



ALL WALES CENTRE *for* GOVERNOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

## MAINTAINING HIGH STANDARDS – TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

***The General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) was established in September 2000 and is the statutory self-regulating professional body for teachers in Wales. In this article Hayden Llewellyn, Deputy Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council for Wales considers the role played by GTCW in raising the status of teaching by maintaining and promoting the highest standards of professional practice and conduct in the interests of teachers, pupils and the general public.***

An integral part of a teacher's responsibility is to maintain the high standards of conduct and competence expected of a professional who is entrusted with the care and education of children, and undoubtedly the integrity of the vast majority of teachers in Wales is of the highest order. Unfortunately, your attention may well have been drawn to press headlines concerning a number of serious disciplinary cases handled by the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW), including:

*"Talented teacher lied for ideal job – false grades on application form lead to two year ban"*

*"Rap for teacher fined for assault"*

*"Teacher gets banned after grabbing pupil by throat"*

*"Teacher struck off for GCSE cheating"*

Whatever you may think about such media coverage, school governors should be reassured that the number of cases of this nature handled by GTCW is actually very small – around 160 since the commencement of the Council's disciplinary powers in 2001. This equates to 0.4% of all registered teachers.

Like many professions such as medicine, the law and social work, teaching is now self-regulated through the GTCW. However, many school governors, headteachers and teachers are still unsure what this means and what the implications are for them and their schools. Indeed, common questions asked of GTCW by governors and headteachers include:

*A member of our teaching staff has been convicted for drink driving. Does this affect her employment as it happened outside of the workplace?*

*We have taken on a new supply teacher, but have received an anonymous report about his previous behaviour. How can we be assured about his credentials?*

*The Governing Body has been informed that a parent has made a complaint against one of our teachers to GTCW. We know nothing about this. What are you going to do?*

### **So how does GTCW protect the public?**

First of all, there is teacher registration. Every teacher working in a maintained school must be registered with the GTCW. This



gives the school, parents and pupils the reassurance that a teacher has the relevant qualifications and has been deemed suitable to work with children by an independent regulatory body. There are now over 38,000 teachers on the GTCW Register.

In the same way that you can check whether your doctor is registered with the General Medical Council or your dentist with the General Dental Council, you can check whether your teacher is registered with GTCW. This can be done by contacting GTCW directly or by using the link on our website. And it's important to remember that any school employing an unregistered teacher in a teaching post is breaking the law, and this includes supply teachers.

Where a person applying for teacher registration has previously committed one or more criminal offences, GTCW will investigate these applicants and decide whether or not they should be admitted to the Teaching Register. Typically, we see around 70 applications each year where the person has previously



committed at least one criminal offence. Of these, a handful are refused registration by us because of what they have done.

As far as professional conduct and competence are concerned GTCW has a legal duty to investigate and hear cases against registered teachers where it is alleged that a teacher is guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, serious professional incompetence or has been convicted of a relevant criminal offence. The Council has well defined, published procedures in place for handling these cases.

## How does GTCW become involved in conduct or competence matters which occur in a school?

If a registered teacher is dismissed on misconduct grounds or resigns in circumstances where they might have been dismissed, their employer is legally required to notify the Assembly. Where the matter involves the safety and welfare of children or health, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) will investigate the matter due to the possibility that there are implications for the person's wider employment beyond teaching. If this is not the case, then the matter is referred to GTCW to investigate.

For competence matters, the employer must notify GTCW directly – the Assembly and Department for Children, Schools and Families play no role.

If a registered teacher commits a criminal offence, the police force concerned will inform the ISA. Again if the matter does not involve the safety and welfare of children or health, the matter is passed to GTCW to investigate. In such circumstances, the Council will also consider any previous offences committed by the teacher.

Finally GTCW also has powers to investigate complaints from, for example parents, pupils, fellow teachers or members of the public about a teacher's conduct, though the number of such complaints is small.

## Are schools taking risks?

Fortunately, most schools are very clear about their legal duties in respect of GTCW. However, some schools are still taking unnecessary risks.

For example, in the last twelve months, we have seen:

- a secondary school employ a person who had actually failed his initial teacher training course
- a primary school take on a teacher whose application for teacher registration had yet to be approved by GTCW as a result of a string of previous criminal offences
- a primary school employ a teacher on the basis of an out of date Criminal Records Bureau disclosure record, which did not contain details of criminal offences recently committed
- a teacher who was on List 99 (the list of persons deemed unsuitable to work with children) approach a special school for work
- a secondary school dismiss a teacher for misconduct, yet the LEA / school did not refer the matter to the Welsh Assembly Government as they are legally required to do

## What assurances should governors be seeking from their head teachers?

If your school does the following, you won't be going far wrong:

- Your LEA and school should be checking that all teaching staff are GTCW registered **before** they start work. They should, under no circumstances employ an unregistered teacher since they will be breaking the law by doing so.
- GTCW publish a good practice guide for registered teachers called Professionalism in Practice. This gives teachers an awareness of issues and situations which might arise and could call their professionalism into question. Ensure copies are available in your school.
- If your school does dismiss a teacher, contact the Welsh Assembly for referral advice.

## Want to know more?

The following are available at [www.gtcw.org.uk](http://www.gtcw.org.uk) or on request from 029 20550 350.

- *Teacher Registration – Guidance for Employers*
- *Professionalism in Practice – a good practice guide*
- *GTCW Disciplinary Procedures and Rules*
- *GTCW journal "Teaching Wales". This carries details of cases heard by GTCW.*

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## FROM THE CENTRE MANAGER

For our "Conversations" feature I interviewed Rob Griffiths who was the Chair of a governing body of an infant school in Abergavenny at a time of schools re-organisation. I'm sure what he had to say struck a chord with many governors in Wales who are having to face the same process, and from Rob's comments it is clear that, however school closures and mergers are managed it is bound to be a very worrying time for all concerned. At least great comfort can be drawn from Rob's observations on the situation now, some four years since the re-organisation took place.

I mentioned in our last issue that the Centre was producing a national governor training programme for handling complaints for the Welsh Assembly Government. This has now been completed and will be distributed to local authority Governor Support Units in the Summer Term. Researching and writing this programme made me realize the tough decisions that governors sometimes have to make. As one experienced governor put it to me "It's not all

about concerts and prize giving!" Very true, and Heads, teachers and local authorities really are grateful for the way governors are prepared to make hard decisions to help the smooth and efficient running of their schools.

Finally, and on a more cheerful note, for the last two years I have been giving lectures to students on Education degree courses at Swansea Metropolitan University on the role of governors. I've made a point of telling them about the less pleasant side of the job, like grappling with reduced budgets or handling disciplinary issues, as well as the many rewarding features. I've been pleased by the interest they've shown in the subject. Even more heartening though has been the numbers who've said they'd be interested in becoming a school governor when their student days are over.

**Steve Gullick**

## NEWS FROM GOVERNORS WALES

### Award for Outstanding Clerks to Governing Bodies

There has been much interest shown in the Wales Clerks award. 38 nominations were received in all from across Wales. Four governing body clerks were shortlisted from Carmarthenshire, Gwynedd and Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills announced the winner, Heather Jenkins, clerk to governing body of Dyffryn Taf School, Carmarthenshire, authority at the awards ceremony held on 5th March 2009 at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells. Heather will go forward to the overall award ceremony with the regional winners from England on 21st March 2009 to be held in Birmingham.

### Publications

A series of governor guides on "Effective Governing Bodies" will be distributed to Chairs of governing bodies term.

The section on statutory policies and documents required to be determined adopted and implemented by the governing body, found in part 1 of the Handbook for school governors has been updated. Governors Wales has emailed the update directly to schools 'en bloc'. It is also available to download from the Governors Wales' website.

All publications are available on [www.governorswales.org.uk/publications](http://www.governorswales.org.uk/publications)

### Regional Conferences

Two regional conferences are planned to take place in South Wales in the spring of 2009. Each conference is a joint initiative between a consortium of LEAs and Governors Wales.

The first conference builds on a successful conference held last year. The theme is The School Effectiveness Framework – the governors' role, and involves the four LEAs covering the ESIS consortium area (Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf) in conjunction with Governors Wales. It will take place on Saturday 28th March 2009 at ESIS.

The second conference is a new initiative involving Governors Wales in partnership with Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen Local Education Authorities. It will take place on Friday 8th May 2009 in Newport with the theme being "In Search of Excellence".

*For further details please contact your Governor Support Officer or Governors Wales.*

### Summer Conference/AGM – 11th July 2009

The theme of the conference will focus on the Independent Safeguarding Authority and Safeguarding Children in Education. The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills will deliver the keynote address.

### Governors Wales' Website

The Governors Wales' website [www.governorswales.org.uk](http://www.governorswales.org.uk) provides up to date, relevant information for school governors. Please spare a few moments (or longer!) to browse the site – you will find news items, FAQs, a wealth of publications – ranging from Governors Wales publications to circular guidance and statutory instruments from the Welsh Assembly Government, direct links to LEA governor training programmes and more!

We are keen to develop our website and would welcome any feedback, useful links, FAQs etc. Please email your comments to [contact@governorswales.org.uk](mailto:contact@governorswales.org.uk). We look forward to hearing from you.



## CONVERSATIONS

*School closure is an emotive issue in Wales, and in this issue's "Conversations", editor, Steve Gullick, speaks to Rob Griffiths, the former Chair of an Infant school in Monmouthshire which closed in 2005.*

**S.G.** What type of governor were you – parent, local authority, teacher etc.?

**R.B.** I was an LEA governor at a local Junior school and Chair at a local Infant school; both of them were involved in the closure process.

**S.G.** When you first heard about plans to close your school, what reasons were given?

**R.B.** There were several reasons that were given for the possibility of a need to change the situation at the time. These included the condition of the buildings at one of the schools in particular. The Infant school was a 1950's 'temporary' aluminium structure which was in a poor state of repair and needed urgent attention.

The second reason was a desire to improve the standard of education across the local schools, so that there was consistency of standards for all of the children. The third reason was the surplus numbers within the local schools which was causing concern and was likely to cause future concerns for the management of the schools and importantly the standard of education within those schools.

**S.G.** What did the governing body think would be lost by the school closing and what would be gained?

**R.B.** There was a genuine fear for some that the character of schools would be lost, a sense of community that had grown up within the schools and a concern to ensure that the standards of education could improve with the possibility of change. It was hoped and expected that the new provision would offer opportunities to the children which would benefit their education and their socialisation. It was expected that there would be real potential for education to improve, with better teaching spaces, improved levels of education resources and the ability for the school to become a genuine community facility.

**S.G.** Overall, what was the attitude of your governing body to the closure?

**R.B.** At both governing bodies there was concern, because after all it is a massive change, and we wanted to ensure this was of benefit to the children and, in fact, one governor did resign over the change. Also, governors wanted to try and obtain a genuine understanding of what would happen next, step by step and how the change would be managed. That being said, there was excitement that if the plans fitted the needs of the children presently in school and for those well into the future then the thought of new facilities and classrooms was generally welcomed.

**S.G.** And what were the feelings of the pupils, parents and teachers?

**R.B.** There was a mixed bag of feelings initially. The pupils were already thinking about the new swimming pool, BMX track etc that they had their thoughts set upon. For the vast majority of the children it was about curbing their enthusiasm, but recognising that change for them can be stressful so looking out for those who had concerns. Again the vast majority of staff and parents who expressed their views were in favour of improvement and they saw that this could be achieved by a new build.

**S.G.** What was the closure procedure like and were there any hiccups?

**R.B.** The closure programme was all about planning. There is no getting away from it that a considerable amount of hard work had to go into the plan and its execution. Staff had particular resources that they wanted to take with them, even though as part of the process all new resources were brought in and plans were needed to celebrate the past and ensure that what had gone before was recognised as positive. It was agreed that the children would put together a time capsule which would be placed in the foundation of the new school so there was plenty of excitement as to what should and should not be included. The whole process was about involving as many people as possible, and making sure that parents and children and the local community were kept informed of what was happening. I think in retrospect the wider community could have been involved more often, as I feel that occasionally they felt a little left out.

Making sure the new governing body was ready to run alongside the old governing bodies was important as it helped to allow the change for the management of the school to flow. I think there were some governors who found this part of the process difficult, because it was about an end to a piece of history.

**S.G.** And what are feelings like now amongst pupils, parents and governors about the closure of their old school?

**R.B.** There are those, of course who would still say that the change should not have happened but I would say for the vast majority if asked it would be a positive response. I have certainly been approached by many people commenting on the positive outcome that the change has brought. One of the resounding indicators of success for me was the look on the faces of the children and their desire to 'look after' their school. It has, I think given them a feeling of confidence and reassurance that they had been given something that they can be proud of and boast about to others

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**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.



# THE CRITICAL FRIEND: FACT FILE 01/09



The governing body's main role is to establish a strategic framework for the school and to regularly review the progress made. The governing body should fulfil its strategic role by taking three key actions which are to set:

- aims and objectives for the school;
- policies for the school to achieve those aims and objectives; and
- targets by which they can measure progress towards the aims and objectives.

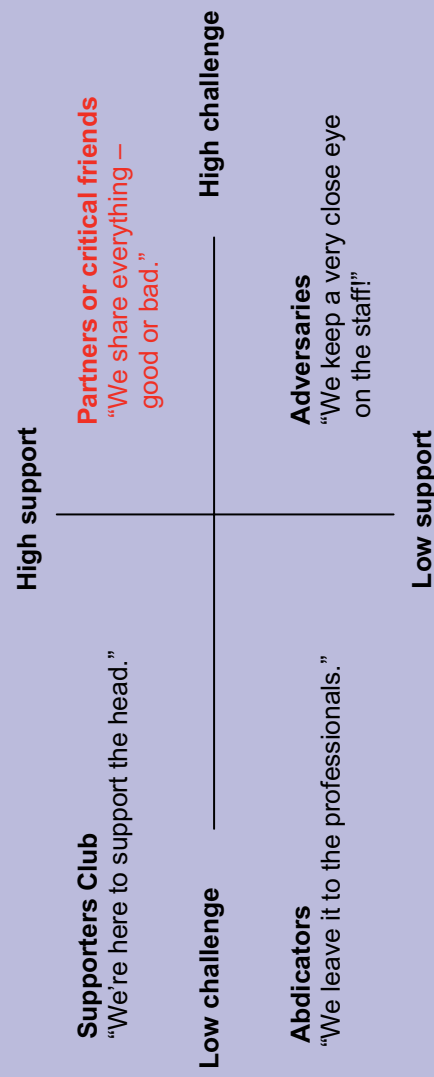
It is very important that the governing body monitors and evaluates progress. To do this successfully they need to act as a 'critical friend' to the headteacher.

## Acting as a 'critical friend'

- The governing body provides the Headteacher and staff with support, advice and information, drawing on its members' knowledge and experience. In these ways the governing body acts as a 'critical friend' to the school.

The diagram below describes four very different positions governing bodies might take. It is important, however, that governing bodies strike a balance between support and challenge, providing strategic leadership and acting as a 'critical friend' to the headteacher. An effective governing body will undoubtedly provide strategic leadership combined with a high degree of challenge and high levels of support.

Where does your governing body sit?



Source: *Governing the School of the Future (DfES)*

The quadrant in red indicates where your governing body should be ...

## What is a 'critical friend' ?

The term 'critical friend' is hard to define - 'questioning friend' might be more appropriate.

The governing body operates as a 'critical friend' in helping the school and its staff with actions and decisions which affect all aspects of school life and its work. In doing so, the governing body should seek out and question the reasoning behind the decisions and offer, where possible, careful and considered feedback.

Although governing bodies should provide support, they must not be afraid to ask challenging questions and seek further information or clarification when necessary. Remember the word 'critical' is used in the sense of the governing body's responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness and the continual striving for improvement.

## How can a 'critical friend' help with school improvement? Here are some points to consider:

- being a good listener and problem solver can help the school improve ideas and proposals and reach sound decisions;
- asking searching questions\* that help develop expectations and intentions, particularly when expectations are too low or actions do not match intentions. Sometimes, those key but often 'simple' questions: Why? How? Where? When? will give you the answer you need. Further information is available in part 3 of the Handbook for School Governors about the role of the governing body;
- recognising and celebrating the achievements of the school;
- knowing where the school is not achieving as well as it could;
- providing support and encouragement when strategies to bring about improvement are being explored. Systems should be in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the school;
- striking an appropriate balance between **support and challenge**.

\* A list of possible questions for governors to ask is found on

[www.governorswales.org.uk](http://www.governorswales.org.uk). The suggested questions concentrate

on specific areas ranging from support and challenge, strategic overview, monitoring and evaluation, accountability and will assist in preparing for an Estyn inspection.

## The 'critical friend' checklist and suggestions for training:\*\*

- **Open and trusting working relationships between the governing body and staff are at the heart of the 'critical friend' role.**

If you are setting up a governing body development/training session, think about sharing one with the staff – one on *Roles and Responsibilities* will help you to look at relationships within the governing body. You might want to consider ways of working with the governors and staff together. Examples could include joint sessions on looking at the vision for the school, governors' visits to schools, or the School Development/Improvement Plan.

- **Being well informed will help you develop the confidence to ask challenging questions.**

There is a variety of training and support available for school governors to assist you in carrying out your role effectively. Training linked specifically to school priorities and the needs of individual governors will be of benefit. Many courses will help you concentrate on monitoring particular areas of governing body responsibility – e.g. **The Curriculum, Safeguarding Children, Health and Safety.**

The list is endless - examples of LEA training programmes for governors can be found on: [www.governorswales.org.uk/training](http://www.governorswales.org.uk/training), or you can contact your LEA directly.

- **Once your strategic framework for school improvement is in place, it is important to monitor its implementation and evaluate its impact.**

Courses on **School Self-Evaluation/Review, monitoring and evaluating** will help you to develop the skills to monitor and evaluate effectively and will assist you in asking the right questions. A session on **Sharing a Vision for the School** will provide a good opportunity for the whole governing body and staff to reflect on how the school's vision and aims can be monitored in practice.

- **To monitor and evaluate effectively, you must be aware of the range of information available to help you know and understand your school.**

Requesting information or training on **School Data** will make you more aware of how to use information for the benefit of the children in your school. Likewise, information on **Pastoral Support** will help you to understand the non academic side of school life. The headteacher's report to the governing body is also a useful tool to provide information on these and other areas.

- **Governing bodies are responsible for the educational achievement of every pupil in their school.**

How inclusive are the policies agreed by your governing body? Training e.g. on **Inclusion, Equality and Complaints Procedures** are all areas that will help you

ask the right questions to ensure that the needs of individuals are met in your school.

- **Many governing bodies delegate specific responsibilities to individual governors.**

Link Governors should find out more about the potential of their role. Governors linked to Special Educational Needs as well as nominated child protection governors will find it useful to make sure they attend courses on **SEN and Child Protection.** If you are a new governor, or feel your understanding of the governor role needs to be updated, an **Induction Course** will help you. A governing body development session on **Roles and Responsibilities** will provide a holistic view of delegation of responsibilities on the governing body, and the Governors Wales' governor guide on **The Appointment of Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers** is essential information for the panel delegated to carry out the selection process for a new headteacher or deputy headteacher. If you are likely to sit on a pupil exclusion panel then make sure you attend appropriate training opportunities.

- **Staff are your most valuable asset and the governing body which is a good 'critical friend' will take their well-being seriously.**

Sessions on **Performance, Pay and Progression** will help you to monitor the provision you make for all your staff.

- **Governing bodies need a clear structure to help them monitor and evaluate the impact of their policies effectively.**

It is useful to have a checklist for this purpose. A template is provided as well as a list of statutory policies and documents required on: [www.governorswales.org.uk](http://www.governorswales.org.uk)

- **Governing bodies need to understand how the financial systems in their school work, if they are to ensure that the budget is put to best use in delivering priorities for improvement.**

Training sessions on **Finance** will be able to help you here.

- **A governing body also needs to monitor and evaluate its own performance if it is to remain effective.**

A whole governing body self-evaluation/review exercise is a useful way of reviewing governing body practices and is an excellent tool to prepare for an inspection, linked specifically to the School Evaluation report, and will assist in ensuring that the governing body is performing effectively in its leadership role.\* In addition, chairs will find it helpful to attend specific sessions to assist in developing the skills they need to best support and lead the governing body. Likewise, an effective clerk is key to effective governance - make sure that your clerk is aware of specific training or development opportunities.

\* Governor guides on Effective Governing Bodies provide further information: [www.governorswales.org.uk/Publications](http://www.governorswales.org.uk/Publications).

**Remember** – you can't all do it all!

But if every member of your governing body is committed to training for one aspect of your work, you will be making good use of the time you have available give to your school.

\*\* based on LA information

### **Additional sources of Information**

- ◆ A Handbook for Governors of Schools in Wales
- ◆ Governors Wales' website: [www.governorswales.org.uk](http://www.governorswales.org.uk) . Critical Friend checklist available.

**N.B.:** This Fact file should be read in conjunction with the material listed above and information produced by your LEA and diocesan authority where appropriate.

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