



'A community striving to succeed and acting with integrity'

Oratia District School Board of Trustees Newsletter

10 November 2011

Welcome to the first newsletter from your Board of Trustees. Thanks to all parents and caregivers who completed our recent Parent Consultation Survey. One of the key results to come out of the survey was that some of you wanted to know more about the role of the Board of Trustees, so we've decided to put together a newsletter after each of our monthly meetings to keep you up to date with what we are doing. Let's start by introducing ourselves:

Parent-Elected Trustees

Christine Healy (chair, curriculum vision portfolio) – mother of Elesa (Year 5), email christine@healy.co.nz

Erik Van Den Top (deputy chair, curriculum vision portfolio) – father of Marsha (Year 5) and Griffin (Year 4), email erikiphmail@gmail.com

Angela Nauck (treasurer) – mother of Bradley (Year 5) and Cameron (Year 1), email nauck@xtra.co.nz

Jane Binsley (communications and curriculum vision portfolios) – mother of Sophie (Year 4) and Mia (Year 2), email jane@byline.co.nz

Robin Kewell (health, safety and environment portfolio) – father of Tristan (Year 5) and Lucas (Year 3), email robinkewell@xtra.co.nz

Tim Sherring (health, safety and environment portfolio) – father of George (Year 4), Joseph (Year 2) and Billie (starting school next month), email lisaandtim@orcon.net.nz

Julia Moore (Lone Kauri School) – mother of Ryan (Year 3) and Kyla (Year 0), email joolz.moore@gmail.com

Staff-Elected Trustees

Naomi Laycock (curriculum vision portfolio) – Room 22 teacher, email naomil@oratia.school.nz

Principal

Sherilee Swanepoel (board secretary), email sherilees@oratia.school.nz

We each take responsibility for the particular portfolio areas listed above, and share the responsibility for the discipline and appointments portfolios (a member of the board sits on the selection panel for all teacher appointments). The majority of us were elected by you in May 2010. We have since seconded two extra members, Angela Nauck for her accounting expertise and Julia Moore as a voice for Lone Kauri School. We are approximately half-way through our three-year term, with the next election due in early 2013. You can see our photos and read more about us in the BOT section of the school website at www.oratia.school.nz

The Role of the Board

Our job is to decide the strategic direction for the school, set and review the school's policies on a range of topics, monitor student achievement, oversee the financial management of the school, and employ, support and appraise the Principal. You can think of it rather like the way a public company is run. The shareholders (in our case the parents and teachers of the school) vote for a board of directors (in our case a Board of Trustees), whose job it is to employ a CEO (in our case a Principal) to manage the day-to-day running of the company (in our case the school). Just as the board of directors of a company would set goals for its CEO in terms of profit, we set measurable goals with our Principal and her team in terms of student achievement.

The board's most important job is to decide the values, vision and goals for our school. Our current five-year strategic plan sets out five key goals:

1. Creating a learning community in an environment focussed on supporting excellence in student achievement.
2. Empowering staff and students to think and act with integrity and personal responsibility.
3. Ensuring the Oratia District School environment is developed and enhanced to enable our vision to be realised.
4. Enabling effective communication between all members of the school community to foster and acknowledge positive learning and teaching environments and relationships.
5. Empowering each person to be a self-aware and confident individual who makes a difference to themselves and others in their community.

We will go into each of these goals in more detail in future newsletters, but if you would like to view our full strategic plan in the meantime, it is available at the school office and under the BOT section of our school website at www.oratia.school.nz

Our Meetings

Our meetings are usually held in the staffroom at 7pm on the third Tuesday of each month, but check the school newsletter for confirmation as the dates change a little around school holidays. You are welcome to come along to get a better feel for what we do – our next meeting will be held on Tuesday 15 November and we sometimes even have chocolate biscuits! The minutes are public documents and can be viewed at the school office or online in the BOT section of the website at www.oratia.school.nz

Parent Survey

Thanks again to the parents and caregivers who took the time to fill out our Parent Consultation Survey. The results have been collated and were presented to the board at our October meeting, along with our Principal's recommendations for building your responses into our ongoing process of review. While we are delighted to report that the vast majority of respondents were happy with the school's direction and their children's progress, some themes emerged:

Communication

Some respondents wanted more information about the school's strategic plan, the board's role, activities on offer for their children, and what goes on inside their children's classrooms. This newsletter is a direct result of those requests – sorry we didn't think of it earlier! The school also plans to hold an Open Day and information evenings in the new year to give parents the opportunity to see their children's classes in action and find out how the New Zealand Curriculum is taught at our school. Members of the board will be available at those events to discuss the school's strategic direction and answer any questions. The Principal advises us that communication will be a key focus throughout the school next year, particularly in the area of using email and our website to communicate more effectively with our school community.

Bullying

Although our school's Values Project and Peer Mediation Programme have been effective in teaching our children positive ways of resolving conflict, some survey respondents remain concerned that bullying has not been satisfactorily addressed. The school board and management take this issue very seriously, so in 2012 the Principal intends to introduce a restorative justice programme to ensure that any issues are fully resolved for all parties.

Composite classes

Some parents expressed concern that composite classes did not seem to have been beneficial to their children's learning, especially in the junior school. The Principal informs us that this matter is under review and if numbers permit we should see some change. More information will be available after the November board meeting.

Investment in IT

Ongoing investment in technology is one of the key actions in our Strategic Plan and as such will be a priority in future budgeting. We are also working towards creating a new computer suite as part of our proposed building project for a new Learning Centre in the space currently occupied by the caretaker's shed.

Uniforms

Some parents expressed support for introducing a simple uniform at our school. The Board of Trustees is keen to listen to the opinions of the school community on this issue so we will be inviting discussion during the 2012 year.

The Board's View on National Standards

As you will be aware from media reports, the government's recent introduction of National Standards has caused widespread debate. At our school the board's view is that we do not have a choice about whether or not we comply with the Ministry of Education's requirements regarding reporting in relation to National Standards, as these have been mandated by law. We also feel that in principle it is useful for schools to have a standardised benchmark against which to measure the achievement of their students. However, we feel the Standards are not without flaw and we will continue to advocate for improvement to them. We believe there needs to be more focus on moderation to ensure that the Standards are being interpreted in the same way not only between different schools but also within each individual school.

Within our own school, our teachers' focus this year has been on moderating their marking, particularly in the area of written language, to ensure the achievement of children in different classes is being measured against the same yardstick. It is also important to note that, although our reports record each child's progress in relation to the National Standards, our teachers do not reach this assessment on the basis on a single test or piece of work, but as a result of overall teacher judgement built up throughout the year. Our school uses a range of standardised assessment tools, including AStTle, STAR and PAT testing, to monitor and report on our children's learning progress. If you have any concerns about your child's progress, please speak to their classroom teacher.

Term Four

In the second-to-last week of this term (Monday 5 to Friday 9 December) the school will host visitors from the Education Review Office (ERO) as part of the regular three-yearly review cycle (our previous ERO report is available in the BOT section of the school's website at www.oratia.school.nz). Please make them welcome. In the meantime, should you have any questions about anything in this newsletter – or anything that's not in this newsletter that you think should be – please don't hesitate to contact one of us using the email addresses overleaf.

Warmest regards from your Board of Trustees