

School governance at a time of rapid de-/re-regulation: the changing role and responsibilities of school governors

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ESRC SASE 2012-2015



Future Research Leaders Grant

October 2012 – January 2015

In-depth, multi-sited, case study
investigation of school governance

Key focus:

To explore the changing role of governance,
governing and governors under new education
reforms in England

ESRC SASE 2012-2015

Research questions

How do governors understand their role and responsibilities?

How do governors and senior leaders understand and practise governance?

Who gets to influence key decision making?

What is the relationship between governors, parents and the wider community?

What is good governance?

Research Methods

Interview

102 senior leaders, school governors and parents.

Observation

42 observations of full governing body and committee meetings.

Documentary evidence

School improvement plans, induction packs, minutes, headteachers report to governors, articles of association.

Literature review

Government and non-government texts including third sector, media and academic.

Research sites

Sample

Two free schools, three converter and sponsor academies, one foundation school and three LEA maintained schools.

Location

London and a rural area of England.

Phase of education

Seven secondary schools and two primary schools.

Collaboration and Federation

Three stand-alone schools, two multi-academy trust, one co-operative trust and three local government maintained.

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What skills do academy governors need to manage million-pound budgets?

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Are cliques taking control of our governing bodies?

news | Published in TES magazine on 14 November, 2014 | By: Helen Ward

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Gove: school governors 'must toughen up and stop singing Kumbayah'

Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, says school governors should ask tough questions, not allow the role to become a 'sherry pouring, cake slicing exercise in hugging each other and singing Kumbayah'

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'Gap' in school governor records

By Sean Coughlan
Education correspondent

10 February 2015 | Education & Family

Hard regulation

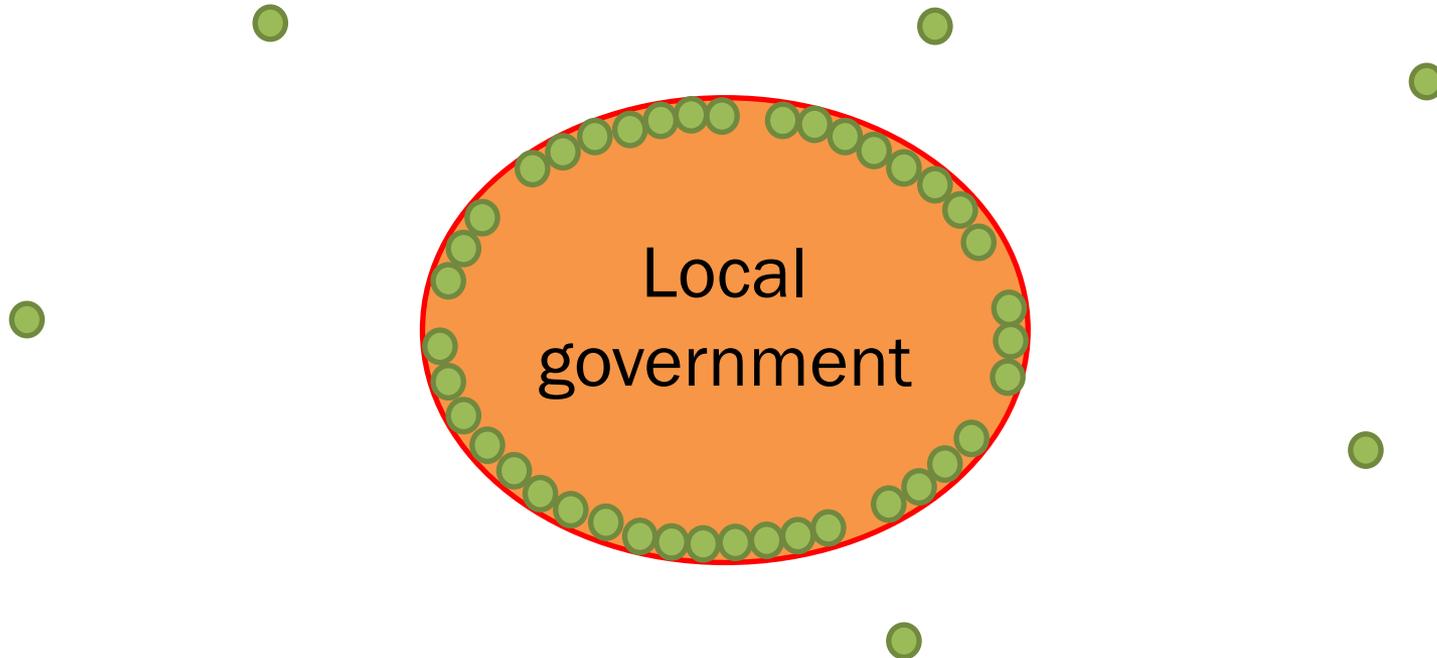
Direct control

Regional Oversight

New Labour

1997-2010

203 academies opened



Soft regulation

Decentralisation

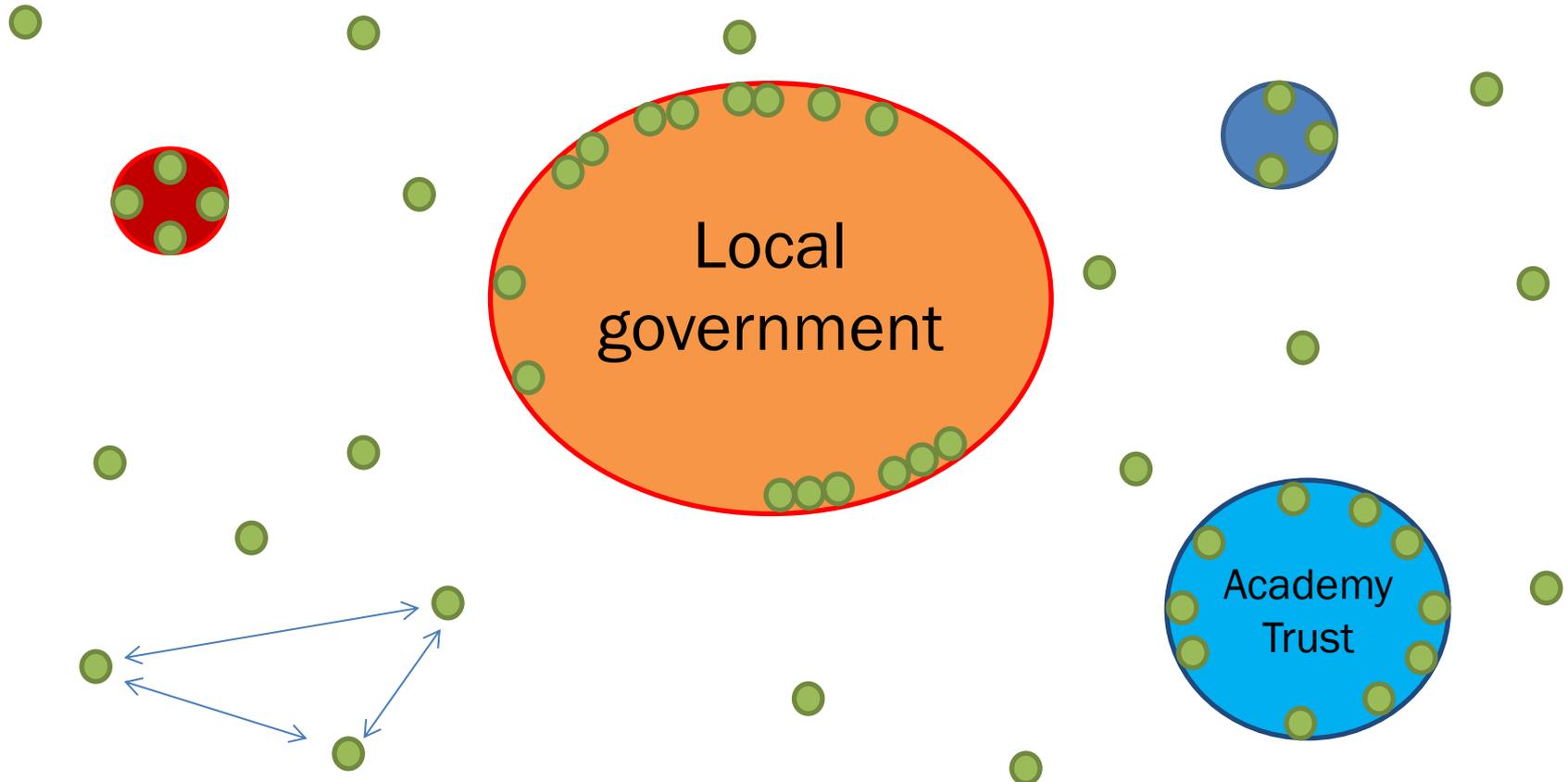
Dis-intermediation

Steering and facilitation

Coalition

2010-2014

3924 academies opened



Academisation and school governance

Reconstitution, reorientation and reculturing

New relations of accountability

Decentralisation and duplication of bureaucracy

Supplant the formal authority of local government



Technocratic specificity of role ('checks and balances')

Data tracking and monitoring (RaiseOnline and OSDD)

Emphasis on experts and expertise

Becoming professional: CPD, training, external review

Overlapping trends in school governance

- Professionalisation
- Managerial ideology
- Technicity of knowledge
- New accountabilities
- Pedagogies of surveillance

Running a school is in many ways like running a business

culture of self-review

professional ethos



Professionals and Amateurs

trying to find people who've got **the right sort of experience from industry, commerce**, that sort of thing, who want to give the time, is quite difficult. But Emma has **contacts in the business world** so she is actively trying to recruit people (Community Governor)

I'm not trying to knock governing bodies or governors or anything like that but I feel that governing bodies should be **run by a series of professionals** (Community Governor)

I think it's fair to say that the governors we've got would **represent the higher end. So more affluent, professional classes, eloquent and articulate**, which is why they are on the governing body in the first place (Headteacher)

We are not professionals. We are **amateur** I suppose really trying to do a **professional job** (LEA Governor)



Technicity of Knowledge

In the bank I'd always worked, most of it was looking after corporate customers in a sort of **corporate-customer relationship role**. So I suppose I've got a pretty good idea in terms of what was required on the **business side of running the school** (Community Governor)

I think I can only see it in terms of **outcomes**. I mean I can say that for political reasons, yes, I'd love it to be part of the local authority, wouldn't it be grand. But at the end of the day the **only thing that really counts are the outcomes** and **I will judge it on that** (Diocese Representative)

I'm not a curriculum person as such but the **business of the school** interests me...Well, **pupils equals pounds**, you've got to provide a first class education (Community Governor)

Just imagine yourself in business. **You've got a problem in business, you can't just slide home**. You've got to sort it out (LEA Governor)



Pedagogies of Surveillance

I think it's very important that the governing body knows the school in terms of, you know, data, because **that's what Ofsted want to focus on**, is data, so a weak governing body will not understand the data or will just accept the data (Parent Governor)

Last year we've looked at the, **not just Ofsted requirements**, but **evaluated ourselves** in terms of how we'd come out...I think that's a good benchmark to monitor things and it does do jobs. It also **prepares us for the Ofsted inspection** (Parent Governor)

It's got to a point now that schools are, you know, under a lot of pressure to improve. And **Ofsted is hovering**, has been for some years with a **threat of Ofsted inspection**, making sure you are improving (LEA Governor)

I suppose when Ofsted come in they can call the governors more to account and I know they do. And **governance is something being looked at now very closely by Ofsted**. Governors have to be informed (Headteacher)



Key strategies to good governance

Formal and informal processes of
socialisation and **acculturation**

A silhouette illustration of two business professionals, a man and a woman, standing and talking. The man is on the left, wearing a suit and a red tie. The woman is on the right, wearing a suit and glasses. They are both looking at a document held by the woman. A large speech bubble originates from the woman's mouth, containing text.

I suppose you could argue that I've been **socialised** by being a governor for eighteen months (Parent Governor)

Key strategies to good governance

Meetings are **participative** and **democratic** rather than exclusively **consultative**

Sometimes you have a **very autocratic head and chair** and they sew up quite a lot of stuff in advance and then the **governing body acts as a rubber stamping** (Parent Governor)



Key strategies to good governance

Recognising formal and informal **relations of accountability**

You've got your, at the upper level, **you've got the EFA and the DfE**. There is an element of responsibility there. But for me our responsibility very much is, **maybe not legally**, is to the pupils, the parents, and the wider community locally (Associate Chair)

ultimately it's accountable to the parents isn't it? **It doesn't feel like that sometimes**...Ofsted and all of that stuff, God knows we are incredibly accountable to them, but I never lose sight of the fact that **it's to the families that we are accountable** as far as I'm concerned (Assistant Headteacher)

