

# Boards of Management 2011

## A Guide to Best Practice



This framework has been developed from examples of successful practice provided by individual members of Boards of Management, focus groups of school principals and from submissions received from Principals. It also draws on research on school governance, both nationally and internationally.

Effective boards demonstrate a:

- clear sense of common purpose – what is the right thing to do for all children in the school
- determination that respect for others, regardless of role, is a core value underpinning all behaviour

These underlying principles ensure that there are good relationships and that board business - no matter how challenging - is dealt with efficiently and effectively.

### **1. THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT – A 'CORPORATE BODY'**

The Board of Management is acting on behalf of the patron, and in accordance with the regulations of the Department of Education and Skills. It operates as 'a corporate body'. This means that:

- the board acts as one unit in terms of its function in addressing the business of the school
- the elected parents and teacher, once elected, do not act in a representative or communicative role.

Board members are not always familiar with the concept of 'corporate body'. This can lead to serious breakdowns in the functioning of boards when individuals liaise with those who elected them.

#### **1.1. BOARD MEMBERS**

Each member should

- uphold and support the ethos, culture and traditions of the school
- be aware of his/her collective and individual responsibilities
- have a specific role/function in the management of the school
- support new members in understanding the functions of the board, and the relationship between the board and the pupils, teachers, staff, patron and the Department of Education and Skills.

#### **1.2. CONFIDENTIALITY**

It is essential that confidentiality is respected, and this includes

- respecting the sensitivity and privacy of individuals within the school community
- maintaining strict confidentiality on all discussions of the board and its sub-committees, other than information specifically agreed as 'open information'
- ensuring that all documentation is filed securely and not shown to, or discussed with, anyone other than those directly involved in the business of the board.

### 1.3. COMMUNICATION

The board should

- get to know all staff of the school, including teaching and non-teaching staff
- be introduced to members of the Parents' Association
- ensure that representative(s) of the board attend important school events
- maintain courteous and positive relationships with staff, parents and children
- host an annual (low-cost) celebration of the school's success with all staff and with the Parents' Association issue an agreed report to parents and staff after each meeting of the board, or at least once per term.

### 1.4. BOARD PLANNING

Planning should include:

- long term and short-term goals<sup>1</sup>.
- schedule of dates for the year's meetings, circulated at the end of the school year (June) for the following year (September-June)
- plan, including specific and realistic objectives, agreed at the first meeting each school year. This plan should include:
  - specific policies to be formulated/reviewed, prioritising mandatory policies (e.g. health/safety, child protection, enrolment, behaviour)
  - building/maintenance programme, including a time-line and a brief commentary on financial implications
  - training programme/schedule for the board and/or for officers of the board
  - budget/financial plan
  - list of the sub-committees that may be required for specific areas, and clarification on the reporting structure for such sub-committees.

### 1.5. BOARD MEETINGS

Meetings should

- be convened at least twice each school term
- have an agreed time-limit and a clear starting and finishing time
- focus on specific activities to meet the goals identified in the year plans.

### 1.6. PARTICIPATION

All members should

- contribute to the business of the board, at meetings and between meetings
- participate, as necessary, in the work of sub-committees and/or working groups to progress specific areas of work
- act as chairperson, or secretary, to a sub-committee when required.

### 1.7. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES <sup>2</sup>

Roles and responsibilities should be agreed, and the workload being distributed fairly amongst all board members. Roles should include the following:

- Chairperson
- Principal (who acts as secretary to the board)
- Treasurer
- Capital Projects' Officer
- Maintenance Officer
- Safety Officer
- School Premises Officer.

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<sup>1</sup> **Long-term goals** will probably take a year (or longer) to achieve e.g. a building project

**Short-term goals** will ideally be achieved within a school term e.g. development and approval of a new policy area, establishment of a sub-committee to oversee the change of use of a classroom to a library/resource room

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to the Role Descriptors.

## **1.8. CHAIRPERSON**

The Chairperson should

- conduct the business of the board efficiently by
  - planning effectively for board meetings
  - ensuring that agenda, minutes and relevant documentation have been circulated
  - agreeing a time-allocation for agenda items at the beginning of each meeting
  - inviting all members to participate in discussions and decision making
  - ensuring a fair balance in participation at meetings, and between meetings
  - prompting the establishment of sub-committees, or working groups, to progress the business of the board between meetings
  - ensuring that appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place for officers of the board, or for sub-committees and working-groups
  - ensuring that decisions are communicated, and upheld
- progress the business of the board efficiently between meetings by
  - communicating frequently with the principal and treasurer
  - reporting to the meeting on issues progressed, and/or decisions taken between meetings by officers of the board and the principal
- attend training opportunities offered for chairpersons.

## **1.9. DECISION MAKING**

Decisions should

- be by consensus, ensuring that the sense of common purpose - the right thing for the good of all the children – prevails
- be fair, consistent and impartial ensuring that
  - members declare a potential conflict of interest, and are not present for any discussion and decision making on that item
- be recorded by the person nominated to record decisions at the meeting
- be included in the minutes
- avoid voting as a mechanism
  - voting, while appearing democratic, can be divisive
  - voting, if taken and the vote is tied, should allow the chairperson the right of a second, casting vote.

## **1.10. AGENDA**

The agenda for each meeting should:<sup>3</sup>

- be prepared and agreed by the chairperson and principal
- be circulated at least one week before the date of the meeting
- be accompanied by minutes of the last meeting, and relevant documentation
- be focused on issues affecting the school
- have as specific agenda items
  - the agreement of the minutes
  - correspondence
  - a principal's report
  - a treasurer's report/financial statement
  - a report from sub-committees, or working groups, where appropriate.

## **1.11. MINUTES**

The minutes constitute the official record of the school's business and are an important legal document. Minutes should<sup>4</sup>

- be recorded at the meeting by the recording secretary nominated for the meeting
- be redrafted after the meeting by the principal in consultation with the chairperson

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the Agenda Template in the PIMS desk diary

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to the Minutes Template in the PIMS desk diary

- be reviewed with the chairperson and finalised after the review
- have the following recorded at the beginning of the minutes
  - time, date and location of the meeting
  - attendance and any apologies received
  - any correspondence received and/or discussed
- reflect the agenda of the meeting, with each item on the agenda having a corresponding record in the minutes
- be clear and concise, recording decisions, actions, responsibilities and time-frame for completion of tasks (DART)
- have the following recorded at the end of the minutes
  - time the meeting concluded
  - date, time and location of the next meeting
- be circulated to all members at least one week before the next meeting
- be agreed (or amended as required) as the first item of the next meeting
- be signed by the chairperson when agreed by the board
- be filed safely as a record of the business of the board.

### **1.12. FINANCE**

The Education Act (1998) requires Boards of Management to

- prepare an annual financial report
- have the accounts certified by an independent accountant
- have the accounts available in the school for review by the Parents' Association or individual parent, school staff, the patron, the Minister for Education and the inspectorate.

**Note:** An audit of the accounts is not required

### **1.13. PARENTS**

The Education Act (1998) requires Boards of Management to assist parents in the formation of a Parents' Association. The National Parents' Council

- can assist and advise on setting up a Parents' Associations
- have a website [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie) providing information and advice.

**Note:** *Supporting Each Other – A Guide to Best Practice for the Effective Partnership between Principals and Parents' Associations* is available on [www.ippn.ie](http://www.ippn.ie) and on [www.npc.ie](http://www.npc.ie).

### **1.14. TRAINING & INFORMATION**

Boards of Management should

- avail of training offered to the board, or to officers of the board
- invite relevant persons (e.g. a solicitor) to present to the board on its legal, corporate, financial and other responsibilities.

The following references are important and should be of particular relevance to all board members:

- The Education Act (1998)
- Boards of Management of National Schools: Constitution of Rules and Rules of Procedure 2011

## 2. ROLE DESCRIPTORS

The following describe specific roles and responsibilities. While duties and functions may be delegated for the purposes of sharing the workload and giving meaningful involvement to all members of the board, overall responsibility remains with the board as a *corporate unit*.

### 2.1 CHAIRPERSON

Whose responsibilities include

- chairing meetings
- corresponding officially on behalf of the board on governance issues
- being available to liaise with the principal between meetings
- acting on recruitment/employment issues for all school staff
- preparing an annual budget in consultation with the treasurer and principal
- signing cheques with the treasurer or other person nominated by the board
- maintaining familiarity with financial matters including online banking and credit card arrangements
- being available to act as 'data controller' for the DES OLCS (Online Claims System).

### 2.2 PRINCIPAL

Whose responsibilities include

- providing leadership to the overall school community
- managing the school, staff and pupils on a day-to-day basis
- addressing all educational issues affecting the quality of teaching and learning
- acting as secretary to the board of management including:
  - setting the Agenda for meetings in consultation with the Chairperson
  - issuing notice of meeting and agenda to Board members
  - recording the minutes of Board meetings - to include issues discussed, decisions taken, including the numbers of those voting for or against a motion, and actions to be taken.
  - The specific function of recording the BoM decisions may be delegated by the board to another member of the board to allow the Principal take full part in the dialogue of the meeting
  - transmitting Board decisions to relevant parties and following up appropriately
  - Preparing the official minutes following each meeting, presenting the minutes to the Chairperson and following agreement, keeping the minutes in an appropriate form and in a safe place
  - dealing with correspondence
  - liaising with Chairperson between meetings on matters of significance
  - Providing professional advice and guidance to the members of the board as required.
  - Co-ordinating the teaching staff, and where relevant, members of the BoM and parent association in the review and development of school policies.
- preparing and monitoring the annual budget with treasurer and chairperson
- acting on recruitment/employment issues for all school staff
- preparing an annual budget in consultation with the chairperson and treasurer
- being familiar with all online banking and credit card arrangements
- acting as data entry controller for the DES OLCS (Online Claims System).

### 2.3 TREASURER

Whose responsibilities include

- preparing an annual budget in consultation with the chairperson and principal
- presenting that budget to the board for approval
- reporting at each meeting on the management accounts and outlining budget comparisons
- liaising with the principal/deputy principal/school secretary regarding invoices and lodgements

- preparing management accounts using software
- preparing accounts for the annual returns
- arranging for the annual certification of accounts<sup>5</sup>
- liaising with the bank in regard to school accounts
- being familiar with all online banking and credit card arrangements
- being available to act as data controller for DES Online Claims Systems.

## **2.4 CAPITAL PROJECTS' OFFICER**

Whose responsibilities include

- managing Summer Works' Scheme projects
- managing emergency works
- managing school building/extension projects for the board.

## **2.5 MAINTENANCE OFFICER**

Whose responsibilities include

- managing cleaning staff and/or cleaning contractors
- managing caretaking staff
- organising cleaning arrangements
- organising for maintenance and repairs of buildings and grounds

organising the maintenance of equipment and procurement of supplies.

## **2.6 SAFETY OFFICER**

Whose responsibilities include

- carrying out an annual Health & Safety audit in consultation with the Staff Safety representative
- preparing a Health & Safety Statement in consultation with the Staff Safety representative
- identifying risks to Health & Safety and planning for the management of those risks.

## **2.7 SCHOOL PREMISES OFFICER**

Whose responsibilities include:

- providing keys and alarm codes to school staff and other approved users
- ensuring appropriate security and fire alarm systems are in place
- co-ordinating a list of out-of-hours key holders in the event of alarm activation or access for repairs and maintenance
- hiring of the school premises to outside groups, including arrangements regarding insurance, timetabling, security, cleaning and keys.

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<sup>5</sup> School accounts must be independently certified annually. School accounts do not need to be audited