



Governance support resources

The role of the staff trustee

What is the role of the staff trustee?

The staff trustee is elected to bring a staff perspective to the board in the same way that parent trustees bring a parent view.

The staff trustee is part of the board team rather than holding a single representational focus and is a full member of the board with the same roles and responsibilities as other trustees.

The staff trustee is privy to much more information than the staff. Like all trustees they must understand both the strategic direction and the financial position of the board, and above all, act in the best interests of all students at the school.

It is also important that staff understand the role of their “representative”. This can help prevent any role confusion later on if the board is grappling with difficult issues that may have a direct impact on the staff. The staff trustee is not there to necessarily vote the way that the staff would want them to vote. The staff trustee role is also not like that of a union delegate or employment advocate, who must take every staff issue or cause to the board table. Bringing governance issues to the attention of the board must be within the board’s set processes and must not undermine the role of the principal.

Staff trustee role description

Here is an example staff representative role description policy which can also be found in the [NZSTA governance framework](#) (policy B6/B7):

Staff trustee role description policy

The staff representative brings a staff perspective to board discussion and decision making.

As a trustee the staff representative is elected by their peers to serve the interests of the school at governance level. They have equal voice, vote, standing and accountability to any other board member.

Staff representative accountability measures	Standard
1. To work within the board's charter /strategic plan.	1.1 The charter/strategic plan is obviously considered in all board decisions and actions.
2. To abide by the board's governance and operational policies.	2.1 The staff representative has a copy of the governance manual and is familiar with all board policies.
3. The staff representative is first and foremost a trustee and must act in the best interests of the students at the school at all times.	3.1 The staff representative is not a staff advocate. 3.2 The staff representative does not bring staff concerns to the board.
4. The staff representative is bound by the trustee code of behavior.	4.1 The staff representative acts within the code of behavior.
5. It is not necessary for the staff representative to prepare a verbal or written report for the board unless specifically requested to by the board.	5.1 No regular reports are received unless a request has been made by the board on a specific topic.

What are the reporting expectations?

Parent trustees do not report on the day to day happenings of the parent body or on issues that parents may have with the school and it is no different for the staff trustee. Therefore, the staff trustee is not expected to report to the board on any matter in the school, unless the board specifically asks them to.

If the board wishes to introduce (or continue) the practice of requiring a staff trustee to report at each of its meetings it needs to think through its expectations of what these reports might contain and their purpose, in terms of whether the information provided will assist the board in its governance role. More often than not, such reports add no information to assist the board in its governance role and can in fact sideline staff representatives to a five-minute slot at meetings. Requiring the staff trustee to report in this way also risks conflict with the principal, who is responsible for reporting to the board on operational matters.

The board also needs to respect the principal's role of day to day manager of the school. Any governance information that the board needs regarding the staff should come from the principal after they have had an opportunity to deal with whatever the issue may be.

The staff representative may report back to the rest of the staff on non-confidential matters if so desired by the staff and this could be incorporated into the staff meeting perhaps. However, the minutes once confirmed remain the record of the meeting, and the principal is responsible for ensuring staff are aware of decisions impacting on the school and staff, subject to any confidentiality requirements relating to staff and other matters dealt with in public excluded business.

What is the staff trustee's relationship with the principal?

Here are some points to consider:

- The relationship between the principal and the staff representative is slightly unusual. As a board member the staff representative is a member of the employing body. However, aside from their trustee role, they are a staff member working under the principal's management. This can cause tensions
- The board should work under a 'no surprises' rule, meaning no surprises for either the principal or other trustees in terms of items dealt with at a board meeting. The agenda needs to be correctly notified and followed, with last minute items added only if required for urgency and with board agreement
- Being a staff trustee does not mean that the concerns/complaints process for staff can be bypassed. In the same way that parent trustees cannot bring a specific complaint from a member of the community to the board, neither should the staff trustee. Staff must work through the internal staff concern/ complaints process
- The staff representative is entitled to be treated the same as any other trustee and should not be automatically asked to leave when discussing and deciding a staff or student matter in committee (public excluded business), e.g. the principal's performance appraisal or a student suspension meeting. If the staff trustee has a conflict of interest they must be excluded ([schedule 6\(40\)11](#), Education Act 1989) or they may request to leave the meeting if they feel uncomfortable

How is the staff trustee elected?

Staff representatives are elected every 3 years during a triennial election year.

If a staff representative resigns before their term is up, then a casual vacancy occurs, and it must be filled by holding a by election. By resolution the board must set an election date and appoint a returning officer, who must follow the election process outlined in the [Returning Officer's Handbook](#). Boards cannot simply co-opt someone to the role, and nor can the staff simply vote someone on without a by election.



Where do I get advice?

The Governance advisory and support centre advisers can also assist and are contacted on 0800 782 435, option 1 or govadvice@nzsta.org.nz