

# Expertise, engagement and connectedness

## Can we have it all?

### An investigation into the future of school governance

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**University of Manchester Governance Conference**

Thursday 27th April, 2017

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# School governance – a scoping study

- A scoping study focused on the future of school governance
- Commissioned and hosted by the RSA
- Funded by the Local Government Association, The Elliot Foundation and RSA Academies
- Supported by an “Expert” Group drawn from the Local Government Association, The Elliot Foundation, the National Governance Association, the Association of School and College Leaders, the Centre for Public Scrutiny, the Catholic Education Service and RSA Academies
- Launched: January 2016; Publication: June 2017

## (a) Who, why and what?

1. Why does school governance matter?
2. Who are the key partners in the governance process?
3. What are school governors and Governing Boards responsible for?
4. What do school governors and Governing Boards do that is not addressed elsewhere in the range of school accountability and regulatory frameworks?
5. Other than governance, what else do governors contribute to their schools and their school communities?

## (b) Emergent landscapes

1. What might governance look and feel like in the emerging landscape?
2. What are the risks implicit in less localized models of school governance?
3. How does *trusteeship* in a MAT differ from *governorship* in a school?
4. What might headship feel like in the emergent governance landscape?
5. Do current policy guidelines and announcements capture the extent of this change?

## (c) Preparation, quality and principles

1. How do we best train and induct the various participants in the school governance process?
2. Where and how do we strike the balance between local expertise and expertise sourced from elsewhere?
3. How do we best inspect or otherwise assure the quality of school governance?
4. What core principles must underpin any future framework for the governance of our schools?

# Headline 1: governance and the participative spirit

- *Effective governance is not just a vital engine of school improvement; engagement as a school governor is one of the most popular means of formal volunteering in the UK*
- *Any move which undermines either this purpose or this participative spirit should be rejected*

## Headline 2: training for governance

- *There is rightly a strong focus on the need for better induction and training for school governors, but training for governors alone is insufficient*
- *We need a better understanding of governance across the teaching profession and others who work in and with schools, especially amongst school leaders and those who aspire to such roles*

## Headline 3: governance reform - by accident or design?

- *Too often governors are left to navigate a changing landscape that is not of their making and which has not been crafted with governance in mind*
- *It is common for changes to school governance arrangements to emerge as the unintended consequences of change elsewhere in the system*
- *How we govern our schools should be an education policy priority, not an afterthought*

## Headline 4: stakeholders can be experts

- *There is a false dichotomy in the minds of policymakers and in Department for Education documentation that assumes stakeholders cannot be experts*
- *Building on the locally contextualized knowledge of parents, staff, students and members of the local community is not a block on good governance; it is often the route to it - and it may have significant benefits in terms of personal and community development for the individuals and neighbourhoods concerned*

## Headline 5: governance, locality and autonomy

- *The shift towards a system dominated by federations and Multi-Academy Trusts has paid insufficient regard to the benefits of locally based school governance and autonomous headship*
- *The costs to the schooling system - in terms of economic value, social capital and the recruitment and retention of head teachers - could be profound and may be incalculable*

## Headline 6: governance across the sectors

- *Infusing collaborative school working with the voice of local stakeholders, and sharing the essence of good governance across and between sectors offers the key to more effective, creative and transparent school governance, stronger school leadership and, most importantly, better outcomes for learners and their communities*

# Questions for Discussion

1. What can different sectors learn from each other about governance?
2. What can schools in different settings, contexts and phases learn from each other about governance?
3. How might engagement in governance contribute to personal development and community wellbeing?
4. How do we balance the need for professionalism and effectiveness with the need for community engagement and involvement?
5. In professionalising our governance arrangements and moving these up-stream, do we risk some of the issues that have arisen with, for instance, the professionalisation of our politics?
6. How do we 'grow' governance expertise in our communities, whatever the social capital these communities start out with?

# Some tentative suggestions

1. A cross-sector commission on governance
2. A stronger recognition of the wider benefits of engagement in school and charity governance
3. A focus on identifying and growing expertise in local settings, not on simply 'importing' it
4. A focus on developing governance-literacy sector wide (and across sectors), rather than on simply 'training' those who take up governance roles
5. A national cross-sector campaign to boost engagement in governance, especially amongst under-represented groups
6. Greater representation of those involved in educational and charity governance on Corporate Boards

# Feedback

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