

**THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THE SCHOOL GOVERNOR:
A LETTER FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR
LIFELONG LEARNING**

As the Cabinet member for lifelong learning I should like to take this opportunity to thank you, our school governors – and there are 1200 of you in all – for the hard work you do throughout the year to support the work of Greenwich schools. The national strategy for education continues to be progressed – consultation on proposals for the 14 – 19 age group and for youth services, considerations post Tomlinson report, the healthy lifestyles and well-being initiatives, and the Every Child Matters agenda. As governors we know that every child does matter to us, and we are aware of the duties we have for the children for whom we hold responsibility. How can we make sure that our Governors are working effectively with the right support mechanisms from the local authority to guide them in their next task? I have listed below ten points and I should welcome feedback on my suggestions.
(angela.cornforth@greenwich.gov.uk)



1. As a Council we should continue to work towards an integrated Education and Children's Services agenda with one lead professional overseeing the provision made and with clear funding streams dedicated to the services provided. In this way we will ensure that the welfare of our young people is safeguarded and that vulnerable youngsters cannot fall through the net in the way they access our service provision. In our Borough no child should be left out or left behind.
2. We should continue our drive to raise standards of attainment and work together to encourage good teaching and focused learning in all areas of the curriculum, and especially in the core areas of English, Mathematics and Science.
3. We should involve young people and parents in our plans and delivery, and listen to them so that their thoughts inform our planning. By recognising the responsibilities which need to be recognised and exercised by all sections of a school, we will build a greater sense of community in those schools.
4. We should build schools for the future which will provide a broad balanced and relevant curriculum delivered in an

environment which fosters whole class learning and individual learning. Our schools must be able to meet rising individual aspirations.

5. We should recruit and retain qualified, qualitative staff who understand our vision and who want to play a part in our future. Governors are vital to this process.
6. We should tackle truancy and exclusions and work with children who are reluctant to engage in school life. Governors should request data in respect of truancy and exclusions, and should monitor the Head teacher's action planning showing how a school will maximise the attendance and engagement of its students, and how students will be enabled to realise their potential and make a full contribution to the school they attend.
7. We should encourage staff from black and minority ethnic groups to come and work in our schools and to find positive career development in our Authority.
8. We should continue to provide training programmes which enable governors to have the financial knowledge to hold the school to account and to ensure that value for money principles apply.
9. Our training programmes should continue to promote good governance through self evaluation and through an understanding of what constitutes best practice.
10. Finally we should continue to work together – councillors, Head teachers, teaching and non teaching staff and Governors. The safety, welfare and wellbeing of the children in our care depend upon our teamwork and our commitment. Our pupils should go to school so that they can discover the reserves of potential that they have, and so that they will come to learn what they have within themselves and which possibilities are open to them. Good teachers and governors come to know the students in their care, and are able to see the people they could become with the benefit of a good educational grounding. That is the task which we face together in partnership. Once again, thank you for everything you do, and please let me know your thoughts.



Angela Cornforth

From the editor: As well as responding to Angela, could you let us know how you feel about her suggestions? Your responses would appear in the next issue of Voice. Send them to margery@nzerem.com or Margery Nzerem, 20 Beaconsfield Rd., London SE3 7LZ

GOVERNORS' ALLOWANCES

The National Governors Council and DfES have produced a good practice guide to developing an Allowances Policy for governing bodies. For more details see the NGC website www.ngc.org.uk

Recommendations

It should be acknowledged that being a governor is not a cost free activity. Payment of allowances for expenses which have been incurred and are verifiable is not a reward!

All governing bodies should adopt a formal written allowances policy and encourage governors to claim.

Accepting that schools do face financial constraints the governing body should consider whether to place a financial limit on the total allowances pot.

It is clear that Chairs of Governors face additional costs over and above the rest of the governing body and we believe that they should take the lead in raising the issue of allowances, ensuring a policy is in place and that all members of the governing body claim.

Ensure that the policy is reviewed at regular intervals. We recommend an annual review.

Coordinators of Governor Services are also well placed to advise and encourage governors in their areas. COGs will be proactive in encouraging governing bodies to set up allowances policies and to claim.

In its campaign to Raise the Profile of governors DfES should stress that as valued volunteers governors should not feel stigmatised by claiming allowances. The work they do is every bit as valuable as that carried out by JPs and no-one questions their reimbursement.

Issues To Consider When Drawing Up An Allowances Policy

What items will members of the governing body be able to make a claim for? E.g. travel expenses, childcare, postage and phone calls.

Consider whether to set an annual budget limit for the allowances fund.

Consider what mechanism you will adopt for making and verifying claims.

All policies should be reviewed

regularly. Consider in drawing up your policy at what interval you will review it. You may also need to review the amount individuals can claim, for instance, in the light of any changes to the Inland Revenue mileage allowances.

Ensure that all new members of the governing body are provided with a copy of the policy and any relevant claim forms.

Ensure that your policy is in line with The Education (Governors' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and the DfES Guidance Paying Allowances for School Governors (key details reproduced at Annex 3).

The Education (Governors' Allowances) Regulations 2003 are available from The Stationery Office (ISBN 0-11-045135-X) or on the Stationery Office's website at:

<http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2003/20030523.htm>

The full text of the DfES' Guidance can be found on Governornet at:

<http://www.governornet.co.uk/linkAttachments/GovernorAllowancesOct03.pdf>

HOW WE INTRODUCED A NEW SCHOOL UNIFORM

September 2005 has seen the successful launch of a new school uniform at Fossdene Primary School in Charlton with approximately 95% of the children to date wearing it. To achieve this took a year of planning and consultation, which we are happy to share. As you're no doubt aware, the issue of school uniforms can be an emotive one. We found that broad consultation with parents, their children and governors was essential to our success.

Although Fossdene had a school uniform, the majority of students did not wear it. However, with the appointment of our new Headteacher, Cathie Doyle, in 2003, came a fresh outlook for all aspects of the school, including a new school logo. It was with the introduction of the new logo that parents began asking Cathie about the school uniform - would there be a new one? Would we have one at all? And even, could we have a uniform? Taking her lead from parents, Cathie considered incorporating the logo onto sweatshirts to create a new uniform. Also, if we were to have a uniform she felt the school needed to be unified by a single colour - green - rather than the previous choice of 2 colours -

red and navy blue.

We decided to formally test the water with parents at our autumn Parents' Evening, displaying the new logo printed on computer drawings of sweatshirts. The response was very positive, so we followed up with a questionnaire about all aspects of the proposed new uniform. Again the majority of respondents were in favour with one overwhelming proviso: that wearing the uniform be compulsory. The results of the survey were presented to Full Governors and the issue of a new uniform was put to a vote. It passed.

At our next Parents' Evening we held a further consultation with parents, displaying sample sweatshirts and the logo. This allowed us another opportunity to speak to parents and their children one-to-one. After the summer half term we held several after-school pre-ordering/fitting sessions with sample sweatshirts of all sizes. Once back at school in September we held a further week of fitting/purchasing of sweatshirts with great support from our office staff.

The issue of making the uniform compulsory is a sticky one, but fortunately it is one that we haven't had to confront - almost all the children are wearing it, and they look FANTASTIC! We believe this is due to a high level of consultation, a strong desire by many

parents for it, enthusiasm by governors and staff, and a growing sense amongst the children of school spirit.

*Nesba Crenshaw and Marie Westlake
Joint Vice Chairs of Governors,
Fossdene Primary School*

Has your governing body done anything you think might be interesting/useful to another governing body? Write it up and send it to Margery Nzerem, at 20 Beaconsfield Rd., London SE3 7LZ or margery@nzerem.com



SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANS - ENCOURAGING PUPILS TO WALK AND CYCLE

Sustrans (the sustainable transport charity) 'works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport in order to reduce motor traffic and its adverse effects.' It publishes the free 'Routes 2 Action' magazine, a 'termly publication packed with information, guidance and ideas on how to tackle issues related to' journeys to school, and how to encourage pupils to walk or cycle. If you are interested, e-mail subscription@sustrans.org.uk or write to: Safe Routes to Schools, Sustrans, Freeport BS 7739, Bristol, BS1 4BR. When subscribing, please state that you are a governor.



EXCLUSION APPEALS - IT'S URGENT TO GET YOUR PAPERWORK RIGHT!

If a Head's recommendation for permanent exclusion is upheld by the governing body, the parents can appeal to an independent tribunal organised by the Council. I have seen these panels from both sides, both as a member and by appearing before one when a parent from my school appealed. I have realised that, often, the paperwork given to these panels by schools is not good enough.

Remember that the panel is not there to automatically uphold the governing body's recommendation. It is there to look at the evidence again and decide whether it thinks the decision to permanently exclude was reasonable. It can only reach its decision on the evidence it has in front of it. **If that paperwork is not good enough, then, even though the school's decision to permanently exclude might actually be a reasonable one, the panel may rule in favour of the pupil on the grounds that the school has not proved its case.**

Good paperwork needs to start with the original letter from the Head. There are two grounds on which a pupil can be excluded. The DfES guidance says that normally such exclusion will be 'the final step in a process for dealing with disciplinary offences following a wide range of other strategies'. However, in exceptional circumstances it may be 'appropriate to permanently exclude a child for a first or 'one off' offence'. The letter from Head should therefore make quite clear which grounds apply.

Then make sure that the panel gets enough information. Send a copy of the exclusion letter and the minutes of the governors' panel that considered the Head's recommendation.

Witness statements should be circulated for the final offence. These should be signed and dated. If possible,

include statements from independent witnesses.

If the exclusion is for a 'last straw' offence, there will have been other offences. Document them all and circulate witness statements for some of them (preferably the most serious ones).

If relevant, circulate information on any support that has been given to the pupil. If the pupil has an ISP or a PSP, circulate a copy of that. The school should be well represented at the panel hearing.

As well as a member of the SMT (preferably the Head) and the Chair of the Governors' Discipline Panel, someone from the school who knows the pupil and the incident(s) leading up to the exclusion and who can give detailed information should be present. If a teacher has made a witness statement that teacher should attend the appeal hearing to be available to answer questions the panel may have.

The school representatives need to be able to answer detailed questions. If the school says that a letter was sent to the parents asking them to come in for a meeting, or telling them that, if the pupil offended again a permanent exclusion might result, and the parents say they never received the letter, it is not very convincing if the best the school can say is 'We usually send such letters'. Some one needs to be able to say 'The letter was sent on May 17 and here is a copy from the pupil's file'. It is not enough to say 'We usually offer counselling in a case like this'. Someone needs to be able to say 'I talked to the pupil in February and offered to arrange counselling.'

If the final offence involves verbal or physical violence to a member of staff, it might be a good idea if that member of staff appeared as a witness.

Margery Nzerem

THE BLACK AND ETHNIC MINORITY SUPPORT FORUM

Some of you may know that there are approximately 1300 governors in Greenwich. Of that figure ethnic minority governors number around 170 (13%) in total. The Black and Minority Ethnic Support Forum, which is now established, recently held elections for a new Chair. The successful candidate was Richard Pittman Weekes II who is a community governor at Crown Woods School in Eltham.

A number of focus points will form the initial thrust of activities that Richard has in mind. He intends to concentrate firstly on asking existing members to examine what their particular role is in a team setting. This will be the foundation that should harmonize the group and shape them into an effective variety of individuals. Becoming emotionally involved is another important aspect of teamwork that Richard believes will get people to care about what they are doing and why. This should be easy, as deep down everyone wants to be valued and to be useful. So getting people to know what a team is and how it works is crucial to achieving success.

Richard has said this before, and those of you that know him will know that he is passionate and bold and doesn't care who gets the credit, just as long as the team achieves what it set out to do. New members to the Forum will always be welcome just as much as those who used to come along and don't anymore. Richard is expecting you to come up and talk to him wherever you see him and he is also expecting to see you all when you attend the next meeting at 6.30 pm on 15 November 2005 at the G.C.R.E office, 1-4 Beresford Street, SE18. An agenda and other relevant information will be sent to every BME governor before the meeting.

Do remember that the intention is to hold effective meetings that start on time. Please be there before the start, as he states that he will never wait for anyone. He knows that there are talented individuals out there and he wants to build a good strong team that he can trust and who in turn will trust him. If you want to know what's going to happen now that he is Chair, go along and see. He will be waiting.

Richard Weekes II

ADVICE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR GOVERNORS

Our clerks are of course a good source of advice for governors and governing bodies and probably our first point of call. But another excellent source of advice is Goverline, offering free advice. The number is 0800 0722 181, and then are available from 9 am to 10 pm weekdays, 11 am to 4pm weekends. And for information, discussion boards, consultations - really almost anything a governor would want - try www.governomet.co.uk/

A LETTER FROM A GOVERNOR

Dear Voice,

I am writing this letter to express views on moral behaviour in our schools today. I have been a school Governor for almost ten years, from Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools.

Schools are one of the most powerful tools we possess to raise the aspirations, confidence and prosperity of our communities. Among Local Government services, school focus on the future rather than dealing with the past incidents of society.

However one cannot deny the fact that there is a relationship between schools and community. It is impossible to isolate one from the other.

As a Governor I have seen a decline of moral values in our education standard. This decline contributes to various factors and unable us to reach a higher standard of achievement. This too have an impact on our society.

Children are allowed to wear whatever they choose to wear. instead of their uniform. Schools have ethics on what children are allowed to wear. This should not be alter or change the code of dressing of the school.

Lack of moral discipline contribute to exclusions from schools, lack of respect to teachers and other fellow students. I am talking about race , as mention before moral breakdown affect every individuals in our society regardless of what nationality, culture or race. Yes, there is a strong relationship between schools and the community and as the saying goes whatever a child learn at home that what the child practices.

There must be clearly defined boundaries between students and teachers. There are codes of guidelines concerning behaviour that is acceptable and unacceptable, these guidelines must be implemented. They must not lie dormant and must be used in a fair and decisive way.

One can clearly look and see the effects the decline has our community, rise of job cultures, graffitist and of course anti -social behaviour. I am aware that the government is doing and making a lot of effort to eradicate this kind of behaviour which put our society in danger.

There are times when I am doing my shopping I had to act as a community officer or assisting the officers to remove the crowd of children form the street, this is very risky but as a member of the community I still feel that I can offer some help when needed.

I am aware that the council and the Director of Education Mr Paul Burnett are doing a good work in the borough to raise the standard of education and continue to eradicate immoral behaviour in our schools. What I love to see included in the School Curriculum is The Ten Commandments and more prayers pray in schools frequently. This would change the behaviour of our schools and would also have great impact on our society for the better. There would be more love, respect and understanding toward each other.

Ruth Gabriel
Governor

Would you like to respond to Ruth's letter? Or write a letter of your own? Send your letter to Margery Nzerem, 20 Beaconsfield Rd., London SE3 7LZ or margery@nzerem.com

NATIONAL GOVERNORS COUNCIL KEEPS YOU UP TO DATE

As the AGG is a member of the NGC, individual governors can have access to the membership areas of the NGC website. www.ngc.org.uk. To obtain a password, telephone or email the NGC office. This will allow you to take part in NGC consultations and see briefing papers on such issues as the Three Year Budget, the 14-19 White Paper and the replacement of management allowances by Teaching and Learning Responsibilities. (AGG would be grateful for a copy of any response you make, to help inform our responses)

SCHOOLS FORUM

The re-elected Greenwich School Forum is back at work and faces a heavy agenda as it comes to grip with the implications and details of the new funding arrangements.

Forums, generally, are being given more responsibilities. There has been, it seems to me, a steady accretion of these over the last few years. The underlying principle remains that Ministers recognise the view of local consensus. The Forum is the elected representative body of the school communities within a local authority (LA) with which it works in partnership. A Forum only recommends and the LA decides but there is the increasing expectation that the LA takes on board its Forum's views. I have heard it described as the Ministers ceding powers to the local consensus, not a reduction in the powers of the LA. But why am I beginning to wonder about this?

Forums' work remains with recommendations concerning the share of the funds central government grant for the School Budget. An LA's central budget stays for them to decide.

Given that ahead of us are tasks such as giving views on local implications of new multi-year budgets and the transfer of threshold and performance pay grant to DSG and the updating of Non-AWPU data the LA may be glad we're there and that we, not they, must translate all these into English and then be sure we understand them!

Allan MacCarthy

Chair of the Greenwich Borough Schools Forum



ARE YOU HAVING TROUBLE FILLING A VACANCY ON YOUR GOVERNING BODY?

You might want to consider approaching the School Governors' One Stop Shop (SGOSS) for help. This is 'a small charity dedicated to recruiting governor volunteers and helping them find a suitable vacancy. The service is FREE.'

You can tell the SGOSS what, if any, if with specific skills you would like a new governor to have. The SGOSS explains to prospective governors what is involved, and the governors they recruit have a much higher staying on rate than governors in general.

Interested? Contact Howard Burton at Greenwich Governors Support; he's in regular touch with the One Stop Shop Or contact them directly: School Governors' One Stop Shop, 64 Essex Rd, London N1 8LR, 0870-241-3883, www.sgoss.org.uk;

info@schoolgovernors-oss.co.uk

