

Running a school survey – when, why and how

Done well, a survey can provide a starting point for a constructive process of growth and development for a school. It is not the raw data itself that is of value, rather it is its evaluation and interpretation leading to the co-construction of goals, actions, timelines, resourcing (support) and reviewing that can guide a school forward on its collective journey as a community of learners.

Conversely, those supporting trustees, teachers and school leaders can recall when a survey has been poorly conceived or followed through, with subsequent strained relationships or worse.

Boards have at times relied on an external provider to run surveys, but this can lose the critical element of ownership. There are critical steps below which more correctly sit within governance and those to which an external agent should contribute.

When preparing a survey, the following should be considered:

1. Need for information sought/required is established.
2. Purpose, ownership and security of data to be gathered is determined.
3. Delegated authority (Terms of Reference – purpose, ownership, timeline, management, format, reporting etc) of the initiative is minuted – board is kept updated and ultimately receives report, initially “in-committee.” Who does what at each step?
4. Post information gathering phase is planned/agreed ie security,
5. Evaluation/interpretation, summary, construction of action plan, goals, timeline, potential resourcing/support needed, review and publication/format/presentation – hardcopy, digital, online, hui etc?
6. Professional tool and/or survey questions are designed and tested. Will it provide the information required in a clear and useful way? Will it be easy to compile the data?
7. Survey tool and methodology (format, timing, participants etc). Finalised/agreed.
8. Survey actioned, completed and data collected and held securely.
9. Data collated.
10. Information evaluated, summarised and prepared in agreed format (may or not include a draft action plan) by management group for presentation considering audience etc. Management group completes task for board as per Terms of Reference.
11. Management group shares with board ‘in-committee.’
12. Board receives, discusses, considers, reflects and adopts and perhaps approves action plan resulting from information provided. Modifications are made in consultation with management group.
13. Report shared with staff for comment – action plan may be further revised/improved.
14. Final result - a cohesive, constructive and shared plan is presented to the school community.
15. Action plan is followed through and reviewed in due course following adopted timeframes.