

CADWYN



ALL WALES CENTRE *for* GOVERNOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

WHAT ABOUT THE STAFF?

Ann Birch is a lecturer in the School of Education at Swansea Metropolitan University. She has a particular interest in the continuing professional development of school staff and in this article she considers the opportunities now available to them.

If you were to ask any school governor what was their main responsibility, it is reasonable to assume that their answer would, rightly, focus on the pupils, their welfare and their learning. They would probably express a wish, even vision, that the children in their school should achieve their academic potential and enjoy personal growth, social and spiritual awareness and a safe, healthy, happy lifestyle. No one could argue with these sentiments..... but what about the staff?

If we consider that our schools are communities of learning, and that learning is lifelong, then we have to acknowledge that everyone within the school community is a learner. So how can governors ensure that the staff, that is all staff, have opportunities to continue to learn and develop professionally? First of all, it is important to understand that, as there are many diverse roles and skills evident within any school team, including leadership, teaching, supporting learning, administration and site supervision, there are many different ways for these members of staff to learn and develop professionally.

So what Continuing Professional Development opportunities are available for staff? If we first consider the role of the teacher, historically there has been a range of provision for professional development, usually in the form of:

- School based In-Service Training (INSET)
- Training courses, usually short, often one day
- Academic programmes leading to qualifications such as diplomas or M.A.'s

These are still part of the whole CPD picture. INSET run at and by the school has the potential to develop teachers' skills and practice to deal with initiatives which are of particular relevance to the school. There is also the added advantage of creating an opportunity for team building. This type of CPD, however, is inevitably prompted by school based priorities and may not meet the needs of individual teachers who are at different ages and stages in their careers and have different interests.

Short courses, often just one day, still have a place in the CPD picture but increasingly are viewed as less effective in impacting on teachers' practice and therefore on children's learning. This experience can sometimes be a "quick fix" that addresses an issue but does not offer the time or opportunity to reflect on the issues, either on the day, or afterwards when the teacher returns to school.

Accredited programmes such as Graduate Certificates and Diplomas, Post-Graduate Certificates and Diplomas and Master's degrees are traditionally offered through universities and higher education institutions. Inevitably these programmes are seen as having a strong academic focus but, increasingly, they have moved towards linking academic theory with what actually happens in schools. This

development, along with the critical analysis, critical reflection and networking between teachers, inherent within the programmes, are acknowledged as having a significant impact on teachers' understanding and practice and, consequently, on children's learning. Partnership working between Higher Education Institutions, Local Education Authorities and practitioners, in delivering programmes such as graduate certificates and diplomas, ensures that what teachers experience is up to date and relevant to what goes on in schools.

Continuing Professional Development programmes, which do not offer qualification like diplomas but which last longer than one day, offer similar opportunities for reflection and networking and as such can be highly effective. Many programmes are offered through many different organisations but examples of this type of CPD include Philosophy for Children and Forest Schools.

It is also worth remembering that professional development can be achieved through activities other than "courses," and the value of visiting other classrooms and other schools is recognised as important. Teachers observing one another and talking together about their practice in their own specific settings are usually learning from one another in terms of strategies, resources and relationships. Comparing and contrasting experiences, school cultures, learning environments and practice is stimulating and thought provoking; it can broaden horizons and foster self esteem and confidence. A positive impact on learning, both the teacher's and the children's, is perhaps inevitable.

Members of school staff other than teachers have in the past, perhaps, been considered to be of only very minor importance to the experience of the pupils in the school, and certainly not seen as significant in terms of the children's learning. However, the culture within schools is changing largely as a result of workforce remodelling. Reference to "support staff" now includes teaching assistants, (also referred to as paraprofessionals, learning support assistants and a range of other titles) administrative staff, canteen staff, dinner ladies and site supervisors (caretakers). These support staff, it can be argued, do have an impact on the quality of the children's experiences, including their learning. The majority of teaching assistants are directly involved in supporting children's learning; it is not uncommon to see a site supervisor accompanying teachers and children on outward bound visits (including residential) and contributing to the activities; dinner ladies have daily opportunities to influence the personal and social development of the children in their charge. Are they, then, not only entitled to professional development opportunities but is it not in the best interests of our children to equip them thoroughly for their roles?



So what opportunities are available for support staff other than teaching assistants? Inevitably there is a need for their CPD activities to relate directly to their main roles such as administrative skills and systems, health and safety, possibly even carpentry etc. It might be a good idea, though, to involve them as well in school-based INSET focused on children's learning in specific areas such as Science or Personal and Social Education.

Teaching assistants traditionally gained a nationally recognised qualification (NNEB) but, with the growth of the workforce, opportunities for teaching assistants to take up relevant and meaningful work-based CPD have expanded in recent years. Programmes are offered at a number of levels:

- Induction – provided by schools, LEAS or groups of LEAS
- National Vocational Qualifications at Levels one, two, three (and sometimes four)
- Modern Apprenticeships

- Foundation Degrees (not to be confused with foundation courses) provided by universities and higher education institutions.

It is heartening that teaching assistants can now access programmes that are appropriate to their experience and which will enhance skills and understanding.

There can be no doubt that the professional development of school staff is recognised as crucial to school improvement and therefore to the quality of children's learning. This recognition is underpinned by funding for teachers' CPD through the Welsh Assembly Government and the General Teaching Council for Wales and it is to be hoped that future developments will include a funding stream for CPD for all school staff.

On returning to the opening question of the main responsibilities of a school governor, perhaps it is reasonable to conclude that the issue of the professional development of all school staff should be high on the list.

WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT CIRCULAR 36/2007

'PROCEDURES FOR WHISTLEBLOWING IN SCHOOLS AND MODEL POLICY'

The former Children's Commissioner for Wales, the late Mr Peter Clarke in his Clywch Inquiry report published in June 2004 recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government issued guidance to governors of all maintained schools in Wales to assist them in establishing a whistleblowing policy. He also recommended that the policy should be made known to all school staff.

In response to this recommendation the Welsh Assembly Government consulted key partners in the education sector and other statutory and voluntary bodies concerned with children's rights and local and national education organisations on draft 'best practice' guidance for school governing bodies on procedures for whistleblowing in schools and a model whistleblowing policy.

Responses to the consultation were considered and taken into account, and in December 2007 the Welsh Assembly Government issued Circular 36/2007 'Procedures for Whistleblowing in Schools and Model Policy' to all maintained schools. Copies of the guidance document can also be found on the Welsh Assembly Government's website at:

http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance_and_information/whistleblowing-model-policy?lang=en

The document includes guidance on whistleblowing procedures for school staff, and a model policy that governing bodies can adopt.

Whistleblowing has been defined as:

'the disclosure by an employee or professional of confidential information which relates to some danger, fraud or other illegal or unethical conduct connected with the work place, be it of the employee or his/her fellow employees'
(Public Concern at Work Guidelines 1997)

Whistleblowing is the means by which an employee can raise concerns with a third party, often with his or her employer. Within a school setting members of staff are often the first to realise if there is something seriously wrong. Having a whistleblowing procedure in

place ensures that all members of staff are able to raise concerns about conduct or practice within the school which is potentially illegal, corrupt, improper, unsafe or unethical or which amounts to malpractice, and are able to do so without fear of victimisation and with confidence that their concerns will be taken seriously and dealt with properly.

An effective whistleblowing procedure should:

- Ensure that members of staff are aware of the appropriate channels to raise a concern;
- give members of staff an assurance that they can raise such concerns without fear of reprisal; and
- wherever possible ensure that the procedure is confidential.

There is statutory protection for employees who whistleblow, provided by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), which protects employees against victimisation if they make a protected disclosure within the meaning of PIDA. Circular 36/2007 explains PIDA in more detail and the legal context of whistleblowing.

The guidance also covers what constitutes whistleblowing; the aim, scope and context of a whistleblowing procedure; processes for raising and enquiring into a concern; and a model whistleblowing policy that can be adopted by schools.

If you would like a copy of the whistleblowing guidance you can access it via the web address mentioned above or request a hard copy from:

Schools Management Division 2
Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ
Tel: 029 20 826051 | E-mail: SMD2@wales.gsi.gov.uk



FROM THE CENTRE MANAGER

As you might have noticed from the new logo on the front cover of this edition of "Cadwyn", the Centre is now based at Swansea Metropolitan University. We haven't changed location, though; it's just that Swansea Institute achieved university status in January to become the U.K.'s newest university, so congratulations to all who worked to achieve this. It won't affect the Centre a great deal, though we have a new e-mail address.

I've been involved in a variety of training programmes in a number of places across Wales since our last issue. I've spoken to governors in Flintshire and Denbighshire on effective governance and addressed a conference of Primary Head teachers in Rhondda Cynon Taf on their role in developing the part governors can play in strategic planning and monitoring and evaluating. I've also been working with Governor Support Officers and Governors Wales on ways of measuring good practice in support and training for governors to help share ideas.

I told you in our last issue that we had completed our research into the role of the governing body Chair. We've now used the evidence from that study to produce a national Chair training programme; a project financed by the Welsh Assembly Government. This programme is now being printed and will be given to local authority Governor Support Officers in March.

I am also very pleased that the Welsh Assembly Government has asked the Centre to undertake an extensive research project into the training for governors provided by local authorities in Wales. As you can imagine, this is likely to be a large piece of work, and as well as carrying out research based at the Centre, I'm sure I'll be working with local authority Governor Support Officers and speaking to individual governors and colleagues at Governors Wales.

Finally, for our "Conversations" feature, I interview people who are involved with school governance. For this issue I interviewed two associate pupil governors – Sixth Formers from a school in North Wales. To say I was impressed with them would be an understatement. At a time when we hear so much about young people's bad behaviour, interviewing these two pupils was a real reminder to me that the vast majority of our youngsters are thoughtful and conscientious, and all those who are involved in their development – administrators, teachers and governors – need sometimes to stand back and pat themselves on the back for the part they play in our children's education.

Steve Gullick

NEWS FROM GOVERNORS WALES

Proposals for a New Management Structure:

Governors Wales has carried out a review of its management structure and constitution. Consultation is now taking place with local governor associations and other parties. The proposals aim to strengthen Governors Wales' contribution to the practice and improvement of school governance and enhance policy development.

New Staff Member:

Ray Wells took up the post as Development Officer for North and Mid Wales in November 2007.

Prior to this, Ray served over thirty years with Corus in various management roles. He has a wide range of expertise in the management of people development and process quality improvement techniques. He also has specialist knowledge of the application of the EFQM Excellence Model in an education environment, with particular reference to strategic planning and leadership.

He has been a senior assessor for the EFQM European Excellence Award and the Wales Quality Award for several years and has also been an Investors In People Recognition Panel member for Wales since 1997, assisting Primary Head Teachers with their understanding of how IIP fits with other Standards. A governor, since the mid-nineties, with both a College and a High School, he has taken a particular interest in effective leadership and how partnerships can

be forged between employers and schools to develop the learning pathways agenda.

Lastly, Ray is a qualified Rugby Union Coach at Club, County and Regional level and played professional rugby league for Warrington in the early 1970s.

Future Publications and events:

Governors Wales are in the process of compiling a "Governors Guide" on "The Appointment of Headteachers". If you have any suggestions for future publications please contact us by:-

Telephone – 02920487858 or

E-mail – contact@governorwales.org.uk

AGM and Summer Conference - to take place on Saturday 12th July 2008, at Llandrindod Wells. The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills will be speaking at the conference. Further information is available from the Governors Wales' office on 029 2048 7858.

Other Initiatives:

Governors Wales is contributing with LEA Governor Support Officers, etc. to working groups that are meeting to discuss the possibility of establishing a "Quality Mark" for governors and also examining opportunities to benchmark best practice in a variety of aspects for governor development.

Llywodraethwyr Cymru

Governors Wales

GOVERNORS HELPLINE

0845 6020100

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

As you are no doubt aware, secondary schools in Wales can now have associate pupil governors who are aged 16 and over. In this issue's "Conversations", editor Steve Gullick speaks with Rachael Roberts and Robin Morris, pupil governors at Ysgol Glan Clwyd an 11-18 Welsh medium comprehensive of 840 pupils at St. Asaph in Denbighshire.

SG How were you selected to the post of associate pupil governor?

R.R. We were elected by the teachers and Year 13 pupils after the candidates gave a speech on a set subject. The topic we had to discuss was "How, if you were Head Boy or Head Girl, would you try to encourage greater speaking of Welsh by pupils outside lesson time?"

S.G. What type of voting system did you use?

R.M. Oh, it was just a straightforward "first past the post".

S.G. Since you've been in post as pupil governors, what have been the greatest problems or challenges you've experienced?

R.R. Not many really, though I sometimes wish we had the power to make things happen more quickly.

S.G. What exactly do you mean?

R.R. Well, for example, our Year 11 have a common room of their own but it's not very private and it doesn't have enough chairs. They told me about this and although I've made enquiries and suggestions, I haven't managed to get much done. I supposed it's because of limited funds.

R.M. I agree with Rachael. It can sometimes be frustrating when you want to get something done and you just can't afford it. It would be really helpful if it was possible to set aside a certain amount of money from the school's budget to pay for suggestions that came to the governors from the school's pupils through pupil governors. Perhaps that's the next stage in the development of our role, though I know it all depends on the money.

S.G. You've already seen just how important finance is to getting things done! What do you like most about being a governor?

R.R. First of all, the welcome we've received by the governors and the way they always listen to what we have to say. Wouldn't you agree, Robin?

R.M. Definitely. Also, I've really enjoyed taking part in the debates and discussions about changes which are being introduced to the school. Like Rachael said, it's great the way the other governors respect our views and are so positive and encouraging about what we have to say.

R.R. That's right. For instance, I'm interested in starting a "survival Spanish club" for younger pupils at lunchtimes. This

hasn't been reported to the governing body yet, but I know they'll be interested and give me a fair hearing.

S.G. You are both obviously enjoying being governors, but there must be some things that you dislike about it.

R.M. One of the big things that I find frustrating is how difficult and time consuming it is to get most things done. The school is introducing a new sex education policy and I've been surprised by how long we've been discussing it, though I've also learned that it's necessary to spend time looking at details because with any issue that involves a lot of people, like a school, you can't afford to make any mistakes.

Unfortunately, a lot of the things we are discussing now won't be put into place until after we've left school so we won't see how well they're working. Of course, Rachael and I have learned how and why it takes so long for decisions to be made but pupils who aren't governors sometimes don't appreciate this and I think that it's our job to try to explain to them.

S.G. And your dislikes Rachael?

R.R. Like Robin, there's nothing I dislike, but I sometimes sympathize with governors who might have difficulty understanding some of the jargon used in education, especially in I.C.T. It can't always be easy for them if they aren't involved in education themselves.

Also, like Robin, I get frustrated sometimes that we can't get things done as quickly as we'd like, but I now understand the reasons. I also think that both of us are learning that when it comes to running an organisation like a school, so much is down to money.

S.G. And finally, what advice would you give to someone who is thinking about being a pupil governor or has just been made one?

Both First of all, we'd definitely encourage people to go for the position because it's a great opportunity to get involved in and influence the changes which will affect your school.

Secondly, if you become a pupil governor, never give up on what you believe, and if you really want to introduce or change something keep pushing for it.

Last of all, don't be afraid to say what you really feel. It's no good just being passive and simply going along with everything that's said if you don't agree. If you do that, you can't complain if something happens that you don't like.

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