

## National Association for Primary Education

### Position Paper on School Governance

NAPE recognises the critical importance of school governance in the leadership of primary schools and sees it as a key dimension in school improvement. In the context of strengthening the links between primary schools and their respective communities, giving a voice to key stakeholders and extending the robustness of the accountability mechanisms within schools, this trend for greater governor participation in the senior management dimension of school life is to be welcomed as part of the process of making schools more open and more democratic.

NAPE therefore views with misgivings the re-constitution process implemented by the government by September 2015 whereby governing bodies were expected to slim down, irrespective of school size, for the sake of greater efficiency (School Governance Regulations, 2012 and 2014). The fact that schools, including the largest, can now limit themselves to a single staff representative, a single LA representative and two elected parent representatives on the governing board, is unfortunate because it undermines the capacity of the board to represent the interests of the wider community. Moreover, effectiveness at governance level can only be enriched by the diversity of perspectives a larger and more representative governing body can bring to bear. We note that co-options currently afford schools considerable room for manoeuvre in terms of retaining a governing board which is reasonably representative as well as skilled, but it is unfortunate if this is a matter to be determined at the whim of a group of school trustees, which could be the scenario for the future, as the academisation agenda takes hold.

We share the government's emphasis on the importance of the governing body having a range of appropriate expertise as well as commitment to its roles and responsibilities, but this should not be at the expense of its democratic function. With appropriate induction, training and support, it should be feasible for governors to develop significantly into their roles from a position of relative unease and uncertainty. While we appreciate that in the past too many governors have entered into governorship without a proper appreciation of the scale of responsibilities involved, this is changing as prospective governors are better informed about school expectations from the outset.

We view with dismay the announcement in the White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (March 2016) that there should no longer be a requirement on academy trusts to reserve places for elected parents on governing boards. On the one hand the White Paper highlights the importance of parental accessibility to school information and emphasizes the importance of parents as stakeholders, but on the other hand it wishes to remove the principle of parental entitlement to an elected place on the governing body.

*The role of parents is crucial, from supporting their child to holding schools to account. (4.49)*

No one would question such a claim, but why then eliminate the entitlement to formal representation? Such a contradiction does not make sense and also flies in the face of another pillar of government philosophy, namely the importance attached to *community engagement*. The fact that parents may serve on the governing board as co-opted members or as the nominated LA representative may mitigate in some schools against this absence of a formal parental voice, but the principle of statutory and elected parental representation on the governing body should be seen as an entitlement and not an option to be bestowed.

In summary, the capacity of the governing board to fulfil responsibilities effectively is bound up with the extent to which it represents the distinctive range of perspectives which characterise the wider school community. This communal voice has the potential to be articulate, breathing life and spirit as well as expertise into the process of governance and it is crucial that for the sake of the educational health of our schools, it is preserved alive and kicking, rather than allowed to wither away on the altar of corporate efficiency.

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