

Chapter 8

Board composition, succession and committees

BOARD COMMITTEES

Most boards operate through a number of committees. This is a practical necessity, as board meetings simply do not have sufficient time available for all trustees to consider every issue at the depth required to perform their duty of due diligence. Committees therefore help the board to use its time efficiently and minimise the number of times it needs to meet by delegating the research and discussion on many issues to a smaller, specialist group of interested trustees. Committees also offer the opportunity to tap into a wider pool of expertise, as committees usually comprise not only trustees, but also key members of the Executive, and sometimes also teachers, parents and students.

An effective way to use committees is to schedule a meeting of each committee in the period leading up to each board meeting. If a particular committee is involved with an important task that has a tight timeline, then of course it has the freedom to schedule several meetings in short succession without waiting for the next board meeting. By meeting at least once before each board meeting, committees can discuss issues in depth, and if action is required, a recommendation can be brought to the board meeting. It is important to remember that committees do not make decisions (unless they have been given a specific delegated authority to do so by the board), as the board makes all governance decisions as a body.

The number of committees will depend to a large extent on the size of the school, the size of the board, the strategic priorities that have been identified, and the stage in the life cycle of the school (is it a new or rapidly expanding school? is the school undergoing a period of change?). In other words, committees do not just exist for their own sake; the number and composition of committees should serve the needs of the school. Needless to say, it is essential that board committees concern themselves only with governance issues so that the effectiveness of the board's governance role is enhanced. Board committees must never delve into management matters that are the prerogative of the Head and the Executive.