

What does being on the St Anthony's School Board of Trustees involve?

We've put together a profile to let you know what being on our Board of Trustees involves, why it is important, and what the benefits are. If you have any questions please contact us at bot@stants.school.nz

Why did you join the St Anthony's School Board of Trustees?

It was something I'd considered for a long time before deciding to take the leap to join the Board. I saw it as a great opportunity to use my skills and experience to give back to our school community and assist our Principal and teaching team to help our kids through their learning journey.

I wanted to be able to help guide the school's direction and help balance the commitments and opportunities for the school and community. Before taking a strong view, I think one needs to see all the information and understand the challenges in ensuring the focus remains on the best education outcomes for each student at St Anthony's.

The Proprietor approached me to ask me to be their representative on the Board. I liked the idea of helping and getting involved with a catholic school at a governance level. Our schools need people who are passionate about catholic education. I enjoy the challenge of working with a great team of committed people who want the best for their children.

I felt that I wanted to contribute to my children's schooling, and with working fulltime there was limited ways I was able to give back. Being a small school with limited number of families, I personally believe it is important that where you can help you do. By being involved on the Board I have been able to do exactly that, and have found my role to be rewarding firstly for the school and secondly I have learnt a lot personally and professionally

How does it help the school?

Legally the school needs a Board of Trustees. It is so important for the school, the principal and the teachers that there is an effective Board giving governance so that they can get on and run the day to day side of the school. In this Board we need committed people, with many different experiences that together contribute to effective leadership.

What is expected of Board members?

Each member of the Board is important and brings to the table their experience. Members are expected to work within a team environment to help make St Anthony's school the best and most effective school it can be.

Members are expected to truly understand the role and know the difference between governance and management. The role of the Board isn't to run the school on a day to day basis, to tell the principal how to do their job in every detail, or to be there just for your child/children. The role is to set the direction for the school in its charter and policy framework and monitor progress towards achieving these expectations.

There is a requirement for members to attend two meetings a term, along with other strategic planning meetings throughout the year where required. Members should be well prepared for these meetings having read all the documentation thoroughly and distributed any papers they have prepared well in advance.

Along with this there is a commitment around attending ongoing training and taking time to understand policies, processes and procedures. Members should contribute to discussion and help the Board develop policies and strategic planning.

What is the typical time commitment involved?

There are about eight standard Board meetings a year, each lasting around two hours, and requiring about two hours preparation. There are additional meetings for things such as annual planning, and these can take more time. Board members are told well in advance of any meetings (they are usually scheduled at the start of the year in consultation with all Board members).

Most people take on additional work that aligns with their skills and interests, and there is an expectation that each member will at times be part of working groups developing projects etc, so it can end up being a fair amount of work. You do need to be prepared to put in the hours.

Sometimes Board members are expected to respond quickly to requests which require their input, so this can be hard to juggle with work and family commitments, but these tend to be few and far between. More often you are able to plan your Board work well in advance around your other commitments.

How did you add value to the Board?

I work in evaluation and assessment for Government Agencies (as a private consultant) and I found that a lot of the skills I use for my work were useful to preparing papers about plans/new school policies, and in reviewing and giving feedback on reports from teachers and the Principal to say whether the reports told me what I needed to know.

I had worked in communications before, so it was good to be able to use this to provide the regular updates to the community from the Board.

Having a background in policy was especially helpful, as reviewing and writing policies is a key part of Board work.

Previous Board experience was a bonus, especially from other school Boards. It's useful to be able to inform the Board of some of the ways other schools have dealt with similar governance issues.

Experience in finance was useful for helping to interpret the data for the rest of the Board when required, as school finances can be quite complicated.

Building and property management came in handy as part of the Board's role is to ensure the school's buildings and facilities provide a safe, healthy learning environment for students.

What skills did you gain on the Board?

Being on the Board really added to my understanding of the importance of governance, and of the difference between governance and management and the need to be clear about the different roles.

I attended some governance and management training courses that really added to my understanding of that area. I also went to specific workshops on various changes and challenges that schools face - many of which are relevant for other aspects of life, including parenting and professional working skills.

You are required to review and develop lots of policies on the Board, and this strengthened my ability to think widely about the practical implications of implementing such policies. You are also required to look in detail at areas such as finance, so my analytical skills were also boosted.

I learned a lot about how things are run - school finances, school buildings, use of student assessment data links to teachers planning for their students.

A better understanding of some areas of school governance that I hadn't really considered before. The NZSTA workshops have been interesting and helpful.

How did you improve your skills and knowledge?

I attended the education seminars provided by the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA), especially the free introductory session with other new Board members one evening. There are lots of free training courses available from NZSTA online as well which I completed at my own pace. There is also an NZSTA handbook which was helpful to read.

Working alongside more experienced Board members I was able to watch and learn from them during Board meetings.

What do you enjoy the most?

Working with a collegial, hardworking and committed team who have different backgrounds and listening to their different points of view.

Knowing that we are benefitting the students who are at the heart of all that we do.