

Sometimes parents who have children in a nursery class attached to a primary school don't realise they have to actually apply for admission to the main school. Then the children don't get a place, even though, because they have siblings already in the school, or live near the school, they would have had a place if their parents had applied on time. This is a reasonable rule – after all there does need to be a deadline – but it seems very hard that children should suffer for the omissions of their parents.

URGENT FOR GOVERNORS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS WITH NURSERY CLASSES! Does your school remind parents with children in the nursery that they must apply for admission to reception?

Most schools already do this, of course – but you might want to check that yours does!

Primary school with nursery classes could help solve this by ensuring that every parent of a child in the nursery who is of an age to be transferring to reception class next year is given the relevant booklet, and reminded of the need to apply. They might also want to check the list the LA sends to schools in mid January of children who have applied for places to make sure all their relevant nursery children are on the list, and to remind again the parents of those who aren't.

A research review published on 9th June by RISE (Research and Information on State Education) shows conclusively that, when asked in detailed surveys, the overwhelming majority of parents are satisfied with their children's schools.

The publication of this review is timely in view of the attention currently being paid to the possibility that parents who are dissatisfied with local school provision might start their own schools.

The review analyses surveys of parents' opinions about their children's schools over the past five years. The analysis also reveals that, despite the emphasis placed on academic results by policy makers, the research contains much evidence to suggest that they are not as important to most parents as is often assumed, when assessing school satisfaction.

Parents frequently say that they value factors such as good discipline, the happiness of their child, and good communication between school and home more than exam results. Ease of communication with the school and the provision of clear, accessible and regular information about their child's progress is a priority for many parents.

Surveys also show that many parents are keen to be increasingly involved in school life and in supporting their children's education outside school. They would welcome guidance from schools on how to achieve this.

The review is wide-ranging and includes parents' views on communication, SEN, admissions, attainment and testing.

The review can be downloaded from <http://www.risetrust.org.uk/website>
(This article is from the National Governors' Association website)

Earlier in the year there was a discussion between governors from across the country about ways of cutting down on paper by using email more. Some of the points made were:

- Our GB has begun to use email to review policies and discuss any amendments etc. We've then agreed them by emails and followed up by recording each approval at the next GB meeting. We have a record if Ofsted wanted proof of our discussion and consideration of policies, which I file on my PC and could print off if Ofsted asked.
- My schools do much by email. In terms of reviewing policies the policy is sent by email for consideration. At the meeting the policy is displayed on a big screen and linked to the central computer store for policies. The policy is then amended (with appropriate notes taken by the clerk) live on screen, approved by the committee and immediately saved to the computer saving paper and time for re-examination at the next meeting
- One of the schools where I'm a governor sends all paperwork, policies, minutes, agendas etc by email. While this saves the school paper and postage I sometimes feel that I'm being a little petty when I ask for a few packs of paper every now and again.



ARE PARENTS HAPPY WITH THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL?

COULD YOUR GOVERNING BODY DO MORE BY EMAIL?

THE ASSOCIATION OF GREENWICH GOVERNORS HAS A WEBSITE!

The AGG now has a website at www.associationofgreenwichgovernors.org

It has

- a list (and thumbnail sketches) of committee members,
- all the back issues of Voice (plus an index),
- copies of information sharing emails which are sent to all Chairs
- links to useful organisations.

Have a look and tell us what you think. We particularly welcome suggestions for other things to include.

In addition, you can contact us at voice@associationofgreenwichgovernors.org



Academies are not democratic. They are not accountable to the Local Authority, so they are not accountable to the public. Their governors are appointed, not elected. Academies are not covered by the Freedom of Information legislation. Schools can become academies simply by a vote of the governors – with no consultation with parents, teachers, support staff or the local community.

The only extra money available for schools that opt to become academies will be taken from money the Local Authority holds centrally for support services and, of course, the academy would still have to buy in these services e.g. SEN support, links to health and social care services and professional development provision etc. The Local Authority's "pot" of money for these services will be reduced, weakening their service provision in these areas.

There is very mixed evidence that academies improve standards. Some academies have improved results but many have not – there is no direct link between academy status and improved results.

Schools function best when working together under a Local Authority umbrella where improvements and difficulties can be shared and tackled jointly. The Local Authority is a safety net when there are problems with budgets or complex situations around staff health, induction training needs, disability provision etc.

Schools that are deemed "outstanding" and "successful" at the moment should remember how quickly this can change when staff move away or illness strikes. Once academy status is granted it is irreversible. A school may not always attract the supportive parents who have helped bring about that success and that's when the support of the Local Authority is most appreciated.

For staff – teaching and ancillary – academy status will result in conditions of service and pay levels outside the existing national agreements. Academy status will promote "competitive" rather than "co-operative" atmospheres and conditions. Is this the example schools should be setting?

It is important to reject any move towards Academy Status. A school does not exist as an entity. It is part of a wider education community where planning for the good of education of all children is more important than the narrow "success" of one establishment that happens to be in a favourable situation at any one time.

Terry Edwards

If anyone would like to write an article supporting Academies, please contact Margery Nzerem at voice@associationofgreenwichgovernors.org

ACADEMIES

The Academies Bill is an attack on the education

system in this country. It is an attempt to destroy a democratic, planned state education system and replace it with a two tier, market driven collection of independent schools at the mercy of education companies driven by profit or organisation with few concerns for all the local schools and children. This would introduce a two tier education system, where the schools deemed most successful would be independent from their Local Authority, while Local Authorities would be left with the schools that needed most help. It would be a return to an era where some pupils were considered a success and others as less so.

INFORMATION FROM THE NATIONAL GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION ON ACADEMIES

The National Governors Association has as a Q&A document on academies available at

www.nga.org.uk/pol-academies.aspx



GOVERNOR MONITORING AND VISITS POLICY – A HEAD'S VIEW

We thought it would be useful to get a Head's view on governors' monitoring and visits, and so the Head of Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre has written this for us.

MONITORING

School and Children's Centres' Governors monitor in order to discharge their responsibilities in eight key areas - curriculum and assessment, staff development, staff and children's morale, school/centre leadership and management, the centre/school environment/property, the use of resources, links with parents, carers, and community links.

Governors should monitor a variety of elements of the workings of both the centre/school and the Governing Body:

1. **Decisions:** The decisions of the Governing Body itself and those to whom they have delegated decision-making powers, how their decisions affect others, and the implementation and impact of their policies and plans
2. **Conditions:** The sufficiency or otherwise of resources, the state of the premises and grounds, and the wellbeing and progress of all staff
3. **Standards:** The wellbeing of the children, the achievements of the children, the behaviour of the children, the reputation of the centre/school
4. **General:** The likely impact on the school/centre of local and national developments

HOW DO GOVERNORS GATHER INFORMATION?

- Use your senses – including your common sense.
- Listen to the Head and staff. Listen to the parents and carers, the Local Authority (LA), the inspectors and the neighbours of the school/centre – and, most of all, listen to the children.
- Read the papers supplied by the head and staff, the LA and others. Read the educational press for a view of the wider context.
- Walk around the centre/school to observe what is happening and to get a feel of it

And, most importantly, ask questions.

CONDUCT OF VISITS

There is no better way to acquire information than by visiting the working school/centre. Governors can visit in many different ways, these range from the very informal to formal visits on behalf of the Governing Body. The main reasons for Governors to make visits are to learn about the centre/school, to contribute to the Governing Body's monitoring role, and to show those employed at the centre/school that they are interested.

Although Governors are a part of the /school/centre community, they nevertheless visit as a guest. It is therefore important to remember to observe normal courtesy, not only out of politeness but so as not to cause a nuisance to those who are engaged in their jobs.

CHECKLIST FOR VISITING GOVERNORS

For the Governing Body: Plan a timetable of visits so that every Governor has the opportunity to visit during the year, agree an explicit purpose and plan for each visit which has been communicated to all parties, and consider different styles of visit, for example, paired visits where an experienced Governor partners a less experienced one.

For individual Governors: Negotiate a mutually convenient time with the Headteacher, teacher, etc., to ensure that the visit is expected; look at the possibilities for developing any link you may have; thank the staff, Headteacher, etc. at the end of the visit; make a point of listening rather than talking; dress appropriately and follow the normal centre/school rules; if you would like to look at children's work ask the staff if this is acceptable and if possible ask the children's permission; discuss any concerns the visit may raise with the Headteacher; be polite, tactful and sensitive; avoid stressful periods such as during or just before an OFSTED inspection, the first and last weeks of term, unless specifically requested to attend; visit at different times of the day, term, year; try to attend any special occasions, especially if regular daytime visits are difficult; try to attend when you have been specifically invited; go in as a helper where appropriate and possible.

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GREENWICH SCHOOLS FORUM REPORT

The Greenwich Schools Forum met on 15th June. The first task was to elect a Chair and Vice Chair for the new municipal year. I was re-elected Chair and Frank Lerner was elected Vice Chair.

The Forum approved the draft agenda plan for the year ahead and agreed amendments to the Scheme for Financing Maintained Schools. The changes are largely minor and incorporate changes in legislation that have taken place since the last major review of the Scheme. There was consultation on the £3.761m of uncommitted Dedicated Schools Grant. A recommendation that no proposals on the use of this underspend should be considered until after the government's emergency budget on 22nd June was supported by the Forum, although some members felt it might be wiser to have no unspent reserves under the current economic climate!

An information item provided the Forum with details of the revenue balances held by schools at the end of 2009/10. The total, excluding Standards Fund balances which had to be spent by 31st August, was £11.595m. Overall school balances have fallen by £6.0m in the last two years, with the most significant decrease across the secondary phase. There is a downward trend in the overall level of school balances, but Forum members are concerned about the wide variation in the size of balances held by individual schools. For example, whereas 25 schools had less than 5% balances (as a percentage of delegated budget), 8 schools had balances of over 25%. One primary school had over £640,000 (43%). Governors need to be aware that the Council can claw back excess surplus balances if the school does not have a clear plan to show why the money is being saved.

At the other end of the scale 8 primary and 2 secondary schools were in deficit. The total value of these deficits was £1.289m. With the help of the local authority all these schools will have deficit recovery plans in place. This poses an interesting question – if you become an Academy and get into deficit, who do you turn to for help? Presumably Education Secretary, Michael Gove, whose knowledge of Greenwich schools is so great that he believes Northumberland Heath Primary School is in Greenwich!

Roy Moore

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Don't:

- Go in like an inspector
- Sit at the back writing notes
- Go in unannounced
- Arrive in the middle of a story time
- Interfere with organisation
- Try to talk to the staff while they are teaching
- Criticise the performance of a member of staff, even in a constructive manner, during your visit.
- Make promises to staff on behalf of the Governing Body

A SAMPLE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR GOVERNORS

If your governing body does not already have a code of conduct, the National Governors Association has produced a sample one. You can find it at <http://www.nga.org.uk/Code%20of%20Conduct.aspx>

THE OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDINGS: The Governing Body needs to be aware of the quality, repair and adequacy of the buildings and should take the opportunity of a visit to check these points. As well as classrooms, also check children's toilets and staff facilities.

THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL/CENTRE: Governing Body visitors will want to check whether the centre/school is friendly to visitors; attractive and clean; free of litter, well signed; with social areas for the relaxation of both children and staff; and a place with good morale

AFTER THE VISIT: As soon as possible after the visit write a very short report (some schools/centres have forms for this purpose, sometimes kept in the office) clearly stating the most important points of your visit. It should not be a narrative but an analysis. The document will form part of the Governing Body's papers and is therefore a public document. It should not, therefore, mention the names of individuals - either children or staff. The Visits Form should be given to the Headteacher.