Schools, governors & disadvantage

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The commitment

- 350,000 governors
- Significant increase in responsibilities
- An unpaid workforce
- A massive investment of civic capital
- A major contribution to the school system

Why governors matter

- Managerial
  - Ensuring schools are managed efficiently in line with the national interest
  - Challenge & support
- Localising
  - Bringing local knowledge to bear on what schools do
  - Filtering inappropriate national policies
- Democratising
  - Ensuring local people have a voice
  - Promoting civic engagement

In some places…

- Ample supply of skilled & assertive volunteers
- What governors want is what parents & communities want
- Most people want the same things
- Government policies meet local needs & wishes

But elsewhere…?

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JOSEPH ROWNTREE
FOUNDATION

Interviews with governors, heads & LA officers in schools serving 3 disadvantaged areas

http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1994-schools-governors-disadvantage.pdf

Ample supply of skilled & assertive volunteers?

- Recruitment & retention problems:
  - I went 'oh my god what have I let myself in for?' because the amount of paperwork is unbelievable…Generally we get the paperwork beforehand and it's that, that kind of plays on my mind a bit I suppose, because I didn't understand a lot of it which I kind of felt shame on me as well as I've been a parent of children going to school for many years, but I really didn't understand it at all even as a governor and I'm still finding it, two years later, still going – panic attacks and things

- Critical friendship:
  - …whatever it's – what's it called – critical friend or something? It's the classic – I don't know what that means, I never have!

- Two-tier governing bodies

What governors want is what communities want?

- Governors recruited from outside the area
- Little relationship between governor background & the social mix of the school
- Under-representation of minority groups
- Little linkage between governors, parents & community activists

Most people want the same things?

- The 'common interest'
  - Generally we all seem to work together and want the best for the school and the children, basically.
- But who decides this?

Government policies meet local needs & wishes?

- Schools serving disadvantaged areas find it hard to succeed
- Government policy is centralised & prescriptive
- Governors have little freedom of action
- Governing bodies shy away from representation & sectional interests

The challenge

If you took my secretary away or the school keeper…or any one of my class teachers away, it would have a huge impact…Governing bodies… can be highly effective, full of very good people [but] if it didn't exist, you might not notice.

What are governors for?

- Managerial
  - Lack of people, lack of capacity
- Localising
  - Favoured role
  - Lack of control, lack of legitimacy
- Democratising
  - Lack of control, lack of mandate

Option I: incremental improvement

- Proactive recruitment of marginalised groups
- Induction & mentoring
- Flexible meetings & tasks
- Enhanced capacity through trust nominees
- Reduced government expectations

Option II: structural change

- Replace governors with LA or agency management
- Move towards federations
- Create a corps of semi-professional governors

Option III: radical change

- Democratise & politicise school governance
- Develop links between governors, local communities, & activist groups
- Give governors more power to shape the work of their schools
- Increase numbers of community-owned schools

How do these issues play out in your school?

How do you see your role as a governor?

**Can the system be improved
– or does it need to be scrapped?**

The report

http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1994-schools-governors-disadvantage.pdf