



CADWYN



ALL WALES CENTRE *for* GOVERNOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

IT'S OUR CHOICE

Phil Williams worked for most of his career in television and film production. During this time he spent 17 years living abroad where he developed a great interest in environmental issues. He returned to Wales just over 8 years ago and started his one man company "Plan-It Eco" with the aim of encouraging people to "take better care of this wonderful world", by organizing lectures and workshops throughout the UK.

In this article, Phil considers human impact on the environment, and how we as governors can make our schools more "green".

The promotion of Education for Sustainability and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) is now an important aspect of education throughout the UK and is being driven forward by the EU and UK governments as well as local authorities. This means that all of us need to be educated as to the true meaning of the word "sustainability" and the importance of adopting a sustainable lifestyle both at home, school and work.

For me the meaning is quite simple: that we humans take from the planet what we need without hurting it so it will still be there for future generations.

We have to understand that whatever we do makes an impact on the world in which we live. Take the use of energy for instance. Turning on a light, driving a car, shipping items from far away places, the printing press which produced this newsletter all use energy and in the UK we waste 1/3 of all the energy we produce.

Then there is the food we throw away, the waste we produce whether at home or at work, the fact that the UK is running out of landfill sites, our increasing use of packaging (up last year by a third) The list goes on and on but the question we all have to ask ourselves:

"Is this really the world we want to create and pass on to future generations?"

We have always taken from the natural environment thus creating an impact, but never in the history of the world has one species, had such a negative impact on this world, as we humans have had in the last 100 years. A famous environmentalist recently said that we are acting like we have another planet earth to go to.

It is my belief though, that through greater awareness and education across all levels of society we humans have the capacity to do wonderful things and create a sustainable world of which we can be proud. It does not matter how small a step we think we are taking, we should nevertheless all take it realizing that if we all step in the right direction collectively

we will be making a giant stride towards creating a sustainable future for all.

It is a very reassuring aspect of my work that in the last 12 months I have noticed an enormous increase in requests for workshops, seminars and presentations throughout all levels of society. From small companies to large international corporations, from schools and colleges through to teacher training institutions, from local authorities to community organisations, there is now a true interest in finding out and understanding what is really happening to our world.

It is vitally important though, that we not only support Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship but adopt a lifestyle that embraces it. Fortunately, schools and businesses alike need to realize that adopting a more sustainable attitude in the work place does not mean a total change of working practices or a great deal of extra work. All it means is changing our habits.

I am amazed that there are schools around the country that are reluctant to embrace sustainability. Personally I think this is strange as 2 of the most important aspects of running a school are affected by being more sustainable.

Firstly, schools exist to prepare young people for the future ahead of them. What could be more important than the environment of the world they will live in long after the likes of me have passed on?

Secondly, Headteachers and governors always remind me that it is hard to run a school on a tight budget. Becoming more sustainable saves the school money. From my experience the average primary school will find a minimum financial saving of between £3,000 to £5,000 a year on their running costs, and the average secondary school will save a minimum of £5,000 to £7,000 a year on their running costs. In fact, one secondary school I worked with in England last year is on target to save £15,000 by the end of this year because they adopted a number of sustainability methods and programmes.



How green is your school?

So what can you as governors, do to ensure your school is encouraging sustainability, conserving resources and, at the same time, saving money?

Here is a list of questions you might consider.

- How much paper does the school use in a year?
- Does the school have a policy of purchasing only recycled paper? Does the school recycle paper?
- How often does the school check seals around doors and windows?
- How much water does the school use in a year? How much is wasted?
- Does the school have a switching off lights policy?
- How many computers are left on all day?
- How is the school addressing the traffic problem at the beginning and end of each school day?
- Does the school have a green code?
- What is the school doing about any litter problem it faces?
- Has the school looked into the possibility of using alternative energy? (There are now government grants for schools.)
- Where does the food come from that goes into school meals? Is it fresh? Is it local?
- Is there a composting scheme used by the school?

For whatever reasons we all need to look at ways to make a positive impact on this wonderful place we call our home. Our children deserve it.

HOW GOOD A CHAIR ARE YOU?

In our last edition of "Cadwyn" I reported that we had been carrying out research into the role of the Chair of a governing body and, in particular, the skills needed to be a good Chairperson. As part of our research we contacted a number of existing Chairs, Head teachers and local authority Governor Support Officers for their views. All three groups felt that the two most important attributes for a Chair to possess were the ability to work well with the Head teacher and also to involve all governors effectively in the work of the governing body.

Since our last publication I've spoken to a large number of governors at conferences and training sessions which we have run, and quite a number have asked me for further information on our findings. Most have been keen to know what other chairing skills have been rated by Chairs, Head teachers and Governor Support Officers as important. Well, here's what we found.

The first thing that struck us was how much each group thought the same, so that skills regarded as important by the Chairs were rated equally highly by the Head teachers and Governor Support Officers, while there was a similar uniformity of views over the less important attributes. To find such a degree of agreement was very reassuring.

We found in our survey of the three groups that the most important skill, after the two mentioned above, was the ability of a Chair to recognize the boundaries between school governance (the role of governors) and day to day school

management (the role of the Head teacher and staff). Something I think all of us would agree is not always apparent. Next came the recognition that a Chair needs to be a clear communicator, another skill which most of us would regard as very important.

The next two skills were rated equally by our three groups and in many ways they complement each other - the ability to address difficult issues and the ability to deal with issues sensitively. Rated almost as highly as these two was the ability to adopt an impartial position. I'm sure those of you who have had to make difficult decisions over finance, staffing and pupil behaviour issues will have had these three skills tested to the utmost.

Given the amount of work that schools and governing bodies now have to do, you won't be surprised by the importance attached to the next group of skills. They were good organizing skills, good listening skills and time management skills.

We were a little surprised that the next attribute was listed so lowly by all three groups given that we are now often perceived to be becoming a more litigious society - a knowledge and application of governing body legislation. I'm sure, though, that this does not mean that governing bodies in Wales are prepared to flout the law!

The skills which were rated as being of little importance for a Chair were good public speaking skills and good media skills



(i.e. dealing with the press, television and radio). As one Chair put it to me, "I think that's more a job for the Head teacher."

So, where do we go from here? As a Chair, you may decide to do some self-evaluation to see how high you think your

rating is in the skills we've outlined above. As for us at the Centre, we've been commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government to produce a national training programme for Chairs; rest assured we'll take note of what our colleagues think when we start work.

FROM THE CENTRE MANAGER

As well as working for the Welsh Assembly Government, the Centre runs training sessions for local authorities and individual schools and also undertakes non-commissioned research. An example of the latter is the work we are doing at the moment on the long term effect or impact of training on governing body practice. As you are probably aware, what we learn at a training session often has little real impact on the way we carry out our roles as governors - largely because it gets pushed to one side in the hurly burly of the "real world" of school governance. In an attempt to overcome this problem we are looking at the ways that governing bodies can maximize the impact of training and also the very difficult task of measuring impact. Let's hope that our findings will help you.

I reported in the last edition of "Cadwyn" that Karen Evans, the Centre Administrator, had moved to a new job at Swansea University. Karen has now been replaced by Angela Radcliffe. On behalf of the Centre, I'd like to welcome Angela and wish her all the very best for her time with us.

Steve Gullick



NEWS FROM GOVERNORS WALES

- Mike Barker took up his appointment as Development Officer in April 2007, replacing Ann Robertson. Prior to this appointment Mike was Director of Education and Children's Services in Powys (1992-2005) and is a past Chairman of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales and adviser to the Welsh Local Government Association. We would like to thank Anne for her work at Governors Wales and wish her well in her new role as Director for Schools and Colleges for the Archdiocese of Cardiff.
- Governors Wales recently held its AGM and Summer Conference on Community Focused Schools on 16th June 2007. The keynote address was delivered by Mr M Keating, Director of Education and Lifelong Learning for Rhondda Cynon Taff. A conference report will be available shortly which can be accessed from www.governorswales.org.uk or copies can be obtained from the Governors Wales' Office. Information is also available on the regional conference held in North Wales in April on "Managing School Places."
- The revision and updating of the handbook for school governors in line with current legislation is underway. Copies will be distributed in September.
- The Governors Wales website is also in the process of being redesigned.
- The latest Fact Files produced by Governors Wales concentrate on "Staff Disciplinary Procedures" and "Education in England and Wales - a comparison." Copies are available from the Governors Wales' office or can be downloaded in PDF format from www.governorswales.org.uk. Future publications to look out for include governor guides on 1) Community Focused Schools and 2) Appointment of headteachers/deputy headteachers.

Llywodraethwyr Cymru

Governors Wales

GOVERNORS HELPLINE

0845 6020100

is the helpline for governors of schools in Wales.

Operated by Governors Wales the helpline will provide advice on a range of issues to governors in all parts of Wales.



CONVERSATIONS

For our "Conversations" article in this issue, editor, Steve Gullick has been speaking to Jane Crook, a staff governor at Penllwyn Primary School, Pontllanfraith in Caerphilly.

SG What is your job at the school, Jane, and how long have you been a staff governor here?

JC Well, I've got two jobs at the school - caretaker and classroom assistant. I took the job as caretaker 3 years ago and before that I was a cook at the school, so I've had experience of three different staff jobs. As for Staff Governors, I was elected in September 2000 when Penllwyn Primary started from the amalgamation of a Junior and Infant School.

SG What made you decide to become a staff governor?

JC I suppose I've always had an interest in education in general and this school in particular because as well as working here myself my three sons came here. Also, I have a good working relationship with everyone who works here and I think it's very important that everyone who works at a school is able to contribute at every level, including on the governing body.

SG How do you get the views of other staff on important issues at the school and how do you report back to them governing body discussions and decisions?

JC I'm helped very much by two things. First of all the school, with 134 pupils, is quite small which means it's not difficult for me to get around all the staff. I'm sure that in a bigger school it would probably be necessary to have a more formal way for the staff governor to meet with their colleagues. Secondly, all staff teaching and non-teaching, attend training days which means that I know there are a certain number of days every year when all the staff will be together and we can discuss things. This is a real help because as so many of the non-teaching staff are part-time it is very difficult to hold a meeting. In fact I don't think there's an occasion when all the staff are in school together at the same time.

I'm also helped by the fact that our Head values communication highly and all staff receive weekly updates on what's happening at the school. This means that if staff have a concern it can be looked at quickly while the issue is still fresh.

SG What do you think are the biggest challenges for a staff governor?

JC Oh dear! Well, first of all, I think it's essential for a staff governor to be approachable. Fellow members of staff must feel that they can talk to me, and that I'll respect their confidentiality.

I think this must be based on having good working relationships with colleagues and the fact that they know that if they come to me with an issue I'll advise them whether or not their concern is for the Head or the governors and that if it's for the latter, I'll definitely bring it up at a governors' meeting. I believe, that if a staff governor is to have valuable input into governing body meetings then they really should try to keep up to date with what's happening at the school and also in education in generally. I suppose it helps with me being a classroom assistant but it isn't easy.

SG And finally, Jane, what advice would you give to someone who had just been elected to staff governor at their school?

JC First of all, get to know your school. Of course you are representing the non-teaching staff, but it's very important that you have a good idea of what your school is really like so that you can see exactly how you and your colleagues fit into everything and the part you can play in making the school a success.

Secondly, the role of the staff governor is different from other governors. A teacher governor represents the teachers, a parent governor represents parents; a staff governor represents people who have different jobs - caretakers, secretaries, technicians and so on. I think it's important for a staff governor to get some idea of the different types of jobs that these people do so that you'll have some idea of "where they are coming from" when they come to you with a concern.

Thirdly, do all you can to make sure you are approachable, because if people feel awkward about talking to you about things - well, what's the point of being a governor?

I suppose, this links with the next piece of advice; don't just sit at governors' meetings and say nothing. You've been elected to represent the staff of the school so it's important that you take part in discussions and decision making, and, when necessary, put forward the staff's viewpoint. If you don't, well, once again, what's the point of being a governor?

The last thing I would say is important is keeping up to date and also understanding the role of governors and the latest legislation affecting governance. So, I would strongly advise staff governors to attend training sessions - it's so important to keep up to date and it's so easy to let this slide.

SG That seems good advice, but also a lot of things to do. So do you have any misgivings about being a staff governor?

JC None at all.

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