



# CADWYN



ALL WALES CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE *for* GOVERNOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

## SHARED VISION AND TEAMWORK THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

**In an interview with Centre Director Steve Gullick, Jane Davidson AM, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, explains her ideas on the role of Governors in school improvement.**

It is clear that Jane Davidson brings much experience of school governance to her position as Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, having been a Governor of two very different schools. In the late 1980's and early '90s, while a Cardiff councillor, she was on the board of an inner city primary school. "It was very interesting and challenging," she said. "The school had pupils from very different backgrounds with many coming from homes where English was the second language. Also, it was a period of financial stringency in education and, on top of that, Local Management of Schools was introduced and schools took control of their own budgets for the first time."

The Minister's second experience of governance could hardly have been more different. In the 1990's she was Chair of Governors of a bilingual primary in Mid Glamorgan at the time of local government reorganisation. In 1996, the school came under the control of the new Cardiff County Council, which threw up a lot of cross-border issues, especially ones connected with the Welsh medium aspect of the school's provision.

"Both schools", the Minister pointed out, "were at the heart of their communities, and although those communities were quite different, the governing bodies used appropriate, though often different, strategies to ensure the community's opinions and feelings were known. I certainly saw in both situations how important governors are as a link between school and community."

### **Critical Friend**

We then turned to the often thorny issue of the precise role of governors in school management. Ms Davidson was quite clear on this. "In a nutshell, the governors' role is strategic, not day-to-day school management. Helping set policies, long-term objectives and achievable but challenging targets are the provinces of governing bodies. And, to be even more specific, the governors' part in this strategic role is that of a critical friend – supportive of the school's management, but querying proposals with pertinent questions, asking for information, providing a second opinion, acting as a sounding board, and so on." The Minister also felt that the membership of the



governing body was important, in reflecting the various groups to which schools are responsible – parents, local community, local education authority and staff. This diversity in composition was also vital for getting the very best for every school in Wales for, as her experience as a governor had shown her, every school is different and has its own particular needs.

Of course, as Ms Davidson added, a governing body can represent all these interested groups, but unless they work well together, schools will not really benefit. She added, "there is no doubt that teamwork brings success, and research undertaken by Estyn has shown effective governing bodies working as a team bring considerable benefits to schools and teachers."

### **Shared vision**

The Minister was clear about the importance of good working relations between governors and their school's SMT. "Success is about having a shared vision between the governing body and the school's management team, then working together to make the vision a reality."

One of the key areas to make this happen is the budget. "Governors must ensure the budget is targeted where there is most need", she said. "And it is for the governors and senior management to decide where that need lies, whether it is Special Needs, inclusion, school improvement strategies, or whatever. But," she added, "I believe that schools should retain no more than 5% of their annual income as a reserve. When a school receives its budget, then the money should be spent on the pupils and not simply held back unless it is for a planned project."

Continued overleaf



## SHARED VISION AND TEAMWORK THE KEYS TO SUCCESS Continued

### **Transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3**

The Minister is obviously concerned with the drop in performance that so many youngsters experience at Key Stage 3, and she is keen to address this problem. "I believe partnership between primary and secondary schools will go a long way to solving this problem", she said. "We will be consulting on new regulations under Wales only powers in the Education Act 2002 which place a duty on governing bodies of primary and secondary schools to work together in their clusters to set up strategies for transition. We are already encouraging primaries and secondaries to work together on this challenge. Estyn evidence shows that when there is effective collaboration between the two phases, there can be huge benefits in terms of attainment at age 14."

She then went on to describe the support she is giving to this initiative. An extra in-service training day has been given to schools to consider new approaches to the transfer of pupils from the primary to secondary sector, and the additional £25 million revenue funding being provided to LEAs this financial year is available for work on improving pupil progress overall in key stage 3, as well as for reducing junior class sizes. "Much effort is going into addressing the issue of the key stage 3 'dip' in performance."

### **The future**

Finally, we looked at the future of governing bodies. The Minister pointed to changes which she believes will give governors greater freedom in their role. The Education Act 2002 will allow governing bodies to work closely together and indeed to federate so that two or more schools can have a shared governing body, an option that might appeal to small schools which can have difficulties in finding a full complement of governors. The same legislation will enable governing bodies to provide community facilities such as childcare if they so wish. The Minister underlined that there would be full consultation on the introduction of the new governance provisions, so that all those affected – but particularly governors – would have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Of course, governors need to be equipped to carry out their duties, and Ms Davidson is keen to support them. "I am a great fan of governor training", she said, "and although LEAs produce good schemes for individual training, we should now be looking at ways of delivering whole governing body training, something which a number of authorities are already pioneering. I'm also encouraged by the way governor accreditation schemes are now being piloted in some LEAs, and I can see, in the future, distance learning packages being produced to enhance training."

And what about making governor training compulsory? The Minister was quite clear: "Oh no, I'm not in favour of compulsory training. We need to remember that governors are volunteers who are doing a really good job, and they give up so much of their time already. But we need to ensure that candidates for appointment understand that there is an expectation that they should undertake induction training and that experienced governors recognise that they need to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. We should ensure training is so valuable and relevant that governors positively want to receive it. We will continue to encourage governors to take up training opportunities and to engage in discussion with LEA governor support officers, about how and when training is delivered."

## *From The Project Director*

With the summer holiday season over, activities have resumed at their usual pace at the Centre.

We organised a conference for Parent Governor Representatives at Powys County Hall on 2 November. This was the first of its kind in Wales, and we were fortunate to have Avril Atkinson from the Deputy Prime Minister's office as one of our guest speakers. A report of the conference will appear in the next edition of **Cadwyn**.



We have also been engaged in a number of research projects. We completed a survey on LEA provision of Special Educational Needs training for governors for the National Assembly in the summer, and work has just started on governing body input to successful school management.

Finally, having recovered from a short illness, I am looking forward to resuming my programme of visits to Governors Associations throughout Wales.

Steve Gullick

Llywodraethwyr Cymru

Governors Wales

## **Governors' Helpline**

**Telephone: 0845 602 0100**

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.



## Spiritual Development

**How often have Governors been told after an inspection that their school needs to address the spiritual development of its pupils? And how many times have they wondered what exactly 'spiritual development' means? In this article, Martin Rawle and Arthur Geen of the University of Wales Institute Cardiff describe the ongoing research they are undertaking into perceptions of spiritual development held by students and teachers.**

What exactly do we mean by spiritual and spirituality? Reading and research, rather than clarifying matters, often adds to the confusion with definitions ranging from the religious, to those who consider it vague, and even nonsense.

Despite these difficulties of definition, schools have for many years had a statutory obligation to promote the spiritual development of pupils. Yet teachers are confronted with the same problem of definition mentioned above - what is meant by spiritual and how do we provide opportunities for the spiritual development of pupils.

An ongoing research project at UWIC conducted by Martin Rawle and Dr Arthur Geen is investigating these issues. The research is investigating pupils', students' and teachers' perceptions of spirituality. The project is very much in its early stages but already data gathered from the distribution of questionnaires and interviews is proving interesting. The majority of teachers (73 per cent) and 44 per cent of students saw it as part of the role of a teacher to foster the spiritual development of pupils. However, it was very difficult to plan for pupils to have the opportunity to experience spiritual development because of ambiguity as to what 'spiritual development' actually means. The range of responses received clearly indicated that teachers and students alike have different views as to exactly what spiritual development of pupils entails. These encompass the explicitly religious ('To have a faith or belief in a being greater than me'); general beliefs and values ('Being caring and compassionate about decisions and ideas'); being aware of a meaning and purpose to life that goes

beyond the purely material ('To discover why we are here and where we are going'); and encouraging a reflective approach to life ('Thinking deep and soul searching').

The majority of both students (75 per cent) and teachers (67 per cent) believe that you can be spiritual without necessarily being religious. There is also a strong feeling that spirituality is an individual matter and not something to be dictated by others. The problem for educators with this viewpoint is that it becomes difficult to establish criteria against which to measure or even determine whether spiritual development is taking place. What one may regard as spiritual, another may not.

It is perhaps still too early to draw any 'hard and fast' conclusions from our ongoing research, but one point does emerge clearly. There is still much confusion with regard to what exactly spiritual development of pupils at schools means.

If you are interested in this research and would like further information, contact Martin Rawle at UWIC, email [MRawle@uwic.ac.uk](mailto:MRawle@uwic.ac.uk) or Dr Arthur Geen [ageen@uwic.ac.uk](mailto:ageen@uwic.ac.uk)

### Your Opinions Count

We welcome your comments, opinions and suggestions, and should be glad to publish them in future editions of this Newsletter. Please send them to:

All Wales Centre of Excellence for Governor  
Training and Research  
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### DATE FOR YOUR DIARY...

**Friday 14 and Saturday  
15 March 2003**

**Annual Conference for School  
Governors in Wales at  
Llandrindod Wells**

**Theme: How are we doing?**  
Governing body self-evaluation and  
governing body evaluation of schools

**Keynote Speaker:**  
**Susan Lewis, HM Chief Inspector  
of Education and Training in Wales**

Invitations will be issued via  
LEA Governor Support Officers  
– contact the Centre for more details

## Conversations

**This issue's Conversation is between Centre Director, Steve Gullick, and Hazel Hughes who is Head of a North Wales primary school. When she took up her position fifteen years ago, the school had only 28 pupils, but this figure has now grown to 105. Although the school is bilingual, the majority of lessons are taught in Welsh.**

**SG** As a Headteacher, Hazel, what do you think are the most important jobs of a governing body?

**HH** The most obvious one, I would say, is to take an interest in and support the school. When governors turn up to social events like school fetes and concerts, for instance, it really does give a boost to our pupils, and also the staff. It makes us all feel that what we are doing is regarded highly.

**SG** And is that it?

**HH** Oh no, of course not, but if governors have a genuine concern for the school then other things will follow.

**SG** Can you give me some examples?

**HH** Yes, one comes to mind immediately. As the school population was growing in the 1990s, it was clear that the building just wasn't going to be big enough for all our pupils. Not only did the governors totally support my requests for new classroom space, but one or two of them with expert knowledge of the building trade and business were able to help me argue the case for an extension to be built. We were successful and the new extension to the school was completed in 1999.

Similarly, when I have to make a difficult or even unpopular decision, I find the governors' approach really helpful. I know they will expect me to have worked out thoroughly my reasons for a particular course of action but, provided I've done that, it is very reassuring to know I can rely on their support.

**SG** How do you ensure the governors know what is going on in the school?

**HH** Well, it's certainly not easy, even with a school of 105 pupils, but there are a number of methods I use. First of all, of course, there's the Headteacher's report which I give at every governors' meeting, and this is supplemented by any reports from our governors' committees, such as finance and staffing. Our Special Needs governor visits the school quite regularly, and we've adopted a scheme for visits by governors: we set

aside particular times and dates in the term when I'm available and governors can book these times to come to the school when as well as visiting classrooms, they can talk to me about whatever may concern them. I think it's important for developing a good team spirit in the governing body that everyone should feel included.

**SG** How important is your working relationship with your Chair of Governors, and how often do you meet?

**HH** I consider this relationship to be very important. We always meet before governing body meetings, sometimes the day before or sometimes an hour or so before the meeting. The Chair really wants to be "in the know" about items so that at meetings he is able to deal with issues properly, and not simply hand everything to me.

**SG** Is that the only time you are in contact?

**HH** Oh no. If any issues arise which I feel he needs to know about, then I'll contact him, and similarly he'll contact me if he becomes aware of any problem. Also, he'll occasionally call in to see me before school starts, just to keep up to date on what's happening. Finally, he is very concerned with staff welfare, and if staff have had, say, a bereavement in the family, he'll want to know in order to contact them.

**SG** In what ways has your governing body contributed most to your school's successes?

**HH** Well, I've already mentioned a number of things, but there are two more ways I'd like to highlight:

First of all, our governors show a very keen interest in pupils' academic performance. They always want a full report on SATs results, especially how they compare both nationally and with schools similar to us.

Secondly, and this stands out as probably their top priority, they really support under-achievers. The governors understand the importance of pupils' learning in their early years, and they always discuss the Special Needs budget allocation in great detail to ensure it is used to the best advantage of our less able children. They have even on times insisted that we increase our Special Needs spending, provided other areas do not suffer. I'm sure the ongoing steady improvement in our SATs performance is linked to this concern by the governors that all our pupils succeed.

## CONTACT US ...

... for more information on the Centre and its activities, or with any comments you wish to make – we should be very pleased to hear from you.

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