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

BEHIND THE STATISTICS: HOW CAN WE COMPARE PERFORMANCE BETWEEN KEY STAGES 2 AND 3?

Stephen Senior is an experienced Governor and teacher in the primary, secondary and independent sectors. He shares his thoughts on how Governors can interpret the evidence surrounding one of the headline issues in education today.

Nobody involved with education can fail to have noticed the debate over the relative performance of pupils between Key Stages 2 and 3. It has become a recurrent theme in many ESTYN reports on secondary schools and governing bodies may shortly be given a new duty to ensure effective primary/secondary continuity. What are the difficulties faced when we compare the attainment of children between these Key Stages?

The Evidence

First of all, it is necessary to consider the evidence available. Judgements are made on standards in all areas of the curriculum and throughout both Key Stages (Years 3 to 6 in primary make up Key Stage 2, and 7 to 9 in secondary make up Key Stage 3). However, in practice it is the National Tests (commonly called SATs) taken in Years 6 and 9 in the core subjects (English, Maths and Science) that are most often used for comparisons. This data has driven the discussion on school improvement, and it clearly shows a 'dip' in performance at Key Stage 3. Fewer pupils than anticipated reach the 'expected' level in the core curriculum at age 14 than at age 11 – although there would still appear to be various opinions within education as to what proportion of pupils can be 'expected' to attain this. The results also indicate that too few pupils progress by more than one level during the first three years of their secondary education. When looking at the raw data are there any factors that need further consideration?

The Pupils

It is well known that the pastoral needs of many children at age 11 contrast greatly with those at 14. These natural changes can impact on schoolwork, relationships and the home. Many very experienced secondary teachers note that pupil disaffection and sometimes challenging behaviour now appears in Year 9, whereas it was historically more of a feature in Year 10. This means the National Tests at 14 come at a very insecure time for some children, but confidence often returns during Key Stage 4.

An increasing number of primary schools now set pupils very effectively to improve levels of attainment – especially towards the end of Key Stage 2. However, this strategy



can produce problems with motivation and behaviour in secondary schools if pupils who are placed in lower ability sets for a number of years develop low self-esteem. Therefore secondary schools have to seek compromises in pupil grouping that will vary between subjects and from one school to the next.

The Examinations

Analysis of test papers shows a difference in style between Key Stages 2 and 3. The former are generally more child-friendly and the latter have more open-ended questions. Certainly, this acts as a useful bridge towards GCSE, but it means there is inconsistency in examination format and, when we add to this the broader curriculum content at Key Stage 3, the serious question over uniformity of levels across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 arises.

The Structures

Pupils in primary schools have a very different experience from those in secondary because of the contrasting structures. Schools have always had to deal with balancing the requirement for specialist teaching and the wish for children to have continuity in their education. In primary schools greater emphasis is placed on continuity, so classes usually have one teacher for all their subjects. As well as providing continuity, it means primary teachers, especially those of Year 6 classes, are very accomplished at preparing their pupils for core subject examinations. The children are known very well and time can be managed to provide extra support and revision. In secondary schools, the content and increasing complexity of subjects demands that pupils are taught by a number of teachers who are specialists in particular subjects.



BEHIND THE STATISTICS: HOW CAN WE COMPARE PERFORMANCE BETWEEN KEY STAGES 2 AND 3? Continued

Children inevitably take time to adapt to the new system in Year 7 – regardless of how much effort schools have devoted to transition arrangements. This can hinder progress – and many secondary schools are seeking ways of improving this by introducing some aspects of primary practice. Interestingly, it is worth noting that many independent primary schools have subject specialist teaching throughout Key Stage 2, making the transition from Key Stage 2 (primary) to Key Stage 3 (secondary) less of an upheaval for pupils. This method of organisation is rare in state primary schools.

The Resources

Key Stage 2 SATs results (rightly or wrongly) are used as the benchmark for judging a junior or primary school and resources are prioritised accordingly. The elimination of National Tests at Key Stage 1 has further emphasised performance in Year 6. Of course formal Teacher Assessment is taking place but, despite efforts to publicise this, parents focus on National Test results when choosing primary schools and deciding on the quality of education.

The secondary system, on the other hand, has to balance the requirements of Key Stage 3 National Tests with a range of demands not present at primary level - most notably the GCSE, AS and A2 examinations – while, in addition coursework has to be completed, marked and moderated. The English, mathematics and science

departments within a school have finite time, energy and resources. Recruiting extra staff is costly and difficult, given the well-publicised problems of retaining teachers. Therefore secondary schools have to prioritise finite resources to deal with a number of requirements in a way that will maximise their pupils' opportunities in later life.

The Future

I have focussed here on a narrow band of the teaching and learning that takes place in primary and secondary schools – that connected with the core subjects and preparing for National Tests. We as Governors must work hard to understand all the other work that goes on in our schools. It is timely that as I complete this article Prince Charles has brought the issue of testing back into focus. Here in Wales debate over future examinations is more advanced than in England and it is important that School Governors make their contribution.

From The Project Director

Although research is continuing into governing body input to school improvement, the bulk of our time at the Centre is currently being spent on training. We are at present organising our annual conference for governors, which will take place on Friday 14 and Saturday 15 March at the Metropole Hotel in Llandrindod Wells.



The theme of the conference is *How are we doing? – governing body self-evaluation and governing body evaluation of schools*, and we are hoping that governors representing every LEA in Wales will be attending. Our speakers are Susan Lewis, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, and Cathy Burt, an education consultant who specialises in the evaluative work of school governing bodies.

We intend to produce a full conference report which will be provided to delegates and be available to all other interested parties.

Steve Gullick

FIRST CONFERENCE FOR PARENT GOVERNOR REPRESENTATIVES IN WALES

The first conference for Parent Governor Representatives (*PGRs*) on Welsh LEA Overview and Scrutiny Committees was held at Powys County Hall, Llandrindod Wells on 2 November 2002. The conference was organised by the Centre on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Entitled *PGRs – Watchdogs, Representatives, or What?*, the conference aimed to help delegates develop their role as PGRs, and also provide an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas and experiences with Parent Governor Representatives from other parts of Wales, and also two PGRs from England.

Guest speakers were Avril Atkinson from the Local Government Modernisation Team, who spoke on the role of PGRs, and Chris Foster, of DfES School Governor Recruitment and Retention Team who, with English PGRs Liz Lee and Terry Douris, considered the topic *Communicating with Constituents*.

Finally, syndicate group sessions looked at the concerns of Welsh PGRs and their suggestions for training and support.

The conference produced some useful tips for PGRs while the syndicate groups, in particular, produced both thought-provoking and very sensible suggestions to improve the way forward.

A full conference report is available from the Centre.



THE VOICE OF GOVERNORS IN WALES

As a governor, have you ever been stuck on a point of law or procedure? In this article, Jane Morris, Co-ordinator for the Governors Wales Helpline, describes the types of queries she and her team deal with and hopefully resolve.

“Governors Wales’ confidential helpline provides independent advice, support and guidance on any issue concerning school governance. However complex or straightforward your query may be – we are here to help you. The service is available from 9.00am to 10.00pm during weekdays and 11.00am to 4.00pm at weekends, excluding public and bank holidays. All calls are at a local rate and a bilingual service is available.”

(extract from our promotional leaflet)

With the financial assistance of the Welsh Assembly Government, 30,000 copies of a promotional leaflet publishing the helpline service were distributed to governors throughout Wales last year, and since the official launch of the helpline service in July 2001 and the extension of the helpline beyond office hours and at weekends which commenced in January 2002, it is pleasing to note that the helpline has become increasingly busy. The service is managed by myself as Helpline Co-ordinator and a team of trained experienced governor volunteers who provide the out of office hours service.

The calls are extremely varied and sometimes reflect the complexities of personalities and relationships. All too often misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the law lead to problematic situations arising. Many of the callers are extremely grateful to have a confidential helpline facility where they can express their concerns or have their fears allayed and where they can be guided in the right direction. It is always encouraging when callers having contacted the helpline on a



previous occasion phone again for advice on a different issue or even just to express their thanks. This certainly reflects well on the dedication of the volunteers who help to run the service. Hopefully all helpline users consider that a good quality service is offered.

Interestingly, the users of the helpline are not restricted to governors

alone. Headteachers, parents, clerks to governing bodies, union representatives, officers of Local Education Authorities etc., have all used the helpline service. To date, the most frequent categories of callers using the service are chairs, vice-chairs and parent governors. Likewise, the most dominant issues or areas of concern relate to appointment of headteachers, complaints, disciplinary/grievance procedures, health and safety issues, the conduct of meetings and the recording of minutes, and requests for published guidance. Although it would also be true to say that performance management is becoming a major concern for many governors whilst the number of queries about exclusion of pupils is steadily increasing.

Governors Wales is committed to supporting the effective governance of schools. The helpline (in conjunction with the other support services we offer) goes some way to achieving this.

So if you have any concerns or worries, why not give us a ring? We could help you make a difference.

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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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.

Conversations

Our conversation in this issue is between Centre Director Steve Gullick and Chief Education Officer for Rhondda Cynon Taff, Dewi Jones. Before taking up this position, Dewi was Director of Education at Merthyr Tydfil.

SG Dewi, what do you think a good governing body can bring to a school which is different from and/or additional to an LEA's input?

DJ Put simply, a detailed knowledge of the school's community and the time to support the school.

With 169 schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf and external pressures to reduce our central admin/management costs, it is physically impossible to give schools the time and attention we would like, and the schools would often wish to receive. You use the term "good" and we are fortunate that most of our governing bodies are "good", or even "very good"! However, occasionally, schools experience difficulties and our intervention is required to ensure that proper governance is maintained.

SG Do you see any overlap in the role of governing bodies and the LEA which might cause problems?

DJ I'm not sure that "overlap" is the right term. There are areas where we work closely in partnership. Appointing senior management is an obvious one. I am determined that Rhondda Cynon Taf will recruit the best candidates especially for Head and Deputy Headteacher positions. Leadership is such a crucial issue for securing school improvement. Women and ethnic minorities are under-represented in senior positions and we need to address this. Occasionally, there are tensions where governors have a sense of loyalty to internal staff, known to them personally. Happily, over the last two years, our appointments and the contribution of governors have generally been first class. Internal and external candidates have been treated fairly.

The management of resources, particularly budgets, is also an area of close partnership. Schools need to adopt a strategic, three-year perspective and need to take timely decisions. With delegated budgets, schools face a range of demands – which includes ensuring that the fabric of school buildings is properly maintained; not always easy when staffing budgets may be over committed.

SG How best can an LEA and governing bodies work together to the greater benefit of schools and, in particular, in which ways can LEAs support governing bodies in their work?

DJ By focusing, together, on school improvement. Governors have a primary duty to ensure that pupils receive the best possible educational experience. Too much time is still spent discussing mundane matters or simply receiving information, and too little discussing qualitative aspects e.g. standards, aspects of the development plan, parental involvement, enrichment programmes, and so on.

The education service has a variety of methods to fulfil its obligation to governors. However, a number are entered into voluntarily. For example, we have an excellent team of governor support officers. Our experience is that where this service is "purchased", governance tends to be better. The support of the advisory service is also critical and it is no coincidence that where LEAs have worked in collaboration, to ensure the right breadth and depth of expertise, governing bodies have received a higher level and a better quality of support.

SG Finally, I'm going to ask you to predict the future, Dewi. How do you see the relationship between LEAs and governing bodies developing?

DJ Well, I think! Since 1996, new education services have strengthened their partnerships with an array of agencies, especially governing bodies. Governors Wales and your own Centre of Excellence have been helpful in complementing and supplementing these partnership arrangements. We seem to have a strong inclination to work collaboratively in Wales.

As models of schooling change over the next decade – with an increasing variety of staff fulfilling different roles, I suspect that governors will need more support with Human Resources issues. Governors will also have greater freedom to be proactive in involving the community in the life of the school, or the school in the life of the community!

Helping Governors see their school as part of a wider web of services will be particularly important. Our education service in Rhondda Cynon Taf is closely aligned to children's services (from the old social services) and already the integration of services is beginning to deliver real benefits.

I'm particularly looking forward to working with governors to increase the capacity of schools to improve. Resources will be an issue, but I suspect attitudes will be the key.

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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