

Bushey Heath Primary School School Governors – Who Needs Them?

I didn't want to be a School Governor.

There were so many good reasons *not* to be – I know very little about current education policy, I have no particular 'corporate' expertise, I'm too busy doing other things, I don't like meetings, I'm allergic to red tape... and I'm a publishing editor and actor. So other than being able to offer a quick vocal warmup and check some dodgy spelling, I reckoned my contributions to the life of the school would be severely limited.

But I was intrigued.

Some vacancies arose, and I found myself talking to a couple of members of the Governing Body. To be honest, the whole entity seemed to me a little like something out of *Harry Potter*, a talking shop of Grand Wizards who presided over school policy behind locked doors, while the pupils who were supposed to benefit from their mumblings never really noticed them until a new edict or policy was suddenly enforced by the skeletal, malignant Dementors. Of course, I'm exaggerating – I was pleasantly surprised to find that only a couple of the teachers actually looked like Dementors.

In fact, I discovered that the reality was a little less dramatic – the Governing Body actively supports the school's senior management team to enable pupils to fulfil their potential in a safe, happy and caring environment. To do that, it's essential that the Governing Body is made up of a diverse group of individuals – teachers, parents, members of the local community – and from all walks of life, who can offer a range of perspectives and experiences that will benefit the school as a whole, and support and challenge senior management appropriately.

Once I came to terms with that – and felt that I actually could provide a useful perspective from outside the established educational or business fields – then becoming a School Governor seemed quite an attractive proposition. I was also keen to experience a new personal challenge, and to understand better some of the issues that form part of our current education system. I also wondered whether the claims about 'making a positive contribution to the life of the school' and providing 'a useful perspective' were actually true. Great in theory, but did that actually work in practice?

After serving as a Governor for two years now, I can honestly say that the meetings, coffee and some of the red tape still occasionally cause some unease, and the looming presence of Ofsted – perhaps more Dementor like than any of the teachers – still sends an icy shiver down my spine. On average, I'll attend a couple of meetings a term, and there's a steady trickle of bedtime reading on policy changes, Committee Minutes or 'Government Risk Assessments on Playing Tag in the Playground'. All right, I'm exaggerating again, but documents like that are probably not far off.

The benefits, though, vastly outweigh the irritations. I have shared meetings and projects with expert professionals who are passionate about their work and who genuinely want to provide the best possible learning experience for the young people in their care; I have visited the school during the working day and observed lessons and activities, and talked to pupils, teachers and parents about their needs; I've tried to provide a voice for them and, more importantly, I've tried to facilitate change as a result. I've attended training courses that have helped me to develop as a Governor, but which have also given me insights into skills that are valuable beyond the Governing Body and its committees.

I do feel now that I can offer something useful, and would urge anyone who has common sense and an enquiring mind – and who feels that they can spare a minimal amount of time to make a hugely valuable contribution to their local community – to consider becoming a School Governor. Grappling with issues as diverse as building an extension to the school staff room, ensuring adequate provision for children who

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have special needs, raising the standards of school meals, developing a website, helping to provide extracurricular activities... there's an enormous amount of satisfaction to be gained from achieving these goals, and having a hand in shaping some of the strategic thinking of the senior team. There's also the minor matter of helping to maintain high academic standards... It's not all glamorous, but it's certainly challenging, enjoyable and, thankfully, worthwhile.

If that doesn't attract you, then consider this – one nine year old boy insists on calling me 'Mr President' whenever he sees me in the school playground. I have to admit, it's quite refreshing to be shown that much respect on a Monday morning, although I'm slightly uneasy on two grounds – is he being ironic, and what on earth are they teaching him?

I must remember to bring this up at the next Governors' meeting.

Jon Davies was a Governor at Bushey Heath Primary School. If you would like to find out more about the work of the Governing Body, or how to become a School Governor, please contact Camilla Woods via the school office on 0208 950 3042, or email: admin@busheyheathjm.herts.sch.uk