

Report on ESGF and school governance March 2020 – March 2021

Background

The East Sussex Governor Forum consists of 12 elected volunteer school governors from across the County. We serve a tenure of 4 years. The forum has been in existence for many years and has developed in this time to be a vehicle for consultation and communication between the elected members of the council, council officers and the close to 2000-strong school governor volunteer force.

Purpose

We promote good governance by liaising between the County Council and the school governor volunteer force, by supporting training and networking, and acting as sounding board to highlight areas of current interest:

- *Identify key issues for East Sussex governors and ensure elected members understand their impact*
- *Plan agendas across the year in response to issues of importance to East Sussex governors*
- *To receive and discuss data, information and reports to help East Sussex governors fulfil their support and challenge role*
- *To seek the support of elected members for issues which affect schools and school leaders in East Sussex*
- *To ensure that governor briefings, information and network meetings respond to identified priorities*
- *To ensure that governing bodies in East Sussex are informed about key issues, policies and decisions which will affect them in their role?*
- *To represent the views of governors*

Joint Responsibilities

1. It is the responsibility of governors to be informed and set the agenda for consultation, we need to horizon scan and know what Council decisions are going to impact on schools
2. It is the responsibility of councillors to engage with us as the legally responsible bodies which oversee maintained schools before decision making
3. It is a joint responsibility to use our consultative structures to engage with each other in the best interests of our children's education.

Review of the past year

The ESGF noted at its last meeting its disappointment that certain parts of the media or other public figures or bodies, talk about schools being "closed" and refer to the situation as if no learning is taking place, however during this time, governors report, schools have been providing high quality remote learning alongside teaching in school for Key Worker children, which has been a major challenge. Regular phone calls from form tutors; extra support available for pupils who are not accessing and completing work; pastoral support for pupils suffering from anxiety; teachers dreaming up creative and fun ways to replace school trips; schools working hard to encourage as many vulnerable pupils as safely possible to come to school, to name but a few.

Governors, the legally responsible body, accountable for the quality of education and for safety/security of children and staff, have been providing school senior leaders with the opportunity for supportive conversations, and they have been helping schools to ensure that all groups of children are safe and are able to learn well. Governors have also been checking on staff wellbeing and celebrating school successes in order to ensure that those running our schools feel valued.

Governor feedback

The ESGF collects feedback from governors regularly from our facilitated networks and forums – Chair of Governors Networking (6 per annum), Governor Area Forum (3 events 3 times per year), local governor networking and specific networking eg new governor, safeguarding governor networks. Many of these in the last year have included ESGF members in the role of facilitator or trainer.

In our latest Area Forums, we looked at how to promote the Wellbeing of Governors and governors discussed the Transition from a Virtual World. Schools have found some of the technology so useful that they wish to stick with the flexibility and depth that online meetings offer. Some schools are planning to continue online parents' evenings after restrictions are lifted following positive feedback from parents - governors and schools make extensive use of surveys in order to deliver what is most useful to pupils and families. Recording assemblies and other gatherings have made it possible for whole families to share some performances that children have taken part in.

Governors mentioned their appreciation of the wide variety of training topics delivered by Governor Services, and they are so much more accessible now they are on line.

High quality, frequently accessed training is very important in developing a high quality governor volunteer force. Training means helps governors to be both impartial and informed, essential if they are to be supportive as well as being able to question appropriately. Since September 2020, 1545 governor and clerking training places have been accessed over 75 training, briefing and networking sessions.

The ESGF has been able to provide a strong level of support to governors across the County and we in turn receive excellent levels of support from Governor Services. This good relationship is evidenced by the fact that we have a full complement of active governors, with Governor Services actively recruiting. The county has also created the role of the Local Support Governor, where volunteers are trained to help support other governing boards in various areas of need.

Next year and beyond

Wellbeing of governors will be a part of our plans for the next year, along with further development of our relationships with other organisations linked with education and governance.

Recognition from councillors and MPs is always important to the morale of our school staff and governors. For example, when public figures speak in the media about specific examples of good work in local schools. We look forward to updating you on these plans and to our ongoing collaboration.