

# LET'S GET COUNCILLORS INVOLVED IN OUR SCHOOLS

commitments of the governing body.

Why cannot school governing bodies ask their local ward councillors to become an associate member of their governing body? On the [www.governor.net.co.uk](http://www.governor.net.co.uk) website it states 'governing bodies can benefit from being able to draw on expertise and experience from outside the formal governor membership'. Associate members can have bestowed voting rights within a committee, but not on any resolution concerning: admissions, pupil discipline, election or appointment of governors, or the budget and financial

When 8 years ago Nick Raynsford the then Minister for Local Government introduced the Local Government Act 2000, he wanted to separate the executive functions of the Council from the rest of the Council functions such as the full Council meeting, standing committees e.g. Planning, Licensing etc. and its role of overview and scrutiny. The reason for doing this was to deliver greater efficiency, transparency and accountability of local authorities. The new arrangements were intended to ensure that decisions could be taken more quickly and efficiently than in then existing committee system, that the individuals or bodies responsible for decision-making could be more readily identified by the public, and that those decision-makers could be held to account in public by overview and scrutiny committees. A by-product of the new arrangement was that back-bench councillors would need to spend less time in the Town Hall and so be able to go out into the community.

In Greenwich the Labour Party is the majority party with 36 councillors out of a total of 51 and the executive function is carried out by a cabinet of 10 Labour councillors, consisting of the leader, deputy leader and 8 councillors who are given specific areas of responsibility e.g. Jackie Smith is responsible for Children's Services. The rest of the councillors (all 41 of them) via **public** scrutiny committees then have the role of overview and scrutiny to ensure that the policies and plans of the executive are acceptable.

Finally each political party regularly holds **private** group meetings of its councillors to discuss any issue pertaining to the council. The Labour group meeting is the key meeting for deciding policies of the Council.

The benefits of having a councillor as an associate member of the governing body of the school are many. For the school it would inform the councillor of issues which the councillor could take up with Council officers or inform the party group meetings. As an ex-councillor I am sure your ward councillor would like to be invited to help your school. Why don't you give it a try?

**Roy Preston**

## Pun wars:

1. A bicycle can't stand alone because it is two-tired.
2. What's the definition of a will? .... It's a dead giveaway.
3. Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
4. A backward poet writes inverse.
5. In democracy it's your vote that counts;  
In feudalism it's your count that votes.

**Quote:** Learning is finding out what we already know. Doing is demonstrating that you know it. Teaching is reminding others that they know just as well as you. You are all learners, doers and teachers. - **Richard Bach** ("*Illusions: Reflections of a Reluctant Messiah*")



## DO YOU KNOW HOW LONG YOUR HEAD INTENDS TO STAY AT YOUR SCHOOL?

Recently there has been an email discussion by governors across the country about the role of governors, and particularly of Chairs, in ensuring the governing body was prepared when their Head resigned or retired. Some thought it was the responsibility of the Chair to have periodic discussion with their Heads about their plans for their future. Others felt this was improper or embarrassing. One of the correspondents was Jennifer Bell, who has been a Chair in Hackney and an External Advisor in north London, and her thoughts seem particularly useful. She made the following points:

- It's a matter of establishing these conversations as part of the culture of the governing body. It shouldn't be a matter of 'personality'. The Chair (and/or perhaps the Chair of the Personnel Committee) has a duty to consider what would be most appropriate for their school.
- It has been suggested that questions be asked about possible length of tenure at the interview – this might be helpful, but I'm not 100% about this – it's possible it could be taken as an equalities issue!
- Many have suggested it become part of the annual Performance Management procedures. I cannot commend this too highly. When I was an External Advisor and worked with many governing bodies at both primary and secondary level, I nearly always advised them to include 'future plans' in their CPD discussions with the Head. This puts the matter into a professional and non-threatening context and allows sensible consideration of what CPD is most useful for the Head at that stage of their career.
- I'm not sure there's enough time in the new truncated HT PM Reviews for governors, SIPs, and Heads to have extended conversations – but the model described can still be used by the governing bodies in their normal course of activities – probably discussed in the small forums of the Personnel Committee, in preparation for the Headteacher PM reviews
- Similarly I advised the governors, usually under the heading of the Heads work/life balance, to consider recommending structural ways of allowing the Deputy/Deputies to have a regular opportunity to be Acting Head, warts and all, having real responsibility for the school from time to time, while the Head did something developmental or had some thinking/planning time away from school. Some Heads really had to be persuaded on this one – but, once they tried it, they found huge benefits both for themselves and their deputies.

**Jennifer Bell**

**St Alfege's** is situated in Creek Road, near Greenwich Town Centre. It is a small, Victorian gothic building. In the late 1990s it was placed in special measures. The Local Authority and the Diocese responded by giving the buildings a significant make-over. A lot of work was also done on teaching and learning. A head in his 20s was appointed in 2004. At its last Ofsted, the school was rated "good". St Alfege's draws most of its children from nearby housing estates. About 85% are from BME groups, predominately from East and West Africa. A number of children do not have English as their first language. Free school meals are taken by about half the pupils and about half have special educational needs.

The site of the school is well-used. There is a patch of land adjacent to the school which has long been overgrown and dumped on. No one seemed to know whether the land was owned by the school or the local authority or anyone else. Only the school seemed to want it and so costings were drawn up to convert it to a school garden.

Earlier a link had been established with the local HSBO branch. They were prepared to fund our "Magic Garden". The project was designed, with substantial input from the children. The land was finally fenced off using split canes, which clearly marked the boundaries but allowed passers-by to look in at the space. It contains different levels, paths, bushes, willows, bulbs, a gazebo, a fenced-off pond, and some climbing ropes. The garden was formally opened last summer. The opening ceremony was performed by a representative of the bank, who, having been cheered by the children, remarked that it was probably the last time for some years that any bank would be cheered.

So far the garden is a great success. In six months it has suffered only once from minor vandalism. As I write we have enjoyed a very snowy Monday, and I look forward to seeing how the Magic Garden has responded to the severe weather.

**David Grant**  
Chair of Governors

## THE MAGIC GARDEN

**ST ALFEGE WITH  
ST PETER'S C OF E  
VA PRIMARY SCHOOL  
GREENWICH TOWN CENTRE**



A recent survey by the National Confederation of Parent Teachers Associations (NCPTA) found that, on average, PTAs contributed £5,500 to their schools. Some PTAs are doing other things as well – encouraging other parents to get involved in their children's education, and working with the local community. It looks as if a thriving PTA is an important part of the school – but it can be difficult to know how to get one started. If you would like some help, contact the NCPTA, who will be delighted to help. You can reach them on [www.ncpta.org.uk](http://www.ncpta.org.uk) or at 01732 375 460

## WOULD YOU LIKE HELP IN STARTING A PTA?

### PLEASE HELP – DO YOU WATCH TEACHERS.TV?

I have been asked to find out if governors are watching the Teachers TV channel. The programmes cover a wide range of issues and although mainly designed for teachers there is also a 'Governors' Hour' and the channel is available on digital channels. If you do watch could you please send me an email with the heading 'Teachers TV'? My email address is [jim.draper@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jim.draper@hotmail.co.uk)

Thank you

*This is from 'The Essential Guide for School Governors in Gloucestershire', but we thought Greenwich governors might find it useful.*

To answer the question is yours a 'good' school educationally, there are three specifics you must know and be involved in:

## WHAT GOVERNORS MUST DO

1. **The School Self Evaluation Form (SEF):** School self-evaluation is a crucial activity which all governors should be involved in – 'where are we now, where is the evidence that supports this, and what do we have to do to improve further' – judgements agreed by the Governing Body and recorded in a standard (Ofsted) format. You must be thoroughly familiar with your SEF, usually through regular reviews at Governing Body meeting. **Expect to see this document regularly, and be thoroughly involved in keeping it updated.**
2. **School Improvement Partner (SIP) Targets:** Each year your SIP (a serving/recently retired Head or equivalent appointed by the LA) meets with the Head and representative Governors to agree a set of specific targets for that academic year, and then reports on the achievement of these targets. **Ask for a copy of the last SIP report. Ask for the current list of targets and be thoroughly familiar with them – and ask regularly to monitor progress/achievement.**
3. **Ofsted Report.** Ofsted will also inspect your school at least every 3 years (sooner if it has had problems) to provide an independent report on overall performance. **Ask for and read thoroughly the latest Ofsted report – and regularly question progress in addressing any weaknesses identified in the report.**

If all the school targets are being achieved, continue to support and enjoy the school and push to make it even better (the best it can be!). Celebrate the successes, and consider if your good practices might be useful to other schools (collaboration between adjacent schools is growing and benefits everyone).

**If targets are consistently not being achieved, your Governing Body should consider bringing in LA advice and support (your SIP or the LA will advise on who is available). Not to do so is to ignore the best interests of your local children – the very reason you became a governor. Have no doubts about taking positive action if it is necessary.**

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## Voice

Since the start of the current school year in September there have been two meetings of the Schools Forum. There should have been three, but the September meeting was cancelled.

In our role of providing an open and transparent arena for consultation with the Authority on spend within the Schools Budget, I have been eager to ensure that we not only consider carefully the decisions that we make, but also regularly monitor those decisions. At the November meeting we were given updates on a number of funding decisions, which had been agreed at previous Forum meetings. Where funds had not been spent, Forum members were able to seek clarification on reasons why there had been delays. Where funds had been spent on specific projects, we were keen to see evidence of what improvements in outcome had been achieved.

## SCHOOLS FORUM

The major item on the agenda of the January meeting was to seek the views of the Schools Forum on the proposed changes to Early Years Funding arrangements. The government's Ten Year Childcare Strategy gives a commitment to extend the free entitlement to early years education for 3 and 4 year olds from 12.5 hours to 15 hours per week by 2010 at the latest. As an Early Years pathfinder authority, Greenwich is introducing changes a year in advance of national requirements. The inclusion of the Private, Voluntary and Independent sectors (PVI) has been recognised by the addition of 2 Early Years representatives to the Schools Forum membership. The major changes to current arrangements proposed in the consultation document are: funding the maintained sector on participation instead of planned provision; a single formula for all providers (maintained and PVI); and changes to the targeting of additional hours in excess of the free entitlement. The consultation period closed on 30<sup>th</sup> January.

A progress report on the new special educational needs funding strategy was withdrawn with the agreement of the Forum, and a revised report will be presented to the next Forum meeting.

Having served for 2 financial years, this was the last meeting of the Forum under its current membership. Some familiar faces who have served the Forum well will be missing when it is re-constituted with its new membership. My thanks to them for the contribution they have made to what I believe is a very lively and active Schools Forum.

**Roy Moore**  
Chair, Schools Forum

## GREENWICH SCHOOLS FORUM - AN IMPROVED BODY

The operation of the Schools Forum has improved over the years. At the start although all members knew decisions should be for the good of all schools there was a tendency to hear the words "at my school" followed by a defence of a single school perhaps to the detriment of the proposal which would have benefited a range of schools. Now there is a much more collective approach to matters. The improvement is due to both the increased collective nature of the Forum members but also very much due to the way the Forum is supported by the Local Authority. From the beginning the Forum has had the Director of Children's Service (was Education) as an advisor with other Senior Officers putting forward their proposals. This contrasts with some authorities who sought to downgrade the their Forum and provided service to the Forum at a lower level. This short-sighted approach led to confrontation and delays in decision making this has largely been avoided in Greenwich and our Forum is a credit to the Authority and the members.

**Jim Draper**