



CADWYN



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

FREE INDEPENDENT LEGAL ADVICE SERVICE FOR GOVERNING BODIES



Thanks to the project, Governors Wales will now be able to access this independent legal advice when this is an appropriate means of helping a caller to resolve a particular situation. It must be emphasised, however, that this service is available to governing bodies only, and not individual governors. Also, governing bodies do not have direct access to this advice: they must contact Governors Wales who will then pass on their request.

Of course, this service is not intended to replace the legal advice provided by local education authorities.

Pictured at the launch of the new service are (from left to right): Jane Morris, Colin Thomas and Glyn Owen – Governors Wales; Jane Davidson AM; Leon Da Costa – Chief Executive, Judicium Ltd, and Dr Alex Mehta, Director, Judicium Ltd

On 21 January 2004 the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Jane Davidson, launched a new service for governing bodies in Wales which will enable them to access expert independent legal advice via Governors Wales. In providing this service the Welsh Assembly Government recognises that there are occasions when governing bodies feel vulnerable and would benefit from being able to access independent legal advice.

Governing bodies should always discuss matters and seek advice from their LEA as they currently do, but this new service can provide them with a source of independent legal opinion free of charge should the occasion arise.

The new project is being funded by the National Assembly for Wales for a 12 month trial period from 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2004, with the service being provided by a top nationwide legal practice which has been brokered by Judicium Ltd of London. It is aimed to support and enhance Governors Wales' telephone Helpline service.

Governors Wales identified a need for governing bodies to be able to access independent legal advice, as some of the most testing enquiries and requests for advice they receive on their telephone Helpline relate to circumstances that are on the margins of law, or where regulations and guidance may appear to be ambiguous. They explored a number of options for delivery of this service, and selected Judicium Ltd because they were able to provide advice on a wide range of legal issues relevant to school governors.

SPREAD THE WORD!

Some governors have told us that they rarely see copies of Cadwyn.

Can we please ask you, as Chair, to pass on your copy of Cadwyn to your colleagues on the governing body when you've finished reading it.

Also, don't forget that previous issues of Cadwyn can be found on our website at www.swansea.ac.uk/education/governors.

Keeping up to date with ...

Keeping up to date is vital for anyone involved with the ever-changing world of education. This is the second of a series of columns by Madeleine Rogerson, Senior Librarian at the Department of Education, intended as a brief guide to the complex maze of information about education.

... changes in the education system ...

There are many printed encyclopedias and handbooks offering outlines of how the UK education system works. The recent *Education in the United Kingdom* (L. Gearon, published by Fulton) gives a detailed description of organisation and structure up to 2002. For the wider perspective, the 12 volume *Husen and Postlethwaite International encyclopedia of education* (published by Pergamon, 1994) contains summaries of numerous international systems

There are many informative websites, which, generally, are more up to date than printed sources. The Education UK website (<http://www.educationuk.org>) – produced primarily to help international students - gives an authoritative account of the whole sector, including current information on funding, quality and assessment issues.

...qualifications and curriculum ...

The sources mentioned above will also help with finding information on developments in the UK qualifications system. A detailed description of school and the 16-19 system appears on the Department for Education and Skills website at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/qualifications>.

The Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (<http://www.accac.org.uk/quals.html>) and partner regulatory Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (<http://www.qca.org.uk>) pages include comprehensive information on curriculum and assessment arrangements and the national qualifications framework.

Printed guides such as *Whitaker's Almanack* (published each year by the Stationery Office) and the *Jordan Publishing annual Running a school: legal duties and responsibilities* summarize both qualification and curriculum requirements and changes.

The British Library Net at <http://www.britishlibrary.net> provides direct links to educational and cultural resources, including access to a large number of national, university and public library catalogues.

Check with your local school, public, college or university library for access and borrowing entitlements.

GOVERNORS BEWARE!

Since the establishment of the Welsh Assembly Government, our education system has become increasingly distinctive and different in a number of ways from that of England. There are a number of obvious examples of this divergence. In England, for instance, the Department for Education and Skills has established specialist schools and colleges, while in Wales we have seen great improvements made through the comprehensive system and consequently not adopted this initiative. At the same time, Wales no longer publishes league tables of public examination results, while England still does; and in Wales a number of schools and colleges are piloting a new form of post-16 assessment (the Welsh Baccalaureate), while England for the time being remains wedded to 'A' Level.

This divergence in educational forms is often mirrored by differences in the regulations which control English and Welsh education. It is essential, therefore, when reading newspaper or magazine articles which refer to changes in school organisation, that governors check whether such changes affect Wales as well as England before embarking on courses of action which might be inappropriate or unnecessary.

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.



ANNUAL CONFERENCE – 5 MARCH 2004

Our third annual conference was held at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells on Friday 5 March 2004. A departure from our traditional two-day overnight event, the conference was nevertheless another great success, with over 100 delegates present. It was particularly pleasing that 18 LEA Governor Support Officers were able to attend.

The conference was organised by the Centre and was, once again, made possible by funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

Building on last year's work on the evaluative role of governors, the theme of this year's conference was "Where are we going? The role of school governors in strategic planning and target setting".

The conference was opened by Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning. Speaking on the vital role that governing bodies can plan in strategic planning and target setting, she was quick to congratulate governors' input to improvements in Welsh schools.

The Minister was followed by Dr Jane Martin, Executive Director of the Centre for Public Scrutiny. The co-author of "Joined-up Governance" and an expert in the field of public sector governance and

management, Jane emphasised the role of governors as community representatives in the field of school strategic planning.

After lunch, Steve Gullick gave a brief outline of the work currently being undertaken by the Centre.

The delegates spent the remainder of the afternoon in syndicate groups, discussing the role of governing bodies in strategic planning and target setting. They also considered the best ways that they could disseminate information from this conference and, indeed, other training events to their own governing bodies and other governing bodies in their LEA.

From the feedback it is clear that the delegates found the conference interesting and useful, though a number of those who had attended previous conferences felt that our two-day events were perhaps more enjoyable as they allowed for greater networking opportunities for delegates.

A full report of the Conference is being produced. Please contact us if you would like a copy, though the report will also be available on our website at:

www.swan.ac.uk/education/governors/Conferences.htm

CONGRATULATIONS ...



to Mr John Brock, Chair of Governors at Sageston Community Primary School, Pembrokeshire, who has been awarded the MBE for services to school governance. Mr Brock has been a governor at Sageston for over thirty years, serving as Chair of Governors for much of this time. He has devoted a large part of his life to working enthusiastically and with total dedication in support of pupils and staff alike. He always finds time to care and support in a quiet and unassuming way, and is regarded in very high esteem by all who know him.

Congratulations also... to Councillor James Kirkwood who has been awarded the MBE for services to education. He is a City councillor and Chair of Governors at Caerleon Comprehensive School, Newport.

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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Conversations

In this issue, editor Steve Gullick talks to Angharad Reed, Governor Support Officer for Pembrokeshire.

SG How long have you been a Governor Support Officer, Angharad?

AR Since April 2001 with Pembrokeshire County Council, but for two years before that I supported school governors in the Pembrokeshire area under Dyfed County Council.

SG How would you describe the role of a GSO?

AR Well, put quite simply, my role is to provide strategic direction and leadership to the Governors' Support Service in Pembrokeshire.

The Education Strategic Plan places great emphasis on the work of school governors in raising standards in schools, so our Governor Support Service team of three full-timers (with support from staff in other directorates as well as Education Services staff) is kept very busy. Our role is split into providing advice, support and training for school governors, and running a service level agreement with 99% of Pembrokeshire schools. In practice, it is difficult to draw a line between the two.

As the Head of the section I have to maintain an up-to-date knowledge of education legislation and policy and ensure that governors are kept abreast of policy changes and educational developments. This means I spend a lot of time preparing papers for Heads and governors as well as for elected members of the authority.

Information is sent to governors in a variety of ways, and I oversee the development of the interactive website, maintenance of a telephone hotline and the preparation of a model agenda and numerous guidance and briefing papers.

The governor training programme takes up a lot of my time too, particularly as it has to be reviewed frequently. I am also personally involved in delivering a number of training sessions in Pembrokeshire and more and more of these are school based. The identification of training needs is crucial, and this is done at authority level and by the Pembrokeshire Federation of Governing Bodies, as well as by governing bodies themselves.

Overall, the role is people oriented and I enjoy it very much.

SG You've obviously a lot of experience of working with governors, Angharad, so what do you feel are the most important roles of a governing body?

AR I think the most important roles of a governing body fall broadly into three categories: the strategic role; acting as critical friend; and, linked closely to this, monitoring.

The School Government (Terms of Reference) (Wales) Regulations 2000 say that governing bodies should "approach their duties in a broadly strategic way". This means that governors, working with the Senior Management Team, should decide on the vision for the school, that is what the governors want the school to achieve and make plans to get there. The focus must be on raising standards of achievement, establishing high expectations and promoting effective teaching and learning, so that pupils achieve their potential. This means governors should set and review the policies that provide the framework for the headteacher and staff to run the school. They should also set targets to achieve their objectives and put systems in place to check that progress is being made.

In acting as a critical friend, a governing body is expected to recognise and celebrate the achievements of the school and to know where the school is not achieving as well as it could. Governors need to provide support and encouragement and have to find the balance between that support and challenge.

The critical friend can:

- ask questions and seek information constructively.
- offer practical help, skills and knowledge.
- promote positive links between the school and the community.

Monitoring can be carried out in lots of different ways and different approaches will suit different aspects of the school's work. Some ways include

- the headteacher's report
- a curricular, or other, presentation
- designating link governors
- holding meetings in different classrooms
- reviews of policy on a rolling programme.

Monitoring information should be presented to the governing body in a clear and understandable way which helps governors form sound judgements, and certainly the information governors receive from the headteacher about the school's performance should help to make an effective contribution to raising standards.

SG And now for the awkward question; what are the three things more than anything else that a governing body should never do?

AR Well, first of all, it is important that the governing body acts as a corporate body and not a group of individuals if they are to do their best to ensure that all children are achieving their best. Problems really do arise when individual governors act on their own and not as part of the overall group

Another thing a governing body should never do is interfere in the day-to-day management of the school. Governors do not decide the organisation of the school – the head and SMT decide, for example, who teaches which children, when, where and for how long.

The third most important thing is that a governing body should not pre-judge situations. In other words, governors should always be impartial. This is particularly important when undertaking roles such as appointing or dismissing staff, or in sitting on disciplinary panels.

It is also important to stress that governors must always observe confidentiality. Minutes may be public documents but details relating to individuals must always remain confidential.

But to end on a more positive note, I would say that if governing bodies act strategically and as a critical friend, and undertake meaningful monitoring, then not too much can go wrong.