



Appointing a primary school principal

Good practice approach

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Appointing a new principal is an important and critical job

Appointing a principal is one of the most important decisions a board will make. The decision needs to be well informed.

Under the auspices of the Primary Longer Term Work Programme, the NZ School Trustees Association (NZSTA), in collaboration with the New Zealand Educational Institute – Te Riu Roa (NZEI) and the Ministry of Education have produced this information for boards of trustees so accessible, accurate and reliable advice is available in the education sector.

The overall aim of appointing a principal is to ensure that the best, most competent and suitable person is selected for the position. The recruitment, selection, and appointment processes must be fair and consistent, and meet the legislative requirements of a good employer.

This pamphlet outlines the key elements of what boards should expect and what may be expected of boards in this process.

For full information on the process please refer to the NZSTA guidelines on principal appointment at www.nzsta.org.nz.

Legislation

Legally boards must be a good employer. This means they must:

- advertise positions nationally
- appoint the person best suited for the position
- demonstrate equal employment opportunities.

Boards must act in good faith which means dealing with existing and potential employees honestly and openly.

Preparation and planning

Before advertising the role, you need to decide on functions and accountabilities, skills and attributes needed.

Role description and person specification

This is a good time to review the job description and person specification and consider the:

- main functions and accountabilities
- skills, abilities and attributes.

Templates are available from your NZSTA Industrial Adviser.

The Primary Principals' Career Pathways diagram ("*Where are you in your Principalship Career?*") details essential skills and knowledge at various stages of principalship. Kiwi Leadership for Principals also has useful information you can use when determining your needs. For both, see www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/

The job description and person specification will guide the board developing their appointment criteria. Let the applicants know what the criteria are to assist them in providing information that is useful and relevant in their applications.

Appointment committee's role

The next decisions are about the appointment committee and the process. Consider the:

- appointment committee: size, composition (see the chart on page 5) and delegated authority. It may be the whole board or a committee of the board
- parameters of any independent advisory role. Advice to be given to the board. Minute these parameters

- training or process advice needed for the appointment committee
- budget: fees, advertising, travel and materials
- timeline: ensure committee is same people and they are available throughout the process
- contingency if an appointment is not made
- reference checks: decide on relevant stage of process, method of communication.

Important aspects of appointment process

During the process:

- maintain the applicants' privacy
- remember that previous relevant performance is the best predictor of future performance
- when developing the job description and criteria for appointment, look for a good fit with the school – use your school's strategic plan, consultation with staff, students and community
- do not involve the retiring principal in the process
- use independent professional advice if needed
- promptly communicate with unsuccessful and successful applicants at each stage
- use the forms and processes from the NZSTA website www.nzsta.org.nz
- maintain contact with your NZSTA industrial advisor along the way.

The process

Advertising and receiving applications

You must advertise in a nationally recognised publication. Advertising in the Education Gazette meets these requirements and is free. Other advertising options are national newspapers, online, journals, magazines and newsletters.

Describe the school's character, the community and give applicants a clear accurate impression of the role they are applying for. Specify any conditions that will apply and include an EEO statement and any specific measures to meet EEO goals, such as childcare availability.

Once applications come in, privacy should be guaranteed. Send an immediate confidential acknowledgement. Ensure information is stored securely.

Photocopy and distribute CVs so that they can be considered by the appointment committee at a designated time and place.

Use the NZSTA template application form. It has all the information you may need.



Short listing

Confidentiality is essential in the process.

To short list applicants to interview:

- use application forms and CVs, selection criteria and weightings
- verify teacher registration with the NZ Teachers Council www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/
- ensure professional advisory expertise is available to appointments committee/board
- use a matrix with 'critical requirements' and record decisions in writing
- seek additional, independent information if needed.

Look for applicants' qualities and attributes against your appointment criteria. Don't put them to one side if they appear not to fit – an interview will help you assess that. Don't be put off simply because an applicant is some distance away – look for innovative ways to pre-assess whether to interview them by using digital communication or video conferences for selection interviews.

Aim for a short list of ideally no more than five applicants suitable for appointment. If your committee has any doubt about the quality of the applicants, consider re-advertising.

Promptly advise applicants whether they are short listed or not.

Interviewing

Use the interview as an opportunity to assess the skills and experience of the applicants and to clearly outline the expectations of the board as the potential future employer. This is the opportunity to ensure that the goals, aspirations and values of the board, its community and prospective principal, are compatible.

A semi-structured, competency based interview tends to be the most effective interview style. Ask the applicant to respond to questions using specific examples of how they've managed similar situations in the past and how the applicant felt and thought at that time. An applicant's response is a strong indicator of how these types of situations are likely to be managed in the future.

Consider the benefit of asking each short-listed applicant to give a brief presentation on the same prepared topic. This gives the board a chance to view their communication skills, an important aspect of a principal's role.

To be fair to all applicants:

- ask all applicants the same interview questions
- base questions on the job description and person specification
- the interview panel should comprise exactly the same people for each interview and be briefed on the selection criteria, processes and critical requirements
- arrange a quiet non-threatening place for the interviews and allow between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours per interview
- don't make spontaneous job offers during the interview
- let the applicant know the next steps in the process and when they can expect to hear from the appointment committee
- immediately after each interview use standard assessment forms and score sheets to fill in
- involve the independent advisor in the interview, if previously agreed by the board. Ensure their role is well defined.

Referees

Talk to referees. **This is important.**

It's best to talk to referees after the interview to clarify additional information on applicants. It is also an opportunity to check details supplied by applicants. It is best done when the appointment committee has decided through the short listing and the interview process on a preferred applicant.

Applicants need to authorise in the application form that inquiries can be made of specific named referees. Referees often put a lot of effort in preparing the reference so only ask them when necessary. This avoids them in unnecessary work and ensures you have a fresh perspective at the right time.

Contact referees by phone using pre-agreed written framework of questions that are intended to provide the extra information the board seeks. This may be to confirm/or not information already gathered in the interview and written application process.

Don't use written referees' statements that may be sent in as part of the application as these tend to be weighted to the positive.

Background information

Other sources of additional useful information are: ERO reports from the applicant's current school, annual reports, newsletters and websites.

Additional assessments

If you use additional assessments, they should be the same for all short listed applicants.

Making the appointment decision

After the interview and assessing any additional information, including telephone reference checks for preferred applicants (and immigration status where relevant), rate the remaining applicants against weighted critical factors of the person specification. Aim for as close a match to the selection criteria as possible and be prepared to stick with the selection criteria. Consider using consensus decision-making, rather than voting. Once that decision is made, the whole appointment committee must own it.

When there is agreement and the preferred applicant's qualifications have been verified, the board can make an offer. If an appointment committee has managed the process to this stage, they submit their recommendation to the board for its ratification, before the board makes the offer. The board's discussion of the recommendation must be held "in committee".

Phone the preferred applicant and send a formal letter of offer. Once they've accepted the offer in writing, immediately notify the other interviewees that they weren't successful – thank them for providing the opportunity to interview them.

Provide the successful applicant with a copy of the Primary (or Area School) Principals' Collective Agreement. (The terms and conditions of the applicable collective agreement apply for the first 30 days even if the principal is not a member of the union.)

Use the NZSTA template appointment letter from www.nzsta.org.nz.

Ensure that the Board of Trustees has applied for concurrence if it is seeking to provide any benefits that are in excess of the terms and conditions confirmed in the relevant collective agreement.

Finishing up

Once the preferred applicant has accepted, keep their CV and application form and return or destroy the other applicants. You can ask the unsuccessful applicants what their preference is.

Sometimes unsuccessful applicants seek feedback. Use the information from the selection criteria on which the applicant wasn't as strong as the preferred applicant. Do not give information on the other applicants.

Evaluate the process. Make amendments to the board's appointment policy if necessary.

The board must keep all documentation related to the recruitment and selection process and its "in committee" decisions, on confidential file.

Before announcing the appointment, check with successful applicant that the appointment can be made public. They need time to advise their school first/at the same time. Once this is approved, advise in this order:

- management team
- school staff
- students
- parent community.

Plan the new principal's induction, draft performance agreement, professional development plan and support needs. If they are a first time principal, ensure they are on the First Time Principals' Programme. Introduce the appointee to staff, students and community – consider managing this both before starting the job and after.

Who is involved?

This table shows who to involve in decisions.

STAGE	Current Principal	Staff trustee	All other board members	Delegated committee	Staff	Parent community	Advisors
Deciding the details of the process, including steps, delegations and spending							
Deciding what will be in the job description							
Defining the person specification?							
Conducting interviews							
Seeing presentations from applicants							
Referee check							
Decision on the preferred candidate		*					
Final actions to complete appointment process							
Review of process and wrap up							

* This will be a decision made by the board dependent on the circumstances or philosophy of the school

Key: ■ = involved □ = not involved ▒ = depends on context

Checklists for boards in the appointment process

Pre-advertising checklist

- ☐ Receive written notification that principal's position is/will be vacant
- ☐ Refer to board's appointments policy/procedure
- ☐ Board delegates tasks, roles and responsibilities
- ☐ Decide whether to use whole board or establish appointment committee
- ☐ Define and communicate parameters for an independent advisor
- ☐ Establish clear understanding of independent advisor's role
- ☐ Appoint an independent advisor
- ☐ Agree on a budget and timeframe
- ☐ Check current job description against school's charter, strategic plan, goals and targets
- ☐ Check last ERO report requirements
- ☐ Check EEO requirements
- ☐ Consult staff, students on job description and person specification
- ☐ Consult community on job description and person specification
- ☐ Finalise job description and person specification
- ☐ Agree on appointment criteria and critical requirements
- ☐ Decide how you will keep the process confidential
- ☐ Prepare prospectus for appointment package
- ☐ Decide what goes in the application package
- ☐ Write advertisement and advertise nationally or wider.

Post advertising checklist

- ☐ Receive expressions of interest
- ☐ Ensure confidentiality throughout process
- ☐ Acknowledge applications received
- ☐ Provide application packages eg mail or web
- ☐ After closing date read applications
- ☐ Prepare short list against criteria and critical requirements
- ☐ Prepare format for interviews
- ☐ Notify interviewees of interview times
- ☐ Make final arrangements for interviews.

Interview and selection checklist

- ☐ Interview short listed candidates
- ☐ Check preferred candidates' referees and references and immigration status if relevant
- ☐ Conduct second interview, if necessary
- ☐ Select preferred applicant against criteria
- ☐ Decide to appoint/not to appoint (re-advertise if necessary)
- ☐ Appointments committee makes recommendation
- ☐ Board ratifies appointment and minutes decision
- ☐ Successful applicant advised
- ☐ Provide the successful applicant with a formal letter of offer with a copy of the relevant Principals' Collective Agreement
- ☐ Ensure that the board of trustees has applied for concurrence if required
- ☐ Conditions of appointment agreed to
- ☐ Successful applicant accepts appointment in writing
- ☐ Unsuccessful applicants advised
- ☐ Advise the staff and school community
- ☐ Prepare induction programme.

Post-appointment checklist

- ☐ Evaluate the process
- ☐ Start induction programme
- ☐ Establish performance agreement with the principal
- ☐ Determine board delegations
- ☐ Enrol in First-time-Principals' Programme if a first-time principal.

Check the actions (not all may be required).