily at parents with children in whānau Tui.
- Learning conversations with parents/caregivers, students and teachers are now underway, following the release of the new-format school reports. The Board acknowledged with thanks the large amount of work, led by the school's curriculum team, that had gone into developing the new reports. Mark pointed out that attendance at the learning conversations was important for parents and caregivers to get a fuller picture of their child's progress and achievement.
- The Ministry of Education has made funding available, through an urgent response fund, to help children's wellbeing, attendance and engagement following the Covid-19 lockdown. Following a meeting with the Ministry's regional directors to discuss the fund and application process, the school is working through the criteria and considering what applications to progress.
- Treaty training continues, with the aim of staff having a firm understanding and commitment to a bicultural foundation. The multicultural flavour of Newtown School is also acknowledged through a range of activities, including providing opportunities for children to learn other languages.
- The Ministry will notify the school of teaching levels for 2021 on 7 September. Conversations are underway with teachers about their aspirations and plans. Mark is aware that a couple of resignations will be coming. The school also has three teachers on fixed term contracts, but the school will lose one of these positions because of the changing ratio of teachers to students. If any new teaching positions are required, the school will aim to move quickly to get advertisements into the October School Gazette.

- The launch of “Butterflies Together” was very successful, with good coverage of the event in the media. This was a project run with a number of children and the artist Paul Forest, in conjunction with Creative NZ and the Ministry. Staff were also closely involved. Nicki and Mark observed that the final products were fantastic, but the process involved was also important. It did involve quite a lot of teaching conversations, as while Paul was a very experienced artist, he didn’t have a teaching background.

5. Remote learning survey

Nicki provided a summary of the feedback received from parents and caregivers about learning at home during lockdown. Along with lots of messages of thanks to staff, parents and caregivers who responded pointed out a number of positive things they noticed during this period. Getting outside into nature and student-led learning featured often, and the school has continued aspects of these into learning time back at school.

6. School communications survey

Tom Hovey joined the meeting to present the findings from a survey of the school community about school communications. The survey followed a workshop Tom facilitated some time ago on the same topic.

There were just over 130 respondents (which represents a response rate of around 40%), with over half having been involved with the school for four or more years. As the responses were anonymous, we don’t know the demographics of those that responded.

Generally people were positive about the communications received from the school. They felt that about the right amount of information was given.

However, a third of respondents weren’t sure or weren’t confident that if something important was needed to be communicated, it would be.

There were suggestions for improving the school communications, including more timely messages about teachers leaving and events (especially where parent volunteers are needed). Some communications were “too wordy”.

59% of respondents rated learning conversations as good or very good. Some respondents reported, however, that as a result of the conversations they couldn't really tell how their child was doing, and didn't feel they could have meaningful conversations with their child present.

Of those respondents that had received a school report, 14% rated them very good. Others commented that the reports were vague, lacked depth, and they couldn't tell if their child was falling behind or needed help.

Tom pointed out that the survey was completed before the new format school reports and learning conversations were introduced. He'd like to do the survey again in the next 6 – 12 months to see if there have been any changes in how these are received by parents and caregivers.

The survey results showed that parents are looking everywhere for communications, in part because they don't know where to look. Many respondents indicated that email is their preferred channel. There wasn't a lot of positive feedback on Seesaw, particularly as its use changed over lockdown and there is now some confusion about what it is used for. In terms of the school newsletter, some people liked the in-depth information, but others found it a bit long-winded. Some respondents didn't have a clear understanding of its purpose (compared, for example, to whanau newsletter).

On the basis of the survey results, Tom's recommendations were:

- Make it really easy to know who the teachers are and how to contact them.
- Favour email as the main communication channel, and determine how other channels will be used. Communicate this with the parents/caregivers
- Give more notice about upcoming events
- Provide a pack for new parents that sets out expectations around communications
- Improve school reports (this has already been actioned)

- Create more opportunities for parents to meet other parents, as the survey found that getting to know parents and teachers is important to building school community

ACTION: In consultation with the school community and teachers, develop a communications channel strategy, which clearly sets out what messages or information are going to be put on what channels, and when. A structured workshop with parent representatives (including from Ngati Kotahitanga) and teachers (one from each whānau) could be used to develop the plan.

The survey also found that around three quarters of parents/caregivers would like to be more involved with the school, for example, by volunteering their time. The Board discussed how they could harness this enthusiasm, particularly given the fact that FANS is no longer operating. Ideas included holding a disco and book week in Term 4.

ACTION: parent trustees to provide Jess with any ideas they have to harness parent enthusiasm for being more involved in the school.

The Board thanked Tom for holding the earlier workshop on school communications and the more recent survey. The Board is keen to run a similar survey again in June 2021.

7. Finance

Victoria provided an update on the monthly results for July, which represents 58% of the calendar year gone. While expenditure in the month of June was up, July represented a monthly deficit of around \$22,000 against the projected budget. Most of the expenditure items were within the expected budgeted range, with admin sitting at 54% of the budget, property at 49% and learning resources at 60%.

Mark noted that the amount allocated for learning resources would need to increase in future budgets if the current level of TA support is retained. This is because the hourly rates paid to TAs increased as a result of the recent collective employment negotiations. The Ministry has in the past questioned the amount the school spends on personnel for learning support. This will need to be carefully managed when next year's budget is worked through.

The credit card expenditure was reviewed and all expenditure was justified.

Victoria commented that the overall budgeted income against budgeted expenditure delivers a positive variance. The actual funds available and working capital look healthy.

The FANS funds are still sitting on the school's balance sheet as a liability, as they sit in a separate account and are treated as a liability until spent. The Board agreed an alternative arrangement, where a separate account is set up for FANS and any grant funding that can be used for specified purposes (e.g. for the pool).

8. Health and safety

Haidee provided a summary of the health and safety sub-committee meeting, held on 25 August 2020. Haidee and Mark had spoken with Nicola from Aecom about the heating issue in the new building. There is a commitment to installing heat pumps and a manual override switch for the windows.

Mark thanked Haidee for the support she provided around the possible move to COVID-19 Alert Level 3.

9. Policy

Amelia took the Board through the Child Protection policy, asking Board members whether the current policy is accurate, clear and comprehensive. The general consensus was that the policy ticks all those boxes. Amelia noted that there are a number of supporting documents and policies that link to this policy, which will be reviewed at a later date.

The Board discussed the ways the school supports child centred decision-making and protected disclosures, both of which are referenced in the policy. In terms of protected disclosures, Mark and Nicki recognised that this can be tricky to negotiate, but the school practice of working in a shared whānau teaching environment helps. Haidee indicated that she can chat to Annabel (the teacher rep on the health and safety committee) about whether there is a safe environment for staff to raise concerns.

The Board discussed whether there were any issues around parents volunteering to take children on short excursions from school. While checks are in place for parents involved in overnight trips, these do not apply for short excursions. This could be revisited when the excursions policy is up for review.

The next policy for review is on learning support. Amelia indicated that feedback would be sought from staff, Board members and the wider school community.

ACTION: Amelia to share the policy on learning support for feedback and comment.

10. Community engagement

Nick reported on a recent Kāhui Ako meeting he attended, where a range of issues were discussed – personal development for staff, wellbeing survey results (which highlight the benefits and significance of friendships at school), and learning support collaboration (including counselling). Nick was asked whether Newtown School has a policy around managing spaces and noise in the modern learning environment. While the Board wasn't aware of any such policy, the issue of how staff and students find and manage the noise in teaching spaces was of interest to Board members.

ACTION: Nick and Haidee to formulate some broad questions to help find out how children and staff find, and manage, noise levels in the modern learning environments, for the school to consider.

11. Property

Yadana reported that work has been approved to fix the drainage outside the scooter and bike lockup, the remodel of the old Tui classroom has been signed off for QS, and the pool tender is progressing, with responses due in the second week in September.

The Board briefly discussed the Wellington City Council's draft spatial plan, which could potentially see more families moving to Newtown to live in higher-density housing. This could have a big impact on the school's roll numbers, with the school having to proactively manage the enrolment zone while keeping the integrity of the enrolment scheme for Ngati Kotahitanga.

12. September meeting

Chris Rowan from Impact Education will be returning to the September Board meeting to facilitate a two hour session from 6.30 – 8.30 pm. The mid-year student achievement report is also scheduled for discussion at this meeting. Jess suggested meeting earlier at 5.30 pm, and invited Board members to circulate their reports ahead of the meeting so that the focus could be on any matters arising.

ACTION: Jess to come up with some questions/issues for the Board to consider with Chris at the September meeting, potentially around reviewing the Board's objectives, setting new objectives for the future, and reflecting on how to strengthen governance practice.

13. In committee

The Board briefly moved into committee to discuss personnel issues.