

ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATION:

the role of elected parent and teacher
governors of schools, and their
relationship with their constituencies

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APPENDIX ONE Questionnaires distributed to parents
and teachers



1.

INTRODUCTION

This research project is funded by the Social Science Research Council, out of its budget of £200,000 for research into accountability in education, which was established:

in response to increasing interest and concern in educational circles about assessment and performance and about the relationship between local authorities and government, schools and the local authorities, and schools and the wider community, including pupils and parents.

(SSRC Bulletin, 30.6.78)

A wide range of projects were sponsored, of which this is one of the smallest. It is, however, the sole piece of work in the programme carried out by someone not professionally engaged in the educational field, although I have been active in educational affairs from the consumer viewpoint for many years. Whatever its limitations, this report will at least provide a different perspective on accountability from that of the professional educators who normally carry out such research.

Although many schools have had elected parent and teacher governors for some time, there is still a good deal of ignorance, not to say mythology, about how they operate. One of my aims in the project was to elucidate the role

of parents and teachers on governing bodies - why they are appointed, what their functions are, what they, in fact, do. It seems to me that a very significant change has occurred, almost unnoticed, and certainly under-rated. Thousands of lay people and rank and file teachers now have a place, with full voting rights, on school governing bodies for the first time. As the project shows, their first steps are hesitant, but as they get more confident, their demands increase. Perhaps they can provide education with the informed 'supporters club' that is needed to give it political clout.

I am very grateful to the SSRC for sponsoring the research, and to the Centre for Institutional Studies at NELP for its invaluable help.

I would especially like to thank all the people in the schools who gave me their time and co-operation.

Felicity Taylor

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2.

AIMS AND INTENTIONS

The project rests on three assumptions:

that a school is an institution set up by society in order to transmit knowledge, experience, skills and values to its younger members. I prefer this description to more pejorative ones that might describe schools as incarcerative institutions designed to keep young people off the streets, out of delinquency, off the labour market, in their place etc.

that schools can do better in carrying out this function. Here I rely on the work of the Rutter team in London (Fifteen Thousand Hours Open Books 1979), and David Reynolds in Wales ('Schools do make a difference' in Working Class Youth Culture RKP 1976), for evidence that some schools produce better results, fewer delinquents, less truancy than others with similar catchment areas.

that the 1944 Education Act intended the governing bodies set up under Sections 17 and 21 of that Act to manage the school under the authority of the LEA; although in the past governors have not generally attempted to do this, they have become more active in recent years. The evidence for this more tendentious assumption lies in the 1944 Act and accompanying White Paper, Command 6523 of 1944. The

Taylor report, on the government committee of enquiry into the government of primary and secondary schools (A New Partnership for our Schools, HMSO 1977), describes in Section 2.5 what it would have been reasonable to expect as a result of the 1944 Act:

... among these men and women there would be some representing the LEA (whether elected members or not), some appointed or co-opted by reason of their educational or other qualifications, and some who could represent the interests of parents, teachers and the community in general. It would also have been reasonable to assume that a governing body so constituted would share with the local education authority and its officers, and with the head of the school, responsibility for the making of appointments, for the preparation of estimates and for representing the school in issues of importance.

The Baron and Howell survey of 1965-69 (The Government and Management of Schools, Athlone Press 1974) demonstrated that such expectations were not, at that time, being fulfilled. Later surveys, such as those carried out by Stone and Taylor (National Association of Governors and Managers 1975) and by Joan Sallis for the Advisory Centre for Education in 1978, have shown that over the last ten years, to quote the Taylor report, 'there have been very significant changes in the context and atmosphere of school government'

deriving partly from 'a demand for broader participation in educational decision-making which has come from lay and professional people alike'. (Taylor 2.14)

So given that schools are created by society for a purpose that they do not invariably fulfil, and that governing bodies should manage them in accordance with the principles of the 1944 Act, the project adopted a working hypothesis that when governors do exercise their functions fully it enables the schools to respond more accurately to society's demands and expectations. It endeavoured to test that hypothesis in one small area, the relationship between elected governors and their constituencies. It attempted to determine the nature of that relationship, and whether it affects the ability of the governing body to influence what goes on in the school, in such a way as to make it more responsive to the community's wishes.

3.

METHOD

Because of the limited nature of the project, it was agreed with the SSRC that the schools surveyed should be likely to produce good practice because of known active communication between governors and their constituency, in areas where the principles of active school government were fostered by the LEA. For this reason Sheffield and ILEA were approached for help. Sheffield, for example, has had elected parent governors since 1970. William Bacon, in his book Public Accountability and the Schooling System (Harper and Row 1978) says that:

Sheffield's Education Committee made it very clear from the start that it wanted the new school boards to be active and effective bodies taking a lively interest in the affairs of the schools they served.

Both Sheffield and ILEA have developed policies of establishing governing bodies that represent local communities, giving them powers to exercise over the schools and training, sponsored or supported by the LEA to enable them to exercise these powers more fully and efficiently. Sheffield responded immediately to the request for help, and provided every facility for me to visit four of their schools. Unfortunately, political considerations prevented ILEA from making up its mind about my request and, in fact, the year's project was almost over before the authority was able to offer three schools for me to visit. This was a serious disadvantage, only partially compensated for by my

personal knowledge of the ILEA and its governing bodies, having myself been a governor in various ILEA schools over the last ten years.

The problem was aggravated because in one of the schools offered by the ILEA, the Chairman of governors refused to allow the governing body to co-operate, although the headteacher had been willing to do so. So then there was another delay before a substitute school could be found. It was entirely a matter for the LEAs to decide which schools I should visit, and they, of course, had to have the agreement of the headteacher. But as I was not attempting to select a representative sample the fact that the LEA chose the schools was less significant.

Although the schools were all, in theory, of the same type, their differences in character and composition were immediately apparent, and they provided a wide range of examples of different kinds of good practice.

DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOLS TAKING PART

All the schools are mixed county comprehensive schools, catering for the age range 11+ to 18. Two of the Sheffield schools take in children at 11+ and 12+, because there are some middle schools in Sheffield.

SHEFFIELD SCHOOLS:

School One

Formed from 3 grammar schools, on a large campus site, with a catchment segment extending from fairly prosperous suburbs into the city centre. Roll of 1550, including 200 sixth form, in buildings designed for much larger numbers. Broad-banded streaming based on primary school reports. Year system.

School Two

Ex West Riding school, on rural fringe of Sheffield, with catchment of 6 villages, built for 600, roll now 1014 including 79 in sixth form. Mixed ability first year. Year system.

School Three

Similar catchment to (1). Recently celebrated centenary (ex grammar school). Roll 1500 including 250 in sixth form. Setting with some mixed ability. House system.

School Four

Multi-site expanded from small secondary modern with no exam courses into fully comprehensive school with

roll of 788 including 40 in the sixth form. Total mixed ability throughout. House system.

The catchment is a close community based largely on a pre-war housing estate.

ILEA SCHOOLS

School A

Built as an 8 form entry school, now recruiting about 5 forms. Year system. New headteacher. The school has a poor reputation locally, which the new head is attempting to change.

School B

South London suburbia, split site school, roll about 1000 including 70 in the sixth form. New head replacing very popular and dynamic headmaster. Mixed ability first year. Year system.

School C

North London boys' school turned co-educational, the existing fifth year being the last all boys entry. The changeover to co-education very much as a result of a campaign by local parents. Roll 1050, including 56 sixth form. Mixed ability first three years. Year system.

PROCEDURE

The first step was to visit the schools and talk to the headteachers. For the discussion with the heads I used a standard set of questions to give some structure to the interview. The Sheffield heads then helped me to arrange interviews with the parent and teacher governors. Again, a simple set of questions was used. Some of these interviews were on an individual basis, more often it was more convenient to see two or three parents or teachers at a particular school at one time. Parents and teachers were not seen together, however.

Although in theory it should have been easier to see the London parent and teacher governors, in practice, the lack of time made it difficult. In the event, 4 parents and 3 teachers were contacted, three by post.

In Sheffield I also talked to the elected pupil governors at two of the schools.

I also attended at least one governors' meeting at each school. One of the London schools excluded me from the discussion of confidential items, including the Head's report, which rather negated the value of the exercise. Otherwise no difficulties were made.

Finally, a simple questionnaire was distributed to a sample of parents and teachers at the seven schools. This is described more fully in Sections 7 and 8 of this report in which the results are discussed.

4.

INFORMATION FROM HEADTEACHERS

The group of headteachers consisted of six men and one woman, a normal distribution for mixed comprehensive schools. The four Sheffield heads had all been in office for some years, but two of the three London heads were recent appointments, and had not been at their respective schools when the elections for parent and teacher governors took place in 1977.

They were all very helpful and co-operative about the survey, and forthcoming about their schools.

The table summarises the statistics of their replies. In one very significant group of questions the replies were the same right across the sample. All the heads claimed that parent and teacher governors put in almost 100% attendance at governors' meetings, and were consistently better attenders than any other governors. 'Better by far' (about parents) and 'Only one absence in five years' (about teachers) were typical comments.

It seems that heads express broadly favourable opinions about parent governors, although they are more dubious about the teacher governors. They tend to over-estimate the publicity given to parent governors by the school, and to feel that the people chosen to serve as parent governors may not be truly representative of the parent body. On the whole they find both parent and teacher governors a source of support for the school.

	S C H O O L S						
	1	2	3	4	A	B	C
ELECTION (PARENT GOVERNORS)							
Contested?	X	X	X	X	-	-	X
Numbers of parents voting	300	200	200	70	-	-	50
Percentage of school roll	19.4	19.7	13.3	8.9			4.8
COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS ABOUT PARENT GOVERNORS							
Names sent to parents annually	X	X	X	X	X	X	-
Names in every newsletter	O	-	-	-	O	X	-
Names in school brochure	-	X	-	-	-	O	X
<u>Regular reports</u>							
a. newsletter	X	X	-	O	O	O	O
b. PTA	-	-	X	X	X	X	O
<u>Functions attended</u>							
a. social	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
b. academic	X	O	O	O	X	X	X
THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING PARENT GOVERNORS							
Communication with parents	X	X	X	-	X	X	X
Support	X	X	X	X	-	-	X
Personal commitment	X	X	X	X	X	-	X
DISADVANTAGES OF HAVING PARENT GOVERNORS							
Unrepresentative	-	-	O	-	X	-	-
Not impartial	-	-	O	-	X	X	O
Barrier to full communication with parent body	X	X	O	-	-	-	-
ADVANTAGES OF HAVING TEACHER GOVERNORS							
Communication	X	X	-	-	X	X	X
Professional support	X	-	O	X	X	-	X
Realism/staff opinion	X	X	-	-	X	X	X
DISADVANTAGES OF HAVING TEACHER GOVERNORS							
Publicising internal conflicts	O	X	X	-	O	O	X

NB: X = positive confirmatory statement
O = negative disagreeing statement
- = no reply/none/not mentioned

The notes that follow amplify the statistics given:

ELECTIONS

All the heads claimed that the teacher elections were always contested, with a high turn-out, usually 100% of voters. The turn-out of parents should be compared with the comments made by parent and teacher replies in later sections. The two new London heads were unable to give voting figures. Percentage turn-out is a fairly insecure calculation, as no-one has a firm policy on the number of votes per family, and the numbers in the school may have changed.

Both LEAs lay down a procedure for electing parent governors, but there is still quite a wide variation in what actually happened in the schools, especially as regards nomination of candidates, and making them known to the electorate. Because Sheffield insist that all parents should be balloted, this ensures a minimum standard of information. In theory, all parents should receive a ballot form with the names of candidates and a brief statement about each of them, in good time before the election takes place. As these are sent home with children because of postage costs, not all parents receive them. These papers may either be returned to the school via the pupils, or by post, or given in at an election meeting. One school sets up a ballot box at the gate manned by sixthformers, in a deliberate attempt to copy the style of local and national elections. Sheffield has a rolling system for parent governors, one being elected each year to serve for three years. This may make voting more familiar to Sheffield parents.

ILEA, who elect once every four years, relied in 1977 on a meeting at which only those who attended could vote. Nominations were made at the meeting. One head claimed this as a positive virtue, as 'it ensured that people who voted would be those who knew the school and the candidates'. It does make for a lower turn-out.

PUBLICITY/COMMUNICATION

As far as staff were concerned, heads all claimed that the staff did their own reporting, usually through minutes exhibited on the staff noticeboard. The Table refers to communication with parents by or on behalf of parent-governors. It seems clear that although there is no intention to make it difficult to find out about parent governors, not very much attention is paid to informing parents about them, apart from routine information sent to parents when their children join the school, or at the beginning of each year.

As far as reporting back is concerned, parent-governors may, if there is a school newsletter, write a report once a year on their activities, or may for some special purpose, send a letter home to parents, either with the newsletter or separately. Such reporting back as does happen, is mainly to the PTA. Parent-governors are either active or ex-officio members of the PTA in most cases, and this is where the heads feel that most communication takes place.

Attendance at school functions is not seen by heads as very important for parent-governors as a way of meeting other parents, even though governors are expected and

invited to most school celebrations. For governors to put in an appearance at other school functions was uncommon and did not appear to be encouraged. However there did seem to be a difference in attitude about this between the Sheffield and the London heads, the latter being more in favour.

Among the four Sheffield heads, three were dismissive about attendance at report meetings etc. Comments were 'We have talked about this but decided against it', 'not much feedback', 'no-one wanted to talk to them'. However, in London, the comments were all positive. 'We have a policy of associating various governors with different departments, which has been very useful'. 'Parent-governors regularly attend educational meetings', 'All governors have a standing invitation to come in for half a day whenever they wish, but few apart from parent governors, do so'. This distinction between parent and other governors was also drawn by one Sheffield head, 'I never see the political governors between meetings'.

The heads were also asked whether parent and teacher governors were used as a channel for worries about internal and external aspects of the school. Their consensus was that they were not used in this way. There was some feeling that this kind of special access ought not to be necessary if the head was doing the job properly. Two heads mentioned that they might make an approach to teacher governors to sound out their views. One made a point of talking over the head's report to governors with the

teacher governors before the meeting.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF HAVING ELECTED PARENT-GOVERNORS

The positive comments far outweighed the negative ones, and those that were negative were usually about potential rather than actual problems. Summarised under Communication are all comments about better dissemination of information, helping parents to be better informed, and helping the school to be better informed about parents' views. For example, one head described them as a go-between with an ear to the ground.

Support groups all comment about the value of having support from parents both when dealing with the LEA and outside bodies, and when dealing with other parents. One head made a point of enlisting the parent-governor's help with 'persistently awkward' parents. Another felt that ways of exploiting the parent-governors as a support and resource for the school were not yet sufficiently explored.

Personal commitment comprises all comments about the parent-governors' personal commitment to the school, and their inside knowledge, the 'urgency' as one head described it, of their approach.

Disadvantages were not so strongly expressed, apart from one head, who, although in favour of parent-governors felt that his board was not representative of the main body of parents. 'They try hard to act impartially, but are out of touch with the main parent body. They have shrewd and

well-judged views, but from a partial base.' Others thought this 'might' be a problem. Or it might be a problem that parent governors could become an unnecessary buffer between the school and parent. One head had been aware of improper pressure put on behalf of a parent-governor's own child, at another school, not his own. But the general feeling was summed up by the head of the first Sheffield school. He saw his parent-governors as friends who shared his joys and sorrows, who understood the downs as well as the ups, but wanted their school to be a successful enterprise, in which they had a share.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TEACHER GOVERNORS

Although heads were also in favour of teacher governors there were more misgivings expressed, though these were still in a minority. Communication, making staff aware of what was going on, the constraints applied by the LEA, and, in one head's case, a way to break down some of the teachers' traditional hostility to outsiders, were all seen as important. But outweighing these was the advantage to the head of being able to count on their professional support, particularly in specialist professional matters, such as mixed ability teaching. Very close to this was the concept that staff members provided an added dimension of realism to the discussions. Governors trusted them as elected representatives putting the staff view. 'They add another internal perception in discussion of all issues', or more mundanely, 'I can't know everything, and they can supply the different

viewpoints of different ages and different disciplines'.

The disadvantages were all seen in terms of the possibly unwelcome exposure of internal conflicts, of teachers using the governors to get their own way. Only one head, claimed that this did happen; others thought it could.

One felt strongly that such conflicts ought to be resolved within the school hierarchy, and were not the function of governors to determine. If they did come up at governors' meetings, this was a measure of the failure of the hierarchy to deal with them adequately.

5.

INFORMATION FROM PARENT GOVERNORS

All the schools in the survey had three parent governors, elected by the parents, though several more parents were serving on the boards as political representatives. As explained earlier, lack of time made it difficult to complete the survey among London parent governors so although nine out of the twelve Sheffield parent governors were interviewed, only one London parent governor is represented, although attempts were made to contact them by post. For this reason, and also because they were all, apart from the one London representative, seen in groups by school, a tabular presentation of their responses is not practicable. Instead, these have been summarised under main headings.

ELECTION PROCEDURE

All expressed disappointment at the low turn-out, even those at schools where two or three hundred people voted. There was some dissatisfaction with the way nominations were organised. In Sheffield, where employees of the LEA are not disqualified from standing, teachers at other schools in the area can stand as parent-governors in their child's school. In one school, two of the parent-governors were teachers, one at a local primary school and another who had taught at the school in question previously. They felt that this gave them something of an unfair advantage, as parents knew them better than they would know ordinary parents. The third remarked that when he was elected,

someone said 'Thank goodness, not another teacher!' There were five men and five women in the group of ten respondents, eight men and three women in the non-respondents.

COMMUNICATION

Although most claimed that names and addresses of governors were well-publicised in newsletters, they did express a sense of lack of communication, either in using the newsletter to report back, or in other ways. It was difficult to distinguish activities carried out as part of their PTA duties from what they did as parent governors, and certainly they all used the PTA as the main channel of communication. They referred to PTA-type activities such as providing refreshments at meetings etc as an example of contact with other parents. In two schools they had attended the new parents' meeting at the start of the school year, and spoken about their duties as governors.

Some doubt was expressed about the possibility of holding meetings for parents about governors, and some disillusionment about the amount of time spent setting up activities with the PTA with disappointing response.

It was clear that the community around a school in Sheffield meant something to that school in terms of personal commitment and knowledge, in a way that seldom happens in ILEA in secondary schools. So that governors could speak of meeting people in the shops or at church, whereas the one London representative knew very few other parents, and certainly did not meet them, except possibly at the feeder primary school. (Several Sheffield governors also

mentioned this as a source of contact.)

The governors were aware of the problem, and indeed were accustomed to it by their work in the PTA. They felt that the attitude of most parents was that the 'governing body was nothing to do with them'. They were, however, receptive to ideas for changing this attitude. One of the things they wanted to change about the way governing bodies operated was this isolation from the main body of parents. As one of them said, 'how can we say what other parents' views are, without communication with them?'.

ACTIVITIES

Although they had found that it took some time to get to grips with the procedure of governors meetings, once they had become accustomed to this, they felt they had plenty of opportunity to put their point of view. The one new-comer to Sheffield felt that the discussions tended to be rather parochial. They all felt welcome in the schools, and, because of involvement with the PTA, that they enjoyed good relationships with the head and staff. When a contentious subject came up, they would expect to canvass opinion, and had held special meetings to do this. This was particularly relevant at the time of the survey, because the LEA in Sheffield had issued a document on proposals to abolish corporal punishment. Most of the respondents were opposed to abolition, as were staff, and feelings had run high about it. In one school,

the parent governors took exception to the fact that an opponent of corporal punishment had 'lobbied' them about it. (This was confirmed by a pupil governor who supported the abolition and said that the activities of people supporting the LEA initiative had been very unwelcome to the school).

At least one governor felt it his duty to 'sell' the school to primary school parents, and to re-assure those with anxieties, or give advice, but they all insisted that parents with a problem would have to take it up with the school, not with them. They felt that the school would have lost the good will of parents if it was necessary to come to them about a problem rather than the staff or headteacher.

THE VALUE OF PARENT GOVERNORS

All respondents saw their contribution as being founded in their personal knowledge of how the school worked, a knowledge not accessible to other governors, especially, as several people said, as the political representatives 'spend so little time in the school'. They also claimed that they were the only people to speak on behalf of the children. They had no political axe to grind, nor was their bread and butter at stake. They could take a more objective and wider view than teachers, bringing in outside experience. They knew better what the community wanted and thought about the school. They felt that the LEA was more likely to take notice of what parents wanted for the school.

Their positive feelings about their role were summed up by one statement: 'All of us appreciate the basic goals and philosophy of the school, and will support the head and the staff when an issue comes up, or an appointment. We like the way the school is going, and want to keep it like that. This adds weight to the school's requests for resources to implement new ideas.'

PROBLEMS

All the problems seemed to centre on lack of power, not in relation to the school hierarchy, but vis-a-vis the LEA. Resolutions were passed, but the LEA did not, they felt, respond. Their views were canvassed but they believed that the LEA would not take much notice of what they said, on issues like, for example, corporal punishment or mixed ability teaching. They wanted to be more in charge of the way their school served its community, though this was perhaps most pronounced in the case of one school which felt that it did not get enough support from the LEA for political reasons.

One or two people felt that meetings lasted too long, with not enough discussion of important issues. There were also complaints about the preponderance of political representatives. They wanted more parent and teacher representation, and fewer 'outsiders'.

They were also concerned that they did not get to know other governors, or governors from other schools. They were not particularly satisfied with the training schemes

sponsored by Sheffield LEA, a common criticism being that they were 'too political'. One set of governors did feel that it had been useful because it had made more realise how fortunate they were in comparison with governors at some other schools. This was a point also made by the London representative.

SATISFACTIONS

What reasons do people give for being school governors? They seemed genuinely to feel that it was an opportunity not just to support their own child at school, but to help the community, to give something back, as one woman put it: 'I love the school dearly, and I'm so grateful for the chance to help'. They liked the feeling of being on the 'inside', knowing more about what was going on, having a say in what happened, a 'fascinating insight' as one man put it. Several people felt that parent representation had changed the atmosphere of school governing bodies, made it less impersonal, more relevant. Above all, they saw their role as supporting the head and staff, and shied away from any idea of opposing the head. 'It would have to be a very important reason to go against him'. But this did not prevent them from feeling that they had a contribution to make, summed up by one Sheffield parent; 'We're not interested in telling teachers how to do their job. We want the children to get the best benefit they can from the school, and we are advocates for them.'

6.

INFORMATION FROM TEACHER GOVERNORS

Because of lack of time, the information collected from teacher governors was not complete. The representation from London was three teachers out of a possible six, all interviewed by post, compared with all twelve Sheffield teachers, ten of whom I met personally. As in the case of parent governors, most of the Sheffield interviews were in groups so statistical analysis is not relevant.

Each Sheffield school had three elected teacher governors, in addition to the head. ILEA schools had two plus the head. There were nine men and three women teacher representatives in Sheffield, three of each in London. Altogether eleven men and four women took part in the survey.

ELECTION

All claimed that the election had been contested on the last occasion, though not always in the past. The staff seemed to take it for granted that almost everyone would vote (a view borne out by the evidence from the teacher questionnaire, see Section 8). One school mentioned that a certain amount of pressure had been put on staff to secure a high turn-out.

COMMUNICATION

Formal communication with staff consisted basically of putting up the agenda on the staff noticeboard, and also

minutes of the meeting. Sometimes the official minutes were used, but in at least three schools the teacher-governors wrote up their own report on the meeting for the staff's benefit. 'I am responsible for recording a summary of each governors' meeting. This is photocopied and posted on the Governors' section of the school notice board.' However, this had been tried in another school and abandoned for the lack of interest. The governors' meeting could also be discussed at staff meetings in most schools. This might be a regular item on the agenda, but more commonly, it was when the more important issues were under discussion.

Informal contact in the staffroom was not surprisingly, the most common way of communicating with other members of staff about governors' affairs. Typical comments were: 'Informal chats and feed-back to particular departments when special matters relevant to them arise'. But the impression from the range of replies is that the affairs of governing bodies do not loom large in the life of the staffroom. Not all were as dismissive as the governors from one school: 'People are not bothered .. I'm giving up because of the lack of interest ... we asked people to stay for meetings but there was no response'. But the feeling was that the staff governors were there if anyone wanted to approach them, though not many did. Professional difficulties were more likely to be taken up through the unions, if not directly with the senior staff.

ACTIVITIES

Just as parent-governors tended to be active members of the PTA, and so found it hard to draw a dividing line between PTA and gubernatorial activities, so teacher-governors were usually committed and energetic members of staff, who would be playing a full part in school life. So in discussing their activities as governors, they concentrated on their role of representing the staff view at governors' meetings. They perceived the difficulty of deciding what that view was, but seemed to make positive efforts to find it out. They do of course have far better opportunities for doing this than parent governors. On the whole, they had little contact with other governors, apart from the parent-governors, and the chairman. A common complaint again is that the governors don't visit the school enough. 'The head has invited governors to have lunch with heads of department, but only the chairman and vice-chairman came.'

An exception was one of the London teacher governors who had managed to 'instigate a few worthwhile ventures with some of them'.

THE VALUE OF TEACHER GOVERNORS

Representing the staff point of view was one of the main functions, and one of the main advantages of having

teacher governors in their opinion, particularly on professional matters. And almost as many teachers felt it was equally important to 'educate the lay governors' about what the school was trying to achieve. This included helping the head to explain new ventures and led into a perception of their role as mediator between the head, the lay governors and the LEA. Realism was another word often used, about what the school could be expected to achieve and what it was achieving. 'We are the only voting governors with regular pupil-staff contact'. The head's report now 'is read to people who know about teaching and so he can't gloss over the problems'. Less secrecy meant more accountability, said one teacher governor, and another felt that teacher participation gave the staff more confidence in the way decisions were taken.

PROBLEMS

As for parents, lack of real power was one of the main criticisms, the feeling that the important decisions were taken elsewhere, by the LEA. 'Whichever political group sets up governing bodies, the game of politics is so intricate that they maintain the real power, and I can't see them giving that away.' This was associated with a feeling that too much power was delegated to the head and chairman, though this was not mentioned in the London schools. 'I dislike the autocratic power still wielded by the head.' 'There should be specific direction given to governors to enable them to discuss the curriculum

effectively.' This view was, naturally, counter-balanced by others taking the more traditional 'professional' line that this was a matter for teachers only. The vexed question of what happened when staff disagreed with the head was touched upon. One or two said that staff representatives were hesitant about speaking out if they disagreed with the head, but others claimed that this was not a problem. Most felt that if you wanted to raise a contentious topic, the correct procedure would be to take it up with the head beforehand. The staff view 'can be, although not very frequently, at variance with the 'official' point of view. In this situation the head is informed and he has never questioned the right to represent the particular point.'

Like the parents, the teachers find the lack of knowledge of the school among some governors very irritating. 'I am very worried about the lack of professional knowledge of teaching of many governors. Often they are very distanced from the realities of modern school life.' 'They follow the head's lead because they don't know enough about it.' 'I dislike self-opinionated governors who know so little about the school and what happens there and who are so obviously politically-motivated and extreme.'

SATISFACTIONS

Why, then do teachers add this extra commitment to what may already be a full timetable? There is certainly an element of career-mindedness in some of their thinking, a

feeling that it will be useful for promotion. But this seemed to be subsidiary to the wish to ensure that the teacher's view is properly represented. Like the parents, they enjoy being involved in the decision making, being part of the management structure of the school, enjoying the confidence of the rest of the staff. 'All teachers should 'do a short term on the governing body.'

The rather cynical, yet almost unwilling commitment to the governing body is best stated by one Sheffield teacher, who'd been a teacher governor for 8 years: 'Sometimes I come away from a meeting and wonder why I bother. Next time, I can make my contribution, put my points, and see that I am influencing the end-product, of education in Sheffield, the spread of educational ideas and thought among people in the area.'

7.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

A simple questionnaire (see Appendix 2) was distributed to parents in the seven schools, in proportion to the number on roll in each school. The method was for the heads to arrange for distribution, at random throughout the school, together with stamped addressed envelopes for reply. The letters were sent home with children, which may have contributed to the low response rate.

By June 1981, several months after the distribution, 143 replies had been received, out of a total of 311. A few replies have come in since the end of June, but these are not included in the statistical tables, although comments from them may be incorporated in the text.

About 56% of those circulated in Sheffield replied, and 29% of ILEA circulation, giving an overall total of 46%. This is set out in detail in Table 1.

This was therefore, in no way a scientifically determined sample, and makes no claims to statistical validity, but it can be used to give an indication of what some parents in Sheffield and London think about parent governors.

The level of knowledge is surprisingly high, although many parents had little personal contact with parent governors. There was considerable approval for the concept, even where parents were not particularly satisfied with what happened in their school.

	S C H O O L S									T O T A L S		
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	n	S	L	S+L
Qs distributed to parents	62	41	60	32		34	42	40		195	116	311
Replies	43	6	44	15	1	7	14	11	2	109	34	143
Percentage	69%	15%	73%	47%		21%	33%	27%		56%	29%	46%

NOTE: The questionnaires were allocated to each school in proportion to the school rolls.

n = replies where the school was not identified, but the postmark indicated which of the two areas it probably came from.

Unfortunately, the low response from ILEA parents was not compensated for by the quality of the replies. They were for the most part, a catalogue of Nos and Don't Knows and there was noticeably less spontaneous or invited comment than from the Sheffield respondents.

As the schools themselves distributed the forms to parents, any variations in the percentage response rate may relate to the extent to which the schools managed the sample.

The lowest response in the Sheffield group comes from the school with a very scattered catchment among the villages on the edge of Sheffield, and this geographical factor may have influenced the result.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE TABLE 2

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>								<u>TOTALS</u>			
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	n	S	L	S+L
No. in sample	43	6	44	15	1	7	14	11	2	109	34	143
<u>QUESTION</u>												
3. Do you know the names of parent governors?												
YES	30	2	22	9	1	3	1	4	1	64 (59)	9 (27)	73 (51) %
NO	13	4	22	6	0	4	13	7	1	45 (41)	25 (73)	70 (49) %
4. Do you know the names of other governors?												
YES	20	0	13	6	0	3	1	5	0	39 (36)	9 (27)	48 (34) %
NO	23	6	31	9	1	4	13	6	2	70 (64)	25 (73)	95 (66) %
5. Do governors make a difference to the school?												
YES	26	2	27	10	0	3	8	4	2	65 (60)	17 (50)	82 (57) %
NO	11	3	11	4	0	2	3	2	0	29 (27)	7 (21)	36 (25) %
POSSIBLY	5	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	9 (8)	1 (3)	10 (7) %
DK/NA	1	0	3	1	1	2	3	4	0	6 (5)	9 (26)	15 (11) %
6. Date of election												
YES	29	2	22	8	0	1	2	3	0	61 (56)	6 (18)	67 (47) %
NO	13	4	22	7	1	6	10	8	1	47 (43)	25 (74)	72 (50) %
WRONG	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1 (1)	3 (8)	4 (3) %

/Contd...

Notes: Questions 1 and 2 were routine questions about the school.
 Figures in brackets are percentages rounded up to nearest whole number
 n = school not identified, but postmark indicated area.

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>									<u>TOTALS</u>		
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	n	S	L	S+L
No. in sample	43	6	44	15	1	7	14	11	2	109	34	143
QUESTION												
7. Did you vote in the election for parent governors?												
YES	29	2	22	8	0	1	2	3	0	64 (59)	8 (24)	72 (50) %
NO	13	4	22	7	1	6	10	8	1	44 (40)	26 (76)	70 (49) %
N/A	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1)	0	1 (1) %
<u>Reason given for not voting</u>												
NONE	5	1	8	2	1	2	10	5	1	18	17	35
NOT INFORMED	3	0	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	4	4	8
CHILD NOT AT SCHOOL	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	2	5
DID NOT KNOW CANDI-DATES	1	1	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	14	0	14
8. Have you spoken to parent governors: in school?												
YES	24	2	4	9	0	2	3	5	0	39 (36)	10 (30)	49 (34) %
NO	19	4	38	6	1	5	11	6	2	68 (62)	24 (71)	92 (65) %
N/A	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2 (2)	0	2 (1) %
:out of school?												
YES	24	1	8	9	0	2	0	3	0	42 (38)	5 (15)	47 (33) %
NO	18	5	35	6	1	5	13	8	2	65 (60)	28 (83)	93 (66) %
N/A	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2 (2)	1 (2)	3 (2) %
9. Contact from parent governors:												
<u>personal</u>												
YES	8	1	2	6	0	2	0	1	1	17 (16)	2 (6)	19 (13) %
NO	33	5	40	8	1	6	12	10	2	87 (80)	30 (88)	117 (82) %
N/A	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0	0	5 (4)	2 (6)	7 (5)

/Contd...

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>									<u>TOTALS</u>		
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	n	S	L	S+L
No. in sample	43	6	44	15	1	7	14	11	2	109	34	143
QUESTION												
9. Contd.												
<u>Newsletter</u>												
YES	30	2	31	10	0	4	6	1	1	74 (68)	12 (35)	86 (60) %
NO	10	4	11	4	1	3	7	9	1	30 (28)	20 (59)	50 (35) %
N/A	3	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	5 (4)	2 (6)	7 (5) %
<u>At a school meeting</u>												
YES	25	2	10	8	0	2	3	3	0	45 (41)	8 (24)	53 (37) %
NO	14	4	39	7	1	5	9	7	2	56 (51)	23 (67)	79 (55) %
N/A	4	0	4	0	0	0	2	1	0	8 (8)	3 (9)	11 (8) %
10. Would you consult parent governors?												
YES	10	2	9	8	0	1	3	1	1	29 (27)	6 (18)	35 (24) %
NO	28	3	30	7	1	5	10	10	1	69 (63)	26 (76)	95 (66) %
POSSIBLY	5	1	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	11 (10)	1 (3)	12 (9) %
N/A	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (3)	1 (1) %
11. Are parent governors a good thing?												
YES	32	5	32	13	1	3	9	6	1	83 (76)	19 (56)	102 (72) %
NO	6	0	6	1	0	2	4	0	0	13 (12)	6 (18)	19 (13) %
POSSIBLY	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	10 (9)	0	10 (7) %
N/A	0	0	2	1	0	2	1	5	1	3 (3)	9 (26)	12 (8) %

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>								<u>TOTALS</u>			
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	n	S	L	S+L
No. in sample	43	6	44	15	1	7	14	11	2	109	34	143

Comments on parent
governors:

They present the parents' views	12	3	11	8	0	1	1	2	1	32	4	36
More accountability	4	1	8	3	0	3	3	0	0	16	6	22
Better communication	6	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	12
Better parent/teacher co-operation	13	0	5	1	0	0	0	1	0	19	1	20
Helps the diffident with a problem	3	1	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	8	3	11
Inject realism	2	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0	7	1	8
Bring in new ideas	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Should have more power	7	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	12	1	13
Would have more contact with parents	3	0	3	3	0	1	1	0	0	9	2	11
Know nothing about them	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	0	3	5	8

NOTES ON TABLE 2Question 3

Parents were asked to give the names, and those included under YES named at least one correctly. All the schools claimed that the names were sent out to parents at least once.

Question 4

The answers to this question and to Question 3 did not necessarily correspond, ie some people knew the names of other governors but not of parent-governors and vice versa.

Question 5

Parents were not asked for reasons why they thought governors might or might not make a difference to the school, but a number wrote in reasons; those who said no referred to excessive dependence on the head; those who said yes talked about accountability and expressing the parents' viewpoint.

Question 6

As explained earlier, elections are held each year in Sheffield, only once in four years in ILEA, apart from resignations. This would clearly influence the degree of knowledge about the arrangements.

Question 7

The problem of turn-out is complicated by the difficulty of deciding what the total electorate is. Does it include two parents per child? If so, a school like School 1 would

have a potential electorate of over 2,000, allowing for the fact that some families would have more than one child at the school.

If the level of voting indicated by the questionnaires (59% of respondents in Sheffield) were extrapolated to the whole school, there would, for example, have been a turn-out of over 800 at School 1 on the basis of one vote per family. In fact, that school claimed that 300 had voted at the last election. So either these figures are unrepresentative of the parent body as a whole, or they are perhaps an optimistic picture, representing what the respondents feel they ought to have done, rather than what they did do.

There is no obvious explanation for the fact that 11 people from one school claimed that not knowing the candidates was their reason for not voting, compared with ones and twos giving that reason from other schools, but the comments were very strongly of the view that you couldn't vote for people you did not know.

Question 8

This referred to contact initiated by parents. The very low percentage of parents meeting governors outside school in ILEA is probably valid in spite of the low totals involved.

Question 9

This referred to contact initiated by the parent governors. Far more parents claimed to have seen a newsletter than parent governors claimed to have contributed to one but this may be because any communication that came from school might be classified by parents as a newsletter. The responses to the question about school meetings reinforces the well-known fact that PTAs reach only a small proportion of parents. Yet parent governors still rely on the PTA as their main means of contact with the parent body.

Question 10

Perhaps this question should have been worded to make it clear that general rather than personal worries were implied, but parents overwhelmingly rejected the idea that you would go to the parent governors, many writing in that you should approach the head or staff.

Question 11

In view of the lack of knowledge expressed in the previous answers, the total of 72% in favour of parent governors seems a surprising vote of confidence. The reasons given in support of the answers to Question 11 did seem to represent what parents hoped the parent governors could do rather than what they actually did. For example, 'I don't think they have much power, but it is better to have the parents' views represented, than for them not to be there at all'. 'I think that parents should have representatives to put forward their views but I doubt that if their views conflict with the school policy they

will have much effect.' Some respondents were more positive: 'Because being a parent and not employed by the Education Department they are able to bring fresh ideas into the running of the school.' 'Often they are able to clear up points of confusion or queries which parents would never approach staff about.' 'Working along with other components (teachers' representatives, local authority representatives etc) they act as a system of checks and balances on the power of a headmaster.'

The negative comments are largely to do with lack of information about the governors and lack of power, the feeling that the real decisions are taken elsewhere. For example 'Your circular implies that most schools have a board of governors. Myself and my wife have always taken a keen interest in our three children's education and been active PTA members/officials at several schools. If these 8 schools had/have boards of governors it is surely disturbing that we have known nothing of them.' Or, more succinctly: 'I would like to know who they are, how many, what power do they have, and are they paid?

Some people, however, have nothing but praise for them: 'Ours work hard to promote interest in school, and get together parents from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Parents will often talk to other parents when they hesitate to discuss things with teacher-type figures. They also get parents together with staff. ...I can see nothing but good coming from their endeavours.'

8.

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

A similar questionnaire to that distributed to parents was circulated through the schools to teachers in the seven schools, again in proportion to the school roll. In order to get a reasonable size of sample, the proportion of teachers circulated was higher than that of parents. Details are set out in Table 3.

A stamped addressed envelope was provided. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the questionnaire.

The table was drawn up in June 1981, and the one reply that came in after that date has not been included in the statistics, though comments from it may be included in the text. Altogether 97 forms were circulated and 57 replies received, there being little significant difference in the response between Sheffield and London. The sample does therefore provide a more valid guide to teacher opinion in the seven schools than the parent questionnaire did for parents.

Teachers expressed predictable cynicism about teacher governors and governors generally, but this was coupled with a high level of participation in governors' affairs.

OVERALL RESPONSE TO SURVEY

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>									<u>TOTALS</u>		
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	n	S	L	S+L
No. of Questions distributed to teachers	19	13	19	10	-	10	13	13	-	61	36	97
No. of replies	11	7	8	9	2	6	8	6		37	20	57
Percentage response	58%	54%	42%	90%		60%	62%	46%		61%	56%	59%

NOTE: The questionnaires were allocated to each school in proportion to the school rolls.

Col. n = replies where the school was not identified, but the postmark indicated which of the two areas it probably came from.

The very high response from School 4 may be due to the influence of its very energetic head.

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>							<u>TOTALS</u>			
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	S	L	S+L
No. of sample	11	7	8	9	2	6	8	6	37	20	57
<u>QUESTION</u>											
3. Do you know the names of teacher-governors	11	7	8	9	2	6	7	6	33 (100)	19 (95)	56 (98) %
4. Do you know the names of other governors?	6	4	7	8	2	6	8	5	27 (73)	19 (95)	46 (81) %
5. Do governors make a difference to the school?											
YES	9	2	8	6	2	4	7	4	27 (73)	15 (75)	42 (74) %
NO	1	5	0	0	0	1	0	1	6 (16)	2 (10)	8 (14) %
POSSIBLY	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	1	3 (8)	3 (15)	6 (10.25) %
D/K, N/A	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (2.7)		1 (1.75) %
6. Date of election											
YES	7	4	6	3	2	0	4	1	22 (60)	5 (25)	27 (47.25) %
NO	4	2	2	5	0	5	2	0	13 (35)	7 (35)	20 (35) %
WRONG	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	5	2 (5)	7 (35)	9 (16) %
N/A	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1 (5)	1 (1.75) %
7. Did you vote?											
YES	9	7	8	11	2	6	8	5	33 (89)	19 (95)	52 (91) %
NO	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	4 (11)	1 (5)	5 (9) %

/Contd..

NOTES: Figures in brackets are percentages, rounded off to whole numbers in most cases.

n = school not identified, but postmark indicated area.

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>								<u>TOTALS</u>		
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	S	L	S+L
No. in sample	11	7	8	9	2	6	8	6	37	20	57
QUESTION											
9. Would you consult teacher-governors?											
YES Positive	2	0	2	4	0	2	4	1	8 (22)	7 (35)	15 (26.25) %
YES Doubtful	6	3	5	1	2	1	2	2	17 (46)	5 (25)	22 (39) %
NO	3	4	1	3	0	3	2	3	11 (30)	8 (40)	19 (33) %
N/A	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (2)	0	1 (1.75) %
10. Are teacher-governors good for school?											
YES	10	6	7	7	2	6	8	5	32 (87)	19 (95)	51 (89) %
NO	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (2)	0	1 (1.75) %
POSSIBLY	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	3 (9)	1 (5)	4 (7.50) %
N/A	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (2)	0	1 (1.75) %

	<u>S C H O O L S</u>						<u>TOTALS</u>				
	1	2	3	4	n	A	B	C	S	L	S+L
No. in sample	11	7	8	9	2	6	8	6	37	20	57

Comments on teacher-governors:

They present the teachers' views	8	1	4	5	1	0	6	4	17	10	37
Better communication	5	4	2	3	0	1	3	2	14	6	20
More community feeling	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Inject realism	1	2	4	2	1	3	1	0	10	3	11

NOTES ON QUESTIONSQuestion 3

The respondents were asked to name the governors, and the entries under YES include all those who named at least one correctly. The result, almost 100% positive, speaks well for the level of knowledge about teacher governors in the staffroom.

Question 4

And the high positive response to this question indicates an unexpectedly high level of awareness about governors generally among the teaching profession.

Question 5

Teachers were asked to give reasons for their answers to this question. Those who thought they did have an influence saw it as mainly concerned with backing up the head and staff. 'Their opinions concerning school uniform and corporal punishment were sought, and they backed the staff view completely. This gave added strength to the argument.' Those who said they had no influence thought it was because they followed the head's line too closely, or knew too little about the school or education generally.

Question 6

The answers to this question may be invalidated by by-elections that changed the formal pattern of elections.

Question 7

The very high totals claiming to have voted endorse the

comments made by the heads about teacher elections.

Almost all those who did not vote had not been employed at that school when the election took place.

Question 8

The answers to this question were not tabulated, as they were all very much the same; they referred to minutes on the staff notice board, to discussion at staff association meetings, and to informal contacts. Only one or two people in each school claimed to have heard no reporting back, but there was one significant divergence from the pattern occurring in one of the London schools, where it was consistently claimed that there was no reporting back of any kind, nor did the teacher governor respondent for that school mention any. There was a feeling that the 'teacher governors were not at liberty to do so'. One even said somewhat wistfully, 'No reporting back, although the sixth-form representatives do report back to the sixth form'.

Question 9

Rather more teachers would be likely to take up problems with teacher governors than parents with their representatives, though many reservations were expressed. For example: 'Not initially. If discussion with other staff, the union etc showed that taking an issue to governors might be valuable then it could be raised with a teacher governor, usually at a common room meeting.'

One respondent replied, 'No, although after having completed this questionnaire I am probably more aware of what they do and might do so now.'

Question 10

The overwhelming support given to teacher governors is not so surprising given their answers to the earlier questions, though it may surprise those who might have expected teachers to take a more cynical view of governors as a whole. The one dissentient was perhaps not typical in his view of education: 'The staff are predominately conservative in their attitudes and the elected teacher governors reflect this body of opinion. This facilitates the maintenance of anachronistic structures which do not serve the best interests of the pupils during a period of rapid change beyond the school gate.' (This view was shared by the pupil governors at that school.)

Like teacher governors, teachers saw the importance of their representatives as bringing a note of realism into the discussions: 'Teacher governors give a more down to earth attitude to discussions. Parents and other governors often tend to get bogged down in rather idealistic theories, or think of a lot of things for other people to do, ie teachers.' 'They bring sanity and reality to the governors' meetings, because they are often the only ones who know the truth as opposed to rumours.' Criticism centred on lack of power, lack of knowledge, diffidence about opposing the head. 'There ought to be more of them. They ought to have quite a lot to say about the appointment

of staff and heads, and the dispensing of public money. To this end political appointees ought to be eradicated.' They are useful, said one respondent: 'In theory, yes, if they are more in contact with the staff, more responsive to the staff, and if their role is more clearly defined.' Perhaps one teacher summed up the prevailing teacher view: 'They are intelligent, committed, educationally aware people, which is more than can be said for most governors. Most become disillusioned very quickly.'

9.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONSSUMMARY

Taking the five groups whose opinions were canvassed, a surprising degree of unanimity emerges from their responses to the survey.

Headteachers stated that parent and teacher governors attended more meetings and visited the school more often than other governors, knew more about it, and were more likely to support the head. Heads were not aware of much communication between parents and their constituencies, and the main concern expressed was that they were not truly representative of the parent body.

Heads felt that staff representatives were valuable in reinforcing the professional view, though they were concerned about potential conflict. The head quoted at the end of Section 4 was perhaps expressing a view that other heads would endorse, that staff disagreements were not the province of governors, but of the authority structure within the school.

Parent governors also thought that they were more assiduous governors, with the teacher representatives, than other appointees, and that they had special knowledge of the school to contribute. They saw supporting the head and staff as an integral part of their role.

They knew that their communication with the parent body

was limited, but had not made very strenuous efforts to improve it. They relied on the PTA for contact and support. They saw themselves as less partial than other governors, and as advocates for the needs of the pupils.

Teacher governors also believed that they were more energetic in their duties as governors than other governors, and were concerned that other governors lacked knowledge of the school and educational matters. On the whole, they claimed that they were not inhibited from speaking their mind, though this view was qualified by one or two of the more experienced governors. Because of their daily contact with other teachers in the staffroom, they felt less need to communicate formally with them, though they were not satisfied with the level of interest in the governors' deliberations. They were also dissatisfied with the degree of autonomy that the governing body had in relation to the LEA.

Parents generally knew very little about parent governors, but their view of what parent governors might offer was similar to the ideas expressed by the governors themselves, ie specialist 'realistic' knowledge of what parents wanted; help as intermediary with the school for other parents - support for the head, qualified by some fears that they would support him or her too much. They expressed doubts about how much real power parent governors would have, and considerable resentment about the lack of communication with them.

Teachers saw the teacher representatives as bringing forward the 'chalk-face' views of ordinary teachers in the classroom, and curbing doctrinaire excesses and unrealistic expectations, particularly among political appointees on the board. They felt there was not much reporting back, though staff meetings were often mentioned as a source of information. They had doubts about whether any real power was exercised by governing bodies, but still felt it was important for teachers to be represented on them.

CONCLUSIONS

Before putting forward the conclusions I have drawn from the evidence here presented, I would like to comment on the nature of that evidence. As explained in Section 3: Aims and Objectives, it was not intended that such a small survey should claim to be a representative sample of parent and teacher opinion. In the event, the difficulties with ILEA, and the low response to the random questionnaire made it even more limited than had been intended. Yet it does present a sample of the opinions of more than 200 parents and teachers at schools which claim to be supportive of parent and teacher involvement, one which accords with my own experience of parent and teacher opinion. Moreover, the responses were not confined to articulate and well-educated members of society, though these may be over-represented in the quotations from answers to the questionnaires.

If we look again at the four functions identified by the

Taylor Report as the responsibility of governing bodies, how far does communication between parent and teacher governors and their electorates influence them?

1 Responsibility for appointments

The Sheffield Articles of Government do not give this responsibility to governors for appointments to any post below deputy head, and few Sheffield governors expressed any desire for change. ILEA governors are accustomed to making appointments for all posts above Scale I, and regard it as one of their most important functions. They are also beginning to take an interest in internal promotions, instead of giving formal approval to these on Chairman's action. Parent governors in particular may have a direct personal interest in the performance of the chosen candidates, and are less willing to accept excuses for incompetence.

2 Conduct and curriculum

Here is the real nub of governors' influence over a school, and almost every respondent stressed the difference made by people with personal knowledge and experience of the school to the quality of the discussions. One perhaps unexpected result is the very strong feelings expressed by both parents and teachers, of loyalty towards and identification with the school, as opposed to what they often characterise as the political motivations of other governors and the LEA.

It may be that an appreciation of this loyalty makes it easier for the school to take seriously any matters of concern that parent governors in particular may bring forward.

There is not, however, much evidence of serious curricular discussion by governors, though this varies from school to school, and seems more common in ILEA.

3 Finance

There are few governing bodies where financial decisions are anything more than an endorsement of decisions made by the head and staff, and of course, the LEA. But governors did express concern about the lack of financial control, and the need for schools and governing bodies to have more independence within a given budget.

4 Representation of the school on important issues

This is an area where heads seem to take the governors' role very seriously, particularly in representing the school's interests to the LEA. Heads believe that if these representations can be shown to have the weight of the parent and staff body behind them, then the LEA is more likely to take them into account, because of the political implications.

This view is not altogether shared by governors or their constituents, who express some cynicism and frustration about the extent to which the LEA takes any notice of their resolutions and requests. Communication with their

electorates clearly plays very little part in the way in which parent and teacher governors exercise these functions, though they may make special efforts to consult when a controversial issue arises. It could even be argued that the beneficial effects of having parent and teacher governors depend on the simple fact of their personal involvement with the school, and not on their election by the parents and teachers in the school, or any communication with them, an argument that might be reinforced by what many see as a low level of interest in the election procedure, at least among parents.

I would dispute it. In the first place, the turn-out at Sheffield parent governor elections, where the postal ballot system encourages a high level of participation, can rival that for many local government and some Parliamentary elections at which there is more at stake, with wide media coverage to whip up interest.

But far more important than this, and however low the turn-out, the fact that some governors are elected gives them credentials to represent parent and teacher opinion that do not belong to appointees, whether appointed by the head or by political parties. It is particularly important for the credibility of teacher governors that they are seen not to be the head's placemen. The analogy with political elections is a useful one, because it also illuminates the nature of the relationship between these elected governors and their electorate. It does seem to

be very comparable to the relationship between the electorate and their MP or councillor, with, in the case of parents, the PTA playing the part of the local party GMC. (Some might claim it was about as representative of local opinion as the average GMC.) In spite of closer daily contacts, teachers also seem to have this kind of relationship with the teacher governor.

Both groups, parents and teachers, seem quite content to let their representatives act, constitutionally, as representatives rather than delegates. Such communication as there is is largely one-way, outward from the governors and rather ineffectual. Yet this does not seem to prevent the constituencies, at least as represented in this small test of opinion, from valuing a system that gives parents and classroom teachers some rights over how a school is run. Doubts may be expressed about how these rights are exercised and whether they are sufficient, but not about the importance of having parent and teacher views represented, nor about the good this would do the school. There was one comment that encapsulated the general feeling: 'I suppose they really are interested in the school and the pupils, or they wouldn't take the job on.'

10.

REFLECTIONS

Anyone familiar with the maintained school system is well aware that what the law says about school governing bodies is often rather different from what happens in practice.

The 1944 Act supported the concept that schools should be governed by a body of lay people largely because the Bill's sponsors thought it beneficial to follow the practices of the well-established and well-regarded existing school foundations, the public and grammar schools. There were even some Members of Parliament who, during the debates on the Bill, expressed the opinion that parents should be represented on the governing body.

But although the Act recommended that all schools should have their own governing body, and the Ministry of Education provided Model Instruments and Articles to indicate how they should operate, it did not go so far as to make this compulsory. Even today, in 1983, no date has been set to bring into force the provisions of the 1980 Act, which are intended to ensure that every school has its own board of governors with parent and teacher representatives. In 1981 some LEAs still persisted in the practice of designating a sub-committee of the Authority as the governing body of all their schools, and grouping schools under one governing body is still common, especially with special schools. Here the argument is that special

schools are often very small, so that it is practicable to discuss their affairs in a grouped governing body. In reality, the problems of individual schools are so different that it is difficult to give them proper consideration when their governing boards are groups and this applies to special schools and ordinary schools alike. The fact that grouping is allowed to continue demonstrates an unwillingness on the part of the LEA to take governors seriously.

The ambivalence about whether there should be individual governing bodies extends to what they should do where they do exist. The powers granted to them over finance, appointment of staff, and such lesser items as letting of school premises, differ widely throughout the country. There is no more tendentious area than the question of 'oversight of the conduct and curriculum of the school'. It was not until the report of the enquiry into the affairs of the William Tyndale that any serious attempt was made to define what this opaque statement might mean. But the Auld report did delineate, for the ILEA at any rate, the relative responsibilities of the head and staff, the governors and the LEA, in this critical area. The true importance of the William Tyndale affair lies here rather than in the eccentric personality conflicts of the case. Auld said that managers and head generally regard oversight as meaning consultation, but if managers are concerned about the quality of the teaching being provided, then

they have a responsibility to do something about it. What they do is affected by four considerations: they must act corporately; they can only manage in consultation with the headteacher; if the head refuses to accept that there is any justification for their concern, they must pass a resolution at a properly constituted managers' meeting to draw the Authority's attention to the matter; if they are not satisfied by the Authority's response they must either make a formal complaint or refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

It is interesting to note that Circular 6/81 on curriculum policy stresses the collaboration needed from LEAs, governors, and head teachers and staff in "securing a planned and coherent curriculum within schools taking account of national and local considerations and the needs of individual pupils". 'Collaboration' also implies that some positive action will be required, whereas 'oversight' could be, and often is, merely passive.

If we accept the Taylor Report's view of governing bodies that the life and work of a school are indivisible, and that therefore the governors, if they are to govern, must be responsible for all aspects of that indivisibility, it follows that they must also be responsible for appointments of the staff who are to carry out the day to day functions of the school's policy, and indeed, the allocation of the resources that support them, always remembering that a Taylor style governing body would include a strong representation of the school's staff.

Not everyone would agree. There is still quite a strong body of opinion, exemplified by the reluctance of LEAs to establish individual school governing bodies, or to give them powers and duties to perform, which holds that it is essential to keep control over schools entirely in the LEA's hands. The fear is that independent governing bodies would work in ways that were inimical to the interests of the majority, a view that may have been influenced by the activities of the governing bodies of some voluntary aided schools in resisting aspects of LEA policy, whether on major issues like selection and comprehensivisation, or such matters as the abolition of corporal punishment. Control from the centre always has its adherents, especially when centrist policies seem to offer a better chance of change and improvement. This begs the question of how far you can successfully impose change on an unwilling school and its parents, and indeed, how far you ought to do so.

A good example of this dilemma was the way in which the proposal to abolish corporal punishment was handled in Sheffield schools. A policy document advocating abolition was circulated to school governing bodies by the LEA. At the governors' meetings I attended, where the subject was discussed, the proposal met with almost universal condemnation, and it was a brave governor who dared to express support of the proposal in the face of the combined opposition of staff, headteachers, parent representatives

and other governors. It was one of the few issues on which parent governors had made a substantial attempt to consult their constituencies, and the result was a firm no to the proposal. It even contributed to the cynicism with which many governors viewed the LEA. Their views were being consulted, but they were sure that the LEA would go ahead with abolition regardless.

Yet although, in theory, this looks like a defeat for those who support the ideal of an independent governing body, who would make important decisions about discipline for its own school, it is in fact a paradigm of the relative responsibilities on school management. The national government lays down the basic structure which says that LEAs must provide education for their populations, in schools, under certain minimum conditions. The LEA decides the framework of provision in its area, how the money that is available for education should be distributed and the general educational character of each school.

So just as it is up to the LEA to determine whether or not a school should be co-educational, or 11-16, 11-18 or whatever, it is equally a part of the LEA's functions to decide, on an important and emotive issue like corporal punishment, that it is incompatible with the educational policy they have been elected to carry out in their schools. In making up their minds on such an issue, the views of governors and staff will be canvassed, and taken into account, but a willingness to consult does not imply that

the views put forward will necessarily be accepted. They will be among many factors that are considered when taking a decision.

It is the governing body's duty to interpret educational policy and the general educational character of the school, as laid down by the LEA, in a way that reflects immediate local needs and local interests.

This theory of how governors ought to work would be rejected implicitly or explicitly by many teachers, especially heads. The head who claims 'My governors are very useful to me; I can always make them do what I want,' is still a commonplace. And the teaching profession's official spokesmen have often expressed suspicion and antagonism to the idea of 'lay interference' in professional matters. The NUT's injudicious description of the Taylor Report as a charter for busybodies is a good example of this negative thinking. 'Why need governors?' they say, 'when we are the professionals; we know how to teach and the LEA knows how to administer and inspect and, after all, we are accountable to the elected councillors who form the Education Committee.'

Accountability, in this view, means accountability to other professionals, because the elected councillors, who have many other responsibilities, cannot possibly devote the amount of time and provide the quality of interest and knowledge to every school in their constituency that an

individual active governing body can.

I believe that when professionals have to explain and justify the service they are providing to the very lay people for whom that service is intended, this can only result in an improvement in the quality of the service and a better understanding all round of what can and what needs to be done. Yet there are many governing bodies content to rubber stamp decisions taken by the school, giving their highest priority to 'trust' in the head and staff, rather than to their responsibility to make sure that the school is fully considering the community's interests.

When I began work on this survey, my expectations were conditioned by ten years as an ILEA governor, four of those as a co-opted member on a comprehensive school where two of my children had been pupils, but I was aware that my experiences were not typical. The comprehensive school had exceptionally active parent governors, who made a point of ensuring that at least one parent governor was present at every school occasion: meetings, report evenings, new parents' evenings, visits for prospective parents. Staff governors took an active part in the governing bodies' deliberations. It was, for example, largely at the staff representatives' instigation that a joint board of governors and staff was established to consider internal promotions and make recommendations to the governing body on these. The close liaison between

parent and staff governors made them a powerful force, often able to sway opinion among the governors as a whole. Yet even in this school communication between parents and the parent governors was not strong. The numbers turning out for parent governor elections were not particularly high for a school of 1200, and there was no regular communication through newsletters etc between governors and the parent body. The PTA remained the main channel of communication, although parent governors spent a considerable amount of time in the school.

I was not surprised, therefore, by the lack of communication in the survey schools. After all, what communication goes on between an elected councillor and his constituency? It is channelled through his constituency political party, or through complaints he receives from members of the public. But at least his public knows how to reach him through the Town Hall. Many parents have no idea at all how to reach the parent governor, and would be nervous of approaching the school for the address, afraid of meeting the potentially hostile response 'What do you want to know for?' This much was clear from the answers by parents to the questionnaire, quoted on pp 33-36.

Parents did not know much about parent governors, how to contact them, what they did, how they were chosen. Even where the school thought it was doing all it could to publicise parent governor elections, many parents were unaware or claimed to be uninformed about them.

The ILEA has tried hard to publicise parent governor elections, with some success, by leaflets sent home to all parents, and by advertisements in the local press. The attendance at the 1982 elections generally appear to have improved on the results shown in the survey which relates to elections held in 1978. I had expected that a postal ballot system might produce a higher turnout, and this seems justified to some extent by the Sheffield figures, but it cannot be said to have made a dramatic difference. It is clearly going to be a long term educative process to get the same kind of turnout for parent governor elections that most schools manage for report evenings.

It's interesting that the cynicism that was to be expected from staff about the efficacy of governors was not matched by lack of interest in the actual elections for teacher governors. Very high turnouts from the admittedly captive electorate were achieved by almost all the survey schools. So although staff may doubt whether governors make much difference to the school, they are determined that any influence staff could have on a governing body should not go by default. As I said in my introduction, I feel that it is not sufficiently recognised that a profound change is taking place. For the first time, ordinary members of staff - and teacher governors are not usually high in the academic hierarchy, though they may be senior in terms of length of service - can take a full part in school government. This is already taken for granted in the county schools, but has hardly begun to happen in voluntary

schools. The idea of having staff representatives is often firmly resisted by heads, who claim that the views of rank and file staff can be perfectly well-represented by the head and deputy head, and by governors, who have serious reservations about the propriety of discussing the school's affairs in front of those personally involved.

Governing bodies unused to having proper staff representation appear not to perceive the limitations inherent in discussing the school's affairs without the benefit of the staff's views and experiences. I have found that they realise what they have been missing when teachers begin to take a full part on the governing board, and their fears about improper interest, conflict with the head, discussion of colleagues etc, subside. (Though it is possible to go too far in the direction of staff participation. If several members of staff attend as observers by virtue of their office - eg Deputy Heads, as well as the elected representatives, they can appear to dominate the proceedings. The same can be true if there is a preponderance of parents with children at the school among the political appointees.)

If conflicts exist, a refusal to take account of them in the deliberations of the governing body is simply hiding your head in the sand. If, for example, the head is at loggerheads with some members of staff, the school must be suffering as a result. The governing body should be a forum where such differences can be settled amicably,

representing as it should all the interests at stake - staff, pupils, parents, LEA and community. If they can't sort it out who can?

When the relationship between a head and governors is working well, conflicts can be neutralised without undue bitterness. If not, the conflicts are likely to be reflected among the governors, factions will develop, Tyndale-type situations will occur. The breakdown of confidence between the head and governors and the governors and the LEA is a recipe for disaster, and a refusal to bring potential conflicts out into the open makes this more likely.

I suppose the most disappointing result of the survey, though not unexpected, was the lack of real educational content in the governors' deliberations, the paucity of discussion about curriculum, as opposed to peripheral topics like building works and school meals. Policy documents from the LEA on subjects like 'Vandalism in Schools' were often too generalised to have any practical application for the individual school, and were seen as time wasters. Yet any governor who has taken the trouble to go and talk to teachers about their work, what they are planning, their objectives in a particular course, the constraints that inhibit them, usually finds it a rewarding experience, and much appreciated by the teacher concerned. Governors are often told (by the head) that it is too daunting for individual teachers to come and talk to a room full of adults about their work, even though, unlike

governors, they cheerfully face a room full of adolescents day after day. One argument often put forward is that it would be unfair to expect all members of staff to be prepared to do this, and that if some do it reflects badly on the others who won't, or feel they are unable to. This presupposes that governors are an unreasonable lot, who are not prepared to take into account that circumstances and people differ. It ought to be part of the work of parent and teacher governors to make this kind of communication easier. They at least are not strangers, and ought to be able to increase confidence in the ability of the governing body to understand the context of successes and failures.

I was very struck by the frequency with which parent and teacher governors express their need for help and advice about how to function better. They were anxious to learn about what other governors, other LEAs did. In Sheffield they were particularly interested by the Parents Consultative Committees run by the ILEA. These are committees on a divisional basis, which consist of all the elected parent governors of schools in that Division. The Chairman is elected from among their number by the parent governors and they are clerked by Divisional Office staff. Regular meetings are held to discuss whatever topics are raised by the members, and senior officers of the Authority often attend in an advisory capacity. The agenda of one typical meeting was as follows:

Apologies for absence.

- 1 MINUTES
Minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 1979 were circulated on 16 January 1980.
- 2 SCHOOL MEALS
Mr D S B Simpson, Principal Education Catering Organiser, will attend to talk about the Schools Meals Service and to answer questions.
- 3 MATTERS ARISING OUT OF THE MINUTES
- 4 CHAIRMAN'S ACTION
- 5 THE EDUCATION BUDGET 1980/81
Report (January 1980) by the Education Officer - an explanation of how it would affect governing bodies.
- 6 SCHOOL UNIFORM AND PE CLOTHING
Report (Spring term 1980) by the Education Officer - a statement on the LEA policy, and recommendations to governors for consideration in their schools.
- 7 SUPPLY TEACHERS
NOTE (Spring term 1980) by the Education Officer - explanation of improved arrangements.
- 8 EXPANSION OF NURSERY EDUCATION AFTER 1980
Report (January 1980) by the Education Officer - future plans and policies for nursery education.
- 9 CENTRAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE OF PARENTS
Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 1979 are attached. Chairman to report. (This included reports and lively discussions on primary school records, parent governor elections, and the education budget.)
- 10 FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS
To discuss.
- 11 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING
- 12 URGENT BUSINESS, if any.

Each term, there is a meeting of the Central Parents Consultative, consisting of the chairmen of the Divisional committees, held at County Hall and attended on a regular basis by the Leader of the ILEA, and senior officers. Its recommendations are taken seriously, so that the PCCs form a counterpoint to the long-established headteachers' consultatives.

The opportunity to meet one another, exchange views and experiences, put forward policy recommendations and topics of importance to parents is a valuable one, although, as usual, the level of activity in each PCC depends largely on the energy of a few individuals, and on their relationship with their Divisional office. An unhelpful attitude on the part of the Divisional Officer, and an aggressive stance by the PCC can cause problems, but apathy is even more damaging.

In a confusing situation, it's not surprising that parent and teacher governors are muddled and uncertain about their functions and how to carry them out. They do not normally have the political background of other governors and may find the procedure at meetings rather daunting. They are interested enough to want to find out how the system works, and are often shocked when they do. Because their interest in the school is direct and personal, they are not ready to accept the restrictions and political practicalities that political appointees take for granted. They are good, for example, at exposing bureaucratic muddles and

inefficiencies that other governors have been prepared to ignore because it was too unpopular or too much trouble to tackle them.

It is difficult to fob them off with a glib answer, because they know the school too well. They find it easier to resist the wilder flights of educational enthusiasts, both professional and political, because they can envisage what this will mean for their children, their classes. Their successes have been depreciated because of their failure to transform the operation of governing bodies overnight, but what they have done is brought a breath of fresh air into the governing board. At last someone is beginning to look at the school's problems, not from the point of view of an administrator with conflicting calls on the resources he has in hand, of a politician who may have 20 or 30 schools in his constituency and could spend his whole life keeping in touch with them, not of the head-teacher who is burdened with the remorseless day to day problems of keeping the school going, but with sympathy and understanding for the school's individual problems and needs and a determined will for it to succeed. Given the right kind of help it would be possible for governing bodies, reinforced and refreshed by the contributions of their new members, to constitute the informed body of opinion that education needs to fight for its fair share of resources.

HOW GOVERNORS MIGHT BE HELPED

- 1 LEAs should sponsor more training schemes for governors which can be very cheaply done with the help of NAGM, WEA, colleges of education etc.
- 2 The LEA and the schools should encourage more communication between governors and the parent body, by for example providing facilities for newsletters and other publicity.
- 3 Governors should be encouraged to take a wider view of their responsibility to their electorate, and not to depend solely on the PTA.
- 4 LEAs could co-operate more closely with organisations like NAGM, and make more use of their expertise, which is freely available.
- 5 Each LEA ought to have some kind of parents' consultative committee similar to the ILEA. Parent governors could organise this informally themselves if the LEA is unable or unwilling to help.
- 6 There is an opportunity in the light of Circular 6/81 to review the governors' involvement in curriculum policy formation in a sample of schools to see how, if at all, the influence of the governors makes the school curriculum more responsive to community needs. This could perhaps be combined with some kind of developmental

intervention strategy, a piece of action research that would initiate and monitor governor participation in curriculum planning.



NORTH EAST LONDON POLYTECHNIC

Centre for Institutional Studies
Director: John Pratt

Dear Parent

I am doing some research on parent and teacher governors of schools and would be very grateful for your help. Could you spare a few minutes to answer the questions below and post your answers back to me in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope?

Even if you do not know anything about school governors it would still be useful for me to have your answers.

Every local school has its own governing body, and some governors are elected by parents and teachers in the school. I am trying to find out what kind of contact there is between elected school governors and the people who elect them, and whether this makes any difference to the school.

All the information will remain confidential, and the names of parents or schools will not be revealed to anyone else. If you would like more information about the research project, please telephone or write to me at my home address.

Tel No. 01 485 4258

10, Brookfield Park
LONDON, NW5

Yours sincerely,



Felicity Taylor.

1. Name of your child's school?
2. Do you know if your school has elected parent governors? YES/NO
3. If YES, can you give their names?
4. How many other governors can you name?
(Just the number, no need to give the names)
5. Do you think the governors make any difference to the school?

2/p.

6. Do you know when the election for parent governors takes place? If so, when?
7. Have you ever voted at an election for parent governors? YES/NO
If NO, is there any special reason why not?
8. Have you ever spoken to any parent governors of your school?
a, in school YES/NO
b, out of school YES/NO
9. Have they ever tried to get in touch with you
a, personally YES/NO
b, by newsletters sent out from school YES/NO
c, at school meetings YES/NO
d, Any other way YES/NO
(If YES, please explain how)
10. If you were worried about your child at school, or about anything that was happening at school, would you talk to the parent governors about it? YES/NO
11. Do you think having parent governors is a good thing for the school? YES/NO
Why?
12. Any other comments about parent governors?

10.



NORTH EAST LONDON POLYTECHNIC

Centre for Institutional Studies
Director: John Pratt

Dear Teacher

I am doing some research into parent and teacher governors in schools and would be very grateful for your help. Could you spare a few minutes to answer the questions below and post them back to me in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope?

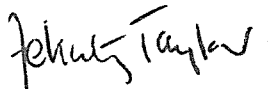
I am trying to find out what kind of contact there is between elected school governors and the people who elect them, and what difference this makes to the school. All the information given will remain confidential and the names of members of staff or schools will not be disclosed to anyone else.

If you would like any more information about the research, please telephone or write to me at my home address.

10, Brookfield Park LONDON, NW5 1ER
Tel 01 485 4258

Yours sincerely,

Felicity Taylor



1. Name of school
 2. Does the school have elected teacher governors? YES/NO
 3. If yes, can you name them?
 4. How many other governors can you name?
(Just the number, names not necessary)
 5. Do you think the governing body make any difference to
the school? YES/NO
- Any comments?

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6. Do you know when the election for teacher governors takes place? If so, when?
7. Have you voted at an election for teacher governors? YES/NO
If NO is there any special reason why you did not vote?
8. In what ways, if any, do the staff governors keep the rest of the staff in touch with the governing body?
9. If you were concerned about some aspects of your work or school activities, would you talk it over with the staff governors?
10. Do you think that having teacher governors is a good thing for the school? YES/NO
Could you give reasons for your answer?
11. Any other comments about teacher governors?