



**Minutes of the Meeting of Hackney School Governors' Association
held on Wednesday 10th February 2016, at the offices of the
Hackney Learning Trust**

Present:

Lisa Neidich (Chair)	Sir Thomas Abney Primary & Federation of Lubavitch
Jo Larkin	Grasmere Primary School
William Sheasgreen	Betty Layward Primary & Stoke Newington School
Derek Powell	Cardinal Pole Catholic School
Jean Charles	De Beauvoir Primary School
Kate Loewenthal	Federation of Lubavitch Schools
Francesca Vinelott	Gainsborough Primary School
Caroline Hughes	Haggerston Secondary School
Mary Walker	Jubilee School
Joanna MacLeod (Vice Chair)	Lauriston Primary School
Bernard Hawes (Treasurer)	Stormont House School
Catherine McGuinness	The City Academy
Nigel Challis	The City Academy
Karen Sims	Our Lady's Convent High School

In attendance:

Maggie Kalnins - HLT	Head, Governor Services, HLT
Maripaz de San Miguel	ecoACTIVE

The following papers were tabled at the meeting:

- Minutes of the last AGM held 24th November 2015
- What makes a headteacher "executive"? – NGA
- The Role of Regional Schools Commissioners – House of Commons Education Committee

AGENDA ITEMS

1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Apology was received from Rita Krishna – The City Academy.

The Chair welcomed members and opened the meeting at 6.05pm. She noted that this was the first meeting to be held at the earlier time of 6pm which should enable members to deliberate agenda items and vacate the building at 7:50pm. The Learning Trust charges a flat rate of 2hours if the meeting extends beyond 8pm.

Members present, including the clerk who was covering the meeting, introduced themselves.

2. MAGGIE KALNINS – NEW HEAD OF GOVERNOR SERVICES (HLT)

Maggie thanked members for inviting her. She explained to members that since taking over as the Head of Governor Services in January, she has been ruminating as she explores the roles of both the Service and herself as Head. The main mission of school governors is to help schools give their pupils the best education. Governors' functions are complex, challenging and time-consuming. In Hackney, this involves passion and drive. The main responsibility of governors is strategic direction, ensuring that pupil attainment gaps close – not by holding back those high achievers, but by helping the lower achievers move up more rapidly and consistently. Hackney has done incredibly well in this area; and governors have the privilege of knowing that they do make a difference. Exceptional schools are always associated with good governance.

Shift in focus is imminent and, following the subtle change in the DfE guidance when the Governors' Handbook was renamed Governance Handbook, this shift is rapidly emerging. While it is not yet clear what this will encompass, it is obvious that OfSTED is working on changes as indicated in its review of Framework. Lessons should also be learnt from the Charities and Social Enterprise Commission as there is not much difference between schools and charities. Schools may not be able to escape the modalities which led to the demise of Kids Company and it is important that governors pay attention as those modalities could impact school governance going forward.

Governors should also learn from schools like John Cass in Tower Hamlets which was Outstanding for a long time and has just suddenly dropped. These are not to scare but to prepare governors.

According to one of the speakers at the last HASGA Annual Conference, Governance is not just who you are, but what you do and how you do it. The CEO of NGA also states that Governance requires 'eyes-on' and 'hands off!' Governors need to spend less time on details of operational issues (e.g. checking spelling/accuracy of policies etc.) and focus on bigger issues such as how to manage behaviour to ensure that all children learn and progress, and that exclusions are reduced. The emphasis should be on reviewing governance and its impact on schools' realisation of their vision.

The Governors Services Team, on its own part, is focusing on how to strengthen governance in schools and the role of the team in this. It is focusing on four key areas:

- Reviewing school governance in light of the NGA's 20 Questions Governors should ask of Governance. Identifying and providing the right skills set required for effective governing body administration is important.
- Vision, ethos and direction: How do we ensure that the vision permeates day-to-day operation in schools?
- What do successful outcomes look like? Instead of simply judging school lessons is external expertise required to monitor how schools judge lessons?
- Management of risks: safeguarding of pupils, school assets and reputation. How do we ensure that public resources are effectively employed for education?

HASGA could help provide more clarity and advice, with support to facilitate sharing best practice among members.

As the new Head of service, connecting with members is key, with ongoing dialogue to ensure that governors receive advice as required. A brilliant Clerking Service will help ensure great governance. While Hackney is doing well, there is room for improvement. The vision is to ensure that schools are strategically governed to ensure that pupils have the best opportunity for brilliance.

Questions and contributions

A discussion ensued and members asked questions and contributed as follows:

A member suggested that school governance in Hackney should not be compared to the management of Kids Company. It was suggested that the charity's management was virtually unchallenged and external expertise were not employed even when it was undergoing some difficulty. It was pointed out that the charity was not on Hackney's list simply because there was no means of ensuring that their systems worked. It was obvious that absence of scrutiny and accountability led to the fall, and this ought to be noted by governors.

Another member pointed out that while Hackney is doing well in the area of school governance, representation on HASGA is not wide enough. How could Governor Services improve representation and help spread good practice at schools? Also, how can governors manage their time to be able to share best practice? It was agreed that attendance at HASGA meetings are optional and members often juggle very tight schedules. Governor Services team should enable and empower governing bodies to self-govern effectively, with a clear steer of what good governance looks like. The Ofsted framework is also becoming clearer and sharper with regards to governance requirements. Members suggested the following probable ways:

- Some Headteachers are already meeting in smaller, natural groups e.g. in local communities or clusters, to moderate and discuss common issues. This could be a successful model for governance, with local clusters of schools meeting to share best practice. Exceptional schools could share best practice amongst others in the local cluster and this would be a good way forward.
- Mailing list – this currently includes almost all governors from all schools. While majority do not physically attend meetings, they often use the website for support, resources etc.
- Changing political agenda – with a push for schools to convert to academies – may force school governors to work together with more established schools. The question remains how schools who are part of a federation can retain their individual identities? It was agreed that this is still fluid and answers will emerge from individual schools and partnerships.
- E-membership, social media and other technological means should be harnessed. For instance, some meetings could be held via video/skype.

Maggie asked members for specific feedback on the last AGM held 24th November:

- Representation was better than previous years. There was around 74 delegates from 50 schools from across all the various phases;
- The venue was small – larger venues (secondary schools) were used in the past but these are no longer generally available;

- The keynote speech was useful but the speaker did not entertain questions. Maggie explained that Ofsted staff are usually wary of going 'off-script', however the keynote speaker has indicated that she would love to come back as she loves Hackney and its zeal for governance. Future speakers will also be encouraged to stay for question and answer sessions.
- The tips on networking were valuable, specific and focused such as the benefits of specialisation to reduce exhaustion and improve performance;
- The conference flagged common issues across schools such as Safeguarding;
- There was clarity on what governors really do, Hackney's expectations and the possibility to create themes for dialogues and workshops;
- Discussion around use of technology to facilitate meetings, dialogues and asking questions both before and during meetings were quite useful.

Maggie asked members for their thoughts on how the group could be improved/moved forward. The following were suggested:

- Regular highlights focusing on big, specific issues would be welcome;
- Timely reminders for important events etc;
- Short (twilight) debates which will engender sharing of best practice;
- Help with induction pack for new governors: members discussed this extensively, including the need for central guidelines and framework to hinge this on. Considering that school governance roles are school-specific, it was suggested that a central link with information for new governors would be useful. Members recognised that the (HASGA) website has useful documents and the new governors' induction checklist is being updated. A link is available on the website.
- While technology can be effectively harnessed, nothing beats face-to-face meetings.
- Melissa Benn is brilliant at education and should be considered for future conferences.

Maggie thanked members for their contributions and encouraged them to email her any further thoughts. She informed members that **the next Conference has been scheduled for 29th January 2017**. She also expressed her desire to meet with more Headteachers and governors to identify any needs and how to work together more effectively.

3. ECOACTIVE EDUCATION – ECOLOGY ACTIVITIES FOR HACKNEY SCHOOLS

Maripaz de San Miguel of EcoActive delivered a PowerPoint presentation which was also tabled at the meeting.

EcoActive is a local environmental education charity which has been commissioned by LBH to deliver free educational workshops to schools, nurseries and colleges in Hackney. These could be one-off sessions, long-term or after school club sessions for pupils; trainings and meetings for staff; coffee mornings or information stalls for parents.

The workshops focus on recycling and waste, waste prevention, composting, local environmental quality sessions where pupils are encouraged to consider the rights and responsibilities as citizens of their local neighbourhoods and how their personal actions impact the environment.

All sessions can be adapted to existing school programmes and the curriculum, and the sessions are fully interactive with fun exploration and educative activities for the pupils. The charity has been in existence for about 14 years and ensure that all pupil learning are linked to the home as well.

Interested schools should contact Maripaz by email on maripazdesanmiguel@ecoactive.orgk.uk or visit the website www.ecoactive.org.uk/schools.

4. REFRESHMENTS AND NETWORKING BREAK

Members had a short five minutes break for refreshments and networking.

5. HASGA BUSINESS

- 5.1 The minutes of the AGM which had been circulated earlier were agreed.
- 5.2 Conference feedback: The Chair explained that the keynote address was planned to be delivered by Sir Wilshaw, but Belita Scott (HMI), who is new in post, had to step in at very short notice. This could explain why she was unable to wait for a Q&A session.

In response to the Chair's suggestions for ways to improve, members agreed that it works well as it is. Members find the keynote addresses useful, and the volume and content of the workshops are just right. One member stated that the Ofsted training was excellent with lots of information to take away.

Members suggested that conferences are a valuable means for new governors to receive training; therefore future conferences could be advertised as Training.

Action: Future annual Hackney School Governors' Conferences are promoted as Training.

- 5.3 Meetings attended – C & YP Scrutiny Commission and Schools Forum: Jo MacLeod joined the Commission this year as the co-opted representative from HASGA. Jo fed-back as follows (report to follow later):

The Commission examined:

- a) Hackney as a place for everyone. The work was broken down to:
- Education opportunity – enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities
 - Vocation opportunity – within a quickly changing borough with new (young) entrepreneurs moving into the borough; focus should be on vocational qualifications and provision.
 - Cultural opportunities – in arts, theatre and music.
- b) London Living Wage in schools, especially within the cleaning and catering provisions which are the most out-sourced services in schools. While all Hackney-led provisions already pay the London Living wage, some suppliers still pay their salaries the minimum wage.
- Members discussed this and its impact on schools budgets. While paying the London Living Wage is not presently a legal requirement, it is considered good practice to ensure that school service suppliers pay their staff the living wage. However, in view of reducing budgets and increasing costs, schools may find

it difficult to accommodate the resultant higher costs of these services. The minimum wage is a legal requirement while the London Living Wage is a labour-led initiative. Members were advised to feedback to their respective schools but surmised that implementing this would be difficult.

- c) The LEA is trialling a new initiative to build schools within their new homes building projects. It was suggested that some of these new homes be earmarked for school staff, to reduce the problems of accommodation and staff recruitment in schools.
- d) The annual update from City and Hackney Safeguarding Board will be circulated later.
- e) Exclusions: discussions were held to drill down into why Hackney has such high exclusion levels. While individual school permanent exclusion figures were relatively low, the cumulative report for Hackney is higher than most other boroughs. It was suggested that up to 95% of exclusions are not challenged by school governors. Members asked if data could be provided for governors and it was suggested that this be discussed with Maggie and Ann Canning (Head of Education) to help inform governors. **Action:** Chair to contact Maggie Kalnins and Ann Canning for support. A report is available on the Hackney website.

- 5.4** Lisa Neidich is chair of The Schools Forum. The Forum has set up a sub-group to look into funding for High Needs SEND children. This is part of a wider consultation. Government is considering doing away with the Schools Forum.

Discussions had to be stopped so the meeting could close in time for the 8pm deadline. Carillion the building owners now charge for a minimum of four hours for any meeting that closes after 8pm. This had been discussed previously, causing the meeting to be moved to an earlier start time of 6pm.

Dates of Future HASGA meetings

Monday 21st March 2016; Tuesday 10th May 2016; Wednesday 29th June 2016 at the earlier time of 6pm in the Learning Trust offices.

Hackney School Governors' Conference: Sunday 29th January 2017

The Chair thanked everyone for coming and the meeting closed at 7:58pm.

Signed _____

Date _____

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