

EDUCATION, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Education, Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel held on Monday, 7 April 2014 at 7.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillors Will Purvis (in the Chair)
Darron Phillips
Margaret Adair
Ken Ferrett
Luke Stubbs

10. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from education representatives Mark Mitchell and Helen Reeder.

11. Declarations of Member Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Stubbs declared a personal non prejudicial interest as he is a governor at Milton Cross School.

12. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2014 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Education, Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 24 February 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

13. Review of School Governance Arrangements (AI 4)

The Chair welcomed Mr Hanna to the meeting.

Mark Hanna, Parent Governor at Portsdown Primary School

Mr Hanna explained that he felt becoming a parent governor was an important way to help improve the school and was the easiest way that parents can make a difference to their child's education. It was down to the governors of a school to help the children's future and they all needed to work together to do the best that they can. As a parent governor Mr Hanna said he always tried his upmost to attend governors meetings however as many parent governors have full time jobs, attendance at meetings was often an issue for them. He felt that parent governors did make a huge difference to the running of the school and that it was a shame there were not more parents willing to become governors.

He explained that he found it useful to use the first six months of his role to absorb all the information and understand the school. He said it took him approximately six months to become fully involved in the running of the school. It was important for governors to ask challenging questions of the

head teacher and query any data that they do not understand.

In response to questions from the panel Mr Hanna made the following points:

- With regard to parent governors understanding school data, Mr Hanna advised that with his background he was able to easily interpret the finance data however it was important for parent governors to ask the head teacher to put the data into an easier format to comprehend or if this was not possible for them to explain this to governors. Governors also need to help each other understand the data and provide support to their colleagues to help the school.
- He was offered huge amounts of training from the governor services team on a variety of issues including sessions on understanding data, which he had taken up. However, he said that he had not been able to attend as much training as he would have liked as the training courses had usually coincided with the date of the governing board meetings. The date of the training sessions had now changed so he was now able to attend more training sessions.
- With regard to barriers to recruitment of parent governors, Mr Hanna said he felt the main reason was a lack of understanding from the parents' point of view on what the role involves. He felt that many parents felt they do not possess the right skills or have a very high education background themselves, and feel that they will be talked down on. Many parents also do not have the confidence and understanding of the school terminology and mentioned that parents can get quite irate if teachers assume they understand the vocabulary and talk down to them. Parents can be put off talking to teachers because of this despite the teachers not meaning to do this.
- He said he had previously suggested a parent governor surgery for parent governors to talk to parents to explain their role, which may help to remove these barriers and get more parents interested in applying to become a governor. He also felt it was important for governors to attend meetings of other schools to learn from each other and share good practice. This however was not easy due to parent governors having their own work commitments but he said he would be very interested to see how things are done in other schools.
- Teachers have a job and are bound by the curriculum. Governors are responsible for the school and parents need to bring the two together.
- Councillor Phillips advised that in his job they have pre agenda informal meetings which gave the opportunity for quieter staff to ask questions and for any 'silly' questions to be raised before the main meeting. Mr Hanna said he felt this might be a useful way to encourage the more reticent governors to ask questions and clarify anything they are unsure of before the main meeting.

- At Portsdown Primary school there were parents with the right skill sets to become parent governors however they do not have the time to dedicate to the role. The governing body did not target parents to become governors. The governing body were considering reconstituting and looking to rearrange the cohort of governors.
- The school was currently looking for a new head teacher from September and the governing body was fully involved in the interview process. They had also been fully involved in recruiting two teachers earlier in the year and had the opportunity to ask them questions.
- Mr Hanna advised he had worked with two clerks at his school. He felt the clerk performed a vital role and provided valuable support to the governing body. Their clerk downloads all the relevant paperwork governors need to read from the Governors Virtual Office (GVO) otherwise the governors would be swamped with paperwork. They are also invaluable at meetings taking the minutes and knowing where to find information, otherwise the governing body would fall into disarray. Mr Hanna advised that he is the deputy chair of curriculum standards and he finds having the clerk at these meetings invaluable as they can advise on the agenda and what was agreed and have a mind of useful knowledge to help support him.
- Governor services send their training programme to governors at the beginning of the year which contains all the training sessions required including refresher courses. He said that he found that training courses were more beneficial once he had attended a few governors meetings first. The training provided was very good and were a boost to what governors have picked up on in their governor meetings.

The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm.

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Councillor Will Purvis