

Governor

to

Governor

2011

The Association of Greenwich Governors

The Association of Greenwich Governors was formed in 1995 to provide support to governors in all schools in the London Borough of Greenwich. Every governing body in Greenwich is a member.

The Association publishes *Greenwich Voice* three times a year. Governors receive copies of *Greenwich Voice* alongside the papers they receive for governing body meetings. Copies of *Greenwich Voice* can be found at our website, <http://www.associationofgreenwichgovernors.org/>

In addition more urgent information is circulated by email. Chairs of Governors receive this automatically. Other governors are welcome to ask to go on the mailing list by emailing voice@associationofgreenwichgovernors.org

The AGG tries to hold a conference every other year which is jointly organised by governor services and the AGG. All governors are invited. In other years it has a public Annual General Meeting.

The committee meets termly and other meetings are convened from time to time. The committee meets regularly with the Director of Children's Services.

The AGG is funded by a small annual grant from the Local Authority.

Governor to Governor 2011

The AGG consulted chairs of governors at the end of 2010 about proposed changes to Governor Services by sending an on-line questionnaire to all chairs of governors.

This proved very informative and helped the local authority shape its proposed governor services to meet schools' needs.

In an effort to support school improvement in Greenwich the AGG committee decided to send all chairs an on-line questionnaire asking how they organised themselves in an effort to discover ideas that might be useful to other governing bodies.

Governor to Governor 2011 is the resulting report. It consists of the replies received minimally edited to ensure clarity and consistency.

We are extremely grateful to all the chairs who took the trouble to fill in the questionnaire and share their experience with us. All responses were submitted anonymously. At the end of a comment **P** signifies primary and **S** secondary.

We will shortly be creating a place on our website where you and other governors can share their responses to this report.

GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS

Full Governing Body Meetings: innovations

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies?

We are about to trial having a closing session with Governor Services present but with the Head and SLT missing. S

Annually we do a reflection exercise of "what went well" and "even better if". The "even better if"s are then ranked by all governors. The top three become our priorities for the year ahead. P

All committee chairs are vice chairs of the full governing body. Two Student Governors, all deputies, the SAO and Bursar are associate governors. We have a talk at each governors meeting from one of the subject departments or support worker teams. All governors are linked to a department. S

We meet twice a term: once for strategic issues (including the head's report - which focuses on strategic matters), the other for routine items such as committee reports (unless they have strategic implications), budget and matters on Greenwich's standard agenda. S

Sub-committees

Which sub-committees do you have? When do you hold sub-committee meetings? (i.e. on the same or different days, at what time of the day)

Subcommittee meetings tend to be at 6pm. We have: Community, Achievement, Finance, Personnel, Learning environment (which covers physical premises + online e.g. Fronter) and ICT (chaired by an associate governor, a domain expert). S

We have Finance, personnel and premises as one committee plus Curriculum (to be called Achievement in the new school year). We also have an Executive Committee, which has the major task of ensuring governors do their bit within the school to help get us out of Special Measures. Curriculum meets separately but Finance meets directly prior to the Main Meeting. S

We have Premises, Finance, Curriculum, Personnel and admissions. We meet in the evenings with times varying between 4.30pm for Premises to 7.30pm for Personnel. We aim to have two committees on the same day, usually a week or two before full governors P

We have Finance, Premises, Curriculum, Personnel and performance management. All are held on different days in the fortnight before a full governors meeting. P

We have Executive, Finance and personnel, Curriculum and premises. Meetings are held on different days prior to a full GB meeting at times to suit committee members (some are morning, some are afternoon). P

We have five committees, three traditional ones: Personnel, planning and resources; Curriculum and student support ; and Premises, and two committees related to specialisms: Performing arts and Humanities and applied learning. They all meet on different days and members decide the most convenient day and time. All have opted for 5pm except for Premises, which is 3pm. PP&R meets bi-termly and the others once per term. S

We have Finance, Personnel, Curriculum, and Premises. They all meet in the evening, on separate days. The exact time of meeting depends on each committee, but 7pm is the most common. S

We have Finance and personnel, Curriculum, and Premises. Finance and personnel meet at 8am or 9am with bacon buns and coffee. Other sub-committees meet at 4pm with coffee and cakes. P

Sub-committee innovations

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies?

We have student council members of most committees (but not Personnel, due to confidentiality). If there is confidential business in any committee meeting, students depart beforehand. S

We fix early meetings of Premises to assist the premises manager. As an increasingly popular church school we have felt it important to add Admissions to the Personnel. P

One of the premises meetings of the year are held during the school day so that governors can “walk and talk” around the school and the agenda items. P

Personnel, Planning and Resources reviews the state of the budget at every meeting, led by the bursar. Curriculum involves a number of staff attending from relevant departments to report to the committee. All committees have senior staff representatives on them. S

Governor visits

Do governors find it easy to visit? What do governors do on visits?

It's easy to visit. Some visit classes, some attend for school lunches to assess quality, some to visit department or year heads. Visits are fairly infrequent. S

The school is very welcoming to governors. Governors are assigned a subject area and meet with the curriculum leader in that area to discuss plans for the coming term. They also take “learning walks” to ensure they see classroom activity. S

We now have two set days a term when governors are encouraged to visit lessons, filling in a form, and having talks with teachers responsible for areas they are associated with. Some governors make additional or alternative visits if not able to come on one of the set days. As chair I also visit usually on a fortnightly basis. P

It is very easy to visit. Governors meet with their link subject leaders to discuss issues or to see good practice in operation. Most visits involve some class observation. P

We have tried to encourage more regular visits by a wider range of governors. Usually governors will have a specific focus, be that a curriculum area, something related to their committee or a role as a named governor. P

We have a governors’ visiting week each year to encourage governors’ visits but governors are also encouraged to visit when they are able. Unfortunately it is difficult to get them all to come as most are heavily committed elsewhere. When they do come, they visit lessons, talk to the Heads of Department and make a brief report back to governors. We have a visiting policy which is given to all governors on appointment and this lays out what they should do on a visit and what they should not. S

We find it easy to visit. We do various things: governors with special responsibilities (i.e. the child protection governor) may meet with a relevant member of staff, others may visit a specific faculty, or (quite popular) shadow a class. S

We have three structured half-day visits every year. The subjects of these are decided at the last full meeting of the previous year. This year we had visits on the teaching of literacy, PE, and Foundation stage (with an emphasis on ICT in the foundation stage). Each visit starts with a presentation by the responsible member of staff. The governors split into smaller groups, often an experienced governor with a less-experienced governor, to visit one or more class to observe the teaching. The group reconvene with the member of staff to share what they’ve seen and to ask questions. Finally all governors fill in a report. P

Parent governors

Have you had any issues around parent governor visits and, if so, have you resolved them?

No issues: a parent governor is a governor, just like the others. S

Our parent governors are very active and good. S

Sometimes we have to work hard to get parent governors. We sometimes have difficulties getting parent governors to look beyond their own children. P

We keep it simple: parent governors do not sit in on classes where they have children. P

No issues: in fact parent governors have always been a considerable strength. S

Most are very keen and conscientious though some find the role and meetings rather alien I think. We have had some issues with governors not being sure of their role, particularly on visits and in relation to their own children. As a result we have rewritten our visits policy to emphasise that governors visit the school to help the governing body to monitor the school and to make explicit that they don’t visit classes of their own children nor of friends or relatives’ children. We have instituted group visits with a clearer focus to support this. P

Governor visits: innovations

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies? [Several answers refer to their answers to previous questions about governor visits. I have not repeated these here].

Not innovations but governors have received in-school training on data analysis, what to look for on learning walks and how the school intends to improve discipline. S

We have re-written our form to make it easier to fill in and more relevant to learning and teaching. P

In addition to ad-hoc visits by governors, we have implemented a termly governors' day when all governors are invited in and either have something loosely planned by the head or governors can request what they would like to do. This also enables governors to meet together afterwards and discuss as well as allowing anything to be discussed with the head. P

We have focussed on the monitoring aspect of governors' visits by having termly structured visits on topics chosen by the governors. This has also helped to induct new governors into their monitoring role and, for parent governors, how it differs from their role as a parent. P

MONITORING THE SCHOOL

Reports

How useful do you find the Head's report in helping you monitor the school? How useful do you find the SIP's reports in helping you monitor the school?

The Head's report is useful, the SIP's less so. We are looking at revising the format of the content/structure of the Head's report. S

The Head's report is very useful and backed up by verbal presentation. The current head is certainly more frank with governors than any other head I have known. S

The head's report is good: it does not paper over cracks and the head responds well to challenges. Her presentation of RAISEonline at the extra meeting in the autumn term is particularly helpful. The SIP's reports are more variable. There is a tendency at times to look only at the SATs results and build everything on that. But when she has time to visit the school what she says is usually helpful. P

Both the head's and SIP's reports are useful, especially if we get them at least 10 days before the meeting. It gives all governors the chance to read and digest the reports and formulate questions. P

The head's report is useful in that it is a good starting point and, over time, helps to build up a picture of the school. It tends to be one of the main focuses of the GB. The SIP's report has been immensely useful as it confirms (and potentially informs) the GB view of the school. We have also used it as an aid to improving the GB. P

Both are useful. The Head's Report is very detailed and the SIP's report is clear and to the point. It outlines what recommendations have been made. When I visit departments I always ask how the school's tracking system is being used and if they are making maximum use of the information available. S

The head's report quite useful, especially as it now focuses on strategic issues (it hasn't always). The SIP's report also quite useful. S

Our head's report is very detailed and helpful. It now includes sections written by each of the phase leaders and other post holders. This helps us to see the contribution each makes. The SIP's reports have generally been helpful and sometimes very influential in helping the school to improve. P

School statistics

How do you monitor the school's statistics (e.g. How do you use RAISEonline)?

We use statistics as a tool like any other. They get considered initially by the Achievement Committee, and then in the Head's report/full GB meetings. S

The Head's report will contain statistics on lesson observations both teaching quality and classroom discipline, attendance figures, student outcomes from both internal and external testing. Currently we do not use RAISEonline because with the school reorganisation it is out of date. I am sure we will use it in future. S

We devote a meeting to this and increasingly governor colleagues are able to pin-point issues and ask about them. The Head is also very good at drawing attention to weaknesses; inconsistencies etc and relate them to action. P

All governors have been trained in using RAISEonline. P

We have a full GB meeting dedicated to the presentation and discussion of results and statistics. Some governors have undergone training. P

I read RAISEonline annually. I go to annual review meetings of the School Improvement Plan and SEF with the Head and Senior Leadership Team. I meet regularly with the Head. S

We circulate a resume of RAISEonline at one of our strategic meetings. S

We have employed an expert to help us analyse RAISEonline for the last few years and this has been money very well spent. This annual session is now for all staff and governors. The detailed analysis of progress data is reported in the head's report and in more detail in curriculum committee. I have been invited to senior management meetings to listen to the detailed consideration that is given to individual children's progress in the school using the school's computerised records and how this is used to allocate support resources. P

Governor visits

How useful do you find visits in helping the Governing Body monitor the work of the school?

They're a device, like any other. S

The governing body now is very active and the reports are extremely helpful in checking the progress of the school. S

Essential. I encourage colleagues to ask simple but relevant questions, e.g. "Why are our children not doing as well as those elsewhere?" I stress the importance of down to earth responses: governing bodies do not need to be and indeed should not be all education experts. P

They are vital to understand the school P

When they occur they are useful and interesting but not in great depth with lay governors. P

Not so much used to monitor as to make sure governors are familiar with the school. S

Since we have formalised our visits into three focussed group visits a year they have become a more important part of our monitoring. Group visits have helped develop our collective sense of the governing body as monitors of the

school. The presentation and question and answer parts of visits have helped strengthen our appreciation of the staff's expertise and their appreciation of what we bring to the school. P

Governors with specific areas of responsibility

How useful do you find having governors with particular responsibilities?

Very useful. Each committee is chaired/ populated with at least one member who might be considered a domain practitioner and/or expert. We make a particular effort for all governors to be equally involved. Informally we count chairing a committee as 2 points of involvement, and non-chair membership as 1 point. We then try to make sure that everybody has the same number of points. S

Vital. No governor can cover all aspects of school life. S

It does depend on individuals, but the best are excellent. We have one governor whose work means he has to travel the world and quite often has to miss meetings but he does our end of term interviews with Y6 leavers and his work is excellent: he relates well with the children and can pin-point anything that should be improved. P

We always have had governors linked to subjects. One governor (i.e. the Chair) cannot know every aspect of every subject. P

We have never really successfully managed to get this working although we have tried once or twice. P

They are rarely called upon by the school but I am encouraging them to meet with the relevant staff members and so report to governors on that area. S

We only have the statutory ones, but that is quite useful. S

Linking governors hasn't worked especially well for us, maybe because in primary there are not the distinctions there are in secondary. The special needs governor has made helpful contact with the senco. P

School policies

How do you monitor school policies?

Policies are allocated across committees, with review dates tracked by each committee and the main GB. S

The committees deal with them on a cyclic basis. The business manager has responsibility for ensuring they go to committees at the right time. S

We try to look at them each year, but there are now so many that this can prove onerous. I think we are able to look at those we most need to check, guided by the head and the clerk. P

The head presents an overview of each. The full governors' meeting adopts new policies at one of its meetings during the year. P

School policies are documented and delegated to the relevant committee. The full list and review dates are monitored by reporting to the full GB. P

Policies are reviewed on a two-year rota, S

Most policies are reviewed in relevant committees S

We now deal with most policies by sending draft policies round by email either to a committee's members or all governors, depending on the policy. Comments have to be given within two weeks. We have a policy detailing how to deal with any objections/ suggestions: the school has to respond either with a change or an explanation within

two weeks. If there is continuing disagreement then it is discussed in a committee or full governing body meeting. We've found that this has speeded up the process considerably, been more efficient for governors and the school, and resulted in more in-depth scrutiny. P

School Evaluation Form

Do/did you monitor the SEF and if so how and is/was it useful?

We do use it. It's essentially a useful checklist for us to work to, to ensure that we track all that we should. S

Yes, and we have an amended version in place. Mr Gove may, of course, call for something different in the near future. S

We look at it fairly regularly. I have written one or two governor bits myself, and governors tend to accept it, rather than challenge. But the head and I do go through it. P

Every governor receives a copy of the SEF and is invited to contribute feedback/ideas P

Yes and yes S

Yes, we monitor the SEF in special working parties set up for this purpose. S

It is emailed to every governor with an invitation to comment. We've found it useful to help us focus our monitoring on issues raised. P

Innovations in monitoring the school

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies?

I have tried to get colleagues to e.g. be more involved with the SEF and talk of any skills they might have that we do not know about, but with little effect. P

We have formed an executive committee that specifically has oversight and input into the school development plan and monitors progress against leadership targets etc not covered by other committees. It also helps oversee agenda setting for the GB to improve monitoring. S

I have regular meetings with the Head with prepared agenda and questions. S

Our focussed termly half-day governor visits have helped us focus our monitoring. Preparing for Governormark has helped us to audit what we are doing and has been very helpful.

APPOINTMENTS

Governor involvement in appointments

How involved is the governing body in the appointment of staff?

Governors are involved in the recruitment of all senior staff and optionally involved on other recruitments on a case by case basis (i.e. if there is a governor with useful expertise/experience, and if they're available so their availability doesn't impede the recruitment process). S

Governors are involved in senior appointments only. S

The chair of personnel is often involved and also myself. P

Where practical we like to have a governor on every appointment panel. P

Two governors were on the recent panel for recruiting a DHT. The appointment of other staff is delegated to the HT and monitored (by teaching standards, etc) by the GB. P

Governors are involved in all appointments. S

Governors are very involved. We serve on all appointment panels for teaching staff and for senior support staff. S

Governors are involved in all appointments above main professional grade. P

Innovations in recruitment

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies?

We developed our own process of selection for the Headteacher recently and saved a lot of money by not buying into one of these organisations such as TES. We believe it was very successful and worked well. One of the features was three lots of interviews, Students (all years), Staff (across the school including a variety of non-teaching staff) and finally a panel of governors (we have five committees and therefore five Vice Chairs making a senior team of governors. S

GOVERNOR TRAINING

Your governor training

What training do governors in your school undertake?

Various, but limited. S

There is some in-school training but also we use training offered by Governor Services. S

We use both the Southwark Diocesan Board courses and those from Greenwich. We are thinking of having a whole governor session attached to a governors' meeting. We recently completed and were given the Bishop's Certificate in Governance. Different members have attended a range of courses to ensure the governors as a whole are up to date. P

Training is through governor services, both at the PDC and also in-house. P

Various training but not structured. P

Governors are encouraged to attend training events. S

Not as much as we should. Most new governors have attended induction training. S

All new governors have attended induction training. Some governors are very good at searching out training opportunities but most are not. Auditing ourselves for Governormark has been helpful in identifying where we already have expertise and where we need training. P

Unfulfilled training needs

Is there any training you would like provided that is not available at present?

None really. S

I think training is all out there if you look. S

A whole governing body session or two would be helpful. P

We would like training in the roles of various governors such as Health and Safety, Child Protection etc. S

Innovations in training

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies?

Not an innovation but using the skills within the school can provide training that is pertinent to the school and may be cheaper. S

All governors were trained together at school for safeguarding. S

We commissioned whole governing body training on RAISEonline, and that was very useful. S

Our RAISEonline training was very effective. P

CLUSTERS

Governor involvement in your cluster

How much do you feel involved in the management of your school's cluster?

Not very much. The Head does a good job on this, and reports back to governors. S

None at the moment. S

Not greatly. The cluster is very small - three primaries, two children centres and a secondary which does not attend. I think perhaps the cluster arrangement in this area needs consideration and possible adjustment. P

Could be improved. P

We are not. P

We now send a governor representative to Cluster meetings. S

Not at all. S

Cluster matters are reported in the Head's report. Another chair in the cluster proposed a meeting of chairs but it never happened. Chairs have been invited to one cluster meeting where priorities were discussed but I was the only one who was able to attend. P

Innovation in clusters

Are there any innovations that you have tried that you think might benefit other governing bodies?

None of the chairs reported any innovation.

Any other things your governing body do that could help others.

Not at this time. S

We attend meetings well and this includes committees which are always quorate. I do think the church school ethos (I am the LEA rep) helps a sense of duty. P

We have found the audit that we have done on the way to Governormark to be very helpful. I think it was a major factor in our governing body being awarded the grade "outstanding" by Ofsted. If other schools are put off by the cost it is worth remembering that you can do the audit for nothing and only decide at the end whether to submit the forms.

Any things for which you'd welcome suggestions

Items we might include in another survey

Clear financial figures on what becoming an Academy does to the budget. One of the supposed gains from being an Academy is more money. Is this true and how much? S

Our governing body is overwhelmingly white, a problem which we need to find a way of tackling. P