

NEW LONDON SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS SYSTEM

We thought you might be interested in this information from Greenwich's secondary admission booklet for 2005/6:

Every year around 60,000 pupils living in London transfer to secondary school, many crossing borough boundaries to do so. From this year all 33 London boroughs together with eight councils bordering the capital have signed up to a new system to co-ordinate admissions to their secondary schools.

The new co-ordinated admissions system will be fairer, with more parents being offered one of their preferred schools earlier and fewer getting no initial offer at all. It will be easier for parents to manage, reducing anxiety for them and their children, and will also reduce the workload for schools.

How the new system will work

Under the new London Schools Admissions System, all parents will list the schools that they want to apply for on one form, ranking them in order of preference. (This is important as only one offer will be made and this will be from the highest ranked school able to make an offer). This form will then be returned to the council in which the child lives.

All the councils taking part in the London Schools Admissions System will then use a computerised system to pass on details of applications for schools in other areas and to co-ordinate the offer of places to make sure that nobody gets offered more than one school place.

The decision on whether a place can be offered will continue to be made by the admission authority for each school listed. Where a school is over subscribed, its published admission criteria will be used to decide the order in which applicants will be offered places. Unless specifically required to do so by the published admissions criteria of the school, councils will not pass on details of where the school was ranked, and no school will be told about other schools a parent has applied for.

The councils will hold the offer for the highest preference on the parent's form and release all other lower preference offers, so that these places can be offered to other applicants. Potential offers are then exchanged between councils until they are in a position to make the single best offer to parents using all available places. All offers will be made on the same day.

Preventing and Managing Racism

The role of Governors is extremely important in tackling racism and promoting race equality in schools.

Following the introduction of the Race Relations Amendment Act in 2000, governing bodies have had a legal responsibility to ensure schools actively promote race equality, which includes developing effective systems to record and manage racist incidents. As part of this process all schools should have a Race Equality Policy in place and a process for reviewing its implementation.

The Commission for Race Equality (CRE) has developed standards to support you in carrying out this duty. 'A guide for schools' can be downloaded from www.cre.gov.uk.



All schools should have guidance called 'School Racist Incident Report and Information Pack' which includes forms to report an incident. For the second year the

Council has received 100% returns from schools reporting racist incidents and I would like to thank all governors for their support in achieving this. However, about 25% of schools report they have not had incidents, some for the whole year or more. While this may be the case it is important that if your school is not recording incidents on a regular basis you ensure pupils, parents/guardians and school staff are fully aware of the reporting procedures.

All incidents should be reported to the Education Service at the end of each term. The governing body should also review this information. Identifying the number, the background of victims and the types and places of incidents are important in developing your school planning to manage racism, including meeting the governing bodies legal duty.

If you would like further information on this or any other equalities matter, please contact Liz Bryan, Education Policy Officer (Inclusion and Equalities) Tel 020 8921 8046 e-mail elizabeth.bryan@greenwich.gov.uk

Thoughts From Birmingham Governors' Association No Staying Power?Or What?

About 30% of newly appointed governors leave after only one or two meetings! Schools in the city and the LEA work hard to fill vacancies on their governing bodies, so it is a real disappointment to discover that, having found new governors, about a third of these leave before becoming fully involved in the governing body. The reasons for this high level of 'leakage' are many and varied – and some quite out of our control.

Two questions, however, come to mind:

Do new governors really know what to expect before committing themselves?

Do new governors feel welcome and are they helped to join in and contribute in those crucial early weeks on the governing body?

Both the LEA and schools can work together to address these questions.

It is tempting to play down the role of governors when trying to persuade a prospective new governor to join. But we all know that the role of governor carries a considerable weight of corporate responsibility and demands a high degree of commitment – factors which must be clearly communicated to volunteers at an early stage in the discussion.

Once a new governor is recruited, what is his/her experience?

In the best of cases, before their first meeting, they are:

- contacted by the head teacher and invited to visit the school
- contacted by the Chair who arranges a meeting to introduce him/herself, discuss strengths with a view to committee membership, etc
- contacted by the clerk to confirm personal details
- sent appropriate paperwork, including prospectus, SIP, last annual report, minutes from last meeting, dates and agenda for next meeting
- assigned a 'mentor' who can give them some background information, e.g. talk through the SIP, committee structure, meeting format, etc

At the first meeting they are:

- informally introduced to everyone and made to feel welcome, perhaps at a short pre-meeting social
- encouraged to clarify any uncertainties during or after the meeting

Sadly this is not always the case. Often cursory introductions are made at the first meeting and then it is 'down to business' – in a language and format that could be very alien to the new governor. The discussion of SIPs, the SMT, Performance Management, Key Stages, SATs, etc can send an experienced governor's mind reeling – what must it do to a newcomer?

Is it any wonder that so many governors – especially those without direct daily contact with the school – feel they are 'outside the club'? Maybe they feel they won't be missed... and are they? And yet, how much valuable expertise, effort and perspective are we losing through being so focussed on the business in hand that we forget to induct new members appropriately. Schools spend considerable effort to ensure that new pupils and staff feel welcome and comfortable – why should it be different for governors?

TOP TIP

set up a Buddie System

New Governors Induction Programme at Swanshurst School

Over the last 9 months Swanshurst School Governors have developed an Induction Scheme to welcome new governors joining the Governing Body. The idea was to get over that initial hurdle that often faces new Governors. I remember well the daunting prospect of my first few meetings not knowing people, not understanding the jargon and not being very effective. Having discussed our own experiences the governors have now put a system in place to welcome new Governors, to give them encouragement and support, so that they can feel more useful in a shorter time. The system we have adopted is not rocket science, even though we are a Specialist Science College. When a new Governor is elected, appointed or co-opted they are contacted by the Chair with a general welcome to the Governing Body and very soon after by a governor who will become their 'Buddie' for as long as they need. The Buddie is there at the first and subsequent meetings to welcome the new Governor and to introduce him or her to the other members, thereby breaking the ice. The new Governor is also invited into school for a morning, with their Buddie, for a tour of the school to witness first hand the operation that they will have a role in overseeing. We are also introducing a 'jargon buster' document to help the new recruit fathom what we are all talking about in 'educationese'. In addition we have assigned one governor to manage and monitor this system, who is well supported by one of the Deputy Heads and the process is being constantly reviewed to enhance the arrival experience of new governors. Though it is early days for this new system we are sure that it will help prevent some of our new governors leaving after a short space of time due to a lack of care in their early weeks and months in the job.

"The foundation of every state is the education of its youth."

- Diogenes

ANNUAL SCHOOL PROFILES

Governors will know that the DfES has been carrying out a consultation on a new document for schools. This would provide information regarding the school in a very compact format; the consultation suggests a maximum of four sides of A4. National Governors' Council has consulted its membership on the proposals and there was general agreement that this was a worthwhile concept and that it could replace the statutory requirement for governors to prepare an Annual Report to Parents. It was not thought that the profile should replace the school prospectus. The NGC responses supported the profile containing: -

- Pupil performance including comparisons with national and LEA benchmarked schools preferably over a three year period.
- How the school serves its pupils and how inclusive is the school. This may include a statement of how the school is working towards improving its inclusiveness.
- The most recent Ofsted assessment set against the schools self assessment. The caveat here is that the Ofsted report needs to be up to date.
- The schools curriculum offer including extra curricular activities. The number of pupils involved in the extra curricular activities should be specified.
- How the head and governors see priorities for future improvement and progress made against previously identified priorities.
- What the schools links with and what it offers to the wider community.

There was a further question regarding other information that should be included. As you can imagine there was a multitude of additions including financial information, key strengths, aims/ethos and teacher turnover. There was agreement that the profile should be prepared by the leadership team but signed off by the governing body.

Other comments mentioned the need for strict objectivity, the costs of printing, especially colour printing, and the possibility of using on-line information. All this in four sides of A4! That will be a challenge.

MORE PUBLICATIONS FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL GOVERNORS (formerly National Association of Governors and Managers)

Paper 38: GOVERNORS: WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO

This excellent paper covers, succinctly and clearly, the composition and basic functions and responsibilities of governing bodies. It also includes sections on relationship with the other interested individuals and groups - the Head, the LEA, parents, staff, the Secretary of State, and the community. Much of the information can also be found in 'School Governors: A Guide to the Law', but I found this publication much more accessible. It would make an excellent reference document for any governing body.

Paper 50: SELECTING HEADS & DEPUTY HEADS

This is another excellent paper. It begins by setting out the legal requirements that a governing body must observe when appointing a Head or a Deputy. It follows this up with clear and informative sections on how to actually do the job - 'The Nature of the Selection Process' (including setting the salary!), 'Organising the Process', 'The Advertisement', and many others. It should be helpful for any governing body which is facing this challenge for the first time or which may want to reconsider its procedures.

All papers are available from the National Association of School Governors, 2nd Floor, SQB1, 29 Smallbrook, Queensway, Birmingham B5 4HG, 0121-643-5787, governorhq@nasg.org.uk, Website: www.nasg.org.uk



National Governors Council (NGC) Publications

A full list of NGC publications is available from the NGC Office (National Governors' Council, Lonsdale House, 52 Blucher Street, Birmingham B1 1QU) and is posted on the website www.ngc.org.uk

Some items to note (*available in hard copy from the NGC Office or downloadable from the website*):

- ◆ *Information Pack for Governors on Workforce Remodelling*. The third guidance pack is now available from NGC.
- ◆ *NGC Briefings: Current Briefings: The Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners and The Bichard Inquiry Report*.
- ◆ *NGC's Welcome to Governance*: price: £3.00 incl. p&p.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO RAISE ATTENDANCE AND CUT TRUANCY

Thomas Tallis secondary school was one of the first schools in the country to use Bromcom – the electronic registration system – and despite the initial teething troubles and staff concerns it has been a success.

Every member of staff is issued with a Bromcom folder which they use to take all their registers, send messages and send assessment and report grades. It has transformed our ability to monitor attendance as attendance reports can be printed in seconds and viewed on screen even more quickly. We employ an administrative assistant whose main role is attendance and she has access to all areas of the system.

We have been working extremely hard at Tallis over the past eighteen months to improve our attendance and punctuality rates – for the past year we have worked even closer with our Attendance Advisory Officer – who liaises closely with the Deputy Head, attendance administrative assistant, the Police Community Liaison Officer, Heads of Year, tutors, parents and students – without her excellent input and good common sense, attendance might not be so good.



After raising our attendance by about 3% we decided to investigate truancy call! This is a separate system to Bromcom but it enables our attendance administrative assistant to automatically ring the homes of students who are not in school – it is a brilliant system and our unauthorised absence figures have almost dropped to nil – the truancy call system has an “annoyance” factor, as it keeps calling parents on the hour until 9 p.m. until they reply. The system keeps a record of all answers and is used to ensure the ‘validity’ of the parent calling.

We have also started using the system to alert parents to Open Evenings, reports going home, early closing of school and celebration weeks. This list is endless as it can be used to contact all parents, or a group or just a single parent – the major disadvantage is the frequency at which people seem to change their phone numbers but parents are made very aware of the need for accurate information and generally this has been a very minor problem.

Bromcom and truancy call do have their downsides – for example when all the Bromcom receivers went down on the first day of term – back to paper registers (!) but with staff and student cooperation, registers were taken and entered on the system as normal once it was up and running. The technical support for both of these systems is very good and the staff are always accessible.

The system does work for Thomas Tallis – it has taken a fair bit of work both with staff, students and parents but providing we are all after the same aim – this is ensuring that students are in school, in every lesson and learning – we can show that it is a success.

Maggie Richards
Deputy Head
Thomas Tallis School



NEW OFSTED FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNORS

The new OFSTED framework is being refined to take account of issues of governor involvement. In most pilot schools, two governors have been seen (the chair and one other) and the short notice has not impeded this so far. David Bell is clear that the new Self Evaluation Forms (SEFs) should be signed off by the governing body and appears to have sympathy with NGC's view that governors ‘must’, rather than ‘should’ be involved in the formulation of the self evaluation.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WRITE A LETTER/TELL OTHER GOVERNORS WHAT YOUR SCHOOL IS DOING/ASK A QUESTION?

We would welcome input from readers to future issues of VOICE. Perhaps your school has done something interesting you think other governors might like to know about. You may have a problem you think another governing body might have solved, and you'd welcome some advice from others. Or you have some thoughts on educational matters you'd like to share.

Send your contributions to Margery Nzerem, 20 Beaconsfield Rd, London SE3 7LZ, or email them to margery@nzerem.com