

Last updated: March 2024

Understanding the difference between management and governance

Establishing a clear understanding with your board about where the line sits between management and governance is fundamental to having an effective school operation.

Experience suggests that the smaller the school, the more problematic this boundary becomes. Whether for pragmatism (board members 'volunteering' to do work which should be resourced either through the school's operational grant and/or Ministry resourcing) or with the best of intentions, the boundary should first be acknowledged and understood. Board training is very useful here.

The relationship and regular communications, preferably once a week kanohi ki te kanohi, between the presiding member and the principal, are critical in maintaining the two-way information flow. These meetings are where both parties can clarify small and large issues and a process for working.

Governance is the strategic task of setting the school's goals, direction, limitations, and accountability frameworks.

Management is allocating resources and overseeing the daily operations of the school.

These boundaries are often contained in the board's delegation of duties. On the [NZSBA website](#), you can search for an example 'schedule of delegations' which can be modified as needed to reflect the needs of your school and adopted at a board meeting. The board will be further guided by the school's policies and procedural documentation. When this boundary becomes blurry and something doesn't feel right, contact a trusted colleague and/or the NZEI Te Riu Roa principal helpline (0508 PRINCIPAL) to share your concern. Earlier is always better than later.

Governance – the school board

As the governance body for the school, the board (including the principal in their capacity as a full board member) is responsible for:

- Development and ongoing review of the school charter.
- Monitoring and reviewing your school's progress.
- Putting in place a policy framework.
- Employing the principal.
- Managing assets, including financial and property management.
- Ensuring your school's legal compliance.
- Implementing the [National Education and Learning Priorities](#).

- Health and safety.
- Setting the strategic direction of the school/kura.

Management – the principal

The principal is responsible for the management of the school. While that management must be undertaken per the board's policies and relevant legislation, boards must have a clear understanding that this is not an area into which they should stray. Disharmony and dysfunction in schools commonly have roots in excessively zealous boards moving beyond their governance role into attempting to be directly involved in school management and decision-making.

Understanding, tact, and diplomacy must be part of the principal's skill set when making calls where the community is interested. How and when information is communicated is an art form and in smaller schools, the principal can be particularly vulnerable if not supported by the board. There is no harm in seeking views from around the table before making a difficult operational decision but articulate that it remains an operational decision.

Management in a school context is multi-faceted. First and foremost, the principal is the professional leader of the school. Effective professional leadership includes the following components:

- the health and safety of both students and staff – the wellbeing of all
- the educational achievement – creating a climate conducive to enabling students to achieve their full potential.
- creating a positive working environment for all staff and 'green' (growth) mindset
- growing leadership capability

The principal is also responsible, in alignment with the school's charter and operational plan, school policy and procedures and collective and/or individual employment agreements, for the day-to-day operation of the school, including:

- the employment and performance of staff [Our Code Our Standards](#)
- student behaviour management
- day to day finance/property management
- communications within and beyond the school
- relationship with the community
- liaison with outside agencies