Ambiguous Citizenship: Democratic practices and school governing bodies

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Abstract

School governing bodies in England have considerable formal powers and responsibilities. This qualitative research study explored their concrete practices drawing on understandings of deliberative democracy and citizenship as sensitising concepts. The empirical research was broadly ethnographic and took place in two primary and two secondary maintained schools. Data was generated primarily from interviews and observations.

Considering school governors from the perspectives of deliberative democracy and citizenship draws attention to ambivalences and ambiguities in their role. These ambivalences and ambiguities cover issues of agency, representation, exclusion, knowledge and a singular conception of a 'common good'. Firstly, despite their busy-ness, governors are largely passive in relation to decision making and dissensus can be socially awkward. Consensus is underpinned by a singular conception of the 'common good'. Secondly, the voices of certain governors are marginalised. Some governors are positioned as representatives and their constitution as partial masks the partiality of all governors. Thirdly, there are ambiguities in relation to the valuing of different knowledges. Educational knowledge is valued but also inflected by managerial knowledge. The policy emphasis on the value of managerial knowledge and measurable data tends to displace other possible 'lay' knowledges. Fourthly, education and governing are constituted as apolitical and there is limited discussion of educational aims, principles and values. In all this, despite policy describing governors as 'strategic', their work is largely technical and operates within a constrained national performative system that renders alternative conceptions of 'good' education unsayable or unthinkable.

These ambivalences and ambiguities operate, together with a dominant discourse of skills and effectiveness, to obscure possibilities for thinking otherwise about education.

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Statement concerning work previously submitted for another award

I hereby acknowledge that this thesis incorporates data included in a dissertation which I submitted for the MRes degree at the Institute of Education in 2010. My MRes dissertation which was on a topic similar to that of this thesis, reported the findings of a pilot study. A copy of that dissertation is available in the Institute of Education library. The work presented in this thesis is based on the subsequent main study, but in the thesis I have made some references to the pilot study and the data from that study. Wherever I have done so I have made this clear. In other respects, this thesis is an entirely new piece of work.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count

99,714 words

Copyright

Contents

Tables

Abbreviations

AOB	Any Other Business
ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
BELMAS	British Educational Leadership Management and Administration Society
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BITC	Business in the Community
BSF	Building Schools for the Future
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
COGS	Co-ordinators of Governor Service
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ERA	Education Reform Act (1988)
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FASNA	Freedom and Autonomy for Schools – National Association
FSM	Free School Meals
GB	Governing Body
HR	Human resources
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGA	Local Government Association
LMS	Local Management of Schools (introduced by the 1988 ERA)
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NCOGS	National Co-ordinators of Governor Services
NGA	National Governors Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
RAISEonline	Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation
RISE	Research and Information on State Education
SDP	School Development Plan
SEF	Self-Evaluation Form (for Ofsted)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SGOSS	SGOSS - Governors for Schools, previously known as SGOSS (School Governors One-Stop-Shop)
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SRE	Sex and Relationships Education
TLR	Teaching and Learning Responsibility

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

School governing bodies (GBs) in England are an under-researched aspect of the webs of power operating around schools. This qualitative research study considers their practices drawing on understandings of deliberative democracy and citizenship as sensitising concepts.

This chapter includes an autobiographical section which provides some personal starting points for the research. The research questions are used as a way of introducing the main themes which will be explored throughout the study. There is a short section on the focus of the study. The final section sets out the structure of the chapters which follow.

Autobiography

> Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience – always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognised something cracked, dully jarring or disfunctioning in things I saw in the institutions in which I dealt with my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of autobiography. (Foucault cited in Ball, 2001, p. 210)

This study is an exploration of something which seemed 'cracked' to me. This brief autobiography aims to show some starting points for this exploration.

My initial motivation for working in education stemmed from a belief that schools should reflect the kind of society we want to live in (the 'we' was possibly not problematised at that point in my life). I worked in citizenship education and related fields in which democracy and citizenship are presented as 'a good thing'. Like Apple and Beane, I 'admit to having what Dewey and others have called the "democratic faith", the fundamental belief that democracy has a powerful meaning, that it can work, and that it is necessary if we are to maintain

human dignity, equity, freedom, and justice in our social affairs' (Apple and Beane, 2007, pp. 6-7). Despite this faith or hope, my experience makes me simultaneously sceptical about the possibilities for democracy and citizenship. I recognise that the concept of 'democracy' tends to be deployed in very different ways to those envisaged by Apple and Beane. Hence my understanding of democracy is encapsulated in Gramsci's phrase 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' (Hall, 1996 [1992], p. 267).

I became a community governor in the community primary school in my street in 2007, perceiving this as a form of 'active citizenship' of a similar form to that advocated for pupils in the National Curriculum for Citizenship. The role raised a number of questions for me. As a middle-class white woman without children, I wondered what right I had to a say in the running of a school, especially one so different to mine had been, with over half of the pupils receiving free school meals (FSM) and more than eight in ten from minority ethnic groups. I found that issues of substance were rarely discussed and formalities took up most of the meetings. I was interested in the group dynamics and the different subject positions available to members of the group. Having worked in organisations which attempted to question pedagogies and the aims of schools, I was struck by the lack of challenge to dominant educational discourses.

At the same time, my ontological and epistemological stance was challenged by my work in education policy. My job included developing alternative education policies (around global citizenship) with which to lobby the government. I felt uncomfortable with the arrogance implied by this role and longed to explore further what was being done by current policies and by the discussions of alternative policies. Even before reading Foucault much, I possibly overused the phrase 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions'. My epistemological and ontological starting points and understanding of the relationship between normativity and empirical research are described in Chapter 3.

Two significant themes have recurred through my working life. Firstly, what local democracy and public engagement does and might mean in education. Secondly, how neoliberal discourses in education operate and might be

disrupted. GBs provide a valuable and under-researched context in which to explore these broad themes, particularly at a time when GBs have increasing significance in national policy[1]. These were starting points for my 'intellectual puzzle' (Mason, 2002, p. 7).

This brief autobiography and what follows should be understood in the context that,

> Only from the position of, and with access to, the resources of the middle-class, can the presumption be made that there is a possibility first, to tell a story, second, to assume the power to re-define and, third, to assume significance to the story (Skeggs, 2004, p. 126)

Despite my discomfort in writing about myself, I am 'the main research instrument' (Troman, 2002, p. 101) and my personal experience and perspectives have informed the whole of this study. This position is interrogated in relation to my 'Reflexivity' in Chapter 3 and considered throughout the study.

Research questions

The research questions were intended to act as stimuli for an exploration rather than as narrow constraints driving the research (see Chapter 3). However, presenting them as questions here provides an introduction to the 'intellectual puzzle' (Mason, 2002, p. 7) underpinning the study.

GBs in England have considerable powers and duties in relation to setting the budget; appointing the headteacher; and setting the school's broad direction. The basic composition of a GB in a maintained school is: the headteacher; staff elected by staff; parents elected by parents; local authority (LA) nominated by the LA; community nominated by the GB. Their role is complex (see Chapter 2).

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[1] Since the research period, the 'Trojan Horse' affair in Birmingham and the subsequent Ofsted reports and national and local investigations (Clarke, 2014; Kershaw, 2014) have further increased the profile of governors. They raise questions about the boundaries of the role of GBs which are not directly addressed in this thesis.

As James *et al* suggest, 'school governing has not received the kind of attention from scholars that it warrants.' (2011, p. 397). Furthermore, there is very little research that specifically explores GBs and democracy (the main research studies are Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Dean *et al.*, 2007; Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995; Ranson *et al.*, 2005a). In this study, the focus is on using conceptions of deliberative democracy and citizenship to explore GBs. However, there is a secondary aim which is to use GBs to explore conceptions of deliberative democracy and citizenship. Deliberative democracy provides a valuable perspective from which to consider the practices of these small groups of people with a responsibility for a significant public good. The understanding of deliberative democracy drawn on and the way in which the concept is used in the study is set out in Chapter 2. Deem *et al* suggest that the complex nature of governing can leave governors acting as 'state volunteers' (1995) whilst under the impression they are acting as citizens. They suggest that acting as citizens would require that governors deliberate on ends not just means, and challenge policies rather than just manage their implementation. Drawing on citizenship and democracy raises questions of representation and GBs tend not to be representative of their local populations. There is a lack of national statistics about the profile of school governors. However, the research which does exist suggests that they are disproportionately white, middle-class and not young (Dean *et al.*, 2007; Ellis, 2003; Ranson *et al.*, 2005a). Furthermore, when it comes to those playing a more active role or forming a core group, governors can become even less representative of their local populations (e.g. Dean *et al.*, 2007; Radnor, Ball and Vincent, 1997). Using conceptions of citizenship and deliberative democracy provides a way to consider processes of inclusion and exclusion in GBs. Based on the above, the first research question is broad and overarching:

**1. How do discourses of democracy and citizenship operate
in school governing bodies?**

The stakeholder model of school governing is premised on some idea that a diverse range of perspectives and knowledges are valuable. Exploring these using conceptions of deliberative democracy and citizenship draws attention to how particular perspectives and knowledges are privileged, including through

particular ways of talking. Furthermore, GBs are a forum in which lay and expert governors need to deliberate and the relationship between lay and expert perspectives and knowledges is a complex problem for democratic theory. In the context of GBs, I argue that the relationship between lay and expert knowledges is further complicated by the valuing of managerial knowledge. These issues underpin the second research question:

2. Are particular perspectives and knowledges privileged in policy and in governing bodies? If so, how?

Closely linked to the valuing of particular perspectives and knowledges is the question of the subject positions of governors. They both govern and are governed. Policy describes governors as stakeholders. However, there are debates in policy (see Chapter 2) as to whether governors should be valued for their representativeness or their skills. Further ambiguities in the subject positions available to governors are considered in Chapter 2 and these form the basis for the third question:

3. What subject positions are available to governors? How are governors produced as subjects?

GBs have considerable formal power and make decisions about education, which is a controversial area of social policy. However, members often claim a 'distaste for politics' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 134) and 'may not engage in discussions about "the kind of school we want"' (Balarin *et al.*, 2008, p. 4). One of the starting points for this study was to consider possibilities for challenges to dominant discourses of education. Therefore, the final research question is:

4. What discourses of 'good' education are drawn on in the conduct of school governing bodies?

The research questions have inspired aspects of each of the analysis chapters (Chapters 5-8). There is a summary of how the study has drawn on them in the final chapter.

Focus

The empirical research was conducted in two primary and two secondary maintained schools in one LA (sampling is discussed in Chapter 3). The specifics of the LA and of the schools resulted in unplanned limitations, for example, only one school had a student associate governor and I never met her. The main policies discussed apply only to England but I do raise issues with implications for other countries. The empirical research was conducted in a shifting policy context, soon after the Coalition Government came to power in 2010. Education, governing, citizenship and democracy are all complex, and there are abundant discussions of them in the literature. The literature drawn on is that which has been productive in relation to the research questions and to the themes emerging from the data. It is set out in Chapter 2. As this is an empirical, not a political theory, study, it does not make claims to an in depth theoretical exploration of citizenship and deliberative democracy. These issues have been explored largely in relation to the empirical data. This study is about school governors but is not in any way attempting to consider their 'effectiveness' within the existing national performative system. Instead, it explores effectiveness as a discourse. The research drew on qualitative, broadly ethnographic, approaches and the limitations in the conception and execution of the methodology are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 9 reflects back on the study, considering its focus and limitations whilst looking forward to the need for further research.

Structure

The structure reflects the epistemological approach. I am not establishing the parameters of an ideal for which I then scrutinise the data. The approach is more fluid and recognises the slippery nature of the concepts of democracy and citizenship.

Chapter 2 considers the historical and policy context of GBs; existing literature on democracy and citizenship in relation to GBs; and introduces the sensitising concepts of citizenship and deliberative democracy. Chapter 3 sets out the methodology and methods underpinning the study. Chapter 4 provides some

local context to the study, introducing the borough, schools and research participants.

Considering school governors from the perspective of democracy and citizenship draws attention to some ambivalences and ambiguities in the role of school governors, with implications for policy and practice. The four analysis chapters explore themes around the following:

Chapter 5: '(Not) making decisions' considers governors' formal role which positions them as decision-makers. This chapter explores the processes by which decisions are made and the significant constraints on these. I discuss: the framing of decisions; spaces for decisions; voting; consensus and the 'common good'; and valued ways of talking.

Chapter 6: 'Representation and available governor subject positions' notes that there has been considerable debate on the place of skills and representation in GBs, as seen, for example in a recent Education Select Committee Inquiry (Education Committee, 2013a). In an attempt to move beyond this binary as well as show how it is constituted, this chapter explores the varied and multiple subject positions from which governors speak and how these subject positions affect what individuals are able to speak about and the ways they are able to speak. The data suggests that the ability to speak of those who are positioned as representing a constituency or attribute is complicated and constrained. Those constituted as 'independents' are more able to present themselves as objective and to take on core positions within their GB. The chapter suggests that the constitution of *some* governors as only ever partial masks the partiality of *all* governors.

Chapter 7: 'Education professionals and lay voices' considers the relationship between education professionals and lay voices, exploring how power relations operate through struggles over which knowledges are claimed and which are valued. It explores the increasing role of managerial knowledge in complicating this relationship. Furthermore, the chapter explores shifting conceptions of

accountability and how these impact what counts as educational knowledge and as valued knowledge.

Chapter 8: 'Discourses of 'good education'' focuses on governors' distaste for 'politics' exploring how: education and the work of school governors is constituted as apolitical; there are limited educational alternatives which are thinkable or sayable; and governor criticality is co-opted as *prescribed criticality* by the provision of the 'right' questions for governors to ask. The chapter contrasts a positive understanding of the 'political' with understandings emerging from the data.

The study concludes with reflections on the implications of the findings for theories of deliberative democracy and citizenship and for democratic engagement in schools. It suggests that the ambivalences and ambiguities discussed do significant work in shaping the practices of governors.

Chapter 2: The Impossibility of School Governors?

Introduction

This chapter sets out ambivalences and ambiguities in the role of school governors through the lenses of history, policy and existing research. It shows a lack of consensus and coherence in the role and rationale of governors. It ends with a section exploring citizenship and deliberative democracy, which provide sensitising concepts for this study. This chapter is intended to provide some background and 'set the scene' rather than provide an 'exhaustive' review of the topics covered. The analysis chapters synthesise and evaluate this background in relation to the research findings.

The ambivalences and ambiguities found in the role of school governors reflect tensions around the role of the state and conceptions of citizenship and democracy more broadly. They also reflect ambiguities in understandings of education as a public or private good and as a process or product. There are ambiguities in governors' relationships to each other, to their 'constituencies', to experts, to the state, to the market and to wider society. As Foucault described the French legal system, GBs appear to be:

> more Heath Robinson than Audi, full of parts that come from elsewhere, strange couplings, chance relations, cogs and levers that don't work – and yet which "work" in the sense that they produce effects that have meaning and consequences for us ([Foucault] cited in Gordon 1980) (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 38)

A brief history of school governance in England

In many ways, GBs today appear to be similar to how they have been ever since 1988 or even since the mid-nineteenth century. However, appearances can be deceptive and 'Policies shift and change their meaning in the arenas of politics' (Ball, 2006 [1993], p. 45). This section explores changes and continuities in the history of GBs. It begins with a brief history up to 1988 then explores themes from 1988 until the current day with a particular emphasis on

2011-12 when the empirical research was conducted. Ambivalences and ambiguities run through the history of GBs and are layered upon each other contributing to the complexity of the current system. The changes indicate how what is 'normal' and 'thinkable' shifts. A key example of this is that the role of the market has increased whereas that of the Church decreased (although religious groups are now increasing their role in academies and free schools). On the other hand, the continuities, despite the changing context in which schools operate, underpin some of the contemporary ambiguities in GBs.

Before the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA)

In England, bodies similar to GBs can be traced back as far as the sixth century (Gann, 1998, p. 8; The Taylor Report, 1977) when boards of trustees were 'responsible for setting up and running English schools' (Gann, 1998, p. 8). However, it may be more appropriate to trace their history to the GBs of the state funded schools of the mid-nineteenth century (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 14; Sharp, 1995, p. 1).

This sub-section provides a very brief outline of the history of GBs up to the 1988 ERA. An appendix to the Taylor Report (1977) provides, in detail, 'A Historical Retrospect 597-1945' which concludes with two key points illustrating a change and a continuity. Firstly, it emphasises 'the shift in the balance of control' from the Church to lay people to the state, over hundreds of years, and note that at the time of writing, 'when the responsible public authorities are fewer in number and, it is said, more "remote" … other voices are to be heard claiming that they too should have a share in this control' (The Taylor Report, 1977, p. 183). Secondly, it points to

> the persistence of ideas and practices. The concept of school governing bodies has a long history and it would be expected that over the years ideas about their composition and functions should change. There have been changes but what is noticeable is, first, how comparatively little change there was before the middle of the nineteenth century and, second, how the changes that were then affected by the Public Schools Commission and the Endowed Schools Commission have endured. Many of the ideas that they evolved, and in some instances even the language in which they

expressed those ideas, have survived to this day (The Taylor
Report, 1977, p. 183)

In the mid-nineteenth century, the balance of control very much rested with the
Church. In 1839, the Government Education Office was set up and distributed
grants to the societies of the Church of England and the Non-conformist
Churches (Gann, 1998, p. 9). Sharp (1995) provides a clear and comprehensive
history of the debates and conflicts around GBs in England from 1840 until the
mid-1990s and observes that the 'English school system of the 1990s has in
essence much in common with that of the mid-19th-century in the years before
the 1870 Act. All schools have their own GBs which are answerable to central
government' (p. 72). In addition to the diversity of school types and practices,
there appear to be many other similarities between the GBs of the mid-
nineteenth century and the present day. It was explicit from 1847, 'as Richard
Johnson has emphasised, that school managers were to be drawn from the
comfortably-off and respectable levels of Victorian society and from classes
above those from which both the elementary teachers and their pupils came'
(Sharp, 1995, p. 3). Governors still tend to be unrepresentative of school
communities. Furthermore, in an additional similarity, 'In theory school
managers were given discretion and choice, but in practice they operated within
a highly circumscribed national or even nationalised system' (p. 11).

The 1870 Education Act led to a dramatic increase in access to elementary
education. It also led to the creation of School Boards (Gann, 1998, p. 12;
Sharp, 1995, p. 12). 'School boards were to be formed for areas where there
was currently insufficient provision' (Gillard, 2011). 'Much was made of the fact
that school board members were democratically elected representatives of the
people' (Sharp, 1995, p. 15). However, 'they didn't come anywhere near
reflecting the social make-up of the nation' (Gann, 1998, p. 12). This issue of
composition persists with contemporary GBs as discussed in the next sub-
section. Boards were able to set up bodies of managers for individual schools
but did not do this in every case (p. 12). School Boards were superseded in
1902 with the establishment of Local Education Authorities (Sharp, 1995, p. 24).
From their inception, LEAs had differing powers over different types of schools.
The Education Minister, R A Butler, attempted changes to this and to introduce

one GB per school with the 1944 Act. However, GBs were not greatly changed by the 1944 Act (p. 40).

Sharp suggests many histories of education neglect the period between 1944 and the 1980s and sets out the ways in which the movement towards parent and staff membership of GBs and towards having one GB per school occurred in this period. During this period, a major report into GBs was produced, 'A New Partnership for our Schools' (The Taylor Report, 1977). It began with a recognition of the complexity of the history and policy of GBs, describing 'a bewildering variety of practice and opinion' (1977, p. xi). With regard to membership, it said:

> We RECOMMEND therefore, that as a matter of principle, the membership of governing bodies should consist of equal numbers of local education authority representatives, school staff, parents with, where appropriate, pupils and representatives of the local community (The Taylor Report, 1977, pp. 23-4)

It also recommended governors should be responsible for establishing the aims and participating in planning the curriculum, budgeting, appointing the headteacher and staff. The report was controversial and not all committee members signed up to it. 'The committee was divided on a number of issues, one member (Councillor PO Fulton, chair of Cleveland's education committee) even producing his own minority report' (Gillard, 2012). Reactions to the Taylor Report included concerns from professionals and from democratically elected LAs that they may be undermined (Sharp, 1995, p. 54). These issues remain unresolved and central to contemporary tensions around GBs. The Labour government fell in 1979 before any changes were implemented but the Conservative 1980 Education Act brought in many, though not all, of the proposed changes.

Deem *et al* describe the context of the Taylor report as one in which 'demands were being expressed widely for democratic participation in the running of broad range of public services' (1995, p. 66). However, by 'the mid-1980s, the discourse of citizen participation had been replaced by a market-based one, in which consumers were to take power from producers and the different

categories of governors could be classified as one or the other (p. 66). The 1986 Education Act (No. 2) 'changed the composition of governing bodies, allowing more parent governors and co-opted governors' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 16). Deem *et al* argue that new right discourse suggested that 'Parents' common sense' would act as a counter to '"politics" in education', in other words, 'left-wing teachers and LEAs' (p. 64). A sense that 'politics' should be kept out of education is still strong, although 'politics' has a range of meanings (see Chapter 8). As Gann (1998, p. 21) points out, these new governors began their terms as the new responsibilities from this Act and the 1988 Act came into effect. The 1986 Act gave governors many new responsibilities including over the curriculum and headteacher appointments (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 16). It also said GBs should have regard to:

> the extent to which those they are considering for co-option are members of the local business community. This is an important departure from the Taylor Committee's recommendations as Taylor did not specify who should be co-opted other than that they be from the school's immediate community… the co-option of business governors may be seen as having primarily to do with helping to change the culture of schools and teachers in directions consonant with the "enterprise culture" (Brehony, 1994, pp. 54-5)

The Local Management of Schools (LMS), introduced by the 1988 ERA, gave GBs, 'responsibility for budgets, staff appointments, headteacher and discretionary teacher pay, overseeing the teaching of the new National Curriculum, and the operation of the new National Assessment system, enforcing collective worship and religious education, operating open enrolment and the right to embark upon the road to grant-maintained status[2]' (p. 16). The immediate implications of the changes brought in by the ERA for the practices of GBs were explored at length through a major study (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995) which is summarised below under 'Existing research on governing bodies and democracy and citizenship'.

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[2] This status existed from 1988-1998 and meant schools could be funded directly by a grant from central government.

What is striking in this brief history are the continuities around small groups of middle-class people making decisions about individual schools (or for a short period, groups of schools). However, there has been a significant power shift in wider society from the Church to the market which is strongly reflected in the make-up and role of GBs. These continuities and changes before 1988 are responsible for many of the ambivalences and ambiguities seen today.

Ball summarises the ERA and describes it as providing 'the infrastructure for an education market and a neoliberal vision of the education system' (Ball, 2008, p. 80). The rest of this section explores some of the historical developments based on this infrastructure.

Size and composition

As set out in the previous sub-section, the composition of GBs has changed over time. Looked at over a long period of time, there has been a shift from valuing Church people to business people; as those who are valued in wider society has shifted. More recently, staff and parents have become involved. By 1988, the composition of GBs was similar to that of contemporary maintained schools. At the time of the empirical research for this study, GBs for community schools were required to have a membership of: staff governors elected by the staff; parent governors elected by the parents; community governors nominated by the GB; and LA governors nominated by the LA (DCSF, 2010b). The ambiguous positions of these different categories of governors are explored in Chapter 6.

The minimum size was reduced by the Education Act 2011 to seven. From September 2012, the Act requires the headteacher, parents in the plural, staff and LA governors of a minimum of one and does not require community (now called 'co-opted') governors (c.38). The chair of the National Governors Association (NGA) said 'The NGA has asked for the evidence time and again that small is more beautiful … it simply doesn't exist' (Adamson, 2012). Similarly, James *et al* state that 'size is not the issue' (2013b, p. 88). The Education Select Committee Inquiry found that 'Despite the DfE's clear preference for smaller governing bodies, there is no evidence base to prove that

smaller governing bodies are more effective than larger ones' (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 11). The emphasis on a small group of governors with skills is explored in the policy section and in the analysis chapters.

There is a strong historical continuity in GBs' lack of representativeness of their school communities. Ellis found 'increasing evidence that certain groups among the population are under-represented as school governors (see for example, Bird, 2002 & 2003; Sharpe and Attan, 2000; Scanlon, Earley and Evans, 1999)' (2003, p. 9). Ellis's research was commissioned by the DfES which said they had identified six groups 'as being under-represented - black and other minority ethnic people, young people, disabled people, lone parents, people with low incomes and people who are unemployed, and business people' (Ellis, 2003, p. 4). Her research explored these groups and considered the limitations of research in this area, for example:

> Evidence, to date, however, has been inconclusive on the extent of participation by business representatives on school governing bodies, not least due to the difficulties in defining "business representatives". Scanlon, Earley and Evans (1999) found that 80% of governors and chairs were from professional or managerial professions – suggesting a potential high level of representation of business interests. (Ellis, 2003, p. 29)

Subsequently, Ranson *et al* suggested that, across the UK, volunteer governors are 'generally White, middle aged, middle class, middle income, public/community service workers' (2005a, p. 360). In their study of schools in three disadvantaged areas, Dean *et al* found that 'the membership of governing bodies bears little relationship to the composition of school populations nor, by implication, to the composition of local communities (2007, p. 21). They also found that 'it was not uncommon for a quarter to a half of governors to live outside the school's immediate locality' (p. 20).They say membership was 'skewed towards women, older people, and people from majority ethnic and professional backgrounds' (p. 22).

Dean *et al* found that the 'skewing' which they identified 'was even more evident among the limited number of governors who were most active' (2007, p. 22). Much research has found a tendency for there to be 'core' and 'peripheral'

governors (Dean *et al.*, 2007, p. 39; James *et al.*, 2010, p. 50; Radnor, Ball and Vincent, 1997, p. 215; Ranson *et al.*, 2005a, p. 361) so the tendency of the core to be even less reflective of the composition of the local community is significant. This is explored through the current study.

The current study is small and qualitative so is not able to make any generalisations about who governors are. However, it does explore the implications of the structural dimensions mentioned above for *how* governors engage.

It is unclear how many governors there are nationally. A figure of over 300,000 is often used (e.g. DCSF, 2010a; Lord Hill, 6 November 2010). However, this was challenged by Bridget Sinclair of COGS (Co-ordinators of Governor Services) at a governor conference (RISE, 2013) where she suggested that the number was a simple calculation of the average number of governors multiplied by the number of schools. She referred to data from 18 LAs from 2007-12 where the numbers have decreased, partly due to smaller GBs and to single GBs governing more than one school. Whatever the accuracy of the figure, governors are still 'one of the largest volunteer forces in the country' (NGA, 2014).

School autonomy and the national performative system

A key element of the reforms which began in the 1980s is increasing autonomy for individual schools. In this, despite its individual characteristics, England has been part of a global push. The World Bank 'favours decentralization and school-based management' (Balarin and Lauder, 2010, p. 741) and the OECD has been 'a strong advocate for these reforms' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2006, p. 255).

Contemporary policy discourses around autonomy have emphasised autonomy from the LA. 'The changes in education in the 1980s and 1990s have been motivated at least in part by the desire to reduce the power and influence of LEAs, and there can be little doubt that this has been achieved.' (Sharp, 1995, p. 71). The power and influence of LAs has continued to be reduced since that

time, both under New Labour and increasingly under the Coalition Government, and particularly through the academisation described in the sub-section below. LAs are elected and have regard to a wider community than individual school communities and 'balance the interests of the whole population against powerful interest groups, a vital task in terms of education but not always a popular one' (Benn, 2011, p. 111). In these ways, reductions in their influence can be understood as reductions in local democratic accountability. Furthermore, as discussed in relation to 'Competition and school choice' below, increasing autonomy for individual schools raises questions around how much GBs see their school as part of a family of schools in a wider local community or how much they see their role as supporting their autonomous school in competition with others.

The word 'autonomy' implies giving more power and independence to schools. However, there is an apparent paradox (Higham and Earley, 2013; Simkins, 1997) of simultaneous decentralisation and centralisation. Hence, 'school autonomy is exercised within a much firmer framework of central control' (Simkins, 1997, p. 22). Ball points out 'crucially it is a mis-recognition to see these reform processes as simply a strategy of de-regulation, they are processes of *re-regulation.* Not the abandonment by the State of its controls but the establishment of a new form of control' (Ball, 2006 [2003], p. 145). The power of the state, in this new form of control, does not necessarily imply that only sovereign power relations are at work here. The state plays an important role in neoliberal governmentality. Jessop (2011) is helpful in exploring Foucault's conception of governmentality with this recognition of the important position of the state and cites Foucault's description of the state as relying on 'the institutional integration of power relationships' (Foucault, 1998 [1976], p. 96).

Centralised assessment targets and league tables mean that 'any new autonomy at the periphery is in relation to means rather than policy ends, which are set more tightly by the centre as part of a new regime of outcomes accountability' (Rizvi and Lingard, 2006, p. 255). It is this regime which is referred to throughout this study as the 'national performative system'. Despite

autonomy in certain spheres, schools are increasingly driven by the rationality of this national performative system to attain particular test and exam results.

The autonomy of schools in the form described has had important implications for the role of headteachers. They have become more central within their schools:

> despite *de jure* empowering of governing bodies, one of the major consequences of devolution has, in fact, been to reinforce the pivotal position of heads and principals as organizational leaders (Jephcote *et al.*1996, Hall and Southworth 1997). This has been a natural consequence of two related facets of the new policy world: centrally-driven attachments and agendas which emphasize the overall performance of the institution above all other measures of success and the unprecedented degree to which individual leaders are now held responsible for that performance (Simkins, 2000, p. 322)

Furthermore, heads have taken on a more managerial role rather than being seen as lead educationalists:

> Hughes [makes a] seminal distinction, in relation to headteachers, between the roles of "leading professional" and "chief executive" (Hughes 1985). Indeed, managerialism might be argued to be virtually synonymous with the predominance of the chief executive role. Thus Raab *et al.* report growing "tensions between [heads'] traditional role as educational leaders concerned with curriculum development, teaching and learning, and their new role as financial managers" (1997: 151), while Jephcote *et al*, note similarly that the focus of principals has become "the organization and financial management of the corporation ...[C]urriculum matters have generally not been amongst the main current concerns of principals and boards of governors" (1996: 44).
> (Simkins, 2000, p. 323)

At the same time, governors' roles are shaped by this regime. In their post-1988 study, Deem *et al* questioned whether governors were acting as 'citizens' discussing ends or 'state volunteers' discussing means (1995, p. 162). This ambivalence is still a useful way of understanding the position of governors. Autonomous schools operating within a national performative system have important implications for governors' engagement with schools as educational institutions. Firstly, the areas which have been devolved to schools and for

which governors are expected to take greater responsibility have been less about educational ends and more about technical means or management such as buildings, finance, human resources and legal matters. This has implications for the membership of GBs and there is an increasing emphasis in policy on recruiting governors with the managerial skills to address such issues. The situation raises questions about democratic engagement in education if the issues discussed are largely not educational issues. Secondly, when governors do discuss educational issues, they are expected to place an increased emphasis on monitoring attainment data based on centrally prescribed ends.

The particular form of school autonomy and the concomitant national performative system described here together provide a key element of the context for this study. Further details of the rationality of the national performative system are explored in the following two sections which describe how knowledge is commodified and the resulting data provides the basis for competition and choice.

Data and the commodification of knowledge

Increasing autonomy of the kind described above has come hand in hand with an increasing commodification of knowledge and focus on measurable outputs. Schools can be strongly steered from the centre through the provision of attainment and other numerical data which is intended to be as intelligible to a lay person, albeit with managerial knowledge, as to an education professional. Ozga suggests England is 'a context that can be described as the most 'advanced' in Europe in terms of data production and use' (2009, p. 149). Ball (2007) describes commodification as 'making transformation possible by re-working forms of service, social relations and public processes into forms that are measurable and thus contractable or marketable' (p. 24). In 'the language of the OECD, at the centre of the reform of the public sector are "monitoring systems" and the "production of information"' (Ball, 2006 [2003], p. 147). Governors are positioned as operating on behalf of the state to push for improvements in school data. Their role in this has been increasing and specific legal requirements for governors around 'use of data and ensuring value for money' first appeared in 2009 (James *et al.*, 2010).

It is the state, often informed by global comparisons such as those provided through PISA, that decides what data it requires and hence 'what counts as valuable knowledge' (Clarke *et al.* 2000, p. 9 in Ball, 2007, p. 25). What a 'good' school means becomes associated with reaching the required standards. Questions around 'valuable' knowledge and the 'good' school, therefore, are centralised and pre-empted rather than resting with the pupils; school staff and management; the governors of individual schools; and/or LAs.

The focus on testing and data has significant implications for pupils' experience of education. Mansell sets out the many 'side-effects' of 'hyper-accountability' (2007, pp. 29-131) on possibilities for 'truly raising pupils' deeper understanding' (p. 26). These 'side-effects' include significant social justice effects as certain pupils' outcomes come to be valued more than others, for example, in the 'triage' system of focusing on pupils on the C/D GCSE borderline (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000, pp. 133-164). The commodification of knowledge and reduction of education to data not only facilitates enhanced central control of what is valued but has significant implications for relationships within schools so,

> in fetishising commodities, we are denying the primacy of human relationships in the production of value, in effect erasing the social. Our understanding of the world shifts from social values created by people to one in which "everything is viewed in terms of quantities; everything is simply a sum of value realised or hoped for" (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001, p12) (Ball, 2008, p. 22).

In other words, there is a 'thorough exteriorisation of knowledge' (Lyotard 1984, p.4 in Ball, 2006 [2003], p. 154). By reducing the complex process of education to data such as RAISEonline which is apparently intelligible to those governors who have a good understanding of statistics, it can be presented as neutral and objective. Governors are encouraged by league tables and Ofsted to focus on improving data and the skills to do this are valued in policy. The different perspectives which education professionals and lay voices bring to understanding this transformation of education through commodification and data are considered in Chapter 7.

Competition and school choice

Data is central to the construction and identification of 'good' and 'bad' schools in a competitive market. In an era of competition and school choice, governors monitor and push for improvements in data; market their school to get pupils, especially those who will enhance their attainment data; and, establish ways of distinguishing themselves from their neighbouring schools. This narrow conception of 'good' education is explored in Chapter 8.

The rationalities driving competition have increased markedly since the mid-1990s and governors are increasingly involved in marketing given the imperative to find pupils who they and the school management perceive will increase the school's position in the league tables. The focus is on marketing the school to parents but marketing the school to prospective employees can also form part of the governors' role and this is particularly significant in the recruitment of a new headteacher.

In this competitive context, there is normally one GB per school and having chosen to be governors in a particular school (possibly over another nearby school), their role can be seen to involve loyalty to that school rather than to all schools in their LA or more broadly. They become part of a school which is required to compete with other schools and, 'in a climate which encourages atomization and competition, many schools have little option but to be concerned, first and foremost, with their own survival, and, if necessary, take actions which may be detrimental to their "competitors" (Gewirtz *et al.* 1995) and members of their local community.' (Ball, Vincent and Radnor, 1997, p. 151). Questions about which 'community' people demonstrate their loyalty to are central to debates around the Big Society, to which I now turn.

'Big Society'

Michael Gove (2012b) told Parliament that governors embody the Big Society. It is helpful, therefore, to understand school governors partly through this lens and to recognise that conceptions of school governance are informing other Coalition Big Society policies. There have been differences within the Coalition

and the Conservative party around the Big Society. However, it can be seen as the basis for much Coalition policy. They describe it as follows:

> The Big Society is about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It's about putting more power in people's hands – a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities. (Cabinet Office, 2012)

Clearly, the intention is that changes should be 'massive'. Issues which will recur throughout this study are who 'the people' are; whether the 'power' being referred to should be understood as consumer power or citizen power; whether this 'power' is about individuals taking on greater agency or greater risk; and whether power can be cut and distributed like a cake or whether more sophisticated analyses are needed.

The Big Society suggests that lay people can take on roles previously carried out by professionals. Firstly, this raises questions about the shift from valuing professionals with educational expertise to those with management expertise. This shift is seen for example in the push to recruit governors with a business background described below under 'National Policy'. Secondly, it raises issues around the relationship between lay and educational professional knowledges. This second concern seems to be the focus of the former New Labour Schools Minister's critique of the Big Society when he said of GBs: 'This is in the worst tradition of Big Society British amateurism' (Knight, 2012). The complexities of the lay/professional relationship are discussed in Chapter 7.

The 'society' in David Cameron's much quoted phrase 'there is such a thing as society: it's just not the same thing as the state' (2005) appears to be far removed from that of Mitchell Dean's 'Governing Societies' and, in fact, reflects what Dean calls 'community'. Dean helpfully argues that such communities are entirely consistent with individualisation (2007, p. 90). These are communities that individuals can drop in and out of as suits their interests. Individuals have to ensure they are part of multiple communities because 'they can no longer rely on their identities as social citizens, or social roles ascribed to them, to ensure their support' (p. 90). This recognition helps illuminate the relationship between

the Big Society and neoliberalism as described under the more typically neoliberal headings of the previous two sub-sections. In discussing neoliberalism and volunteering in Italy, Muehlebach comments that

> the unwaged labor regime relies on good feeling—trust, reciprocity, magnanimity—which are considered "essential to the social contract" in a "disarticulated" society (Caltabiano 2002:19–21). But a public thus produced is at best a partial one. It unites citizens through the particularities of co-suffering and dutiful response, rather than the universality of rights; through the passions ignited by inequality, rather than presumptions of equality; and through emotions, rather than politics (Arendt 2006:85–87). It thus differs quite profoundly from its Fordist–Keynesian forebear (Muehlebach, 2011, p. 62)

Her description resonates with attempts to use the Big Society to address social and emotional voids left by neoliberalism. It also resonates with the common governor motive of 'putting something back' described in Chapter 4.

Academies and free schools

There have always been a number of types of schools in the state system with different forms of governance and these have proliferated in recent years. This study is about maintained schools. However, this sub-section will briefly introduce the schools most closely associated with the Coalition Government: academies and free schools. The development of these schools is significant for a number of reasons, not least because the constitution of academy GBs and boards of trustees points towards GBs generally becoming more like company boards.

The academisation of schools in England can be seen as, on the one hand, a continuation of the policies begun in the 1980s, and, on the other hand, a seismic shift. The introduction of funding agreements between individual schools and the Secretary of State forms the basis for a new contractual form of relationship. This contractual basis for the provision of schooling is at the centre of a radical depoliticisation. Academisation can be understood in relation to the topics of the previous four sub-sections.

Firstly, academisation can be understood in relation to school autonomy and the role of LAs. Academies and free schools are independent of the LA and are directly accountable to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State said that 'the OECD found that "in countries where schools have greater autonomy over what is taught and how students are assessed, students tend to perform better"' (Gove, 2011). In England, academies and free schools (or their sponsors) have greater autonomy than maintained schools over what is taught whereas assessment is increasingly controlled from the centre. This partly counters Gove's claim. Morris (2012) analyses the sources of international evidence which the 2010 White Paper claims to draw on and concludes that 'there was little evidence to assert a direct connection between pupil performance and the specific form of school autonomy it promoted' (p. 102). He suggests that the references to international evidence are instead, a 'facade to legitimate a set of policy actions intended to promote a differentiated and competitive school system' (p. 105).

Secondly, as mentioned above, data and the commodification of knowledge are a precondition for the marketisation of education (Ball, 2007, p. 24). The Academies Commission equates the model promoted by the Coalition with what the OECD calls an '"extended market model" … [which] on the one hand could bring innovation and dynamism but, on the other, might result in exclusion and inequality' (Academies Commission, 2013, p. 55).

Thirdly, competition and school choice are central to the ideology driving the creation of these schools. Competition and choice tend to be based around the centralised attainment targets above. However, there are other dimensions to choice such as the role of various religious groups.

Fourthly, the free schools were a 'flagship policy of the Big Society' (Higham, 2013, p. 1). However, Higham's article shows 'how the civil society actors best able to gain access to state resources bring a range of private and self-interested motivations into the public sector. Rather than being well disposed to meet the complex needs of disadvantaged communities, this process appears capable of diverting state resources towards more advantaged actors' (2013, p.

16). He concludes that without 'critical and long-term engagement with the needs and interests of disadvantaged children, parents and communities, the "opening up" of state resources to civil society that is proposed in the Big Society agenda appears destined to reproduce a range of existing socio-economic inequalities' (p. 16).

The roles and responsibilities of school governors and their relationship to the academy trust varies depending on the type of academy and on the individual funding agreement with the Secretary of State. There is a current ESRC research project considering GBs in a range of school types which explores these issues further (Wilkins, 2014).

The introduction of academies and free schools also has a number of implications for maintained schools and their governors. The choice as to whether to convert to academy status technically lies with the GB. Schools which do not wish to become academies need to become particularly vigilant about the 'weaknesses' which could lead to forced academisation. The setting up of nearby free schools can have implications for the size and make-up of the pupil body. The autonomy of academies and free schools from the LA has implications for the LA services available to maintained schools.

Whilst this study focuses on maintained schools, the implications for academies and free schools are briefly considered in Chapter 9.

An ambiguous history
The brief historical outline of this section has adumbrated some of the changes and continuities in the English school system. In many ways, 'English education policy has come full-circle' (Ball, 2012b, p. 89) so it is now, as it was before 1870, 'messy, patchy and diverse' (p. 13). GBs have emerged from their complex history with competing rationales and roles. Dean *et al* refer to governors' three competing rationales of 'managerial, localising, and

democratising[3]' (2007, p. 48) and Deem *et al* refer to GBs as 'hybrid organisations':

> partly democratic, a little corporatist and also, to a large part, managerialist. In the mid-1970s in England their composition and their purposes were shaped by notions of participation and partnership. Later, these purposes became overlain, first by "parent power" and then by the new managerialism (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 72)

This managerialism in the context of the national performative system described within this section is a key issue that emerges throughout this study.

The long and twisting history and the current messiness of the system, both contribute to the ambivalences and ambiguities of policy around school governors as set out in the following section.

National policy

Some broad themes in national policy have already been mentioned. This section introduces some key policy texts, actors, and discourses which are explored throughout the study. The research approach to policy is discussed in Chapter 3. Policy has been changing fast and the empirical research for this study was carried out from May 2011 – July 2012 so the focus is on policy which applied then. However, subsequent policy is also discussed.

There have been quite a few speeches, policy texts, debates and even a Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry on school governance during the research period. It has received more attention in the past few years than in the preceding 20, possibly reflecting schools' increasing 'autonomy'.

There has been an ambivalence about the contribution of GBs and governors in recent policy discourse. It seemed at one point that it was almost obligatory for any policy document or politician's speech about governors to mention that they are over 300,000 volunteers who should be praised (e.g. DCSF, 2010a; Lord

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[3] These are described below under the heading, 'The Joseph Rowntree Foundation study (Dean *et al.*, 2007)'.

Hill, 6 November 2010). However, Michael Gove has seemed ambivalent about school governors. In the 2010 White Paper, governors were described as 'unsung heroes of our education system' (DfE, 2010, p. 71). He repeated this in his evidence to the Education Select Committee Inquiry, with the addition of 'heroines' (Gove, 2012b). On the other hand, his description, in a speech to FASNA, of 'bad governance' as encompassing 'Local worthies who see being a governor as a badge of status not a job of work' implied that such a scenario was not uncommon (Gove, 2012a). This speech provoked an angry response from many governors including the chair of NGA (Adamson, 2012). The Chief Inspector of Education, Michael Wilshaw also made headlines with negative comments about governors as he launched the data dashboard[4] and proposed that governors should be paid (Coughlan, 2013).

Key policy texts

The policy texts drawn on most in this study are summarised here. They exemplify historic changes and continuities as well as current directions. The 'Guide to the Law' (DCSF, 2010b; DfE, 2012b) was the key document bringing other law and regulations together for clerks and governors. 'Learning from the best' (Ofsted, 2011c) set out Ofsted's expectations of GBs and was referred to by governors in the two schools which I was observing at the time it was published. 'The 21st Century School: Implications and Challenges for Governing Bodies, A report from the Ministerial Working Group on School Governance' (DCSF, 2010a) sets out thinking near the end of the New Labour government. 'The Importance of Teaching: The Schools' White Paper 2010' (DfE, 2010) lays out the initial thinking of the Coalition government. All reveal ambiguities about the role. A key theme is the relationship between a model of stakeholder representation and a model based on skills. I am describing these models in binary terms as a heuristic device rather than to reinforce the idea that they are entirely mutually exclusive (further complications are introduced in the final section of this chapter and in Chapter 6). This sub-section merely introduces each text. They are referred to in relation to three policy discourses

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[4] Ofsted's Data Dashboard provides 'an analysis of performance over a three year period and comparisons to other schools or providers' (Ofsted, 2012a).

later in this section and are then discussed in relation to the analysis in later chapters.

'A Guide to the Law for School Governors' (e.g. DCSF, 2010b) sets out what governors need to know about the law. It was revised annually till the 13th edition in 2010 but the Coalition revision was not published until May 2012. The May 2012 version had many similarities to the 2010 version as the changes set out in the 2010 White Paper had not yet come into effect. However, the 'Introduction' of the 2012 Guide focused on the changes proposed in this White Paper.

The length of the Guide suggests the complexity of the role. A 2010 report pointed out that if governors were to follow up on the links on the 250 pages of it, 'an extremely conscientious new governor would have to digest nearly 5,000 pages of central government regulation and guidance' (LGA, 2010, p. 15). The 2012 version was of a similar length; containing 210 pages. References to the length partly point to the massive complexity of the role but they could also be seen as a misunderstanding of the document as governors may be more likely to use it as a reference document than something to read from cover to cover. After the research period, the 'Guide to the Law' was replaced by the 'Governors Handbook' (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2014c) which is less than half the length.

Both the 'Guide to the Law' and the 'Governor's Handbook' contain a lot of specific detail but very little on the overall rationale for governors. They do provide three bullet point summaries of their role. The change in the stated role in relation to setting aims is explored in the sub-section below on 'Policy discourses on the role of school governors'.

'The 21st Century School: Implications and Challenges for Governing Bodies, A report from the Ministerial Working Group on School Governance' (DCSF, 2010a) emerged from a working group launched two years earlier. It is valuable as it was published just before the 2010 election and brings together most relevant New Labour policy and helps to demonstrate the continuities between

the previous New Labour and current Coalition Government in relation to GBs. It describes governors as 'one of the best examples of civic engagement' (p. 6). It says there needs to be clarification about their role. In relation to composition and skills, it does not suggest a change in size but proposes 'a relaxation of the governor proportions in the "stakeholder model" to allow more flexibility so that GBs can have the right skill mix whilst retaining a strong focus on the parent voice, stakeholder engagement and the wider community' (p. 3). It describes these skills as including 'negotiation, influencing, conflict resolution and challenge' (p. 7) rather than suggesting that these skills largely come from business. However, it does later briefly refer to the role in recruiting and placing governors of two business based organisations: School Governor's One Stop Shop (SGOSS) and Business in the Community (BITC) (p. 22).

In summary, it ambiguously recognises the role of stakeholder representation whilst also reflecting and constituting the growing discourse around skills.

'The Importance of Teaching: The Schools' White Paper 2010' (DfE, 2010) was extremely wide ranging and set out the Coalition Government's main intentions in relation to schools. It covered 'Teaching and Leadership', 'Behaviour', 'Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications', 'New Schools System', 'Accountability', 'School Improvement', 'School Funding' (DfE, 2010, p. 1).

The Government committed to providing governors with 'the recognition, support [and] attention that they deserve' (p. 71). It said it would work with 'Non-governmental policy actors' (described in the sub-section below):

> We will work with the National Governors Association and others to clarify governing body accountabilities and responsibilities to focus more strongly on strategic direction, and encourage schools to appoint trained clerks who can offer expert advice and guidance to support them (p. 71)

It emphasised the role of data:

> We will make it easier for governors to set high expectations and ask challenging questions, by giving governors easier access to data about how their school compares to others, and the National

College will offer high-quality training for chairs of governors (p. 71)

This White Paper proposed smaller GBs based on skills (p. 71) with the local community valued as a source of skills (p. 66) rather than a source of local perspectives. It emphasised the value of business skills:

> Governing bodies benefit from having people with business or management experience as members, and employers find that their staff benefit from and enjoy serving as school governors. We will work with the Education Employer Taskforce, Business in the Community, the Institute for Education Business Excellence, the School Governor's One Stop Shop, and others to encourage business people and professionals to volunteer as governors (p. 71)

In summary, this text indicates a strong shift towards governors as skills-carriers rather than stakeholders with a representative role that goes beyond the shift shown in the New Labour document.

'School governance: Learning from the best' (Ofsted, 2011c) was influential for schools and governors as they are strongly motivated by their perceptions of what Ofsted will be looking for on inspections[5] and it was referred to in meetings which I observed. It was significant within Ofsted and was cited at length in their Annual Report (Ofsted, 2011b, p. 66).

Baxter and Clarke (2012) consider this document in their analysis of discourses of excellence constructed through Ofsted's thematic reports. They suggest that it is 'a "bridging" document … which seeks to change the practices of governors not just by outlining the ways in which they can emulate Ofsted defined ideologies of excellence, but equally to pave the way for a set of responsibilities that appear not unlike the job description of a full time company director' (p. 26). They describe this as a move to 'a model of managerial governance in which [governors] work as "economic subjects, working to business and governmental logics in a competitive field" (Newman, 2001; Newman & Clarke, 2009:128)' (p. 28).

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[5] The study was conducted before the May 2014 controversies around the role of governors in Birmingham schools. This raised relevant issues about limits on the remit of governors which I cannot address here.

This thematic report describes managerial governors with skills and encompasses a strong 'effectiveness' discourse. The 'best' in the title slips into meaning 'effective' so 'The aim of this small-scale report is to help all governing bodies to become excellent by showcasing examples of highly effective governance that is contributing to improved outcomes' (Ofsted, 2011c, p. 1) and the core of the report is 'Key characteristics of effective governing bodies'. 'Effective' appears 55 times in this 33 page report. The emphasis in the report is on 'information' (66 appearances) which implies value free knowledge. There appears to be an assumption that with the right information, the GB will agree on the 'right' choice which is for the common good. There are hints of dissensus in phrases such as 'different perspective' and 'challenge assumptions' (p. 5) but throughout the report, there is a suggestion that once the relevant information is gathered, the question of what to do will not be problematic and there will not be outstanding differences of perspective or values. The only mention of governors being representative appeared as part of one of the school case studies in the Annex, and this was co-located with skills:

> The governors set out to remove any perceived barriers between the school and the local community and *to ensure broad local representation* on the governing body. As a result, there was a good mix of governors, including several with community links, who had a wide range of skills and networks with others (*my emphasis,* Ofsted, 2011c, p. 33)

In summary, this document, which was salient at the time of the empirical research, places a very strong emphasis on skills and effectiveness and almost none on stakeholder representation.

Non-governmental policy actors

This sub-section introduces some of the organisations and companies providing support to governors. With regard to this research study, they are more significant for their influence on policy making rather than their direct impact on the particular GBs which I studied, where they were hardly referred to. I found very limited evidence of them taking a critical stand with regard to the national

performative system and effectiveness discourse outlined in the previous section.

The National Governors Association (NGA) describes itself as 'the representative body for state-funded school governors in England' (NGA, 2012) and their website says:

> The NGA is the only independent body representing school governors in England... We are an independent charity that aims to improve the well-being of children and young people by promoting high standards in all our schools, and improving the effectiveness of their governing bodies. We support both local authority maintained schools, and academies… NGA supports local governor associations and governing bodies, lobby ministers and policy makers on all policies that impact schools and offer high-quality guidance, information, conferences and advice for governors and governance professionals (NGA, 2012)

The NGA has a close relationship with Government and the 2010 White Paper states that they will work closely together (DfE, 2010, p. 71). Their main focus in policy lobbying tends to be asserting that governors are very important and should be valued and supported. However, their diverse membership does not seem to daunt the NGA in taking positions on wide ranging policy debates. It is rare for an edition of their bimonthly magazine, 'Governing Matters' not to include the phrase 'NGA believes'. Their 'beliefs' extend more widely than the role of and support for governors, for example, 'The NGA welcomes the plan to double the size of the [Teach First] Scheme by 2015' (NGA, 2011, p. 8). The NGA operates as secretariat for an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Education Governance and Leadership (Parliament, 2012a) initiated by Neil Carmichael, Conservative MP.

Another significant actor is SGOSS - Governors for Schools[6]. It was 'established in 1999 by the Department in conjunction with private sector partners to recruit school governor volunteers with transferable management skills.' (DfES, 2004, p. 14). The Coalition committed to work with it (DfE, 2010, p. 71) and in November 2012, Lord Hill confirmed they would fund it until the

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[6] Previously known as SGOSS (School Governors One-Stop-Shop)

end of the parliament saying it does a 'great job bringing the world of work and education closer together and has successfully placed more than 14,000 business people as governors in schools and Academies' (Modern Governor, 2012).

The National Co-ordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS) does not work directly with governors. Rather, it 'is a committee representing Local Authority providers of services to school governors' (NCOGS, 2012).

In addition to the actors above, there are a number of private providers offering training and support to governors. Many of these providers, along with the organisations above, provided evidence to the Education Select Committee Inquiry into 'The Role of School Governing Bodies' (Education Committee, 2013a).

Overall, there are a growing number of non-governmental policy actors supporting and advocating for governors. They tend to broadly support an effectiveness discourse of the role of governors, as explored in the following sub-section.

Policy discourses on the role of school governors

The role of GBs includes: setting the budget, appointing the headteacher and setting the school's broad direction (DCSF, 2010b; DfE, 2012b; Ofsted, 2011c). This neat summary belies the complexities of the role. A lack of clarity about governors' roles is mentioned in many policy texts including those summarised above and in much school governance literature (e.g. Balarin *et al.*, 2008, p. 5; James, 2012, p. 11; Martin and Holt, 2010, p. 111; Sallis, 1991, p. 5). The Coalition Government has said that they will simplify the role (DfE, 2010, p. 71). This simultaneously gives them the opportunity to transform the role. This sub-section sets out some of the ambivalences and ambiguities in current policy discourses.

The 'critical friend'

Since the mid-1990s, the phrase, 'critical friend', has been central to understandings of GBs. It was defined in statute in The Education Regulations

in 2000, which were still in place at the time of the empirical research: 'The governing body shall act as "critical friend" to the head teacher, that is to say, they shall support the head teacher in the performance of his functions and give him constructive criticism' (p. 2). The phrase is ambiguous and 'open to wide interpretation' (Balarin *et al.,* 2008, p. 16). James describes it as 'a metaphorical and perhaps inappropriate term for such an important statutory role' (2012, p. 11). The phrase, 'critical friend' appears in the 2010 (DCSF) and 2012 (DfE) editions of the 'Guide to the Law' but does not appear in the 'Governors Handbook'. However, 'support' and 'challenge' both appear in the 'Governors Handbook' (DfE, 2014c, p. 7) and in Ofsted's 'School Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2013, p. 49) suggesting that the dual role at the root of 'critical friend' remains.

Skills and/or representation

As described in relation to the 'Key policy texts' above, governors' skills have been increasingly emphasised over their representative stakeholder role. The Government's schools White Paper stated that they would 'legislate in the forthcoming Education Bill so that all schools can establish smaller governing bodies with appointments primarily focused on skills' (DfE, 2010, p. 71, para 6.30). The size was reduced in the subsequent Education Act 2011 (c.38) and the Secretary of State for Education told Parliament:

> We should encourage schools to have a tighter group of governing bodies. Governors should be chosen on the basis of their skills rather than the organisation or interest that they represent, and we can learn a lot from shining a light on the practice of the best schools. I have been really encouraged by the response of the business community, who are trying to encourage more and more people with a background in business to use some of their skills to enhance what governing bodies provide (Gove, 2012b)

As in the above quote, the policy discourse has tended to be around a binary between skilled and representative stakeholder governors. This is despite some politicians periodically challenging the idea that they are mutually exclusive, for example, Andrew Stunell MP and Tristram Hunt MP in a Westminster Hall Debate on governance (Parliament, 2012b).The Education Select Committee

Inquiry into the role of GBs included as one of its points for submissions 'the structure and membership of governing bodies, including the balance between representation and skills' (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 5). In its report, it noted,

> Evidence to our inquiry showed mixed opinions on the appropriate balance in a school governing body between individuals with specific skills, and representatives of stakeholder groups. Overall, there was agreement with the DfE's view that the stakeholder model does not preclude skills, but, conversely, several witnesses felt that individuals recruited for specific skills may lack important local or community knowledge (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 7)

However it did not make any recommendations in relation to this 'balance'. Other metaphors around a 'shift' and a 'binary' have already been deployed in this chapter in relation to skills and stakeholder representation. However, as mentioned earlier, I am concerned not to overemphasise this as a binary. The situation is more productively seen as complex and ambiguous.

There are further ambivalences and ambiguities specifically around the representative role of governors. Parent and staff governors are elected by parents and staff respectively. However, they are there as representative parents and staff rather than as parent or staff representatives. In other words, they have the experience of being parents or members of staff but they are on the GB as individuals and are not meant to represent other parents or staff as a constituency. This means they are not individually or directly accountable to those who voted for them. Chapter 6 will explore the contribution of these ambiguities to the displacement of a representation discourse by a skills discourse[7].

Setting the aims of the school

There has been a change in how much GBs are technically meant to set the aims of the school. At the time of the empirical research, the wording was the

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[7] Since the research period, the Inspiring Governors Alliance has been established with an emphasis on 'skills' (Inspiring Governors Alliance, 2014). Also see 'Appendix A: May 2014 policy ensuring newly appointed governors have 'skills''.

same in both the most recent New Labour and the Coalition editions of the 'Guide to the Law':

> The governing body must exercise its functions with a view to fulfilling a largely strategic role in the running of the school. It should establish the strategic framework by:
> • setting aims and objectives for the school
> • adopting policies for achieving those aims and objectives
> • setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives
> (DCSF, 2010b, p. 13; DfE, 2012b, p. 15)

The Coalition Government's 'Governors' Handbook', published after the research period at first sight appears similar:

> In all types of schools, governing bodies should have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:
> a. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
> b. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils; and
> c. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent
> (DfE, 2013, p. 6; DfE, 2014c, p. 6)

However, there are important differences:

> The word 'strategic' is still there. In fact, many of the same words are there and the sentence structure is similar. However, 'setting aims' seems qualitatively different to 'ensuring clarity'. 'Setting aims' may suggest discussion by governing bodies (and hence, possibly, local communities) about what happens in schools. 'Ensuring', 'holding to account' and 'overseeing' may suggest governors are compliance checkers operating on behalf of national government (Young, 2013)

Issues around setting aims are central to conceptions of democracy and will be explored throughout this study.

Summary

This sub-section has set out some key ambivalences and ambiguities in relation to policy discourses around governors. These relate to support and challenge; skills and representation; and setting or ensuring a vision. They interact with

each other and with other policy discourses. Their implications for GB practices will be explored throughout the study.

Existing research on governing bodies and democracy and citizenship

There is surprisingly little literature on GBs in England. As Showunmi points out in introducing a special edition of Management in Education on 'Governing and Governance in Education':

> The way the education system is governed is important for society. However, despite its importance, educational governance is substantially under researched in comparison with other aspects of the management in educational settings. (Showunmi, 2013, p. 83)

Of what exists, a lot is presented as 'How to' guides and/or is captured by an effectiveness discourse (e.g. Bartlett, 2013; Martin and Holt, 2010; McCrone, Southcott and George, 2011; Scanlon, Earley and Evans, 1999) so can be understood as more about governors as 'state volunteers' than as 'citizens' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 162). Some literature on democracy and education refers briefly to GBs (e.g. Ball, Vincent and Radnor, 1997; Reay *et al.*, 2008). This section will largely focus on literature which is particularly relevant to GBs *and* democracy and/or citizenship. It will summarise the four key studies that focus on GBs and democracy then explore some emerging themes that arise from these and from other relevant literature on GBs (Farrell, 2005; Hatcher, 1994; Smith, 2010; Thody, 1994). Each of the emerging themes is brief as they are all revisited in subsequent chapters in relation to the empirical research.

The Active Citizenship Study (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995)
The main research for this study was a 'UK-based, longitudinal, multi-site case study project' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 1) looking at 10 GBs from 1988 till 1993. The focus was on 'educational reform and the participation of lay people in the administration of publically funded schools' (Deem, Brehony and

Heath, 1995, p. 1). It reflects an earlier and different policy environment but their perspectives and conclusions have greatly informed the present study.

Deem *et al* emphasise that school governing is inherently political and that 'the circuits and indices of power … are … very elaborate' (p. 155). Interestingly, their research found that many governors showed a 'strong distaste for politics in school governing bodies' (p. 134) (see Chapter 8 on notions of 'the political').

The study suggests that governors' roles used to be focused on benefits to students and the wider community but moved towards 'regulatory agents engaged in surveillance over teachers and headteachers' (p. 27). They question whether governors act as 'state volunteers', with a managerial role implementing government policy, or as 'citizens', who sometimes challenge these policies (p. 162). They conclude with the view that 'it is not acceptable for lay people to do the state's work for it under the guise of semi-autonomous devolved management, which is falsely seen to empower schools, parents and the local community' (p. 162). The available subject positions for governors as 'citizens' or 'state volunteers' are explored throughout this study (the final section of this chapter discusses the problematic nature of such binaries).

The Birmingham Study (Ranson *et al*, 2005)

This UK-wide study suggests school governing has been 'the largest democratic experiment in voluntary public participation' (Ranson *et al.*, 2005a, p. 357). It 'assessed the extent to which the experiment of school governors as volunteer citizens has enhanced democratic participation and public accountability, and whether it has made a difference to policy, practice and performance of public institutions' (p. 358).

It provides a typology which does not explicitly focus on democracy. Rather its basis is 'the definition of purpose and responsibility; the relationship of power between the headteacher and the chair of governors; and the extent of corporateness of the governing body in its deliberations and decision-making' (Ranson *et al.*, 2005b). The typology proceeds along a continuum towards what the study offers as an ideal. The four types are: 'Governance as deliberative

forum'; 'Governance as consultative sounding board'; 'Governance as an executive board'; and 'Governance as a governing body' (2005a, pp. 362-3). The last occurs when 'the governing body takes overarching responsibility for the conduct and direction of the school. The head will be a strong professional leader of the governing body that acts as a corporate entity' (2005a, p. 363). The concept of a 'deliberative forum' as set out in their study consists of 'a gathering of parents at which discussions of the school are determined and led by the headteacher' (2005a, p. 362). This narrow, directive environment is very different to the concept of a 'deliberative forum' implied by the theories of deliberative democracy set out in the next section. However, this may just be a matter of terminology as much of Ranson's work is about deliberation in the sense in which it is used in much deliberative democracy theory. The study places a strong value on GBs acting as corporate bodies. This normative position is challenged by Hatcher who says 'The achievement of consensus through Habermasian dialogue has been a consistent theme of Ranson's writings and is a principle of the mainstream deliberative democracy movement' (Hatcher, 2012, p. 33). Hatcher draws attention to 'the unequal power relationship within which governance operates… [and to the] terrain of neoliberalism' (p. 34) to argue that Ranson's writing is overly optimistic.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation study (Dean *et al.*, 2007)

This study explores issues related to school governors in areas of disadvantage, where the authors suggest that the current volunteer model is most problematic. It is based on case studies of GBs in three geographical areas. In relation to governors' roles, they say:

> by and large, the governors in our study felt happier offering support rather than challenge and tended to rely on heads for strategic leadership. They also found it difficult to articulate any clear and detailed vision of "service quality" on which to base their leadership. However, they did have a strong and principled sense of acting in the interests of the schools and of the children within it (Dean *et al.*, 2007, p. 37)

The emphasis of the study is on three rationales for school governors which they describe as follows:

- 'Managerial', where governors 'derive their legitimacy…. from their ability to drive up schools' standards of performance' (p. 12);

- 'Localising', which operates in a similar paradigm of focusing on how to achieve externally set ends, and implies governors 'bring local knowledge to bear on external imperatives and … implement them in the light of "what works here"' (p. 13); and

- 'Democratising' where governors 'exercise a significant degree of control over the nature of the service on offer to local people' (p. 13) and decide what quality means, not just how to achieve it.

The study suggests that there is a lack of clarity in policy and practice about which of these rationales takes precedence and that the differing rationales undermine each other since 'each assumes different characteristics on the part of governors, different forms of legitimacy and different definitions of service quality' (Dean *et al.*, 2007, p. 14). They conclude by suggesting wider debate is needed to decide what school governance is for. The relationship between the three rationales provides a valuable starting point for the present study to focus on deliberative democracy and citizenship and consider the effects of a range of ambivalences and ambiguities, including these competing rationales.

Of particular relevance to governors' democratising role, their empirical research found that 'the role of governors in relation to democratisation was rarely mentioned' (p. 51). They suggest that 'the capacity of governors to challenge external imperatives was limited … governors were able to make a difference where the battles they were engaged in did not confront national or local policy' (p. 43). They had a 'lack of connection into wider decision-making bodies' (p. 44). The sense that governors felt that there was one common interest of the school was a theme running through their study. In contrast to Ranson *et al* (2005a; 2005b) above, they problematize this singular common interest.

The Business in the Community study (Balarin *et al.*, 2008)

This study was commissioned by BITC to consider school governing and how it might be 'improved' (Balarin *et al.*, 2008, p. 3). It reviewed 'the business

contribution of governors' and took a particular interest in what could be learnt about governance from other sectors (p. 4). It involved a literature review, in-depth interviews and an online survey (via NGA, SGOSS and NCOGS).

Their key messages are that school governing is: 'Overloaded' with governors having too many responsibilities; 'Overcomplicated'; and 'Overlooked' in that 'what governing bodies are responsible for and how they should function has not received enough of the right kind of attention and the work of governing bodies goes largely unnoticed' (p. 4). These key messages lead directly to their recommendations that 'responsibilities should be reduced'; 'the role ... should be simplified'; and the 'status … enhanced' (p. 67).

They quote extensively from Dean *et al* (2007) but do not otherwise discuss democracy and citizenship. However, the study is of relevance to conceptions of citizenship and democracy as they emphasise the need for governors to talk about 'the kind of schools they want' (p. 32). They set out their ideal:

> A forum where "what we want our school to be" could be discussed would:
> - Have very wide community involvement and would ensure that all "voices" were present and heard
> - Encourage wide active participation
> - Enable full discussion and deliberation
> - Facilitate the making of collective judgements
> - Allow scrutiny and deliberation of matters of import (p. 32)

Follow up work included 'Hidden Givers' (James *et al.*, 2010) which extended the analysis of data from this study as well as reviewing literature and undertaking 30 further case studies (p. 2). It provides useful background on GBs but does not follow up on the issues around 'the kind of schools [governors] want' (Balarin *et al.*, 2008, p. 32).

Emerging theme: Deliberation and consensus

Deem *et al* (1995) found a distaste for politics and Dean *et al* (2007) found that the governors in their study were 'operating on the basis of goodwill and consensus rather than of politics and conflict' (p. 29), suggesting:

> most governing bodies … proceed through consensus in pursuit of some notion of the common interest of the school… It was important, we were told, that governors were able to work with each other and with the head, in order to "get things done" (pp. 53-54)

The construction of consensus in policy and practice is explored in Chapter 5 using the deliberative democrats referred to below (Dryzek, 2002; Young, 2002 [2000]).

Emerging theme: What governing bodies discuss

The literature suggests that 'governor participation in school strategy is limited' (Farrell, 2005, p. 104) and that educational issues were not discussed much (e.g. Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 85; Farrell, 2005, p. 103). Hatcher suggests that this is partly related to the issues raised by the lay/professional relationship and gives the example of governors not raising issues around race:

> the attitude that lay governors in general had towards "educational" issues. They regarded them as the province of the "professionals" and deferred to their expertise. If the head didn't think "race" was sufficiently important to put on the agenda, who were they to disagree? (Hatcher, 1994, p. 131)

The topics which governors discuss and how they are brought to the deliberations are explored in this study. Chapter 7 considers the relationship between educational and lay knowledge.

Emerging theme: Governors as overloaded

Related to the issue of what is discussed, is the fact that there appear to be numerous statutory duties overloading governors (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Dean *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, any exploration of what governors discuss needs to consider how this may be constrained by their statutory duties and to consider whether, 'If governors were to have less statutory responsibilities, the situation might change and lay persons might enter into a genuine dialogue about those matters on which they were competent to make judgements' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 87). Busy-ness, and its paradoxical relationship with passivity, is discussed throughout the current study.

Emerging theme: Ambiguous role

A key theme in the studies outlined above is the tensions between competing roles. Deem *et al* (1995) discuss governors as citizens or as state volunteers; Dean *et al* (2007) refer to competing rationales of 'managerial, localising, and democratising' (p. 48); Balarin *et al* (2008) frame the tensions as: 'support-challenge, representation-skill, operational-strategic, managing-scrutiny' (p. 36). As Dean *et al* point out, competing rationales can undermine each other. The current study explores these tensions in relation to recent policy and governors' practices. It is helpful to see the tensions as more than just (temporary) flaws in an otherwise rational role. Lemke provides a helpful starting point for the exploration of this:

> Struggles and fights do not only take place in an interval "between" programs and their "realization"; they are not limited to some kind of "negative energy" or obstructive capacity. Rather than "distorting" the "original" program, they are actually always already part of the programs themselves, actively contributing to "compromises," "fissures," and "incoherencies" inside them. Thus, the analysis of governmentality does not only take into account "breaks" or "gaps" between program and technology but also inside each of them, viewing them not as signs of their failure but as the very condition of their existence (see Malpas and Wickham 1995; O'Malley, Weir, and Shearing 1997; Lemke 2000). Indeed, we need to refrain from a "rationalist conception of rationality." Neoliberal practices are not necessarily unstable or in crisis when they rely on increasing social cleavages or relate to an incoherent political program. Neoliberalism might work not instead of social exclusion and marginalization processes or political "deficiencies"; on the contrary, relinquishing social securities and political rights might well prove to be its raison d'être (Lemke, 2002, p. 57)

The tensions themselves may be a key element of how GBs 'work' and this is explored throughout the study. It raises questions as to whether school governors are impossible.

Discourses of citizenship and deliberative democracy

This section introduces some concepts which are explored in more depth and detail in the analysis chapters. It is impossible that GBs could 'match' the ideal deliberative forums set out by political theorists. However, it is intended that

using these concepts as sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1969 cited in Charmaz, 2006, pp. 16-17) helps explore the ambivalences and ambiguities in the role of governors highlighted by the preceding sections. An exploration of discourses in a power/knowledge sense points to the ubiquity of power and forms an important element of this research. Chapter 3 explores the relationship between normativity and empirical research and the use of both sensitising concepts and discourse.

As Apple says, 'democracy does not carry an essential meaning emblazoned on its head so to speak. Instead it's one of the most contested words in the English language' (Apple, 2008, p. 245). There are shifting discourses operating around 'slippery rhetorical terms' (Charlton in Biesta, 2004, p. 234) such as democracy and citizenship. For example, the Prime Minister is able to use the term, 'democracy', to refer to an entirely market discourse when he says, 'Some critics say [free] schools aren't democratically accountable. I would say: yes, they are. They are accountable to every parent who chooses to send their child to that school' (Cameron, 2011). In this, he is substituting the *consumer power* of individual parents for the *representative democracy* of LAs and excluding other possible models of democratic accountability. This study aims to explore the deployments of these slippery terms and the work that they do in the concrete practices of GBs. Many of these slippages appear to create binaries. Throughout the study, binaries such as this are used as a heuristic device to draw out the ambivalences and ambiguities around GBs. However, they are being treated with caution. Binaries tend to have a judgement embedded in them, for example, there is an implication here that 'citizen' is good and 'state volunteer' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995) is bad. Furthermore, using binaries can lead to the simplistic categorisation and clustering of concepts rather than a recognition of complexity.

In this shifting context, it is helpful, to have recourse to the alternative sets of meanings which are raised through various conceptions of citizenship and the theory of deliberative democracy. These act as sensitising concepts providing an analytical language with which to 'think otherwise' (Ball, 2006, p. 4) in exploring the concrete practices of the empirical world. Thinking otherwise is

underpinned by a sense that the world could be otherwise. This is premised on Foucault's much quoted phrase from his debate with Chomsky:

> the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them (Foucault and Rabinow, 1991, p. 6)

Citizenship

Deem *et al* explored a range of theories of citizenship and concluded that 'School governors do not fit neatly into any of the theories of citizenship' (1995, p. 62). However, using conceptions of citizenship as sensitising concepts foregrounds a number of perspectives and issues. Citizenship is often seen as concerned with a polity; it draws attention to inclusion and exclusion; citizenship can be contrasted with consumership; there are debates around the extent to which it is concerned with the common good and with ends rather than means.

Citizenship and democracy tend to be premised on being part of a polity which is often taken as read (and is often national). Citizens can be seen as having allegiance to a particular geographical polity and as having rights and duties within that place. An individual school as a polity is a less easily justified construct. This raises questions as to whether governors see their allegiance to one pupil (in the case of parents), one school, one LA, the nation state or to a combination of these. However, Dean suggests a wider shift away from a territorial polity so, 'Against the unitary spatialisation of the social, there are a plurality of communities' (2007, p. 89). Empirically, this links to the earlier sub-section on 'Competition and school choice' which suggests that governors tend to feel allegiance to a specific school which can work against the interests of a wider polity. Some governors have a very limited connection to the local area and some governors' sense of being a collective was limited to being part of the GB. Chapter 6 explores governors' allegiances in relation to the subject positions of different governor categories.

Allegiance to a specific polity can have implications for temporal justice and it may be useful to conceive of citizens as being future-regarding with a responsibility for future generations. Citizens within a fixed polity might consider future generations. There is no incentive for members of shifting communities or for consumers (see below) to do so. Their interests lie in the present.

The spatial dimension implied by a polity can exclude those outside the place to which citizens feel allegiance. However, the inclusion and exclusion embedded in conceptions of citizenship are deeper than this (Lister, 2007) and 'No account of citizenship can evade the fact that it was originally constructed in order to exclude and subordinate people' (Delanty, 2000, p. 11). Non-UK citizens are not excluded from being school governors. However, as has been described in relation to the 'Size and composition' of GBs, GBs are not representative of their wider school communities and those who are the most active in GBs are even less representative, particularly in terms of class and ethnicity.

The exclusivity embedded within the term 'citizen' as a legal status can also be seen in understandings of citizenship as active citizenship. 'Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools' (Crick, 1998) set out a conception of active citizenship which underpins the teaching of citizenship in schools and which has, therefore, informed wider understandings of the term. The concept of 'active citizen' has a strong normalising role (Dean, 2007, p. 76) and excludes those who do not fit with it.

Knowledge or lack of particular knowledge is often central to exclusion and a range of dimensions to governor knowledges merit exploration. One dimension is the relationship between lay and professional knowledges. On the one hand, it seems that a good understanding of education is needed to challenge complex discourses. On the other, 'The requirement that citizens "become informed" potentially undercuts the aim of deliberation to strengthen and extend democracy' (Davies, Barnett and Wetherell, 2006, p. 165). There seems to be a considerable ambivalence about the place of professional (in this case, educational) knowledge in citizenship (see Chapter 7).

An important way of describing citizens is in contrast to consumers. Explorations of a citizen-consumer binary and the concomitant understanding of public and private spheres are central concerns of this study. They are not in any way clear labels which can be attached to particular practices. Empirically, the labels which individuals attach to themselves often reflect a greater complexity than the citizen/consumer binary. In the health service, Clarke and Newman (2007) found that other terms such as 'patient', 'service user', 'member of the public' and 'member of the local community' were more popular than 'consumer' or 'citizen'. They question whether 'the "big binary" citizen/consumer so central to political discourse (and political science) lacks any substantial popular reach around public services' (p. 5). Theoretically, the terms, public and private, 'are not simply straightforward designations of societal spheres; they are cultural classifications and rhetorical labels. In political discourse, they are powerful terms that are frequently deployed to delegitimate some interests, views, and topics and to valorise others' (Fraser, 1997, p. 88).

As discussed in relation to the quote from David Cameron at the beginning of this section, the slipperiness of the terms deployed means that discourses of citizenship can easily slip in to discourses of consumership. In relation to governors, Deem *et al* suggest 'The contradictory discourses that make up the new managerialism enable the status of consumer to be exchanged with that of citizen, so that no difference is perceived between democratic ways of reaching decisions and decisions made in the market.' (1995, p. 46). Biesta describes how 'the relationship between the state and its citizens… has become less a political relationship … and more an economic relationship - that is, a relationship between the state as provider and the taxpayer as consumer of public services' (2004, p. 237). In the specific context of schools, the language of consumer can lead to confusion as to who the consumer is (Ball, Vincent and Radnor, 1997, p. 153). In a school, it could be the parent or the pupil. The school might also be the consumer of services from public and private organisations. What is clearer is that non-parent, local residents, for example, are not generally included in a consumer discourse. This is one of the elements emphasised by Fielding and Moss in response to a shift from a citizen to a consumer based understanding of education:

> The ruination of public education and its replacement by markets and governing at a distance is catastrophic, for a number of reasons. First because it removes the public in public education, the idea that education is a common good, a responsibility of *all* citizens, an endeavour in which everyone has an interest. What should be a political relationship between *all* citizens (not only parents), schools and democratically accountable bodies becomes an economic relationship between consumers, providers and funders (Fielding and Moss, 2012, p. 6)

The shift from citizen to consumer, therefore, not only transforms the subject positions of those accessing public services but it transforms the publicness of schools and who might be involved in decisions about them.

Citizenship is often described as concerned with the common good, although the 'definition and meaning of the common good remains highly contested' (Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010, p. 68). A singular 'common good' privileges the perspective of those able to define it. However, as suggested by Fielding and Moss, the 'common good' also signifies something valuable and vulnerable. A tentative response to this dilemma is provided by Young who suggests understanding citizens as concerned with 'collective problems' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 43), including public goods, rather than with a singular common good. Her response is used throughout this study as a heuristic alternative to both a singular 'common good' and a view of self-interested consumers or stakeholders.

The common good is explored in relation to consensus in Chapter 5. Here, the constitution of a 'common good' of the school suggests that it would be against the interests of the children to challenge what the school was already doing. Chapter 8 explores how a singular common good can be used to suggest that politics is about self-interest and should be avoided for the promotion of this common good.

The current GB model for maintained schools is described as a stakeholder model (DfE, 2012b, p. 5). Until this point, I have only used the word 'stakeholders' juxtaposed with conceptions of representation. I did this to draw

attention to the policy debate around representation and skills and to distinguish representative stakeholders from skills-carriers. I would now like to narrow the definition of stakeholders. As set out in Chapter 6, stakeholders can be understood as coming with pre-established preferences whereas citizens can be understood having a 'shared identity as members of a polity' (Davies, Barnett and Wetherell, 2006, p. 34) and a concern for 'collective problems' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 43). Chapter 6 explores the three positions of stakeholders, citizens and skills-carriers in relation to claims for a singular common good.

Finally, another common binary of considerable relevance to this study is the idea that citizens (including as GBs) decide the ends and professionals decide the means of education. For example, 'parents, the community and the state certainly have a right to say what *goals* they want for education' (*my emphasis*, Apple and Beane, 2007, p. 21). Chapter 7 will explore this binary and challenges to it, party drawing on the distinction between 'criterion' and 'operational' power (Winstanley *et al*, 1995 cited in Simkins, 2012, p. 4). This resonates with the work of Deem *et al* who, in the mid-1990s pointed to the tendency of governors to act as 'state volunteers', with a managerial role implementing government policy, rather than as 'citizens', who question these policies (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 162).

This brief section has shown how conceptions of citizenship help highlight slightly different issues and perspectives to those highlighted by the main sensitising concept of deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is particularly useful as a sensitising concept for exploring the practices of GBs beyond voting. This sub-section provides a brief introduction, giving particular attention to theories which have attempted to respond to the challenges of unequal power relations and which are drawn on most in this study (Dryzek, 2002; Young, 2002 [2000]).

The term 'deliberative democracy' was first used in the early 1980s (Held, 2006) and has been developed in different ways by a range of theorists. Broadly, it is a set of theories which propose that democratic legitimacy be derived from public reasoning about the public good rather than from the aggregation of the private interests of individual participants. Definitions tend to be presented in idealised terms, for example:

> [Deliberative democracy is a] form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally acceptable, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 7)

Deliberative democracy can be described in opposition to an aggregative (or voting) model of democracy. Deliberative democracy incorporates considerations of the views and needs of others and of the collective whereas aggregative models of democracy are premised on the aggregation of private interests. In the aggregative model, individuals' preferences are seen as fixed in advance of any political process so the purpose of the process is to aggregate them. Numerical strength is what is important. Individuals listen passively to political manifestos as set out by political elites. They make a choice, to which they may have a strong or weak commitment, between a number of discrete options. They take this fixed preference to the ballot box and vote. Votes are aggregated and the discrete option with the most votes wins. Due to the similarities between aggregative democracy and consumption, Fishkin suggests that an aggregative understanding of democracy easily leaves the door open for citizenship to be replaced by consumership where we choose 'our candidates more or less the way we choose detergents' (1991, p. 3). In other words, an aggregative model of democracy slips easily into the consumer discourse used by Cameron, above.

In contrast, advocates of deliberative democracy argue that individuals' preferences may be altered by the political process. They do not just receive packages of policies from political elites, they can be actively engaged in the creation of policies themselves. People learn more about the situation and

come to understand how others are affected by a particular stance. Engaging in dialogue and reflecting on their own and others' reasons can lead to the transformation of their preferences. This does not have to mean compromise in a win-lose paradigm. In response to seemingly intractable problems where one group want one thing and one group want something apparently opposite, deliberation can 'multiply dimensions and options' (Dryzek, 2002, p. 41) leading to a creative resolution, if only through a temporary and particular consensus. Dialogue as a social process is central to the conceptions of deliberative democracy being drawn on here and is well articulated by Davies *et al*:

> The ideas that emerge from the process of social interaction are not necessarily ones that any one participant would have reached alone. And if this is the case, we need to foster "reflective solidarity" (Dean, 1996) - not the easy *solidarity in sameness* but the more difficult *solidarity in difference,* that demands a pause, requires respect of the other, and a willingness to reflect aloud and to shift positions... The power of the social is all too easily overlooked in a culture that celebrates the rational individual. Yet it is what underpins the very idea of deliberation (*emphasis in original*, 2006, p. 224)

Furthermore, deliberative democracy can have 'educative power' and 'community-generating power' (Cooke, 2000). This could also be understood as collective meaning making (Wenger, 1998). As with the discussions of the 'common good' in the sub-section on citizenship, this point raises questions about what the collective means, in other words whether the collective meaning making takes place in one school or in one LA or in a differently boundaried community. Conceptions of deliberative democracy as social, creative and educative also raise questions about the forms of knowledge brought to and valued in deliberations.

Theories of deliberative democracy tend to be premised on an ideal society where all participants are equal, as suggested in the Gutmann and Thompson definition above. This is far removed from the empirical world considered in this study. As Walter says of deliberative democracy, 'Within this broad church there is a radical strain, and John Dryzek and Iris Young are the most important examples of it.' (Walter, 2008, p. 531). These theories of deliberative

democracy that recognise and attempt to respond to unequal power relations are, therefore, particularly relevant as lenses through which to develop creative insights into the technologies and discourses operating within GBs. Ironically, these two theorists would prefer to use different terms rather than 'deliberative democracy'. Their accounts of 'communicative democracy' (Young, 2002 [2000]) and 'discursive democracy' (Dryzek, 2002) are described below.

Young favours the term 'communicative democracy' to 'denote a more open context of political communication' because, she argues, 'for many the term 'deliberation' carries connotations of the primacy of argument, dispassionateness, and order in communication' (2002 [2000], p. 40). A major challenge for deliberative democracy is that the means of communication used, can be exclusive. Therefore, 'political inclusion specifically requires openness to a plurality of modes of communication' (p. 12). Political argument should be complemented by 'greeting, rhetoric and narrative' (p. 12). Greeting is about establishing recognition, equality and trust. Through this participants are welcomed into the debate. With regard to rhetoric, theorists from Plato to Habermas have made distinctions between reason and rhetoric which all presuppose the possibility of neutrality. For Young, rhetoric includes both the affective and figurative dimensions of communication (p. 7) and these are needed for people to express the particularity of their experiences and responses, with limitations on rhetoric which is completely disrespectful or unintelligible (a difficult line to draw). She suggests narrative or story telling is valuable for people to give testimonies which express their experiences in a way that encourages broader understanding. All three of Young's modes of communication are relevant to GBs where they can be understood as excluding as well as including. This is considered in Chapter 5 along with a greater exploration of the role of emotions in deliberation. Young's emphasis on the emotions is an important counter to the emphasis on rationality of much deliberative democracy (e.g. Benhabib, 1996). However, others provide a less all-embracing response to the place of the emotions suggesting that it is better to recognise that emotions are everywhere and to try to harness them constructively (Thompson and Hoggett, 2001, pp. 2-3).

Dryzek (2002) proposes three reasons for adopting the term 'discursive democracy'. Firstly, he suggests 'A discursive process is necessarily social and intersubjective' (p. vi) whereas deliberation can be personal and individual. Secondly, 'deliberation has connotations of calm, reasoned argument' whereas a 'discursive process connotes something more expansive … including unruly and contentious communication from the margins'. Thirdly, the reference to 'discourse' draws attention to both Foucault and Habermas as Dryzek's approach 'emphasizes contestation across discourses in the public sphere as a key component of democracy' (p. vi). Habermas (1996) emphasises the communicative power of dialogue and claims that 'discourse', in the sense of dialogue and debate, can transcend ideology. For Foucault (2007 [1977]), 'discourses' shape our understanding of the world and our sense of what is possible. As set out at the beginning of this section, this study is based more on Foucault's than Habermas's conceptions of discourse. However, there may be creative tensions between the different understandings of discourse which provide ways of approaching the data (see Chapter 3). Foucault's conception of discourse particularly helps with exploring the place of different knowledges and this is considered in relation to the empirical data in Chapter 7.

The use of deliberative democracy (albeit as communicative democracy and discursive democracy) as a sensitising concept has value in drawing attention to process rather than merely to outputs or fixed states. With Mouffe, I would suggest that politics implies ongoing contestation and that 'In a democratic polity, conflicts and confrontations, far from being a sign of imperfection, indicate that democracy is alive and inhabited by pluralism' (Mouffe, 1996, p. 255)[8].

This brief introduction to deliberative democracy has hinted that, rather than being merely a 'utopian irrelevance' (Benhabib, 1996, p. 84), this normative theory can provide a useful sensitising concept for exploring the concrete

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[8] In drawing on Mouffe in relation to deliberative democracy, I am reflecting the similarities in deliberation and agonism discussed by Yamamoto who says 'Erman argues that the adversarial relationship Mouffe insists on as an alternative democracy to deliberation necessarily requires deliberative presuppositions between adversaries' (Yamamoto, 2011, pp. 173-4).

practices of GBs. The normative theory is explored further in relation to the empirical research in each of the analysis chapters.

There have been hints throughout this section of the understanding of 'politics' underpinning this study. It is based on ongoing contestation, diffused power and a recognition that things could be otherwise. This understanding operates, with conceptions of citizenship and democracy, as a sensitising concept for the empirical research and provides a particular focus for Chapter 8.

None of the concepts outlined in this section are unproblematic so my approach involves both 'using and troubling a category simultaneously' (Lather, 2005, p. 2). However, as sensitising concepts, they can help to adumbrate ambivalences and ambiguities amongst theory, policy and practice.

Reflections

This chapter has introduced conceptions of school governing in England through the lenses of history, policy and research. All of these have indicated ambivalences and ambiguities around the role of school governors. These ambivalences and ambiguities might be seen to point to the impossibility of school governors. The final section of the chapter set out conceptions of citizenship and deliberative democracy which can be used to look differently at the empirical data and see the 'work' (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 38) which these ambivalences and ambiguities do in the concrete practices of GBs.

Through the historical lens, ambivalences and ambiguities can be seen throughout the long history of school governors. The chapter has focused on changes which have occurred since the 1980s. There has been increasing school autonomy with increasing formal powers for governors and a decreasing role for LAs. This has involved a centralising of control through the commodification of knowledge and the use of attainment data in a national performative system. The chapter began to question whether these developments have led to a greater focus by governors on technical means rather than on educational ends. The increasing emphasis on data apparently makes educational processes more visible to lay governors with implications for

their relationships with professionals. There have been moves to greater school choice and competition between schools with implications for understandings of the place of individual schools and their GBs within a broader community. Conceptions of community are also being changed by the Coalition Government's Big Society for which it sees GBs as a model. The relationships between democratic rationalities; managerial approaches; and professional educational knowledges have been in constant tension throughout the history of GBs and will be explored further in this study.

Governors have had a higher and more controversial profile in recent education policy making. A summary of recent policy documents focused on the shift in emphasis towards governors' skills rather than their stakeholder role. Three ambivalent and ambiguous policy discourses were identified: support and challenge; skills and representation; and setting or ensuring a vision.

The chapter has introduced existing research on GBs and democracy. These studies have tended to lead to typologies which highlight different, potentially contradictory, understandings of governors by governors, policy texts and educationalists. Emerging themes include: how deliberations are conducted; what GBs discuss; governors as overloaded; and their ambiguous role. These are explored further in relation to the empirical research in later chapters.

The chapter concluded with an introduction to deliberative democracy and citizenship, raising issues around conceptions of 'politics', the market, exclusion, knowledge, power and subjectivity. These are used as sensitising concepts in the analysis of the data for this study.

This chapter has provided some background and raised questions for the whole study. Most of the issues raised are revisited in the data analysis chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

This chapter first sets out the epistemological and ontological starting points for the methodology and methods. Based on this, it then discusses issues related to the ethics, data generation and data analysis aspects of the research.

Epistemological and ontological starting points

I do not believe that epistemological purity is possible. This study could not be described as fitting with solely post-structuralism, critical theory or any other neat theoretical package. As Ball suggests:

> [it is not that] any and all theories can or might be used, thrown together unsystematically and unreflexively, concepts can be "used and troubled"... Epistemologies and ontologies may clash and grate but the resultant friction can be purposeful and effective (Ball, 2006, p. 2)

Having previously studied politics and (analytic) philosophy of education, I found the ideas of Foucault challenged a lot of my ways of seeing the world. As Veyne says he dispels 'the four illusions that, as he saw it, were correspondence, the universal, the rational and the transcendental' (Veyne, 2010, p. 83). Foucault's main influences on this study have been to challenge the foundational basis of normative claims as discussed in the following sub-section; to provide a power/knowledge understanding of 'discourse' as discussed below; and to shift the focus of the research towards questions which ask 'How?' rather than 'What?' or 'Why?' These fundamental shifts in my thinking are not necessarily reflected in specific references to Foucault throughout the study but reading his work has influenced my way of seeing the world and the research.

Relationship of normativity to empirical research

Normativity cannot be wished away from research. What I am suggesting here is that the normative values underpinning the descriptions and analysis of the data are tentative and do not have solid foundational underpinnings. Democracy

and citizenship both have multiple normative ideas embedded within them. This study aims to explore the work which these normative discourses do in the practices of GBs. It does not aim to set out a normative ideal and then measure the empirical world against this. Instead, the focus is on *how* GBs operate, with a particular emphasis on power.

Research inescapably incorporates normative values. Dean (2007) problematizes the position of those such as Rose (1999) who claim that their approach to governmentality 'is neither descriptive nor normative but "analytical and diagnostic"' (Dean, 2007, p. 50). Dean challenges the possibility that normativity might be avoided, suggesting:

> Governmentality is thus an analytical framework to describe second-order statements about governing which comprise "rationalities of government" (for example, "good governance means proper accounting standards") and the techniques and technologies to which they are linked. It also enjoins us in a normative sense to problematize or call into question and to make strange the rationalities by which we make these first-order statements (p. 50)

In the same way, there is normativity embedded in my approach to research. I am, however, taking a cautious approach to normative political philosophy and agree with Foucault on its dangers. Evoking the same nostalgia as the statement 'I don't believe in God, but I miss him' (Barnes, 2009 [2008], p. 1), 'Foucault renders impossible the old leftist thinking, which aspires to true democracy, the goal/end of history' (Veyne, 2010, p. 76). Furthermore, Foucault draws attention to the dangers of utopian thinking:

> perhaps "there has never been a more dangerous ideology ... than this will to good" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.95), this is the first step in becoming moral, this realisation that, in Foucauldian terms, "... everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do" (Foucault, 1983, p.343) (Lather, 2007, p. 62)

This reflects, to some degree, Fraser's position that the absence of a utopia means 'we are flying blind' (Fraser, 1997, p. 2) but from an oppositional position

of progressive political critique. In this way, limited normativity does not have to imply a utopia:

> social criticism without philosophy *is* possible, if we mean by "philosophy" what Linda Nicholson and I meant, namely, ahistorical, transcendental discourse claiming to articulate the criteria of validity for all other discourses. Nothing in this view precludes that the situated feminist critic is a radical critic, nor that she engages in critical self-clarification. (Fraser, 1997, p. 212)

In summary, despite the lack of a stable foundational basis and the avoidance of utopias, I am not claiming that normativity is absent from the research. The political theorists whose ideas are set out in Chapter 2 make considerably stronger normative claims than me. I am drawing on their work as sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1969 cited in Charmaz, 2006, pp. 16-17), not as ideals against which to judge the empirical world.

Research aims and questions

The political aims of the research have been to make visible the operation of power in GBs and hence to 'sap power' (Foucault cited in Ball, 2006 [1993], p. 63). Throughout, I have been concerned that this has traces of an arrogant emancipatory aim (Lather, 2007; Tamboukou and Ball, 2003) and have attempted to emphasis the 'critique' element:

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest. ... Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. (Foucault (1988: 154) cited in Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 40)

This quote has a double application in this study. Here I am referring to my research as 'critique' whereas in Chapter 8, I use the idea of 'critique' to consider the criticality of governors' questions in meetings. The research aims to make visible the operation of power in GBs. This is not straightforward as

> power is real and effective in a remarkable variety of ways, some
> of them indirect and some hidden … indeed, it is at its most
> effective when least accessible to observation, to actors and
> observers alike, thereby presenting empirically minded social
> scientists with a neat paradox (Lukes, 2005, p. 64)

As stated in the previous sub-section, questions of *how* concrete
practices operate are central to this research. The research questions, as
set out in Chapter 1, were:

1. How do discourses of democracy and citizenship operate in
   school governing bodies?
2. Are particular perspectives and knowledges privileged in
   policy and in governing bodies? If so, how?
3. What subject positions are available to governors? How are
   governors produced as subjects?
4. What discourses of 'good' education are drawn on in the
   conduct of school governing bodies?

These questions were an important stimuli for the exploration of the data. They
operated alongside the ideas which I brought from my personal experience and
from literature, particularly theories of deliberative democracy and citizenship.
Where one side of this triangle of theory, experience and questions was less
fruitful, I approached the research from the others. In this way, I was not
strongly attached to solely pursuing the research questions where other issues
arose from the research.

An ethnographic perspective

This study draws on an ethnographic perspective in the data generation,
analysis and writing up. It also draws on post-structural perspectives. Even
Hammersley and Atkinson suggest 'it is almost always a mistake to try to make
a whole ethnography conform to just one theoretical framework' (2007, p. 159).
Their work has informed this study. I have found the work of Tamboukou and
Ball (2003) helpful in exploring the (creative) tensions between ethnography and
genealogy. Whilst avoiding a simple integration of ethnography and genealogy,
Tamboukou and Ball point to a number of similarities, suggesting that both:

> interrogate the validity and universal authority of scientific
> knowledge; adopt a context-bound critical perspective; transgress
> closed theoretical and methodological systems; point to the limits
> of dominant power/knowledge regimes; recover excluded subjects

and silenced voices; highlight the centrality of the body in sociohistorical analyses; restore the political dimension of research (pp. 3-4)

Tamboukou and Ball suggest different understandings of power according to each approach: '*power as sovereignty* in ethnography and *power as deployment* in genealogy' (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003, p. 8). In this study, inspired by Foucault's triangle of sovereign-discipline-government (Burchell *et al.*, 1991, p. 102), I am attempting to understand power in multiple ways and to follow Britzman's imperative that:

> Ethnographic narratives should trace how power circulates and surprises, theorize how subjects spring from the discourses that incite them and question the belief in representation even as one must practice representation as a way to intervene critically in the constitutive constraints of discourses (Britzman, 2000, p. 38)

Much ethnography is about working with the 'marginalised' and has emancipatory aims which imply some form of freedom outside of the (sovereign) power of the oppressor. Firstly, as mentioned above, I am not suggesting that there is a place outside of power (Foucault, 1998 [1976], pp. 92-102). Secondly, school governors as a whole are arguably not an especially marginalised group (e.g. Dean *et al.*, 2007, p. 21) although there are significant issues of marginalisation in relation to who becomes a governor, who speaks and which topics are open to discussion. Following this epistemological stance and empirical context, I have attempted to follow Brown who advocates:

> ethnographies that take the very processes of knowledge production as their object ... In these ethnographies, the ethnographers, rather than looking for the "meaning" behind a social formation or a cultural practice, attend to the ways in which meanings are created and assigned in particular sites, at particular moments, and in dialogue with those reifications produced in authoritative discourses and dominant disciplinary practices (2003, p. 74)

An ethnographic perspective is often associated with approaches to grounded theory (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 158) and I have drawn on elements of grounded theory. I have found the work of Clarke valuable in seeing how this

can be combined with post-structuralism. She describes grounded theory as in many ways 'always already postmodern' (Clarke, 2005, p. xxvii). The similarities she identifies include Mead's ideas of perspective; 'processes and contingencies'; and 'difference as range of variation' (pp. 5-10). She also discusses the differences including the lack of reflexivity and the oversimplifications of some grounded theory (pp. 11-18). She largely draws on Strauss (1987) and on Foucault but makes clear 'I am explicitly *not* arguing here for some dialectical synthesis of Strauss and Foucault. I *am* arguing that using the analytics of both considerably strengthens situational analysis' (p. 59). The key link she makes is that 'If action is at the heart of Strauss's project, and power is at the heart of Foucault's, they meet in related conceptualisations of practices as fundamental processes of action and change' (p. 59). Exploring governors' *practices* is central to this study.

The idea of sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1969 cited in Charmaz, 2006, pp. 16-17) stems from grounded theory. 'These concepts give you initial ideas to pursue and sensitise you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 16). They provide 'points of departure for developing, rather than limiting, our ideas' (p. 17). In the case of this study, the concepts of citizenship and deliberative democracy outlined in Chapter 2 provide sensitising concepts. However, the analysis has moved around and beyond them as well as through them.

For some researchers using ethnographic research techniques, 'These methods of truth production can be seen to operate ritualistically to ensure validity and reliability of the claims being made' (Popoviciu, Haywood and Ghaill, 2006, p. 406). In this sense I am making more limited claims than some ethnographers as seen later under 'Criteria for assessment'.

Reflections on reflexivity
The idea of reflexivity is problematic and I am attempting to embrace it whilst recognising its limitations. Ball suggests,

> It is a requirement for methodological rigour that every ethnography be accompanied by a *research biography*, that is a reflexive account of the conduct of the research which, by drawing on fieldnotes and reflections, recounts the processes, problems, choices, and errors which describe the fieldwork upon which the substantive account is based (1990c, p. 170)

There is an autobiographical sub-section in Chapter 1 and I have attempted to integrate a reflexive account within this chapter and the analysis chapters, based on memos from interviews and observations and on my diary of reflections.

Reflexivity is sometimes drawn on as a way of reducing bias and making the research more 'true'. I am not suggesting that there is an objective truth 'out there' and if only I could be reflexive enough, this could be uncovered. The fact that I am conscious of some of my experiences and views does not necessarily make them less significant for the research. Furthermore, there are many other aspects of my experiences and views of which I am not conscious and which are significant in the research generation and analysis.

There is a danger that conceptions of reflexivity can essentialise the researcher. I am middle-class, white woman studying for a PhD. As a statement, this can imply a fixed, knowable and knowing subject and I do not see identity in these terms but rather as more relationally. Following a discussion of Judith Butler and agency, Youdell says:

> these discussions render indeterminable the question of whether I should offer an account of myself as the researcher. The risk of slipping into an inadvertent essentialism tempts me to avoid such an account, however, the risk of assuming a disembodied authorial authority by not doing so seems much greater (2006, p. 65)

I share Youdell's concern and her conclusion. Furthermore, it is important to recognise the privilege I have (as a middle-class, white woman studying for a PhD) but my responsibility cannot be evaded through this acknowledgement. As Skeggs points out:

> Yet to evade acknowledgement of social position, and responsibility for the privileges (or not) that come with it, is what Bourdieu (1986) regards as a hopeless illusion; it is to attempt to escape the gravitational pull of the social field. No doubt this is why so many concepts – such as mobility, reflexivity and individualisation – are generated by academics to enable this recognition and evade responsibility for their privilege and position (2004, p. 116)

There is an interesting paradox in writing about subjectivity and myself as I am constituted through the writing of it. This process reflects and interacts with the constitution, by the research, of the research participants. In summary, reflexivity is problematic but is important nonetheless. I have attempted to be reflexive throughout the whole research process and to write reflexively.

Discourse

There are three understandings of discourse being drawn on in this study. Firstly, a power/knowledge approach is central. Secondly, critical discourse analysis is being loosely drawn on as a tool for analysis. Thirdly, deliberative democracy, which is being used as a sensitising concept, draws on conceptions of discourse as dialogue. These three understandings could sit uneasily together but I have attempted to deploy them in a creative tension with the first taking priority. This sub-section provides a brief summary of what they encompass.

Firstly, with a power/knowledge understanding of discourse, I am referring to 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... Discourses[9] are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention' (Foucault, 1974: 49 cited in Ball, 1990a, p. 2). In this way,

> Every discourse constitutes, even as it mobilizes and shuts out, imaginary communities, identity investments and discursive practices. Discourses authorize what can and cannot be said; they produce relations of power and communities of consent and dissent, and thus discursive boundaries are always being redrawn

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[9] Veyne suggests that with 'discourse', Foucault was 'settling on an ill-chosen word' (2010, p. 6) and, in fact, Foucault later moved on from using 'discourse'.

around what constitutes the desirable and the undesirable and around what it is that makes possible particular structures of intelligibility and unintelligibility (Britzman, 2000, p.3 in MacLure, 2003, p. 175)

Research which draws on a power/knowledge understanding of discourse can problematize subject positions, social relationships and practices which appear natural.

Secondly, my approach to texts has been influenced by Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis as he sets out clear procedures which are very valuable for highlighting aspects of what texts do. I am using Fairclough's approach 'with caution' (Pennycook, 1994, p. 133) as his epistemological starting point is different. Unlike Fairclough, I am not suggesting there is 'a "real" world that is obfuscated by ideology' (Pennycook, 1994, p. 125).

Thirdly, deliberative democracy adds a further complication to the use of the term discourse. As discussed in Chapter 2, I am drawing on Young's 'communicative democracy' (2002 [2000]) and Dryzek's 'discursive democracy' (2002) as sensitising concepts. Both these theorists draw to some degree on a Habermasian understanding of discourse as dialogue. Young avoids mention of Foucault or post-structuralism (although she does draw on Lyotard's 'differend' in discussing how particular idioms of speaking can exclude particular people (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 37)). She adopts a more Habermasian use of 'discourse', using it to refer to ways of speaking and making 'public discourse' central to her analysis. However, she is also critical of theories that aim 'to purify rational argument from rhetoric' such as 'Habermas's theory of communicative action' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 65). Dryzek draws attention explicitly to the complex interrelationships in his use of both Foucault's and Habermas's conceptions of 'discourse'. Dryzek's approach,

> emphasizes contestation across discourses in the public sphere
> as a key component of democracy, so discourses are not prisons.
> On the other hand discourses in the Foucauldian sense do exist
> so discourse in the Habermasian sense cannot wish them away
> (p. vi).

This study is not premised on the idea of discourses as 'prisons' but I would suggest

> the operation of discursive practices is to make it virtually impossible to think outside of them; to be outside of them is, by definition, to be mad, to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason (Ball, 2013b, pp. 20-21).

There is always the possibility, in any setting, for other discourses apart from that which is dominant (although, in the case at hand, alternatives are scarce).

The main uses of the actual word, 'discourse' in this study refer to the first, power/knowledge understanding of 'discourse' in which discourses constitute subjects and practices. This understanding of discourse is a key ontological underpinning and analytical tool throughout the thesis. For example, Chapter 2 emphasises the effectiveness discourse which constitutes current education policy as common sense. In Chapter 6, I have distinguished between different discourses which constitute governors: a skills discourse; a citizenship discourse and a stakeholder discourse. I have written about discourses displacing each other, for example, Chapter 7 describes how the slipperiness of lay and accountability discourses allows for the displacement of democratic discourses by managerial discourses. Chapter 7 draws on discourse in a power-knowledge sense and considers how expert knowledge is more than a perspective as it constitutes objects in the world. Chapter 8 considers the constitution of education and GBs as apolitical; a 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 2013a); and possibilities of governors challenging particular discourses of 'good' education.

Despite its problematic aspects and despite my allowing a little fluidity between usages, I have attempted to deploy conceptions of discourse productively throughout the analysis.

Criteria for assessment

In light of the epistemological and ontological starting points described above and of the research approach used, this study can be appraised against criteria

of trustworthiness and plausibility. In stating this, I hope to avoid the pressure described by Mason:

> Qualitative researchers often feel pressurized into making highly categorical claims and arguments, for a range of reasons, but this approach is not always the most appropriate. I am not suggesting that we should be vague or slipshod in our arguments, on the contrary, but sometimes we may require them to convey a great deal of complexity, messiness, contradiction, ambiguity and so on, because we see these as intrinsic to the phenomena or process which we are arguing about. In that case, being overly categorical can constitute a sanitization of the argument, and risks missing the point entirely (2002, pp. 177-8)

There are additional issues arising from the specific research topic. There is a lot of 'effectiveness' research in the area of GBs. This study has emerged from different epistemological and ontological starting points and has attempted to address different questions. I am concerned that statements I make about, for example, the lack of clarity around the role of school governors will be taken as indications that I do not 'properly' understand the role rather than as explorations of the ambiguities and complexities embedded within it from practical and normative as well as legal perspectives.

Ethics

BERA's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* were followed throughout (BERA, 2004; BERA, 2011). This research project had Institute of Education ethics approval (see Appendix B). This section attempts to show how I have met these formal requirements but also to explore some of the ethical issues which have arisen beyond the basic guarantees set out in the ethical guidelines.

Voluntary informed consent based on accessible written information about the research was obtained and the right to withdraw made explicit. Separate consent forms were developed for headteachers, chairs of governors and for interviewees (see Appendix C). Consent was obtained from the headteachers to access the schools. Consent was obtained from the chairs to observe GB meetings and their form required them to obtain the consent of all members of the GB and sign on their behalf. For the interviews, consent was obtained from

each individual both for the interview itself and for the interview to be audio-recorded.

Consent was informed to the extent that people were told how the data would be used. However, I was concerned that people did not understand the research as fully as I had hoped. I felt the need to frame the ethics form in modernist terms in order to be understood. Some people asked questions about the research paradigm such as whether my sample size was big enough to generalise from which indicated a lack of understanding of qualitative research methods. My concern that participants would not understand the research was similar to that expressed by Warren and Vincent (2001). Like them, I concluded that perhaps the research was 'just not particularly important' to the research participants (p. 42).

I attempted to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for both the school and individuals. Data was anonymised with pseudonyms given immediately on generation. The exact dates of meetings have not been used. I attempted to ensure confidentiality for the borough, schools and research participants. I explained the limits of this to the participants. The clerks insisted on putting my name on the minutes of meetings which I attended which means that anyone looking at them could potentially make the link to this research. Ensuring the anonymity of the borough has meant that I've been unable to draw on literature about it or, more problematically, be specific about the demographics of the locality.

I made it clear at the beginning of each interview that participants did not have to answer any questions which they did not want to. During interviews, I took care to recognise sensitive issues and avoid personally intrusive and judgemental questions. I was concerned that sometimes people felt bad that they did not know things that they felt they ought to know. This issue is explored further under 'Interviews' below.

I did not conduct participant checking as this would be premised on there being one truth and an assumption 'that research subjects are in a position to judge

and confirm (or otherwise) the validity of the interpretations the researcher has made' (Mason, 2002, p. 193). Furthermore, I was conscious of the ethical implications of asking for participants' views then not incorporating them for a range of reasons.

I agreed to share my findings with the schools upon completion. When I did a pilot study at Thames School, I was able to provide feedback to the GB the term after carrying out observations. They said that this was useful; the headteacher emailed me 'I thought the feedback was very interesting and helpful'; and, when I met one of the governors a year later, he referred to how they had used this feedback positively. At the four schools for the PhD research, I felt uncomfortable about not being able to provide useful feedback more immediately. I wanted to be able to give them something in return for their generosity in addition to the tins of biscuits which I took to the last meetings I attended in each school. Feedback to schools requires careful consideration as the aspects in which research participants are interested are often different to those which have informed the research. Unexpected aspects can be received as criticism as Ball found in his feedback to Beachside (1984, p. 84). Ball's feedback was combined with opportunities for 'respondent validation' so hopefully the feedback to the four GBs will be a more positive experience.

I have been concerned throughout to avoid portraying the GBs in a negative light. They were all recommended to me as reasonably well functioning GBs and the focus of the research was on how broader processes operate rather than the specifics of particular GBs. Where I have focused on what might be perceived as negative aspects of the GBs, this should be understood in the following spirit:

> The point of concentrating on instances where things do not work well is that it helps one discover how things work when they do work well, and these are discoveries that are more difficult to make in situations of harmony because people are more likely to take them for granted and less likely to discuss them (Becker *et al.*, 1977 [1961], p. 21)

There were some cases where, for ethical reasons, I felt I should not include certain things which people said. Where I was uncertain about this, I discussed it with my supervisors.

Finally, I believe that I have an ethical obligation to try to make a valuable contribution to theory, policy and practice. I hope that work drawing on this study can do this to some small degree.

Data generation

The approaches to data generation described in this section follow from the starting points outlined above. Qualitative methodologies 'celebrate richness, depth, nuance, context, multi-dimensionality and complexity' (Mason, 2002, p. 1). I have used a range of methods, not in order to triangulate in the sense of finding 'the truth' (like the exact position of a ship), but in order to explore this richness and complexity. As discussed above, I see myself as 'active and reflexive in the process of data generation, and seek to examine this rather than aspiring to be a neutral data collector.' (Mason, 2002, p. 66). Data generation was carried out in parallel with the literature review and data analysis and they informed each other (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 159). This section includes reflections on specific interactions with the research participants who are introduced in Chapter 4.

Sample

I am a community governor in a community primary school but have not drawn directly on that experience as I wanted to focus my attention there on being a governor. However, my thinking is inevitably informed by my experience in that school (as described in the 'Autobiography' in Chapter 1). Furthermore, the fact that I am a governor probably made access to other GBs easier and made me more intelligible as a subject to other governors (particularly those who, like me, are not parent or staff governors).

The main subjects of study for this research are the GBs of two primary and two secondary maintained schools. A pilot study was conducted in another community primary school before the main study.

I have chosen not to study faith schools as I am concerned that an emphasis on the role of religious groups will distract from the research questions. There are an increasing number of types of school, such as trust schools and academies, with different types of GB. For this study, the focus is on maintained schools. It was initially intended that the research be solely in community schools but, due to some difficulties of access, research was conducted in one non-religious voluntary-controlled school and three community schools. At the beginning of the research period, maintained schools formed the majority of schools nationally. It was important to the research that the structures of the GBs studied were similar to each other. As is outlined in Chapter 9, findings from these maintained schools have important implications for other types of schools.

The study schools are all within one LA as the focus is on GBs rather than on differences between LAs. The schools have been selected largely on access grounds. I asked people who I knew to introduce me to community schools in this LA and, ultimately, I conducted research in all that agreed. For Thames (the pilot study school), Mersey and Avon, my initial contact was through someone who knew the headteacher professionally. For Severn and Tyne, my introduction was through their clerk who I had met at Thames school. Therefore, my initial contact in them was with both the headteacher and the chair of governors. I recognised that headteachers who were comfortable to have their GB meetings observed were likely to feel they had relatively positive relationships with their governors. However, I am not concerned that this has been an obstacle to exploring the research questions.

Within each school, the headteacher and chair of governors were interviewed. At least four further governors were selected for interview, one of each category of governor (ie: staff, parent, LA and community). I attempted to ensure variation in the ethnicity and gender of those interviewed. Decisions about the selection were partially determined by the role governors took in the first observed full GB meeting. For example, in each school, I tried to choose one who was vocal and one who was less so. In some cases, the choice of interviewee was informed by a specific discussion, for example, a group of

Muslim fathers led a campaign against the sex and relationships education (SRE) taking place in some schools and this was discussed at length in a meeting where only one Muslim, a mother, was present so I was interested in her views on the framing of that particular discussion.

Chapter 4 gives further information about the LA, the schools and includes a list of the governors who were interviewed in each school.

When I planned the research, I intended to interview a number of key informants early in the research period. These were to include local politicians, local and national government officials and individuals from national governor bodies and relevant charities. However, I found that I gained adequate background information from written documents, attending local and national governor conferences and from talking to a range of people informally. I therefore decided these interviews were not necessary.

A range of policy texts related to school governing were examined. Those selected were particularly focused on governance or had significant implications for governance. Some were selected to show the policies shaping the practice of the research participants and others to show policy changes throughout the research period and beyond (see 'Key policy texts' in Chapter 2).

Timeline

The research in each school was focused on one term as set out below:

MRes Year   Pilot at Thames Primary School

Year 1, Term 3   Mersey Secondary School - observations and interviews

Year 2, Term 1   Avon Primary School - observations and interviews

Year 2, Term 2   Avon Primary School - one interview

                      Severn Primary School - one observation

                      Tyne Secondary School - one observation

Year 2, Term 3   Severn Primary School - observations and interviews

                      Tyne Secondary School - observations and interviews

Having a break from observations for the first half of Year 2, Term 2 gave me an opportunity to focus more on data analysis which then fed into the subsequent observations and interviews.

I observed GBs in each term of the year but spent more time in schools in the summer terms. The interviews were over a longer period and interviewees talked about their overall experiences of being a governor. In analysing the data, I kept in mind that I had spent more time observing summer meetings but this did not appear to be a significant issue.

The timing of the research meant that considerable policy changes were taking place during the research period (see 'Policy texts' below).

Agenda and minutes

Before attending GB meetings in each school, I reviewed the agendas and minutes for the previous year to develop an understanding of the specifics of each GB. This provided a useful basis for the observations and interviews. Furthermore, I was able to revisit agendas and minutes to explore themes which arose from the observations and interviews.

During the pilot study, I conducted discourse analysis on the agendas and minutes of Thames School (largely drawing on the work of Fairclough (2003)). The style of those agendas and minutes raised issues which also appear in the style of the agendas and minutes of the four study schools.

Observations

For each school, (non-)participant observation was conducted in up to three full GB meetings and up to three other micro settings, including committee meetings, selected based on whether relevant dynamics and discussions were likely. A list of meeting observations is provided in Appendix D. The focus was on formal spaces. Nonetheless, I was aware, largely through the interviews, of the existence of informal interactions which would have been difficult to access directly.

Taking notes is not an unusual behaviour in a meeting context. I sat to one side, did not audio record the meetings and attempted to minimise other disruption caused by my presence whilst recognising that my presence was inevitably part of the dynamic of the meeting. I observed both the form the discussion took and any privileging of particular voices and discourses. In the first meeting in each school, the observation was fairly open, exploring who talked and on what subject, what authority claims speakers made and the modality (or degree of commitment (Fairclough, 2003, p. 164)) of their statements. I wrote a brief list to focus my initial observations. This varied slightly depending on what was recorded in previous minutes but included prompts such as:

- Who talks? On what subject?
- Knowledge claims/ Authority claims, for example, 'As a …'
- Drawing on representativeness
- Style, for example, assertiveness
- Are there back and forth deliberations?
- How items end, who leads, who challenges
- Use of minutes
- Time spent on items
- Are different categories of governor seen differently?
- Alternative discourses of education
- Aims of education/kind of school 'we want'
- References to and meanings attributed to 'politics'
- Consensus and/or difference valued
- Types of knowledge drawn on

The observations of subsequent meetings in each school were more focused on themes that emerged from the first meeting. I wrote almost continuously during meetings. However, I mostly wrote in my own words. I used quotation marks where I recorded something verbatim. These quotation marks can be seen in the analysis chapters where I have quoted from my fieldnotes.

As I am a governor myself, the format of meetings and vocabulary used was not strange. I found that writing notes made me see things that I would not have noticed in my own GB. However, I am very conscious that '"A way of seeing is a way of not seeing", [as] feminist author Ann Oakley sagely advises (1974, p27)' (Crotty, 1998, p. 55) and that 'For everything that is noticed a multitude of other things go unseen, for everything that is written down a multitude of other things are forgotten. Great parts of the real world experienced by the participant observer, probably the greater part, is *selected out* (see Cottle, 1982)' (Ball, 1984, p. 78). This applies to all aspects of the research, not just to the observations. Recognising the inevitability of selectivity did not make it less important.

I attempted to observe the materiality of the setting as well as the interactions between people. They are closely related, for example, there were different types of food in the different meetings and this frequently formed a focus of discussion as people entered the room.

I felt more comfortable in the primary than the secondary schools. This was partly as I have more experience of primary schools but also because the GBs were smaller, meetings were less formal and people, including the headteacher, seemed more accessible.

'Research roles seldom are fixed. As an interpersonal process, research is, indeed normally must be, socially dynamic' (Ball, 1990c, p. 164). I found that in the earlier meetings which I observed, I felt comfortable to talk to individuals before and after meetings but felt that I should avoid getting involved in the informal group discussions before formal meetings began. After a while I realised that this might be making other people uncomfortable as it made them feel more self-conscious about the informal chats which they were having. Therefore, in later meetings, I joined in a bit more but as a quieter member of the group.

Twice, after meetings, a secondary headteacher, Heidi[10], asked me in a teasing tone, 'Did you enjoy that?' After a curriculum committee, 'Connor [the committee chair] said "I hope you got something out of coming to the curriculum committee and seeing democracy in action" – I've no idea if this was ironic' (my notes, Tyne Full GB, July 2012). Both these minor incidents reflect the research participants' slight bemusement at my role as a researcher.

Interviews

In each school, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the headteacher, chair of governors and about four other governors. Those interviewed in each school are starred (*) in the lists of governors in Chapter 4.

Interviews were arranged at times and in places to suit the interviewees. Interviews took about one hour and were audio-recorded to capture their richness. They were largely about the theory and practice of the participant's role on the GB and their perceptions of the dynamics and power relations within the body.

In each case, the headteacher and chair agreed to be interviewed when they agreed I could do research in their school. Prior to the first observation, other governors had been informed about the research and had agreed to observations but not to interviews. To invite additional governors to be interviewed, I passed around a sheet after introducing myself at the first meeting I observed. It read as follows:

> School Governing Body Research: Interviews
> I would like to interview a number of school governors. If you might be interested, please write your name and email address below and I will email you with further information. Giving your name now does not commit you to the interview. Thank you very much.

In some cases, since not everyone was present at the first meeting, I asked governors at subsequent meetings as well. Some chose not to sign the sheet

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[10] See Chapter 4 for information on Riverford LA, the four schools and the research participants named.

which slightly restricted my choice but, in each school, I was able to interview a range of governors.

Demographic details of participants were recorded through a form (Appendix E) which they were invited to complete after the interview so that the classifications within it did not impact on their presentation of themselves in the interview.

The interviews were based around a skeleton interview schedule (Appendix F). In introducing the interview, I explained that the questions would be fairly open and that the interviewee should do most of the talking. I used a range of types of questions and my observations informed some of them. I also altered my questions based on emerging themes in a limited form of 'theoretical sampling' (Charmaz, 2006). For example, a number of interviewees at Avon told me that everything discussed at the meetings was confidential so I asked more about this when I went to Severn and Tyne. My interview schedule consisted of main questions with follow up questions which I drew on depending on how I felt the interview was progressing.

Using semi-structured interviews potentially reduced the 'impositional strategies [that] reinforce the power of the interviewer over that of the interviewee" (Barbour and Schostak, 2005, p. 42). However, there is also a danger that making the interview feel more like a conversation can mask the inevitable power of the interviewer. I started the interviews with questions about the participant's work and their story of becoming a governor. This was intended to make the interaction feel more comfortable. However, at the same time, I was conscious of the dangers of the interview dynamic including that,

> from the perspective that a research interviews exists within a power-knowledge matrix, the act of telling secrets is dangerous when one considers the discursively created sense that telling secrets is essential to telling the truth (Foucault, 1978). From this perspective, the discourse of the interview creates a sense that a *good* interview is one in which something previously hidden is revealed. When researchers and participants fail to understand this, when they operate as though the interview is a safe place for the participant to *choose* to tell secrets (or not to), then the effect

> of the interview may become a bad one. (Ozga and Gewirtz, 1994,
> p. 395)

I was surprised at the openness of many of the interviewees. If I had shared parts of the recordings there could have been negative consequences for them. There are a number of things which I have not written about for ethical reasons. Sometimes this frustrated my analysis. Similarly, one interviewee wanted to tell me a confidential story which would illustrate a point we were discussing. I suggested she might try to think of another example instead, however, the story was revealed and although it would illustrate the point well I was unable to use it.

Views presented in interviews do not represent some fixed attitudes which are inside the interviewee awaiting extraction by the interviewer. Instead statements are constructed in the particular inter-subjective context of the interview. The interviewer/interviewee power balance cannot be foretold or read off from demographic categories. However, older, middle-class, white men with English as their first language are likely to perceive their power relationship to me differently to young, working-class women who are not secure in their English language skills. This has significant implications for the data generated.

I found I used different strategies when I disagreed or agreed with an interviewee's stated views. When I disagreed, I was able to focus on the interviewee's perspective, not reveal my disagreement and respond with 'OK, please say more about that'. When I agreed with interviewees, I found it much more difficult to avoid letting them know this as agreement provides a human connection. There was also an instrumentality to these responses because, with many interviewees, my approval of their views potentially led to them enlarging on them.

It appears that their role as a governor is not something that people get to discuss or even reflect on very often. This echoes the findings of Deem *et al:*

> Observations of governors at meetings revealed that many
> governors were quite incurious and unreflexive about their roles.
> The composition and functioning of the governing body were

> accepted by many as natural and were therefore unquestioned.
> Headteachers were the most reflexive (1995, p. 70)

Some interviewees, for example, Christopher, Leonard and Larry, in particular, said that they had enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their role and think about it more deeply. Larry changed his mind about two issues[11] during the course of the interview suggesting that he had not previously considered them much.

The headteachers largely presented themselves in a positive light. As Gewirtz *et al* comment, 'In our experience, most headteachers … are highly skilled spinners. Interviews with headteachers are frequently characterized by their attempts to present themselves and their schools in glowing terms' (2004, p. 333). Hannah, the headteacher at Avon, was less inclined to do this and tended to ask my advice on how to improve the GB.

Audio recording can affect how interviewees respond, not least as it reminds them that what they say will, albeit in an anonymised form, eventually enter the public domain. I referred to the recorder in the interview invitation emails; we discussed it at the beginning of the interview; participants signed a separate section of the consent form to agree its use; and I placed it very visibly between us during the interview.

I tried to avoid questions that might be seen as 'testing' interviewees but some interviewees heard my question 'What do you think the role of the whole governing body is?' in this way. As mentioned in the ethics section, I was concerned to ensure that the interviewees felt that their responses were valued and that they did not feel their knowledge was inadequate. A teacher at Tyne said before the interview, 'I'm just a little bit worried that I won't be able to answer' (Tara). She also felt she should have known more about certain issues despite my reassurances that it was not meant to be a test. A parent governor at Avon, Piyal, did not have sufficient understanding of the legal role of GBs to be able to answer two questions which I asked her so I avoided future questions

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[11] Chapter 6 describes how he started questioning his legitimacy as an LA governor and suggesting that he should be elected by parents. He also changed his mind about whether there should have been a vote about the SRE policy described in Chapter 5.

that might construct her as someone who did not know things which she somehow ought to know. Not pursuing certain topics with people who did not fully understand the role of GBs or who were not so confident speaking English means there is considerable variation in the data. Furthermore, I said in advance that interviews would be about one hour and most were close to that but the recordings varied in length from 42 minutes (Patty, Severn) to 85 minutes (Lucy, Tyne). These issues mean that I have drawn differently on the data from some interviews than others.

I was conscious that people drew on a range of different experiences, such as watching TV interviews, to make sense of the experience of being interviewed. For example, Priya, at Mersey, seemed to feel honoured to be interviewed. She said, 'today I am here [for the interview] because I'm a parent governor, isn't it? So it is very rewarding [to be a governor]'.

My presentation of myself in interviews was not stable. For example, I shifted between presenting myself as naïve and as knowledgeable. Sometimes this meant that I felt I had been caught in the wrong role. At one point, a headteacher, Heidi, responded to my question about governors raising issues around social justice with 'God no, no, no. Come on!' which suggested that I had presented myself as overly naïve.

Transcription

Without suggesting that there is any such thing as pure data, I recognise that the process of transcription involves changes to the data generated and a privileging of verbal aspects. For the observation notes, I transcribed everything from the notes which I had written by hand. For the interviews, I transcribed everything from the audio files and added comments from my notes on body language and my initial impressions of the interview. I used voice recognition software to transcribe many of the interviews. This involved listening to a slowed down audio file and speaking simultaneously. I did not use phonetic spellings or insert symbols for pauses in words as I wanted to be able to search the transcripts electronically. However, when I judged pauses and other sounds to be significant, I referred to them in square brackets. I changed the names in

the transcripts to enhance anonymity and so I could share my developing analysis with others easily.

Data analysis

This section builds on the section on 'Epistemological and ontological starting points'. It first discusses some issues around data analysis. It then sets out the actual process which I followed. This is followed by a sub-section on the presentation of the analysis.

Policy texts

Chapter 2 outlined the main policy texts which I analysed and drew upon. These policies are complex and ambiguous. The emphasis in this study is on policy that particularly relates to GBs but there is a recognition of the changing context of schools policy and wider public policy. By policy, I am referring to the broad understanding set out by Ball:

> For the most part, a common-sense concept of public policy as something constructed within government (in the broadest sense) – what we might call big-P policy (Evans *et al*, 2008) – that is "formal" and usually legislated policy is being used here. But we need to remain aware that policies are made and remade in many sites, and that there are many little-p policies that are formed and enacted within localities and institutions. Furthermore, policy that is "announced" through legislation is also reproduced and reworked over time through reports, speeches, "moves", "agendas" and so on. Therefore, policy … is not taken to be an object, a product or an outcome, but rather a process, something on-going, interactional and unstable (2013a, p. 8)

Ball helpfully proposes analysing policy both as text and as discourse (Ball, 2006 [1993]). Governors are not always directly aware of policy texts but are still constituted by policy discourse in complex ways. Policy texts were not explored in isolation but considered together with observations and interviews which explored aspects of governors' understanding of policy and of their role. Headteachers played a significant role in mediating governors' understanding of policy. For some, training courses and LA meetings were also significant. Ofsted inspections and rumours of other schools' inspections were important for governors' understanding of their role. School governors have recently had a

higher profile in the media with numerous positive and negative DfE and Ofsted press releases about them. This has implications for how they understand their roles. 'Indeed, the production of particular policies by the educational policy field and their distribution in schools is increasingly synchronous with media releases that ventriloquise for the official policy document' (Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor, 2005, p. 769).

I kept a policy changes diary throughout the research period noting policy texts and media stories. This may have been one of the busiest periods of policy change in the history of GBs which presented challenges for the analysis. In responding to this, I have focussed on the policies in place at the time of the research but have also explored some policy trends.

Approach to analysis

My approach to analysis was broadly inductive but guided by my research questions, the literature and my experience based expectations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 165). I used 'grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures' (Charmaz, 2003, p. 251) and developed my own procedures which are set out in the next sub-section.

A key principle which I took from grounded theory was to recognise the interrelationship between data generation and analysis and to begin the analysis immediately. I transcribed and analysed individual observations and interviews as soon as possible after they took place. I did further analysis across data when more had been generated. The analysis was very thorough and involved coding all of each observation and interview.

My approach aimed to ensure rigour without approaching coding as an 'objective science' or losing creativity and openness. Creativity came from approaching the data in a variety of ways and accepting that emerging ideas were provisional and could be rejected. I found that attempts to finalise my analysis too soon stemmed my creativity.

I did not want to falsely suggest that the coding was scientific through using a complex multi-stage coding process. As Charmaz says of axial coding, 'At worst, it casts a technological overlay on the data - and perhaps on your final analysis' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). I have not used different types or levels of codes although my notes might be seen to resemble 'initial codes' and my codes, 'focused codes' (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, I found that the use of technology, in the form of Nvivo, could also make the process appear more scientific, formulaic and tidy than seemed appropriate. I had one false start with coding in that I attempted to apply my provisional codes to some of the transcripts from the first school, Mersey, using Nvivo. This process felt mechanical and uncreative but also premature. I decided to focus on writing notes and wait until I had almost completed the data generation before adding (focused) codes to each file. When I did come to apply codes to the data, I minimised my use of Nvivo preferring to engage with the text directly.

Making comparisons within and between data, emerging themes and literature was central to my analysis. Comparisons are a key element of grounded theory (e.g. Charmaz, 2006, p. 84). However, in making comparisons, I have attempted to recognise variation rather than seeing it as a way of finding the 'normal'; catching out people's contradictions; or pathologising the 'abnormal'.

Procedures for analysis

The analysis process is inevitably messy but below is an account of the procedures which I largely followed in managing and analysing my data:

1. For both interviews and observations, I wrote memos immediately after the event. For each observation, I typed up everything which I had handwritten during meetings adding further details. For each interview, I transcribed everything in one long document. Where thoughts occurred to me during the transcription, I noted these in a separate memo.
2. For each interview or observation, I combined the memo(s) and transcript into one file. I turned the transcript part of the text into a table with the transcript on the left followed by columns for notes and for codes. The rows of the memos were indicated by letters and the rows of the transcript by

numbers to ensure there was a clear distinction between the different types of data.

3. I began writing initial notes in the second column soon after transcription. These notes were process oriented and contained comparisons within and between data. They might be described as a combination of initial codes and memos (Charmaz, 2006). I revisited these files repeatedly adding additional notes.

4. I began developing a list of codes drawing on: the initial notes I was writing; the codes I had used in my MRes pilot study; my research questions and sensitising concepts emerging from political theory. These codes might be described as 'focused codes' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). As they were still provisional, I initially applied them in the notes column but not the codes column.

5. When I had completed the empirical research in two schools, Mersey and Avon, I combined the notes from all of the data and created a document of emerging themes. These themes fed into the ongoing development of my list of codes. I had almost a term's break from empirical research at this point so was able to explore the emerging themes thoroughly.

6. I conducted research at Tyne and Severn, adding notes as I went.

7. I continued to develop the list of codes and the final list of 69 appears in Appendix G. Some of these codes were conceptual, such as 'Construct consensus'. Others were not, for example, I used the code 'Ofsted' to study how and when Ofsted was referred to.

8. I wrote these codes in the third column of each data file (where the code already appeared in the text, I put that in bold rather than repeating the word, for example, 'committee'). Samples of a coded interview and observation can be seen in Appendix H and I respectively. I coded rows according to both presences and (unexpected) absences, in other words, if something seemed *in*formal, I coded it as 'Formality'.

9. I imported all the data files into one project in Nvivo. Each file had been renamed to ensure similar files would appear together in the alphabetical ordering, for example, the first file, '**AI** Hannah 18 Nov 11.docx', was from **A**von and was an **I**nterview.

10. I then used the Query-Text Search function to generate nodes based on each of the codes.

11. I exported the nodes to Word and printed them so I could look at them closely. An example of one of these Word documents is in Appendix J.

12. On some occasions, a word which I had not originally used as a code appeared significant so I used the Query-Text Search function to generate a node for this, for example, 'rubberstamp'.

13. Each analysis chapter explores a key aspect of the themes emerging from the data but they could be organised otherwise. I re-approached the data, chapter by chapter, having only a very loose sense of what each chapter would comprise. There are a lot of codes and some are relevant in different ways to more than one chapter.

14. I approached the printed node documents open to a range of ideas. Comparison between schools, meetings and interviewees was a key element of my exploration. I produced mind maps, rough notes and freewriting. I created a new 'Initial notes' document for each chapter which I used to explore the nodes. These documents only consisted of memos and quotes from the data (I developed separate chapter plan documents in parallel.) Having the initial notes documents as separate documents to the draft chapters helped me to be more open in exploring ideas that may not appear in the actual chapter. I focused on one chapter at a time but also moved between them as they are closely interrelated. In some cases, the codes which I used became sub-headings in the final chapters. Writing has helped me to know what I think although what I think is not fixed and remains problematic.

Presentation of analysis

The four analysis chapters, Chapter 5-8, explore particular aspects of the analysis emerging from the procedures described in the previous sub-section.

Stylistically, my writing is written in the first person due to a recognition that I am 'the main research instrument' (Troman, 2002, p. 101) and a concern that use of the third person sounds authoritative through obscuring the role of the researcher.

I express myself with caution in the analysis chapters. This is intentional since, as discussed in the sub-section on 'Criteria for assessment', I am not making categorical claims, rather I am attempting to offer a plausible account.

I ascribed pseudonyms to the research participants rather than letters and or numbers largely in order to respect them as people rather than as units of data. However, I am concerned to avoid presenting them as whole, knowable, unfractured subjects so have tried to avoid long narratives involving particular individuals. As Lather suggests, this can be frustrating as 'we want to consume, we want to do what bell hooks calls "eating the other" in the culture of consumption' (Lather, 2007, p. 31). I intentionally incorporated ethnicity and gender within the pseudonyms but found that I had tended to incorporate class within them too. For example, 'Frederick' was what the head described as 'posh'. My initial lack of consciousness of this potentially suggests a dangerous reluctance to be explicit about class (Skeggs, 2004) and the subtle ways in which class is commonly talked about. The initial letters of participants' names reflect the type of governor which they are: 'H' for headteachers, 'P' for parent governors, 'T' for teacher governors, 'S' for support staff, 'Sp' for sponsor governors, 'F' for foundation (Mersey only), 'C' for community governor, 'L' for LA governors and 'A' for associate governors. There are some inconsistencies in that Pam was a community governor at Severn as well as a parent governor at Mersey and Heidi was a community governor at Avon as well as headteacher at Mersey. The clerks were given the pseudonyms of Clark and Clara.

I am conscious that 'the juxtaposition of "authentic" respondents' voices with academic writing can make those voices appear naïve and simple' (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998 cited in Warren and Vincent, 2001, p. 49). Furthermore, the juxtaposition of effectiveness and democratic discourses creates a danger of using participants' voices in debates to which they did not intentionally contribute. As with the issues raised in the section on 'Ethics', these are ongoing and always inadequately resolved issues despite my best efforts.

Reflections

This chapter has set out some significant methodological starting points and approaches which are followed and constantly re-interrogated throughout the study. It has considered the relationship between normative theory and empirical research and set out how the normative theory is being used to provide sensitising concepts. It has raised a number of dilemmas and reflexive responses arising from the data generation and analysis. In light of the epistemological and ontological starting points and of the research approach used, this study can be appraised against criteria of trustworthiness and plausibility. The final chapter provides further reflections on two aspects of the particular qualitative approach taken, considering the use of sensitising concepts and the status of qualitative research.

The next chapter sets out the local context and introduces the research participants. Subsequent chapters provide analysis of the data emerging from the approach described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Local Context and Background

Introduction

This chapter provides background about the borough and schools in which the empirical research took place. It also gives background on each school's committee structure, which begins to hint at variations between schools. Some of the interviewees are introduced in the final section through a discussion of their motives. Governor motives have significant implications for the analysis chapters which follow.

Riverford Borough

Characteristics of the borough

Riverford is a London borough with a very mixed population with great extremes of wealth and poverty. More local data is provided below where each school is described. The local data does not always point to the intake of the schools as the areas are mixed even at the neighbourhood level. The descriptions are limited to maintain the anonymity of the research participants.

Riverford LA and education

The LA and the maintained schools were often described to me in terms such as 'family'. They tend to work closely together. Academisation began during the research period but has been slower and involved fewer schools than in neighbouring boroughs.

Support for governors

Governor services provides support to the majority of schools. Of the following study schools, Avon and Mersey are clerked by Clara[12] who works for the LA whereas the other three are clerked by Clark who works for a private company (the high number clerked by him is because I met him at Thames School then he introduced me to Severn and Tyne Schools).

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[12] All names are pseudonyms as set out in Chapter 3. They are listed by school in the next section.

Governor training is provided and advertised in a termly report. Richard (see Table 2 below) is contracted to do the courses for induction and becoming a chair. Other training is provided by appropriate teams within the LA such as the safeguarding team. The LA subscribes to Modern Governor training (www.moderngovernor.com) for schools which have a Service Level Agreement with them.

In Riverford, LA governors are not appointed on a party political basis as they are in some boroughs but are selected by the LA based partly on what the LA perceive to be lacking in any particular school's GB and largely on who has applied to them to become a governor. Where an individual is interested in becoming a community governor in a particular school and there are no vacancies, it is not uncommon for them to become an LA governor. Councillors often become LA governors so there is some party link in some GBs.

Governors are invited to join the Schools Forum and parent governors are invited to join the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There is no longer a local governors association in Riverford but some governors meet at termly briefing meetings held by the LA. There is an annual governor conference organised by governor volunteers and the LA.

The schools

The four schools studied are described in the order in which I first visited them. They are Mersey Secondary, Avon Primary, Severn Primary and Tyne Secondary. The research also draws on the 2010 pilot study at Thames Primary so this is also described. All the schools are community schools apart from Mersey which is Voluntary Controlled.

The description of each school begins with some data about the local area. The ACORN data (CACI, 2009) is by postcodes, which only apply to about 15 households, so it does not necessarily reflect the broader local area in this diverse borough or the student population of the schools. For further information about the ACORN classification system, see Appendix K. All the schools are in

different wards except Tyne and Thames which are in the same ward as each other. Mersey, Avon and Severn are in wards which border each other and which are on the opposite side of the borough to Tyne and Thames. I have drawn on a London specific measure of deprivation: '(ID2010) - Rank of average score (within London) – 2010' according to which, 'A rank of 1 denotes the most deprived out of a total of 627 wards in London (GLA, 2013). According to this measure, Tyne, Thames and Severn are in some of the most deprived wards in London. Avon and Mersey are in two of the least deprived wards. However, this does not accurately reflect the backgrounds of their pupil populations as these are disproportionately deprived. The information given here is limited in order to preserve the anonymity of the schools.

Mersey Secondary School

The hilly ward in which Mersey is located is wealthy but the school population is largely not. The immediate neighbourhood is classified by ACORN as: 'Category 2 - Urban Prosperity; Group   E - Educated Urbanites; Type 16 - Prosperous young professionals, flats' (CACI, 2009). It is a very mixed neighbourhood with great extremes of wealth.

Mersey has approximately 1,300 students aged 11-19. It has more students than average entitled to FSM. It also has a high proportion of students with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Approximately half of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school's vision emphasises citizenship, equality and 'inclusion'. It is a voluntary controlled school with a foundation. The foundation owns the land and nominates five of the governors. Only one of the foundation governors is local to the school.

In its 2009 Ofsted report[13], the school is judged to be 'Satisfactory'. In the 'Main findings', the report states that support for 'more vulnerable students' is especially good. The school is also praised for its links with the community. The GB is judged to be 'Satisfactory'. The report states that the GB provides 'limited challenge' in order to 'hold the school to account' in addressing 'key areas of

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[13] Ofsted reports do not appear in the bibliography in order to preserve the anonymity of the schools.

weakness' although 'governors are aware' of the schools' priorities and progress.

Table 1 shows the composition of the GB and the pseudonyms[14] of each member. Stars (*) indicate those who I interviewed formally.

Table 1: Governing body of Mersey Secondary School

Governors	
Type of governor	**Pseudonym**
Headteacher	Heidi* (also a community governor at Avon)
LA	Laurence (vice-chair)
	Luke
Parent	Priya*
	Pam* (also a community governor at Severn)
	Paul
	Polla
	Pauline
	Patricia (not present during research and sent resignation)
Community	Christopher* (became joint vice-chair)
Sponsor Governor	Speranza
	Frank (he saw himself as a foundation governor as he was a descendant of the man who left the trust)
Teacher	Tara*
Support Staff	Sally*
Foundation	Freya
	Frederick* (chair)
	Finn
	Fraser*
	Fiona (not present during research)
Non-governors who attended all or some meetings	
Role	**Pseudonym**
Clerk	Clara*
Associate Pupil Governor	Anima (not present during research)
Finance manager	Sana
Parent standing for election	Parveen (he lost the subsequent election but was invited to attend as an associate)

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[14] As set out in Chapter 3, the initial letters of participants' names reflect the type of governor which they are: 'H' for headteachers, 'P' for parent governors, 'T' for teacher governors, 'S' for support staff, 'Sp' for sponsor governors, 'F' for foundation (Mersey only), 'C' for community governor, 'L' for LA governors and 'A' for associate governors. There are some inconsistencies in that Pam was a community governor at Severn as well as a parent governor at Mersey and Heidi was a community governor at Avon as well as headteacher at Mersey. The clerks were given the pseudonyms of Clark and Clara.

Heidi was an experienced headteacher close to retirement. Issues discussed while I was there included national policy consultations such as the SEN and Disability Green Paper; the progress of their Building Schools for the Future (BSF) work; and the self-evaluation form (SEF) for Ofsted. There was a strong assumption that most of the work was done in committees but these were not well attended by non-staff members. Laurence had been vice-chair for a long time and was a bit affronted when Christopher decided to stand. The situation was resolved by agreeing to have two vice-chairs. Heidi described the foundation governors as 'posh' and there was a divide which Sally referred to as 'us and them' between them and the parent governors. In many ways the meetings felt very formal compared to the primary school meetings. However, Heidi very strongly brought to meetings what Hannah (the headteacher at Avon) described as an 'irreverent humour'.

Avon Primary School

The hilly ward in which Avon is located is wealthy but the school population is largely not. The immediate neighbourhood is classified by ACORN as: 'Category 2 - Urban Prosperity; Group E - Educated Urbanites; Type 16 - Prosperous young professionals, flats' (CACI, 2009). It is a very mixed neighbourhood with great extremes of wealth.

Avon is a community primary school with over 450 pupils aged 3-11. The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has very high mobility. The number of pupils entitled to FSM is well above average. The school places an emphasis on 'inclusion' and 'community' in its prospectus and the headteacher emphasised this when I met her.

In its 2010 Ofsted report, the school was judged to be 'Good'. The GB was judged to be 'Satisfactory' and extending the governors' evaluation systems was given as one of the key areas which the school needs to improve. Ofsted's appraisal of the GB and the need for them to improve was referred to a number of times in the meetings I observed.

Table 2: Governing body of Avon Primary School

Type of governor	Pseudonym
Headteacher	Hannah*
LA	Layla* (chair)
	Latif
Parent	Piyal*
	Paula
	Parvaiz
	Pakeezah* (vice-chair)
Community	Carl
	Heidi* (also the headteacher at Mersey)
	Carrie
Teacher	Tabitha*
Support Staff	Sadie
Non-governors who attended all or some meetings	
Role	**Pseudonym**
Clerk	Clara *
Deputy Headteacher	Debra
Finance	Fiona
Governor trainer contracted by LA	Richard

Layla replaced Pakeezah as chair in the first meeting which I observed. While I was there, key topics included: how to convince Ofsted that the GB was fulfilling its evaluating role; a consultation with parents about a school uniform; problems with attainment in maths; delays with a building project.

Severn Primary School

The immediate neighbourhood is classified by ACORN as: 'Category 5 - Hard Pressed; Group Q - Inner City Adversity; Type 56 - Multi-ethnic, crowded flats' (CACI, 2009).

Severn School is a community primary school with approximately 450 pupils aged 3-11. Most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with statements of special needs is above average. The number of pupils eligible for FSM is over 50%.

In its 2010 Ofsted report, the school is judged to be 'Good with outstanding features'. The leadership of the headteacher is described as 'inspirational' and the parents are said to be 'delighted' with the school. Governors are mentioned in the 'Main Findings' in relation to meetings with families and to evaluation and target setting. The effectiveness of the governors is judged to be 'Good' and the report says that the governors influence the planning of the 'long-term direction of the school' and that they consult parents well. It says they set 'realistic but ambitious targets to drive improvement forward'. However, they 'do not always monitor carefully the impact of their policies'. It says governors have been directly involved with families to encourage better attendance by pupils.

Table 3: Governing body of Severn Primary School

Type of governor	Pseudonym
Headteacher	Hazel*
LA	Larry* (was an associate governor for a year)
	Lee (vice-chair)
	Leah (vice-chair, not present during research)
Community	Conrad
	Carolina
	Chunna
	Pam* (chair; also a parent governor at Mersey)
Parent	Puja
	Pir
	Piali*
	Patty*
	Patia
	Parwin
Teacher	Todd
	Trina*
Support staff	Shana
Non-governors who attended all or some meetings	
Role	**Pseudonym**
Clerk	Clark*
Associate	Alice
School Business Manager	Fay
Deputy Headteacher	Diane

The vision and aims of the school were on the first page of every school policy and appeared to drive the ethos of the school, in a way which did not seem to be the case in the other schools. The GB meetings felt friendly and supportive to me but some of the interviewees experienced them as more intimidating. There were photos of all the governors on the wall in the entrance and, while I was there, a GB leaflet was produced for insertion in the prospectus. The school had close links to a bank and had two governors, Larry and Conrad, who worked there. Significant topics during the research period included: a petition against the SRE policy; preparing the governors to answer questions from Ofsted; link governors; the budget; the SEF; and marketing the school by leaving leaflets with estate agents.

Tyne Secondary School

The immediate neighbourhood is classified by ACORN as follows: 'Category 5 - Hard Pressed; Group Q - Inner City Adversity; Type 56 - Multi-ethnic, crowded flats' (CACI, 2009).

Tyne School is on the opposite side of the borough to the three previous schools. It is a community secondary school with about 1,000 pupils aged 11-16. Most pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the majority speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with SEN and eligible for FSM is above average. The main highlighted statement on its website is: '65% of students achieving 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths'.

Tyne had not had a full Ofsted inspection since 2008. At the time of the inspection, the chair was the same but the headteacher was different. In the report of this inspection, the school is graded 'Outstanding' and the governors are also graded 'Outstanding' for 'The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities'. The report states that it is 'an outstanding school where students of all abilities and backgrounds thrive, both academically and personally… The GB knows the school extremely well and provides the headteacher with excellent support while offering very good challenge'.

Table 4: Governing body of Tyne Secondary School

Type of governor	Pseudonym
Community	Chaman* (chair)
Headteacher	Hayley*
Community	Caitlyn
	Cathy
	Charbak
	Connor
LA	Lucy* (parent)
	Lucinda
	Lokesh
	Leonard* (vice-chair)
Parent	Paromita
	Prionka
	Parihan*
	Prabal
	Prabit
	Patrick
	Prabhat (vice-chair)
Sponsor	Spencer
Teacher	Tia
	Tarak (not present during research)
	Tarun*
Non-governors who attended all or some meetings	
Role	**Pseudonym**
Clerk	Clark*
Temporary clerk	Cliff
Associate	Adam (a Tyne parent who works at Mersey)
Deputy Headteacher	Dennis
Deputy Headteacher	Deidre

Hayley was formerly deputy headteacher and was appointed headteacher in January 2011. The GB meetings were large (in the May 2012 meeting, there were 27 people in the room at one point) and it was not unusual for people to openly say 'I totally disagree' which I rarely heard in the other GBs. The school had an extremely strong focus on attainment and this formed a focus for many of the meetings. Other significant topics while I was there included: the budget; marketing the school in light of their falling roll; the new teacher performance

and capability procedures; and making the community committee and PTA more effective.

Thames Primary School

Thames was the site of the pilot study (Young, 2010) but is not referred to much in this study.

The immediate neighbourhood is classified by ACORN as: 'Category 2 - Urban Prosperity; Group E - Educated Urbanites; Type 18 - Multi-ethnic young, converted flats' (CACI, 2009).

Thames School is a community primary school with approximately 450 pupils aged 3-11. A range of minority ethnic groups are represented in the school. Most pupils speak English as an additional language and a much higher proportion than average are eligible for FSM. There are a high number of pupils arriving in years other than nursery and reception.

In its 2009 Ofsted report, Thames School was rated 'Good' overall. This Ofsted report describes the school as having 'a very strong ethos of caring for and valuing the individual while also recognising the importance of its community' (Ofsted, 2009, p.4). It says, 'Governors have a good understanding and involvement in shaping the aims, vision and key areas for improvement in the school' (Ofsted, 2009, p.8).

Introduction to variations in committees

This section continues the introduction to the four main study schools by setting out some variations in the GB committee[15] structures. The GBs all had committees but the number and type varied considerably:

- Avon Primary had two: Resources; and Standards.
- Severn Primary had one: Finance, Premises and Personnel.

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[15] The term 'sub-committee' is used in some literature but this study refers to 'committees' of the full GBs.

- Mersey Secondary had four: Curriculum and Personnel; Inclusion and Extended Schools; Premises; and Finance.
- Tyne Secondary had four: Personnel; Community; Finance and Premises; and Curriculum.

Each school had one or two committees that covered finance and premises (called 'Resources' in the case of Avon).

At Severn, Hazel had decided that because curriculum issues were 'what we are about', they should be discussed in the full GB rather than delegated to a separate committee. In all four schools, governors' relationship to curriculum issues is complex. On the one hand, receiving presentations about the curriculum (in both committee and full GB meetings) gave governors a sense of the core activity of the school. On the other hand, education professionals did not want too much governor interference in their core activity (see Chapter 7).

I observed quite a lot of duplication between committees at both Mersey and Avon. This was also commented on by interviewees, for example, Pam told me that at Mersey, she heard about BSF in the Premises, Finance and Full GB meetings. At Tyne, distinctions between committees seemed fairly clear but curriculum presentations were made to both the curriculum committee and the full GB.

The secondary schools each had an unusual non-statutory committee. Tyne had a Community Committee and its Terms of Reference included the following: 'reviewing standards at the School in relation to learner engagement, parental engagement and community activity … extended services … Every Child Matters'. The Terms of Reference did not indicate that the committee should be involved in marketing the school but that was the main expectation of those who talked about it in meetings and in interviews. Tyne's Community Committee was very low status while I was there. Chaman said that although it was about four or five years old, it had 'not been very active unfortunately' and had 'not been all that successful'. Hayley described it as 'the committee that doesn't work well'. Lucy who was actually on the Community Committee and, like me, had gone to

one meeting for which the date had been changed by the deputy headteacher without anyone knowing (May 2012), described it as 'rubbish', 'chaos' and 'crap' during the course of our interview. It did not have a budget and the deputy headteacher who was responsible for it was not proactive in arranging constructive meetings. Mersey had an Inclusion and Extended Schools Committee which was responsible for SEND, behaviour, parental engagement and the youth service. This committee was also fairly low status but Sally, the support staff governor who chaired the committee, felt it had a higher status than it had once had and welcomed the changes that Christopher was trying to bring about since joining. Lucy at Tyne (who became Community Committee chair after the study period) and Christopher at Mersey both felt that these unusual committees were important and had plans to develop them. It may be that they are now fully functional and active. In the case of Mersey, the existence of a committee covering inclusion meant other governors potentially engaged less with this. For example, when I asked the chair, Frederick, about the impact of policies on looked after children, he was confident that the Inclusion Committee would have this covered. Another point that arises, particularly from the situation at Tyne, is the importance of having a clerk who is fully committed to planning and organising meetings.

The two primary schools' committee meetings were clerked by Clara and Clark. Their memberships were not much less than the full GBs. The secondary school committees were clerked by a range of staff and others. Their turnouts were very low. They tended to be dominated by staff and by the core governors who were disproportionately white and middle-class.

This section has provided a very brief introduction to the committee structures. Committees are discussed in various ways throughout the study, for example, Chapter 5 considers their role in adding a layer of legitimacy to decisions which have not been discussed much.

Governors' motives

This section introduces some of the research participants from the perspective of their motives for being a governor. Governors' motives have significant implications for the enactment of their role as will be seen throughout this study.

Interviewees displayed a complex mix of motivations reflecting Le Grand's suggestion that public sector workers are motivated by a mixture of self-interest and altruism rather than fitting the extremes of 'knights' and 'knaves' (2010). The intertwining of motives is also discussed by Vincent and Martin who point out, in relation to parental involvement,

> As Jayne Mansbridge argues (1990), duty, love (or empathy), two commonly recognized forms of altruism, and self-interest intermingle in our actions in ways that are difficult to sort out; when people think about what they want, they think about more than just their narrow self-interest. When they define their own interests and when they act to pursue those interests, they often give great weight both to their moral principles and to the interests of others (p.ix). (2000, p. 476)

Altruism as a motive was highlighted by a number of speakers at a RISE conference on governors who all talked about 'moral purpose' (my notes, RISE, 2013). These included Chris James who described governors' moral purpose as making the 'hairs stand up on the back of my neck'. His joint publication on chairs says, 'Chairs typically have a very wide range of high-level personal qualities, which underpin the moral purpose they bring to the role and the responsibility' (James *et al.*, 2013a, p. 36). As a motive, moral purpose and 'giving something back' was referred to by a number of interviewees. One clerk told me that most governors 'want to bring something back' (Clara, Avon and Mersey). I spoke informally to Connor at Tyne in May 2012 and he said being a governor was a 'labour of love'. The following two community governors talked about finding governing satisfying:

> What I like is. To see the opportunity for improvement. That interests me more than things that are working perfectly. You know and I think if I felt it was a perfectly functioning body I would perhaps be less interested in wanting to do more with it. I think it's the challenge that has the opportunities and perhaps isn't doing it

to its fullest potential. It's what kind of makes me drag myself over to the other side [of town] heh heh (Christopher, Mersey)

very satisfying. Very satisfying because I have got that, what do they call, inside and me, yeah, that I am doing something good the community and everybody knows, I tell them, that the day you find that I am not useful, please tell me so, I will go away, you know that is it (Chaman, Tyne)

Parents were also motivated by giving something back and changing something specific. Both Priya at Mersey and Patty at Severn talked about wanting to get other parents more involved in the school. As a parent, Lucy said,

I'd always felt that I ought to get involved in schools more... Not about my children but just contribute something to the running of the schools (Lucy, Tyne)

It was less common for teachers to see the GB as a way to give something back and/or make a difference but some referred to these as motives:

So I think it's really rewarding and. To have an impact on you know how the future of the school, agree on things or may be disagreeing with things and then moving forward. Yeah I definitely value it (Tara, Mersey)

I thought I could make a bit more contribution so when the opportunity came up to be a governor, staff governor, I put my name forward and thankfully all the staff voted for me and I got in … I'm a bit of a loudmouthed person and I like putting my opinions through and I also like standing up for people's rights and being a maths teacher I like everything to be fair and equal and balanced and all those sorts of things so I thought I would you know, make a good candidate (Tarun, Tyne)

With regard to self-interest, Tarun possibly put the greatest emphasis on this being a key motive (although not for himself):

The governing body is actually, in my opinion, right now, and I am sure it is the same in all, every school made up of people who have a lot of personal interests in there. Parents have the interest of obviously, their own interest, their children's interest. But there is a lot of business people on our governing body … they are there for a reason … they are there to represent their company. They are there to show that their company has got corporate

social responsibility. They are there because their own companies are coming in to do work in the school. So a lot of the governors are there for a reason. Our particular governing body, I don't think are there for. I think the majority of our governors are not there for the benefit of our community … Sometimes we have had parent governors in the school who have got very naughty children and they are only on the governing body because they know they can save their children's um time in the school [preventing them from being excluded] (Tarun, Tyne)

Larry, at Severn, felt self-interest was an inappropriate motive, commenting that parents have a 'degree of self-interest'. He relished his altruistic motives, although he was a reading partner in the school and became a governor partly because he wanted to be a teacher one day:

> I feel like I am doing it for the right reasons. Now I have a little bit of self-interest because I want to be a teacher sometime. I can't say I am just completely non devoid of selfishness and self-interest. But. It, so it just feels really good like that that, you know, I am genuinely volunteering and turning up and doing something here (Larry, Severn)

Larry felt that his lack of self-interest meant he was 'just making sure that the school is being run in the best interests of, you know, of the kids and their parents. Just, you know, overall best interests' (Larry Severn). This sense of a singular common good for the school is a thread running through the study. Linked to this, Clark saw governors coming with their own 'agenda' as problematic:

> I have seen dysfunctional governing bodies where one or two are there to promote their line of thinking… so there are people who come with agendas. Sometimes it is just power isn't it? Power and authority, status: "I'm chair of governors" (Clark, Severn and Tyne)

This suspicion of governors who came with an 'agenda' was widespread and is explored particularly in Chapters 5 and 8. Despite such attitudes, self-interest can be an important motivation to engagement:

> Several [deliberative democracy] authors now argue, contrary to the image of rational, calm and "sanitised" deliberation, that emotional investment in the issue oils the wheels of deliberation.

> With such investment comes the motivation to discuss, and to engage with, material and with fellow citizens (Lowndes *et al*, 2001; Barnes, 2004). (Davies, Barnett and Wetherell, 2006, p. 129)

The emotional investment of governors has implications for how much they engage and persist in pursuing particular agendas. Some governors, particularly the education professionals, have greater investment in a greater number of topics which makes them more inclined to engage. Parents may have strong views on particular topics but often struggle to get these on the agenda. At Avon, Tabitha said those not working in the school did not necessarily have strong feelings about the issues discussed and many of these 'wouldn't have a strong enough opinion to be worried about making a point'. Layla also said 'there are no strong opinions or very few strong opinions being raised in these meetings'. Hannah, the headteacher, was not unhappy about this lack of strong opinions:

> I think we are very lucky. So sometimes the kind of slight passivity we get on the. Not always getting enough buy-in as we want I suppose is balanced out by, they're not here every day trying to tell us what to do. And they're are not disagreeing with everything that we present (Hannah, Avon)

The two secondary headteachers referred to problems from governors motivated by power or status but both said it was not an issue in their schools:

> You know people who want to be in positions of power... And that often isn't a good thing. So sometimes I'm a bit suspicious of people as to why they want to be there. And I've seen that happen in other governing bodies. It hasn't happened in mine (Heidi, Mersey)

> they do it because of a deep commitment to young people. But you can get people who are not successful in their, in their sort of private, professional lives. And this could be an increasing status for them, but I don't have that sort of (Hayley, Tyne)

There is a recognition that being a school governor can be an efficient way of developing skills amongst business employees (CBI, 2013; City of London,

2010; Punter, Adams and Kraithman, 2007)[16]. A number of interviewees saw being a governor as helpful to their career in a variety of ways. Christopher was a consultant for local and national government and said,

> I suppose partly on a sort of personal level to keep in touch with the school. On a professional level you know I was looking for to start to have just a small range of trusteeships or something like that as well in parallel to my career so you know that was part [of my] motivation (Christopher, Mersey)

Leonard, at Tyne, talked a lot about how being a governor helped him with his role at a teachers' union. He was encouraging a colleague to become a governor for the same reason. When Larry, at Severn, and I were talking after the interview, he told me that his bank was particularly keen on corporate social responsibility and volunteering at the moment as they needed to improve their reputation. One clerk described business people volunteering as 'do-gooders':

> You've got big business around. So you try and suck them in. They've got to do their do-gooders bit (Clark, Severn and Tyne)

Piyal was working as a volunteer at Avon because: 'well I want to work with kids. So the volunteer work was a start. And I want to see if I can get anywhere from that really'. She became a parent governor partly hoping that it would help her with getting a job. At Mersey, Priya also hoped being a governor would help her to get a job as she mentioned in a meeting:

> Priya – so you see in point 6 [of the agenda], it says about visiting. How do we visit? I'm willing. I want to get a job in September. I need experience (my notes, Mersey Full GB, July 2011)

A key motivator was learning more about schools. This motive applied to all types of governors. The following three governors did not have an ongoing direct connection with the school but felt they learnt a lot. Pam was no longer a parent at Severn and about to cease being a parent at Mersey. She was a governor at both and said she found it 'interesting'. Layla and Frederick both

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[16] Since the research period, this point has been reiterated by the new Inspiring Governors Alliance (Inspiring Governors Alliance, 2014).

talked about learning about something which was outside of their personal and professional experience, Frederick also felt he was 'learning things professionally':

> I've always been interested in education and education policy and I was looking for a way to get more involved in my local community. And it seemed like a good way of learning about what was actually going on in schools and education (Layla, Avon)

> anyway this is a particularly interesting one. Most things one gets involved in is because your children are involved in them... But doing something at a school. In a state school that I actually had very little connection with and I wasn't state educated. Is very interesting. Broadens my knowledge... And the school has a substantially bigger budget than I have to run here so that's interesting to heh heh. So you are learning things professionally as well as putting into, hopefully helping the school. I think it is a two-way process. And it is very beneficial. We as an employer here [his place of work], we write into people's contracts that they are encouraged to take up civic duties. And contribute. Outside of the job. And we give them time off to do that (Frederick, Mersey)

For parents, it was also an important way of finding out more about the school. In their work on middle-class parents, Reay *et al* suggest that 'For a majority becoming a school governor was as much an issue of developing insider knowledge as a desire to make a civic contribution… school governance became an additional way of managing the risks in sending children to inner city state schooling (Vincent, 2000), a way of subjecting the school to surveillance as well as a means of supporting it' (2008, pp. 247-8). In this vein, Lucy, a middle-class mother said:

> I suppose being a governor, I feel I have the ear of teachers in a way that I mightn't if I wasn't (Lucy, Tyne)

This did not only apply to middle-class parents. Governors were disproportionately middle-class but the working-class parent governors talked about using their role to learn more about the school to the benefit of their child:

> I was just really interested in how the school worked … I wanted to be engaged with sort of what my child was learning, how things were done... My daughter, she is also not so confident, so I

thought maybe is there anyway I can help. You know, by finding out what she is doing in school. Is there something that, you know, I don't know I mean as a parent could help. So I think that was the reasons why I wanted to join as their governor too. So two reasons yeah. For my daughter, sort of giving her sort of some background sort of support, help. And also to find out what the school does (Pakeezah, Avon)

Priya had previously been a primary governor. With regard to Mersey, she said she was motivated by having children in the school but also commented on the lack of Bengali speakers on the predominantly white GB:

I decided to become a governor solely because my children are here and plus it would benefit the school as well. They don't have any Bengali speaking parent governors (Priya, Mersey)

For Piali, her expectations seemed to have been met and she talked a lot about what she had learnt and how interesting it was:

I wanted to find out about the school, um wanted to get more in depth about what they do at school, because obviously my two kids are in the school so I wanted to find out. And gain more experience, get more involved, you know, I like getting involved and doing activities, meeting new people, doing something different, you know. And learning basically (Piali, Severn)

Patty, at Severn, was ambivalent about whether it was satisfying but felt that learning about, for example, how children's work was marked was 'really good'.

Learning about their school was also important for teachers. Tabitha, Trina and Tara were teacher governors at Avon, Severn and Mersey respectively and all told me about how much they learnt about their school and how it operated from a different angle through being a governor. As headteacher at Mersey, Heidi summed up this motivation:

Why staff want to become governors, it's a very good training ground. Because you know you get to look at things that perhaps you wouldn't have otherwise. You know. And I sort of advise people to … be a teacher governor… You know it's really good in terms of learning (Heidi, Mersey and Avon)

I was surprised how often the word 'enjoy' came up in interviews. At Severn, Larry said it is 'fantastic, yeah, love it'. Trina said of others: 'Our governors come in and just enjoy what we show them what we do for them and they seem to really really enjoy it'. For herself, she said, 'I like being a governor. I enjoy it' (Trina). Pam and Larry both told me how the school was a welcome break from their work in banks. At Tyne, Tarun said, 'it's great heh'. Leonard said 'I've always enjoyed being a governor at our school'. However, both Leonard and Layla, at Avon, said they enjoyed other parts of being a governor more than meetings.

This section has introduced most of the interviewees through an exploration of their motives for being a governor. They display a complex mix of altruistic and self-interested motives. Governors' motives have implications for their engagement and these will be explored throughout the analysis chapters. Motivations stemming from a singular conception of the good of the school can lead to the overvaluing of consensus as explored in Chapter 5. The idea that it is possible to be a 'disinterested', 'altruistic' 'outsider' and that this is preferable to having an involved perspective such as that of a parent is considered in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 discusses the valuing of particular forms of knowledge which affects who is encouraged to become a governor and to speak. Chapter 8 considers the tendency of governors to see their work as apolitical because it is for 'the good of the children'.

Reflections

This chapter has provided information about the local context which gives background for the study. As the whole borough and the school wards and neighbourhoods are so mixed, it is difficult to give a picture of the local populations. The descriptions have also been constrained in order to ensure anonymity. The final two sections have begun to provide a rounder picture of the research participants. A more contextualised picture of them emerges in the next chapter where the exploration of their practice begins.

Chapter 5: (Not) Making Decisions

Introduction

Governors' formal role positions them as decision-makers (see Chapter 2). This chapter considers some processes by which decisions are made (or not made) in GBs. I am not claiming that governors never make decisions, but rather exploring the constraints and limitations on their ability to do so. Governors exhibit a paradoxical combination of busy-ness and passivity. On the one hand, GBs are constituted and structured around activity and technically decisions are made. On the other hand, it is rare that decisions could be attributed to active choices by governors. Rather, their more passive agreement to actions and positions is presented as almost unavoidable 'common sense', either due to the national policy context or to the headteacher's presentation of the available options.

This chapter first sets out the variety of means through which decision-making was constrained: through the framing of decisions; the limited spaces for decisions; and constructions of the common good and consensus. It then explores the silences and non-engagement produced by the ways of talking encouraged by the formality of the GB meetings and the division of GBs into core and peripheral governors. It suggests that any decisions that are made are made by a limited number of governors. Finally, it explores contextual factors which may impact on governors' engagement and confidence. It concludes that decision-making was constrained and limited by all the above and that the performance of GB meetings produced legitimacy for 'technical' decisions involving a small number of governors. Before the main body of the chapter, there are brief mentions of some empirical challenges in the research, and of the types of issues available for decision by governors.

Empirical challenges

An empirical problematic arose particularly in relation to this chapter in that interviewees would talk about decision-making hypothetically, in a way which did not match either their or my experience of the actual meetings. For example,

some said confidently they would make decisions on a majority basis by voting but then struggled to think of actual examples of votes or even of decisions taken in other ways. The general statements which they made about how decisions were made cannot, therefore, be understood as always referring to their actual experience of meetings. They seem, rather, to be indications of their conceptions of how decisions should ideally be made.

An empirical problem of perhaps greater significance is that of looking for absences. As Deem *et al* point out, 'non-decisions are notoriously difficult to uncover' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 113). McCalla-Chen (2000) is more optimistic about the possibilities of uncovering non-decisions, possibly because she emphasises the agency of individuals who have an interest in non-decisions. In the current study, the emphasis is on understanding non-decision-making as systemic, rather than stemming from the intentional strategies of particular individuals. There were hints and suggestions of non-decisions which could be discerned and these are explored throughout the chapter.

Issues available for decision

This chapter focuses on the processes by which decisions are made or not made. Later chapters will explore further the actual issues available for decision. However, a few preliminary indications of the issues available for discussion and decision are made here. Many issues which appeared to be available for decision were actually unavailable as the national performative system makes certain options unthinkable (see Chapters 2 and 7). Differences in how much the headteachers led and controlled agendas and specific discussions are explored in Chapter 7.

None of the GBs were involved, while I was there, in what are their largest potential tasks; namely appointing a new headteacher or changing their status. When I asked interviewees for the biggest decision which they had been involved in, Pam[17] and Chaman, who were long-serving governors, both referred to appointing the headteacher. Those who had been involved in

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[17] See Chapter 4 for information on Riverford LA, the four schools and the research participants named.

disciplinaries and exclusions referred to those. A few referred to signing off the budget or agreeing to building work. At Mersey, moving to the International Baccalaureate, taking on the youth service contract and the restructuring were all seen as big decisions by more than one interviewee. 'Big' decisions that were mentioned by just one person included the SRE policy at Severn and shortening the lunch-break at Tyne. At Avon, some governors saw the introduction of school uniform as a 'big' decision. As discussed in Chapter 6 adopting a uniform went against the headteacher's preference, and so was potentially controversial, but she did say 'I'm not really that bothered' (Hannah, Avon). Frederick, at Mersey, had overturned student exclusions on technicalities. Aside from these two examples, uniform and exclusions, the examples which interviewees gave of big decisions were decisions where the governors had agreed with the headteacher's position. This role, of apparently 'rubberstamping' the headteacher's decisions is discussed in the next section. Appointing a headteacher is clearly a case where governors are required to make a decision more independently. Pam described how the governors on the appointment panel had selected Hazel as headteacher of Severn against the advice of the LA and were very pleased with this decision. Headteacher appointments will not be discussed in detail as none occurred during the research period. However, it could be suggested that the lack of other decision-making experience ill prepares governors for this significant decision.

The framing of decisions

The framing of meetings, through the written agenda, the issues presented for decision and the focus of the minutes, suggests that governors are decision-makers. Yet this belies a lack of pro-active decision-making. Written agendas operated to constrain what could be discussed. Minutes suggested that 'technical' decisions were something more than that and that conflict did not occur, potentially precluding future decisions or expressions of difference.

Agenda

'Agenda' can be understood in two different but related ways: firstly, as the written agenda followed in each meeting and, secondly, as 'what it is possible to discuss'.

This sub-section considers the first, the concrete written agenda. The second meaning of 'what it is possible to discuss' is related to the first and is discussed here but is also explored elsewhere (for example, Chapter 7 considers the power of professional and managerial experts in setting this agenda). Keeping items off the agenda of 'what it is possible to discuss' is a key way to influence decision-making (Bachrach and Baratz in Lukes, 2005) and the written agenda is important for this.

GB meetings are closely structured around written agendas set in advance. There are lots of statutory items to be covered such as signing off policies. Additional items tend to be added by the clerk and headteacher rather than by other governors. The two clerks, Clara at Avon and Mersey and Clark at Severn and Tyne, explained how the agendas for the full GB meetings were generated. Both talked about the standard items which make up most of the agenda. In this sense, 'the cycle is already preordained' (Clara). Riverford provided a year planner of items for full and committee agendas which I did not hear referred to, but which provides one example of an externally provided cycle. A few items were added by the clerk as a result of discussions in the previous meeting, for example building issues at Mersey. Most additional items came from the headteacher (or in the case of secondary school committees, the lead member of staff for that committee). Headteachers' engagement in putting items on the agenda varied. For example, Hazel at Severn was much more proactive than Hayley at Tyne as the clerk explains:

> [At] Severn. I will have a list of stuff, matters for consideration and the items will be. They [the school] will ask for particular things to be put in. I may have suggested various things as well… [At] Tyne, I say "would, will there be a presentation?" And about the day before heh they may come up with a presentation heh. There is very little. They will moan and groan but there is very little feedback. And I have suggested items they should have but. I don't get any feedback. Well very little. Whereas here [at Severn], I e-mail [Hazel] and [Fay] and they come back with a number of items. (Clark, Severn and Tyne)

Committee meeting agendas sometimes varied more from meeting to meeting than full GB agendas. However, they were still led by standard items and items

from the school, with very occasional items from committee chairs. Committee agenda items might be anything from reviewing curriculum policies to agreeing to staff leave during term time. The full GB formally delegated certain powers to committees. Beyond this, committee agendas tended to have their own logic and pattern rather than being driven by items arising from full GB meetings which required deeper discussion.

Non-staff governors did not tend to add items to the agenda. This can be understood as an important example of non-decision-making as it restricts the topics which are available for discussion (Lukes, 2005). Both clerks wrote 'Items for next meeting' on agendas so governors could have suggested some but this was not a norm at any of the schools. Both Layla and Christopher were very confident professional people who had considerable experience of similar meetings. When I asked them about adding items, both concurred that it was not a norm:

> I mean anyone can put anything on the agenda but again it's it's part of, I guess it is part of the norms and behaviours of the governing body. If everybody is always putting different things on the agenda that they want to discuss, then everybody else would do it. But because nobody does on a regular basis, it makes it a lot more difficult I think for others (Layla, Avon)

Christopher's comment suggests a greater ambivalence about whether actively adding items would be possible. The italicised words reinforce the lack of clarity about adding items and the passivity of governors in setting the agenda:

> I'm sure if you wanted to put something on the agenda you could. You know *if* I did *if* I felt strongly I would e-mail [Heidi] and [Clara] who's the clerk. But I *think* by and large it is a process that is a very standard agenda every time *as far as I can work out.* It is sort of. There *tends* to be some sort of presentation at the beginning and again that is *probably* [Heidi's] input … It *seems a fairly passive process* to me. *I don't know* if one can actively ask for agenda items (Christopher, Mersey)

One rare exception to this was that Cathy did try twice to get pupil discipline onto the agenda at Tyne (I did not attend the next meeting to see whether she succeeded):

> Cathy – on discipline. I asked for a discussion on this before. Can
> we discuss this at the next meeting? I come to the school to issue
> governors' warnings [as part of a scale of sanctions for pupils].
> Maybe we could have 10 min on it (my notes, Tyne Full, July
> 2012)

Chapter 7 discusses how governors' lack of educational and contextual knowledge also constrained their ability to suggest potential items for future meeting agendas.

A lot of full GB meeting time is devoted to agenda items with broad headings such as 'Headteacher's report'. The headteacher largely determines what is discussed under the headteacher's report (although in the two primary schools, the chairs both proposed a slight restructuring of the headteachers' reports to increase the focus on the SDP (School Development Plan) priorities). The schools tended to alternate written and oral headteacher's reports with the written one mostly being sent to governors in advance. Where an agenda item heading is broad and papers are not sent in advance, it is difficult for governors to prepare for the meeting by researching issues coming up. Chapter 7 discusses how headteachers tend to lead the GB in terms of focus and knowledge.

The agendas were followed closely and were very significant in shaping the discussions at meetings:

> because [Clara (the clerk)] is there from the borough. I think they
> are very structured so I don't think we necessarily. Everything is
> very planned. Especially if there is presentations. The agendas
> are always referred to I think in the full governing full governors
> meeting and [Frederick] is quite a strong chair so it's all very
> organised and official (Tara, Mersey)

Following the agenda closely is one element of the 'formality' discussed below under 'Ways of talking'. It limited the issues which governors, particularly those least experienced in such forums, could raise. As a parent governor, Patty felt there was no space in which she could speak:

> I think, just as I say, if there was. If if, perhaps the the um agenda was looked at. Maybe every so often there could be, you know, if just they. If just times when they talked about general things. Or even if, maybe, once every couple of months they could have a section on the agenda for parent governors to feed back, you know? … because when you look at the agenda, there isn't, it is kind of like. You know, attendance, apologies, um and then it is kind of like, usually the headteacher's report, the finance report, then you get presentations, sometimes you get a presentation from one or two of the teachers might be on ICT, might be on the maths. The other week it was about marking the children's books. So maybe they could just once every couple of months, put a section for like parent governor feedback or parent governor presentation. So that we could then, we would know that every three months we have got that opportunity. So that if anything did arise, we could think "right, OK well when we have the next parent governor feedback thing, we can feed that back" (Patty, Severn)

People did not tend to add items during the meeting. There were occasional issues raised under AOB which tended to manifest as individual complaints (see Chapter 6). Some of these were accepted and discussed whereas others, particularly from parents at Tyne were not accepted as appropriate by the headteacher or chair and governors were directed to other channels. In the other schools, particularly the primary schools, the headteachers were more tolerant of what might be seen as individual complaints. The fact that such items arose under AOB indicates the ambiguities about what it is appropriate to bring to a GB. Governors' lack of clarity about their role was a recurring issue.

This sub-section has discussed how decision-making is constrained by the written agenda. The issues available for discussion and decision are limited. Technically, governors are able to add items but, in practice, this ability is constrained.

Minutes and 'technically' making decisions

This sub-section explores how the minutes present decisions which have only been made in a 'technical' sense as decisions and how the expression of difference is not reported in the minutes. These issues potentially constrain future possibilities for decision-making and the expression of difference.

Minutes were produced by clerks. Clark was the clerk for full GB meetings at Severn and Tyne (Cliff provided cover for one meeting at Tyne). Clara clerked full GB meetings at Avon and Mersey. Both the primary schools also employed the same clerk for their committee meetings. At the secondary schools, different members of staff clerked different committees (with the exception of Mersey's Curriculum and Personnel Committee where minutes were taken by the chair, Laurence). These different clerks resulted in slightly varied styles of minutes for secondary committees.

Minutes implied that decisions had been made. In minutes by both Clara and Clark, each item was followed by 'RECEIVED' or 'RESOLVED'. Minutes produced by Clara had had a higher proportion of items 'resolved' than those produced by Clark. Items 'resolved' tended to include agreeing on previous minutes as a true record, ratifying policies and agreeing the budget. These capitalised 'RESOLVED' items evoke a sense of an objective and final resolution. The presentation of the minutes with this focus on 'resolved' outcomes contributes to the constitution of GBs as decision-making bodies.

Conflict and dissent tended not to be recorded in the minutes. The original minuting of the decision to shorten the lunch-break at Tyne provoked one of the most heated debates which I observed and the subsequent minutes provide a rare exception to the consensus and unity usually recorded in minutes. This recording of conflict possibly only occurred because the controversy was about the minutes themselves. By this point, governors had given up on actually preventing the shortening of the lunch-break and focused their energy on challenging the minutes instead. This conflict was still recorded in the formal minutes in mild and unemotive terms considering the rare heat of the debate:

> MATTERS ARISING
> 4.1   Lunch Break (item 4.6)
> [Hayley] reported that the lunch break would be shortened to 45 minutes from 60 minutes at the start of the Summer Term.
> [Parihan] said she was aware that some teachers were not in favour of the change. In response [Hayley] said that overall, teachers voted for the change two to one.
> [Charbak] said that while the minute said "not all governors favoured shortening" he observed that the governors who did not

support the change felt rather stronger and rather were
"concerned".
However as the decision had been made governors supported the
headteacher's decision and for her part [Hayley] said she would
be monitoring the change to ascertain if there was a detrimental
impact on the school.
Discussion.
RECEIVED.
(Tyne Minutes, March 2012)

For governors reading previous minutes, the lack of conflict and debate recorded in them is potentially significant as it constitutes the GB as a forum where conflict and debate do not, and hence should not, occur. This has implications for possibilities of democracy.

As can be seen from the above extract, minutes are written in formal language. The language is often expressed in the passive tense which makes it appear convoluted. This can be intimidating and constraining to some who are not familiar with such minutes.

There was variation between interviewees as to whether they thought it was the headteacher (and chair) or the whole GB that made decisions. However, where 'technically' they *were* making decisions, many governors in all the schools, referred to their role as often just to 'rubberstamp' the headteacher's proposals. They were busy (doing a lot of rubberstamping) but largely took a passive role in relation to actual decision-making. The headteachers came with a decision for ratification and there was little space to challenge this. As Christopher said, governors 'technically' made decisions. However, this was not active decision-making, rather, governors largely ratified decisions made by the headteacher:

[Hazel] presents something for, you know, a proposal for
agreement so um absolutely the governing body make, they
reaffirm, agree to, disagree but they make the decision. But it is
very much based and influenced by [Hazel] (Larry, Severn)

my experience … has been more that our body is if anything, not
challenging *enough* that I think that sometimes we are almost just
a rubber stamp (Layla, Avon)

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> The biggest decisions about education of the children aren't really made by the governing body. They tend to be approved by the governing body. You know "I've written this policy and". Um I can't give you an example but it happens all the time honestly (Fraser, Mersey)

> I'm just trying to think whether the governing body has actually made a decision as opposed to kind of ratifying a decision. Um. And I don't think it has so I think I would fairly confidently say that it doesn't make decisions. I think that kind of the biggest decision that I've been involved in was around the restructure and the cost-cutting and effectively the staff restructure. Which I came to latterly as part of a small working group... I'm not sure that group really made the decision. I think it was taken through a very well thought through process that the head and a consultant had been through so it was given a kind of opportunity to scrutinise that and to ask questions and be sure about it. And ultimately it did make a decision. It made a decision to agree with that. To support that. That was then brought to the governing body. So it technically made a decision. But if you'd actually track back where the decision was made. It was with the head. (Christopher, Mersey)

Clark was clerk at Severn and Tyne. Speaking generally, he reiterated that governors largely rubberstamped headteachers' proposals:

> [governors] tend to rubberstamp the chief executive's [headteacher's] recommendations and. Occasionally there has been. Yeah, I think that is largely what they do. Although where. If the head has discussed matters with them before and they actually make a decision. So if there has been a sort of open discussion about staffing and why the change then they do make decisions but largely, it does seem a recommendation comes forward from the head and there is a discussion. Some governors may be not in favour of it. And by and large, it is accepted (Clark)

This rubberstamping role is discussed in relation to headteachers' leading role in Chapter 7. There were some minor threats of a rejection of the rubberstamping role. Occasionally, governors seemed to sometimes draw attention to their legal powers through phrases such as '*If* we approve this …'. Pam did this in relation to the decision to put down AstroTurf (Mersey Premises Committee, July 2011) and Frederick in relation to moving to the next stage of BSF (Mersey Full GB, May 2011). This was rare but more common in the secondary schools and in relation to budgetary decisions. Heidi was headteacher at Mersey and a community governor at Avon where her

intervention led to a different staff structure to that originally proposed by the headteacher, Hannah. As discussed in Chapter 7, her position as an experienced local secondary headteacher made her a powerful primary governor.

If governors largely rubberstamp the headteachers' proposals, this may not seem a valuable role. It is valuable, however, according to the conception of 'negative accountability' set out in Chapter 7, the premise of which is that governors would not rubberstamp something entirely outrageous or illegal. As described in Chapter 7, however, governors may not have the educational or contextual knowledge to recognise something as such.

In summary, minutes recorded decisions which have 'technically' been made, largely through rubberstamping. Minutes rarely record conflict which may constitute GBs as bodies where conflict does not and should not occur. Both of these constrain future possibilities for the expression of difference and for pro-active decision-making.

Spaces for decisions

Spaces for discussions and decisions were limited. Firstly, a lot of time was taken up by information giving so there was a constant sense of being too short of time for discussion. Secondly, secondary school committees were often referred to as where decisions happened but this did not necessarily mean these decisions were discussed much. The suggestion that they had been discussed added legitimacy to decisions which reached the full GB.

Information giving and time pressure

Although full GB meetings lasted up to three hours, there was a lot of information giving and a sense that there was not time for much discussion. As Larry said:

> You know, it is very much headmistress and teachers sort of presenting to you (Larry, Severn)

The majority of time in the meetings that I observed was taken up with the headteacher and other staff giving information to the rest of the governors. This is recognised in the minutes where 'RECEIVED' appears after most items which implies that the GB has done its job by passively receiving information. This might be seen as a performance of accountability (see Chapter 7).

Some of the information presented could have been read by governors in advance instead. For example, some governors pointed out that reports and summaries of committee meetings would not be needed in full GB meetings if governors read reports and minutes before the meetings:

> So you're not spending so much time just covering the same stuff. Um the trouble is with a lot of it, I suspect it involves people doing a lot more work before the meetings, you know, reading up on the committee meetings. You know, we sit in the governors meeting and we say "oh, you know, what happened in the finance meeting?" so then [Frederick] goes through well this was what happened in the finance", "what happened in the premises meeting?" Right this is what happened in the premises meeting. OK, inclusion?" "Yeah, this is what happened in the inclusion". And an hour has gone and all they are virtually doing is reading the notes from the minutes [I: yeah] of those meetings. Whereas if you sent all that stuff out beforehand and say to everybody "right, prep, here is the stuff, read it, you know, come to the meeting" (Pam, Mersey)

Conversely, it may be that hearing information collectively strengthened the feeling of being a collective body. This was not something that was raised in interviews. My own emotional response was that passively receiving information for long periods of time felt more stultifying than unifying.

There tended to be less of a sense of time pressure in committees than full GB meetings although a number of committee meetings were set as one hour because there was another meeting immediately afterwards. There were fewer people who wanted to speak in committee meetings and the agendas were usually shorter.

Receiving presentations by staff, usually about the curriculum, seemed to be unanimously valued by interviewees. Often, however, presentations did not lead

to as much discussion as governors might have liked. This was an issue at all the schools but was slightly more so at Tyne. The busy-ness of the meeting was combined with the passivity of governors in the following example where Lucy felt constrained and unable to discuss the interesting presentations:

> I feel a little bit like agendas are too busy to have proper discussion, you know, this week's meeting [Tyne Full GB, May 2012] was a really prime example of that. People were getting up and leaving from two hours into the meeting so there was a big pressure to stop discu, you know, right from the beginning, we were being chaired in a, you know, "you have got 5 min to do this, do this". The literacy people came and gave a fabulous, you know, presentation about really exciting work. Then we all just said thank you … and they left. We weren't allowed, it's a not "allowed" but it was clearly, you know, that was number one of an agenda of 25 items and we had to get through it all so if you discuss it properly, it, there isn't time. So that is a massive challenge (Lucy, Tyne)

The chair, Chaman told me how important presentations were. I asked him if there was time to discuss them and he said: 'Ah it is not that we have got enough time. We make time.' Despite this assertion, he was not very encouraging of the presentations as seen in these extracts:

> 6.15 Teacher1 – a long monologue about maths following the slides quite closely.
> 6.29 Chaman – 'two minutes'
> 6.31 Chaman – 'very quickly'
> … Teacher2 - Learning and Teaching. Are you OK with me speaking or would you like to read the slide?
> Chaman – as long as it is quick
> (my notes, Tyne Full GB, Mar 2012)
>
> Chaman – "you have 10 minutes" (doesn't sound very welcoming or encouraging)
> 6.42 Teacher7 - I need to talk you through the Unit we are putting in next year. It is to keep those who are struggling with their behaviour
> Chaman – "2 minutes maximum please"
> Teacher7 gives more information about the Unit
> 6.48 Chaman – Teacher11, you have 10 minutes, make sure you keep it within that so we have time for questions
> … Chaman – we have time for one more question
> None
> Clapping
> Chaman – sorry we are short on time

(my notes, Tyne Full GB, July 2012)

Despite all the time which was spent on information giving, there was a sense in all the schools that time was very limited so discussion should be kept to a minimum; in 'hurtling through' the agenda:

> And there's no real discussion. There's a lot of information. A lot of process. A lot of sort of hurtling through and a sort of a round of applause if we get through it heh heh in nearer to an hour than two hours. Which I don't really see the point of (Christopher, Mersey)

Chairs' comments on keeping to time were made in all the study schools. Severn felt like the GB where it was easiest to speak, largely due to the friendly atmosphere and the unassuming manner of the chair. However, even there, the following comments suggested that saving time was a high priority. Like 'hurtling through' above, the use of 'rattle through' and 'whistle stop' at Severn were far removed from any conceptions of deliberative discussion:

> Lee [chairing in Pam's absence] said at the beginning that he needed to leave at 7.25. It seems the meeting could have gone on for longer and that he moved things along faster than he might have done
> (my notes, Severn Full GB, March 2012)
>
> Hazel [headteacher] – so we finished at 10 to 7 [proud to finish in good time] (my notes, Severn committees, May 2012)
>
> Pam [chair] – OK let's rattle through. Apologies? (My notes, Severn Full GB, May 2012)
>
> Pam - since we are not quorate, let's do a whistle stop (my notes, Severn Full GB, June 2012)

It was largely, but not exclusively, chairs who pushed for saving time. Heidi was a very influential member at Avon, despite not being chair. As a headteacher at Mersey, she wanted to support her fellow headteacher, Hannah, and to complete the meetings speedily and efficiently. In Tabitha's response to my question about whether she thought it was 'easy or difficult for people to disagree' in the meetings, she was not necessarily advocating greater discussion, but described Heidi as creating time pressure:

> [Heidi] likes to be in and out. So she doesn't want to discuss
> things. She knows what she wants so she will say, "OK let's make
> a decision". So she would stop things from being a discussion
> (Tabitha, Avon)

The sense of time running out was widely felt. It is hard to know what might have emerged for discussion or been discussed further if there had been more time. AOB was a space where new topics could be added but this was constrained by the social awkwardness of adding items when everyone was ready to go home. Pakeezah was a confident governor to the extent that she had been chair at Avon for the year preceding the first meeting I observed. However, she said adding topics that she was interested in was hard as:

> the only chance, you probably would have, is at AOB… but then
> sometimes right at the end, people get tired. And even though you
> wanted to ask, you wouldn't ask. So the situation has been like
> that. I've not asked, because it is like oh everyone is getting all
> restless and they want to go home because it is eight o'clock
> (Pakeezah, Avon)

Governors are unlikely to add items either in advance or during meetings if they feel that meetings are already too long. The feeling that people would like to get home after a long day acts as a significant social constraint. The balance between ensuring everyone feels there is space for discussion and preventing meetings from continuing all night is difficult. However, it felt that there was so much information giving that time for discussion based decision-making was marginalised.

Secondary school committees' role in (not) making decisions

This sub-section explores some issues which apply specifically to secondary school committee meetings. The primary schools' committees were fairly similar to their full GB meetings so are not discussed here. Committees tended to be referred to as where most work is done. This was asserted strongly by Richard, the governor trainer contracted by the LA, in the training session which he ran at Avon in December 2011. This sub-section explores how the idea that

deliberation is taking place in the committees adds legitimacy to decisions even when such deliberation has not taken place.

The GBs all had committees but the number and type varied (see Chapter 4). In policy (DCSF, 2010b) and practice, they are standing committees rather than spaces for deeper discussion of issues arising in full GB meetings. As mentioned in relation to the minutes, the committees took on a life of their own with numerous administrative tasks to complete.

Official membership was low and turnout was very low in the secondary school committees. For example, at Tyne, a third governor arrived halfway through the meeting which approved the curriculum policies and Parihan hardly spoke (my notes, Tyne Curriculum Committee, July 2012). The Terms of Reference said that the quorum was three members so this was just met. The secondary schools' committees tended to consist of staff and the 'core' governors (see 'Ways of talking'). Where other governors attended they did not speak as much. Even when there were very few governors in the room, staff, staff governors and other governors behaved as though there were a number of non-staff governors present. For example, Mersey's Curriculum and Personnel Committee in June 2011 was attended by two teachers and myself who were not governors; Heidi, the headteacher; Sally and Tara who were staff governors; and Laurence, an LA governor:

> There was lots of talking to the room as if there were lots of people there but really there were just staff (my notes, Mersey Curriculum and Personnel Committee, June 2011)

This reflects and is part of the receiving role discussed earlier in relation to the minutes. Committees have a role in passively receiving information. The sentiment in the following comment from Sana, the finance manager, was not unusual in emphasising reporting rather than discussing as characteristic of a 'key' meeting:

> Sana - it is quite a key meeting as there is "quite a lot to report" (my notes, Mersey Premises Committee, July 2011)

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If items had been raised in committees, they were presented to the full GB as having been fully discussed. For example, when Laurence told the full GB that his committee had gone through the SDP and SEF (my notes, Mersey Full GB, July 2011), this implied that they had looked at both thoroughly whereas they had just looked at a one page summary of the SEF (my notes, Mersey Curriculum and Personnel Committee, June 2011). This added legitimacy to what might otherwise be seen as rubberstamping exercises (by a very small number of people). In other words, the full GB often made a decision to accept a 'decision' made in a committee meeting even though that decision was only a decision in a 'technical' sense. This extra layer provided to GBs by committees can be understood as a microcosm of the symbolic legitimacy given to school decision-making by the presence of GBs:

> Decision-making is a micro-political process which embraces a whole set of formal and informal arenas of interaction, confrontation and negotiation. To a great extent the official "moments", the committees and meetings, have only a symbolic role; they celebrate an ideology of participation and collective affirmation (Ball, 1987, p. 237)

The key point here is that most governors have limited access to other micro-political processes (such as snatched conversations in staff rooms or corridors) and are only party to these symbolic moments (or meetings). By engaging in a double layer of symbolic moments, the legitimacy of decisions seems to be increased.

The 'common good', consensus and voting

This section explores how conceptions of a singular common good and the valuing of consensus can militate against the expression of difference which can limit possibilities for deliberative decision-making. It considers the affective desire for consensus and a common good. It then explores the effects of GBs being constituted as corporate bodies where decisions should be made through voting. This combination of corporate body and voting is not unusual amongst governing boards and other bodies but has some complicated implications for both aggregative and deliberative conceptions of decision-making. My findings were similar to those of Dean *et al*:

> most governing bodies … proceed through consensus in pursuit of
> some notion of the common interest of the school… It was
> important, we were told, that governors were able to work with
> each other and with the head, in order to "get things done" (2007,
> pp. 53-54)

The expression of difference in meetings can be perceived to be against the common good. Governors are volunteers who tend to see themselves as being there for the good of the children (see Chapter 4 on governors' motives). As Muehlebach says, 'The emotional ties built through voluntarism have a potency that should not be underestimated' (2011, p. 75). This resonates with this study as well as with that of Dean *et al* who found that governors had 'a sense that their work for the common interests of the school and its children has a moral force' (2007, p. 32). When a headteacher presented a decision for agreement, going against it could be perceived as going against the common good where the children were concerned. Consensus and harmony were often strong ideals.

There was some variation between GBs with consensus and harmony apparently being valued less at Tyne than by the other three GBs. There are a number of possible reasons for the variations. It may have been due to variations in the headteachers' experience. Heidi was experienced at managing her GB and said, 'I don't think they're given that much to disagree on' (Heidi, Mersey). Hayley was less experienced at managing her GB. However, she may also have been less concerned to avoid overt conflict. She would quite often explicitly say to governors, 'I disagree' rather than smoothing things over. Chaman, the chair at Tyne, also sometimes encouraged disagreement in meetings. He said:

> it is a democratic body, you know, people will disagree... In fact, I
> will encourage somebody who I know is against my view. I will
> encourage him or her to talk on her views so that we can all be,
> also be involved. And if necessary, we will reshape our policy
> (Chaman, Tyne)

Clark seemed to suggest that Hayley was failing by allowing conflict at Tyne:

> [Hayley] is an abrasive character. Or can be and just, I don't think.
> So I think, you know, part of. Perhaps governing body is
> leadership anyway. It is just. It is communication and relationships
> and. I don't think she has quite found her metier there (Clark)

He compared her to the previous headteacher who had managed the same GB differently, saying she had

> dealt with all that well, I perceived it as very well and she knew
> how to handle the governing body… when they were pursuing
> some mad line, she would always say "that's a very. I think I will
> look into that and see what I can do" … which, you know, she
> wasn't going to do anything but it was a calming way (Clark)

On the one hand, overt conflict can allow for difference to come out into the open rather than being smoothly managed away. On the other, overt conflict can make meetings feel less trusting and collaborative. Tyne was the largest of the GBs which might have contributed to it feeling less trusting and collaborative than the others, particular the primary ones. Another difference in the atmosphere might have stemmed from the chairing style. Chaman at Tyne would control the meetings tightly so comments made to the whole meeting had to go through him (this did not stop people whispering to each other a lot at Tyne). This can be considered in contrast to Severn where, the headteacher acknowledged everyone's views and the chair adopted an unassuming manner so, although she was in control of the meetings, she did not do this in an overtly assertive manner. The tight control of the meeting by the headteacher and chair at Tyne meant that comments made by others tended to appear as disruptive. The friendliness of a forum has a complex impact on how easy it is to express difference. If a forum feels friendly, it may be that individuals feel comfortable to say whatever they like. However, friendliness can also constrain the expression of difference as individuals do not want to spoil the friendly atmosphere.

The valuing of consensus (with the possible exception of Tyne) operated in concert with GBs' constitution as corporate bodies. Each GB is a corporate body with 'a legal identity separate from that of its members' (DCSF, 2010b, p. 11). The way the requirement to act as a corporate body is presented in policy documents may imply that, in their decision-making, governors should suppress

difference and/or not allow for the development of difference in the pursuit of a singular common good. Although ultimately governors need to act as one body which requires a tentative and temporary consensus on a range of issues, there are questions as to how much the processes for reaching that point involves deliberation and expressions of difference. The push to consensus suggested by being a corporate body is potentially countered by the strong emphasis which the Guide to the Law places on voting as the means for making decisions:

> Every question to be decided at a governing body meeting must be determined by a majority of votes of those governors present and voting. If there is an equal number of votes, the chair (or the person acting as chair provided that they are a governor) has a second, or casting vote (*my emphasis*, DCSF, 2010b, p. 19)

Despite the emphasis on voting in the Guide to the Law, voting within the GBs which I observed was very rare beyond statutory votes, which the clerk told them they needed, for example: 'the budget, the Best Value Statement and the Scheme of Delegation' (my notes, Tyne Full GB, May 2012). Beyond these statutory votes, voting, which would have made difference more overt, seemed to be perceived by some as a sign of failure. A number of governors reported the rarity of voting and the valuing of consensus. Consensus in these terms can be understood as implying some conception of a 'common good':

> I think [we] would avoid getting to a vote. We don't vote. We're very. The only things we vote for are if, you know, more than one person stands for to be the chair or something…I don't think we've ever voted on a decision that I can remember. We always kind of talk to come to a consensus (Hannah, Avon)

> voting is a key part of democracy. I would I would look on it rather more broadly than that. And um the real democracy is people being able to have their say. To ask questions. To speak up and be encouraged to speak up. That's the real democracy. If it comes to a vote, yup we will do the vote. I personally prefer to strive for consensus. Putting as few things to the vote as possible. We … definitely put the restructuring proposals to the vote. In a secret ballot.… And that's unusual. It's the only time that we've ever had to have a secret ballot... [We've not had many other votes:] PFI was one. There was a vote. Um. It's usually consensus (Frederick, Mersey)

> We rarely vote on anything. Because it's, it is talked through and there is always actions from the meeting to come back with things at the next meeting (Hazel, Severn)

> I forget the few occasions it has gone to a vote. And I think in those instances it's only because [Lee] has kind of driven the agenda and said "we ought, for the record, we ought to vote for this" (Larry, Severn)

Interviewees at Tyne referred to votes slightly more than those at the other schools although Lucy felt that they were rare enough that her period spent as an associate had not mattered (see Chapter 6 on associates). It is unclear whether the voting was caused by or was the cause of the more confrontational atmosphere at Tyne:

> whenever I find that there is something controversial, yeah. At the end of the discussion, I always put it to vote. Always I ask, raise your hand… always I do that, as a matter of course. And once it is agreed by the majority members present, then it becomes binding on the other that they will have to buy that, you know (Chaman, Tyne)

According to the Guide to the Law, a 'Resolution' is 'A proposal made formally at a meeting that has been voted on and agreed' (DCSF, 2010b, p. 232). The word 'RESOLVED' was written after many items in the minutes of all the schools where no actual vote had been held. Most deliberative democracy theorists suggest that models of deliberative democracy must share with models of aggregative democracy (see Chapter 2) the assumption that 'voting is the means of making decisions when consensus is not possible or too costly to achieve' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 18). They recognise that, as Saward (2000) says, deliberation does not constitute a complete model of democracy and can require voting. However, the way GBs are constructed as somewhere between deliberative and aggregative models of democracy may lead to the worst of both worlds: to a pressure to consensus and to a lack of discussion. Acting as a corporate body might suggest a deliberative model but also a pressure to consensus. The emphasis on voting in the Guide to the Law may suggest an aggregative model that draws attention to difference but also an implication that discussion is unnecessary.

Theories of deliberative democracy can neglect difference. However, some deliberative democrats, such as Young (2002 [2000]), emphasise drawing out and valuing difference:

> Dialogue participants open to and aiming for agreement must nevertheless acknowledge that conflict and disagreement are frequent, and not be frightened away from democratic practice by their emergence. Too strong a commitment to consensus as a common good can incline some or all to advocate removing difficult issues from discussion for the sake of agreement and preservation of the common good (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 44)

This is important for GBs. Firstly, they are made up of individuals who may well have differing educational values and perspectives to articulate. Secondly, deliberation has an educative role so, if there are no opportunities for the discussion of diverse views, members are less likely to formulate views about issues and are more likely to assume that there is no alternative to the status quo.

How difference is expressed and drawn attention to is important for how it is valued. The way difference was expressed at Tyne felt antagonistic. In the other schools, votes which would express difference were avoided if they might be socially awkward. These examples are described below.

At Tyne, when difference was expressed, it tended to feel aggressive and personal. It felt very uncomfortable and the headteacher was angry and distressed after the last full GB which I observed (my notes, Tyne Full GB, July 2012). This reflects a wider social discomfort with disagreement which can often be understood as discord and unpleasantness. A sense that this is how expressing difference happens and feels partly explains people's reservations. It would require a change in the social norms and understandings of GBs (and wider society) for difference to be valued, encouraged and expressed in positive terms. Deliberative options might reduce the aggressive ways in which difference was expressed.

In general, governors preferred to assume a consensus if they knew there was a majority. There was a recognition of the social constraints by some governors who suggested that holding a vote could be embarrassing and socially awkward, for example:

> if it's a really crucial issue [if] there are clearly conflicting views around the table but it's an issue that really does need to be decided. And to be taken on by the staff to implement. Then we would go to a vote. But if it's um I mean if it's a discussion about um I don't know. The curriculum issue perhaps um you know is it sensible to go this route and somebody says "no I disagree" but they are quite clearly in the minority and everybody else is saying "yes we should go through with that" do we need to have a vote to embarrass that person? I think not… if he comes out with a vote of you know 14 for and one against, it becomes an additional slap in the face isn't it? (Frederick, Mersey)

Avoiding a socially awkward vote was significant in relation to the discussion about the SRE policy at Severn (Severn Full GB, May 2012). There had been a petition led by some parents who were opposed to SRE in primary schools (see Chapters 6 and 7). Lee said he wanted a proposer, a seconder and a vote so Hazel could be protected against the petitioners by having the full support of the governors. Hazel did not want a vote as she said that it would put some of the parent governors in a difficult position. Most parents spoke at this point, to clarify issues such as whether any parents had withdrawn their children. It felt as though people had felt comfortable to speak and ask questions. A consensus to reaffirm the SRE policy was then stated without a vote as follows:

> Lee - so are we unanimous?
> Pam [chair] – yes
> (my notes, Severn Full GB, May 2012)

In their interviews, Patty and Piali told me they were glad there was no vote. Pam said:

> obviously there there was some, parent governors that have probably been to some of the sessions and they were probably, you know, they'd been coerced into signing the petition … when [Lee] said "well let's take a vote". I am thinking [pulls face] "[Lee], we don't need people there putting their hand, you know, let's just,

if everybody is happy, is everybody happy? Yes. Fine. Let's move on"… because I think that would have been quite an awkward …
(Pam, Severn)

Both aggregative and deliberative models of democracy are based on people having different views. Aggregative models highlight differences through voting and deliberative models allow for deliberative explorations of difference. This presupposes that people have positions and views on different issues. Chapter 7 discusses how a number of governors did not have strong feelings about issues they had responsibility for. Reasons for this may include the perceived insignificance of the decisions governors are required to make and a lack of knowledge which might make people more passionate. It may be that those making the decisions are not directly affected by them. Models of democracy are premised on people making decisions about issues which affect them. For example, deliberative democracy's 'fundamental principle is that citizens owe one another justifications for the laws they collectively impose on one another' (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, p. 126). Maybe not being directly affected limits the participants' strength of feeling. Chapter 6 discusses how, paradoxically, the views of those who were not affected and who did not have strong feelings could be valued over those who were and did.

Deliberative democracy emphasises people learning and changing their minds through deliberation but governors tended not to have pre-existing views on many issues on the agenda. Despite this, drawing on models of deliberative democracy might help GBs by creating spaces for governors to educate each other and to explore issues from a range of perspectives.

Theories of aggregative and deliberative democracy provide useful sensitising concepts for exploring decision-making. There was a tendency in the GBs, with the exception of Tyne, to overvalue consensus and avoid the expression of difference. Sometimes this was due to governors not minding that much about the decision being made. There was often more to it than this though and construction of GBs as operating somewhere between aggregative and deliberative models of democracy seemed to lead to the worst of both worlds: to a pressure to consensus and to a lack of discussion. This in turn could lead to

the exclusion of the perspectives of subordinated members and a lack of exploration of alternatives to dominant discourses of education in any decision-making.

Ways of talking

Back and forth deliberation was not common in the meetings I observed. This section explores how particular ways of talking can constrain engagement in decision-making. Governors are constrained in their decision-making by the formality of the GB, including that produced by the chair, which limits the ways in which they are able to speak. However, there are hints that a thoughtfully chaired (or facilitated) meeting can allow certain voices to be heard that might not otherwise be so. Governors tended to be divided into core and peripheral governors. Some of these peripheral governors did not speak so were not part of any decision-making. A lack of personal relationships and context specific confidence also constrained speech and hence engagement in potential decision-making. Some practices, such as 'greeting' (Young, 2002 [2000]), supported engagement and these are explored.

Ways of talking are influenced by and influence emotions and affect. In introducing this section, it is important to note my assumption that 'Emotions are always present, whether or not they are recognised or welcome, and can either facilitate or hinder the deliberation' (van Stokkom, 2005, p. 404). This assumption runs counter to both effectiveness literature on GBs and some writing about deliberative democracy (e.g. Elster in Hoggett and Thompson, 2002, p. 4; and Habermas in Young, 2002 [2000], p. 63) which present deliberation as entirely 'rational' and without affect or emotion. Young (2002 [2000]) rightly recognises that imposing 'rationality' can exclude some people. However, in her attempts to counter this, I suggest she is in danger of overvaluing the emotional dimensions without recognising the potential dangers they bring and that they can also exclude those not comfortable with such speech. As Thompson and Hoggett point out, 'the proposal simply to welcome emotions into public deliberative spaces, without any understanding of the nature of those emotions, is somewhat naive at best, and dangerous at worst' (Thompson and Hoggett, 2001, p. 353). Martin carried out research with a

Macmillan cancer group where some stopped coming to the forum as they found the ethos too overtly 'emotional'. He says, 'it is important to recognize too the potential for emotive discourse – and more importantly the collective identity and closure of deliberation that may stem from it – to exclude some' who are uncomfortable with emotive discourse (Martin, 2011, p. 178). Hoggett and Thompson helpfully introduce a notion of 'passionate rationality' (2012, pp. 122-3) which does not set rationality in opposition to affect but recognises that they cannot be understood separately from each other. Excessive displays of emotion did not appear to be a significant issue in the GBs which I studied, to the extent that they were in the forums above (Martin, 2011; Thompson and Hoggett, 2001), so the work of Young and her suggestions for greeting, rhetoric and narrative as creating more inclusive deliberation (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 12) provide useful sensitising concepts to explore the ways of talking in the GBs.

Formality and the role of the chair

All the GBs demonstrated considerable formality. Formality can be seen as comprising: discussion being addressed through the chair; closely following set procedures and a written agenda; avoiding friendly chat; using impersonal, business-oriented and apparently unemotive language; and the production of formal minutes. A number of interviewees were surprised at how formal the GB meetings were in comparison to their workplaces:

> So it is a lot more formal than I kind of anticipated… and you know, you have got like the note taker and this, I mean working here [in a bank] as, you know, you don't have note takers in meetings, you know, you very rarely see any minutes... To see these very formal meeting minutes coming out and to have an agenda that is very, very structured, and everyone is following (Larry, Severn)

> the thing that really surprised me is how formal it is, you know, in my work life [as a management consultant then coordinator of parent support programmes], I never have meetings that are that formal. You know, with those really bullet. You know, the minutes with 4.2.1 style of writing, the clerk's role. So there are a lot of things that are really formal about [meetings] (Lucy, Tyne)

The secondary school meetings were more formal than the primary ones, partly due to their size and to taking place at huge boardroom style tables:

> I mean at [Mersey] you feel that you have to [breathes in] sit up and, you know, be sensible heh heh. I think also the fact that at [Severn], we are all sitting on little chairs at little tables (Pam, Severn and Mersey)

At Avon, Severn and Mersey, the rooms where I observed meetings were clearly, from the posters and other material items, in schools. Tyne was the only school where I observed meetings in a separate conference room (apart from the curriculum committee meetings which were in the library). This conference room had no signs to suggest it was within a school which potentially abstracted discussions from the lived reality of the school.

Formality and structure can be used to either constrain or enable engagement. The differences which constrain or enable are subtle. For example, if the norm is that the chair always checks for the views of everybody who has not contributed, this can be enabling. However, if this is the norm and the chair does not do this on a particular occasion, it is harder to contribute than it would be in a forum where such checking was not the norm.

At Severn, the chair, Pam, thought everyone would be comfortable to speak:

> I think people do feel that if they don't agree with something they can um, you know, say that they didn't (Pam, Severn)

Hazel talked about people taking a while to settle in also said governors would feel comfortable to speak:

> I think most people would now. Would be happy to say something if they felt it was worth saying (Hazel, Severn)

However, Patty said she had not previously attended formal meetings and when she first came to the GB it was 'quite daunting actually'. Her discomfort had not gone away and was reflected in her disjointed sentence structure as well as the content of the following comment:

> I don't feel, because there is not, there is not the space in, you quite often you quite often. I will sit there and I will think "oh actually, maybe I will say this and" but I don't know, I just don't feel comfortable, you know. I kind of question myself. "Is this the right thing to say?" Or "Is this the right time to say it?" (Patty, Severn)

Piali experienced Severn completely differently to Patty and felt comfortable to speak; possibly because she was used to formal meetings at work:

> we are all listening to each other… it's a good meeting, you feel, you don't feel like, "shall I say it? Shall I not? Shall I say it? Shall I not?" No, it is not like that. Because the head is, she is very open and she is very comfortable... We are not like "oooo, I can't say anything in that meeting" (Piali, Severn)

Having a chair is part of the formality of the meetings. The chair's role is powerful in constraining and enabling discussion. James *et al* refer to the importance of chairs 'Making sure "all voices are heard"' (2013a, p. 19). Some of the chair's power is due to the power placed in the position of chair but their power is not all positional power as people who are already powerful, in the sense of being confident and secure, tend to become chair. Frederick, at Mersey, said if people are 'speaking out at meetings and asking sensible questions', they become chair of a committee fairly quickly. Positional power was not enough to be a powerful chair. At Severn, Trina was committee chair but Lee dominated her meetings, forgetting that he was not the chair. Pakeezah had been chair at Avon but felt that the headteacher had had the final say there. Chairs do have considerable control over the amount of deliberation but are still constrained by the issues discussed earlier such as the limited agenda and time. How chairs use their control depends on the relative importance which they attach to inclusive processes or to efficient outcomes. All four chairs talked about the importance of the former in their interviews but, in practice, they were constrained and moved towards the latter. Chairs' recognition of confidence issues and their responses to them varied. For example, Pam said that when chairing 'you don't want to put people on the spot', whereas I observed Chaman putting people 'on the spot' and he said he specifically aimed to do this with those not participating. He seems to present this as an inclusive practice:

that is where the role of a chair comes into full play. Because it is
up to him [sic], you know, occasionally, when he sees that some
of the members are not participating in the discussion, you know,
putting right on the spot, ask him or her, "Hey, what do you think?
You have not been talking. Come on! What is your idea about it?"
So I mean that has to be encouraged, you know, by the chair...
So, I know all my governors, I know what they can talk about,
which topic they are good and which topic they are not so if I find
that on a relevant topic one of the governors is not talking, right, I
will ask direct questions (Chaman, Tyne)

Chairing in a more facilitative manner might make meetings more inclusive,
deliberative and creative. I agree with Christopher's concern that the formal
chairing at Mersey marginalised some:

I suspect that there is a bit of a sense that people probably have
things they want to say. I think the dynamic possibly means that
they don't necessarily feel that it's a valid point. And I suspect
there's a bit of a feeling that … maybe it is taking a bit too much
time so we need to kind of crack on. And I think that's because it's
not a facilitated discussion. It's a chaired meeting. And I think in
situations where you've got people of equal status with definite
and understood roles which you would in a business environment
or any kind of work environment then that's absolutely fine. You
come prepared with the things you need to say. You've read the
papers. You understand that any kind of comments are gone
through. I think this is. You've got people who don't necessarily
understand that and partly that's you know. It's both reflecting
what works for the people you've got and then making sure the
people you've got understand the process that you want to take
them through... I think I would manage it more as a very clearly
defined, facilitated discussion...
by facilitated I mean with some kind of discussion process put into
it. So that you get everyone inputting and with some sort of output
from it (Christopher, Mersey)

Heidi specifically referred to having made Mersey's GB more informal so people
could speak. It seems that Christopher's suggestion might complement this by
providing a facilitated rather than a chaired structure to encourage more
inclusive and deliberative discussion. There was not empirical evidence for the
potential impact of a more facilitated discussion but it might address some of
the issues raised in this sub-section around how formality can act as a
constraint on engagement in decision-making.

Core and peripheral governors

The GBs of the study schools comprised core and peripheral governors. This raises questions about the extent to which a whole GB, rather than just a core, makes any decisions. The literature suggests that the division of GBs into a core and periphery is common (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 50; Radnor, Ball and Vincent, 1997, p. 215; Ranson *et al.*, 2005a, p. 361). As set out in Chapter 2, the literature also suggests that the core tends to be even less representative of the demographics of the local population than full GBs are. The division of the GB into core and peripheral governors was starker in the secondary schools but occurred in all four. Core members attended committee meetings and spoke much more than the peripheral governors. In all the schools, there were some peripheral governors who hardly spoke at all in meetings: Piyal and Carrie at Avon; Puja, Pir and Shana at Severn; Paul and Tara at Mersey; and Paromita, Prionka, Prabal and Prabit at Tyne. These peripheral governors cannot be seen as contributors to decisions. The core governors tended to be middle-class and largely white. The most peripheral governors included middle and working-class governors and white and minority ethnic governors.

Governors in the secondary schools were explicit about there being a core. At Mersey, there was a discussion about restarting the occasional meetings on Saturdays with the core of white middle-class governors. The following exchange took place at the end of an item presented by the headteacher on the SDP. The core governors involved seemed to value their exclusive meetings:

> Frederick – Any comments?
> Speranza - I'm happy to set up a core [to discuss it further]
> Frederick – we've lapsed with the informal meetings on Saturdays as we had lots of additional meetings about the restructuring
> Speranza – I can set something up by phone – it's easy, you just all call into a number
> Finn – it's not the same as face to face. It was always just four of us
> [I assume the fourth person was Pam as she mentioned Saturday meetings in her interview]
> (my notes, Mersey Full GB, May 2011)

At Tyne, Leonard commented on the existence of the core and periphery and on their ethnicity:

> I think there is definitely two tiers of governing body membership as far as I can see on [Tyne]. And there are those who are. More likely to be consulted informally and those who are less likely to be. And to some extent it reflects the way in which people take part in the more optional activities like going to the subcommittee meetings but. I mean you know I am conscious that most of us are white with the exception of [Chaman] and [Chaman] has been around for a long, long time (Leonard, Tyne)

Attempts to bring the peripheral governors into the core might be understood to be based on a 'colonial' (Biesta, 2009) understanding of inclusion in that the excluded were brought into the existing forum rather than the forum being transformed by their presence. The ways of talking in the GB suited the core governors as 'The discourse at governing body meetings is often "white middle class", which can be a significant impediment to participation by minority ethnic groups' (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 66). These issues will be discussed in relation to context specific confidence in the next sub-section.

In their 2010 inspection, Ofsted had been displeased with Avon for having a very small core (of two) and this had led to attempts to engage all the governors more:

> in the last Ofsted, [Heidi] was vice-chair at the time and she and the chair met with the Ofsted inspector and the feeling was that they. They knew a lot and they were very well briefed and knew exactly what was going on. So they did a really good job in the interview … They were just too sharp really, the inspectors, they looked through all the minutes I think and they saw poor attendance and it was the same people speaking all the time (Hannah, Avon)

Ofsted's thematic report on governors suggests they are ambivalent about the existence of a core and periphery and about inclusiveness. On the one hand it states 'Effective governing bodies are driven by a core of key governors' on the other it states that for 'efficient working … governors, particularly those who were new, felt that their views were valued equally' (Ofsted, 2011, p. 13). As discussed in Chapter 2, Government policy is moving towards 'smaller governing bodies with appointments primarily focused on skills' (DfE, 2010, p.

71, para 6.30). In other words, policy suggests that only the core is needed. The valuing of a small group of people with 'skills' implies that there is no need for a range of perspectives and that representation over a range of dimensions such as class, gender and ethnicity is not significant (see Chapter 6).

Heidi saw committees as a place where those less confident to speak in the full GB could speak, saying, 'It is quite difficult for people to speak at a large meeting. I'm aware of that. That's why we do have committees'. On the other hand, Leonard thought some committees, or at least Tyne's personnel committee, dealt with technical issues and that there was more space for parents to speak in the full GB (the constitution of parent governors as having narrow interests is explored in Chapter 6):

> The problem that I think we have got with the personnel subcommittee is that things tend to be a little bit too bloody technical ... I think people are more likely to participate at the [full] governing body, partly because the discussions are more, you know more reflective and about the way that the school is seen perceived and, there is more of an opportunity for parents to report on what they think and what parents think generally than we have at a meeting of that kind… You know, I can understand why anybody who wasn't really interested in either the minutiae of things like pay and conditions and finance or who didn't love meetings or wasn't a veteran of, you know three meetings a week for the last 15 years, wouldn't be that interested in the personnel or the finance committee (Leonard, Tyne)

In the primary schools, committees were not much smaller and the discussions did not feel that different to full GB meetings. In the secondary schools, committees tended to include a bit more deliberation than full GB meetings, although still not everybody spoke. For example, the Tyne Personnel, April 2012 meeting felt much more deliberative than the main meetings, although not everyone was engaged. The deliberation was largely around detailed issues such as which individual staff should be granted unpaid leave requests and Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) points for staff. Most of the discussion was between Hayley, the headteacher; Fern, the finance manager; Leonard, an LA governor; and Tia, a staff governor. Leonard, who chaired the meeting, was the only non-staff member who was actively engaged. Adam and

Parihan hardly spoke. In summary, committee meetings in the secondary schools were more deliberative but less people were engaged, either because they were not there or because the discussion was 'technical'.

Heidi's suggestion that committees provided a place where less confident governors could speak seems to be premised on the idea of small groups discussing ideas in detail and bringing them back to a larger group. However, this vision does not fit easily with the role of GB committees. Committees had separate administrative tasks to complete. This meant that they were not a space for governors to explore, develop and reflect on their views before presenting them in the full GB. A model which might fit more closely with Heidi's suggestion would be for small working group to take a dilemma raised in the full GB and have a deliberative discussion about it where a wide range of possibilities could be expressed and explored before taking thoughts back to the larger, more conformity inducing space of the full GB.

The division of GBs into core and peripheral governors seemed to be accepted by many governors and by Ofsted's thematic report (2011c) as 'natural'[18]. Committees tended to reproduce the core/periphery division rather than acting as a place where peripheral governors could develop views to take to the full GB. In the study schools, the existence of a core and a periphery meant that just a core made any decisions in the name of the whole GB.

'Greetings', relationships and confidence

Silence and absences such as the absence of engagement are complex and can be interpreted in many ways (Mazzei, 2007). There were hints of ways in which the silent governors might be more engaged. In addition to the more facilitative approach suggested by Christopher above, there are hints of the effects of greeting, relationship building and context specific confidence building which are discussed in this sub-section. These all have implications for wider engagement in decision-making.

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[18] As with everything in this study, by describing a core/periphery binary here, I am playing a problematic role in constructing it as such.

Young (2002 [2000]) discusses the importance of 'greeting' or 'public acknowledgement' preceding deliberation for establishing recognition, equality and trust:

> At that most basic level, "greeting" refers to those moments in everyday communication where people acknowledge one another in their particularity. Thus it includes literal greetings, such as "Hello", "How are you?" and addressing people by name. In the category of greeting I also include moments of leave-taking, "Good-bye", "See you later", as well as the forms of speech that often lubricates discussion with mild form of flattery, stroking egos, deference, and politeness. Greeting includes handshakes, hugs, the offering of food and drink, making small talk before getting down to real business (pp. 57-8)

This draws attention to some important aspects of the GBs which have implications for the engagement of governors in making decisions and which are explored here.

Severn had photos of all their governors outside the school office and Tyne had photos on their website. I assumed they were largely there to raise the profile of governors amongst parents and others but they did provide a way for governors to learn each other's names (maybe I spent more time studying them than governors did). Food seemed to be important in bringing people together. At all the schools, sandwiches and snacks were provided before and during meetings and were a key topic for small talk. At Tyne, the food was to one side and people got up individually and sometimes sat quite far apart from each other whereas at the other schools, food was on the main table and people passed it around.

Not knowing each other well was potentially an obstacle to some governors feeling comfortable to talk, particularly about values or principles:

> The evanescent character of governing bodies means that many governors do not know their fellow governors anything like as well as they would if they worked together on a daily basis. So the conditions under which all or most members of governing bodies might feel able to divulge their values are rarely present in the

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reformed English system of governance (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 164)

It is often easier to talk when people know each other. Thody and Punter suggest this was particularly an issue for business governors:

> Several business governors felt that they were regarded at first as "stereotypical arch capitalists", but that resistant attitudes to business people per se and to business approaches were mostly dispelled as they became integrated and trusted. This was hampered because, in some cases, there were few opportunities outside governing body meetings to get to know other governors and to understand the group dynamics within the meetings. This was considered a particular drawback because the business governors did not have the usual parental, social, political or educational governor links…
>
> Some governors in the study considered that there were too few opportunities outside the formal governing body meetings for them to interact with other governors, so impeding the team building that could engender success in formal meetings (Thody and Punter, 2000, p. 194)

Over a decade later, the business governors in the four study schools did not seem to struggle be 'integrated or trusted'; rather they seemed to be almost idealised governors. Community and LA governors without a direct connection to the school might be expected to feel most strongly that they did not know other governors, for example:

> I suppose that I don't ever speak to any or get a chance to speak to any of the other governors (Christopher, Mersey)

However, in all the study schools, not knowing each other was common for most governors. There were limited other spaces in which they met, apart from primary parent governors meeting in the playground. I was surprised to find a number of interviewees did not know the names of all the other governors. All the above suggests some of Young's criteria for 'greeting' (2002 [2000]) were met but many were missing, including the most basic one of people knowing each other's names.

The diversity of governors in each GB seemed to require that someone act as a bridge or 'transversal enabler' (Wise, 2007) communicating across groups in order to make people feel included and part of the GB. This went some way towards encouraging everyone to speak. This role tended to be played by the headteacher in the primary schools. The primary GBs were smaller and the headteachers were more accessible to everyone. It seems that there was a need for someone else to play the role of bridge in the two secondary schools. At Tyne and Mersey, certain governors seem to be positioned as a bridge between working and middle-class governors (and, in Tyne's case, minority ethnic and white governors). The word 'bridge' was used in relation to both Chaman at Tyne and Sally at Mersey and from the observations, I would suggest that both played a bridging role. Hayley said of Chaman:

> he does bridge some divides. Because it is quite stark on the governing body, isn't it? (Hayley, Tyne)

I understood Hayley to be referring to the 'divides' between middle-class white and working-class Bengali (and one Somali and one Algerian) Muslim governors and suggesting that Chaman could be a bridge because he was middle-class and a Bengali Muslim. Chaman seemed to be positioned by the non-Bengali governors as understanding and representing the other Bengali governors (see Chapter 6 on representation and on how whiteness constructs 'the other' as homogenous). He had run a business locally but, as Tarun emphasised to me, he was a middle-class professional living outside the local area and had been born in a different part of Bangladesh to the families of most local Bengali people. He drew on his in-between positioning to present himself as a chair who understood and listened to everyone.

At Mersey, there was also a divided GB:

> The governors do try hard to mingle and to, you know. They do try but there is a class divide you know (Heidi, Mersey)

Sally was a support staff governor and her children had attended Mersey. Heidi described Sally as helping to 'bridge' the gap between 'those sort of posh lot those sort of foundation you know well-to-do professional people' and 'lots of

the parents who aren't well-to-do and aren't professional'. Sally recognised that she did this:

> You know everyone is different and I think that's what makes the world go round basically. I very much am a people person and I think that's the biggest thing … I bring to the governing body because I'm not an academic. I'm not, without being disrespectful, a dinner lady. I'm sort of in-between and I can bring I think I bring. Trying to bring people together that's what I bring (Sally, Mersey)

Chaman and Sally were both positioned by others as in-between figures and Sally saw herself in these terms, whereas Chaman talked more about understanding everyone's individual perspectives. They both emphasised their localness and were comfortable talking to local people as well as the headteacher and the non-local governors. Sally had always lived locally and knew a lot of people including parents. Chaman did not live locally but his business was local to the school and he was keen to assert his localness a number of times in our interview. Sally's role as a bridge was different to Chaman's and usually involved talking to the less confident people outside the meetings in order to include them in the meetings with their existing formal ways of talking. As the chair, Chaman was able to run the meetings in a way that he felt would include everyone. As someone who was quiet in meetings but active outside of them, Sally was not able to transform the ways of talking in the GB but was able to build the confidence of those less comfortable in such forums.

Partly as a way of bridging divides on her GB, Heidi used humour and Hannah described Heidi's humour as 'irreverent'. However, unlike Coole's 'playful subversion' (as described by Bradley, 2007, p. 198), it did seem that humour was more available to governors who were already powerful as a way of both relationship building and of challenging discourses. Heidi said of her own role as a bridge:

> I just take the mick really. I just you know try to make them laugh sometimes because you know there are tense moments sometimes … we haven't had persistent people putting each other down or whatever but … people feel intimidated so I'd just be me and do whatever I can (Heidi, Mersey)

I observed an example when Heidi gently teased Christopher about his management terminology making those less familiar with that way of talking feel comfortable:

> Heidi - I'm going to write down "pinpointing exercise". Add to my vocabulary (my notes, Mersey Full GB, May 2011)

There were a number of governors who told me that they felt confident to challenge in meetings but who I hardly heard speak in my observations. At Mersey, Tara and Sally both told me they would raise something *if necessary*. Christopher, based on his experience of working with groups, suggested that the reason certain governors did not speak is that they were not confident:

> And you know there are some people who come and never speak. And I don't know whether that's because on that occasion and every occasion that, you know, they haven't felt the need to speak but that they would feel perfectly confident to or maybe they don't feel confident. And I think I know enough about group dynamics to suspect that it's the latter (Christopher, Mersey)

I take Young's italicised words below to refer to confidence:

> Deliberative theorists tend to assume that bracketing political and economic power is sufficient to make speakers equal. This assumption fails to notice that the social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an *internalised sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak*, and the devaluation of some people's style of speech and the elevation of others (*my emphasis*, Young, 1996, p. 122)

The relationship between 'social power' and confidence is very significant for GBs where inequalities, including of class and ethnicity are pervasive. Such power cannot be 'bracketed'. (Chapter 6 describes how it is often those with some apparent form of 'representative' role, for example, those seen as representing a particular ethnicity or other parents, who are the least confident in meetings and that this is partially due to the lack of clarity of their role.) Furthermore, context and relationships, rather than just individual attributes, are significant in the apparent confidence of governors' engagement. As Hoggett

and Thompson point out, 'the emotions, like power, are always located in social relations, particularly group relations, rather than within the space of the individual' (2012, pp. 122-3). This applies at a micro as well as a societal level. Leonard was middle-class and a confident and active governor at Tyne. In describing how he had been a disengaged primary school governor before this, he talked about the importance of 'glue' which I understood as referring to having been engaged in actually speaking, echoing Young's 'greeting':

> But I mean the full governing body, I think it is. It is on the big side. It is run more formally, I think, than, it might be… what you don't want is to see someone come to their first meeting as a governor, not say anything, come to the next meeting as a governor, not say anything. If they haven't said anything at the first two meetings, they are not going to. But in any case, the whole term has gone by by then. So, you know, it's a sort of glue that sort of pulls you in. And as I said, when I was a governor at the primary school, partly because I was quite busy and I missed a couple of meetings and partly because there wasn't anybody there saying "yeah, come in, this is what your role is, this is what we would like you to do", you know, making you feel welcome, then you don't participate. So that is what happened with me in the last school (Leonard, Tyne)

This context dependent confidence was also borne out by the difference in the two governor experiences of Patty, a working-class mother. She talked about the importance of amicability and social relations for her confidence. As mentioned above, she did not feel very confident at Severn which she found formal. However, she felt confident at the smaller special school where she was also a governor:

> Patty: yeah because [X special] school, I am a lot more familiar with um because I get on really well with the staff at [X special] school because obviously, it is a lot more small and intimate … so I get on really well with the staff, I'm really comfortable with them. Again because of the intimacy of the school, I know the other parent governors really well there. So I am a lot more relaxed and it is a whole lot more relaxed atmosphere... Whereas here it is kind of a more rigid and I don't know everyone on the board really. I don't really know anyone on [the] board really well other than [Hazel]
> I: OK
> P: And [Fay]. So I don't really feel comfortable to say things.
> (Patty, Severn)

In addition to context, the topic being discussed impacts on governors' confidence. Governors who appeared not to be confident were very confident when talking about a particular topic about which they felt knowledgeable and 'allowed' to speak about, for example, Piyal talked confidently about school uniform at Avon, a 'welfare' rather than an academic issue on which parental views were deemed legitimate. Governors' apparent lack of confidence is sometimes a symptom of a lack of clarity about their role, especially for the elected parent and staff governors who felt constrained in the topics about which they could talk (see Chapter 6). The lack of knowledge of particular subjects, discussed in Chapter 7, also has important implications for individuals' confidence.

Since confidence is partly context specific, it could be increased by changes in the context with a greater emphasis on greeting in Young's (2002 [2000]) sense. Such social interaction validating each governor as an individual might engage more governors and transform the ways of talking normalised in the meetings. This, in turn, might present new possibilities for decision-making processes.

Reflections

This chapter has discussed how governors perceived themselves as decision-makers but tended not to actually make decisions, beyond ratification. The decision-making processes of these school GBs are very far removed from theories of deliberative democracy. However, these theories help to explore constraints and limitations on decision-making. These include: the framing of decisions; the limited spaces for decisions; and constructions of the common good and consensus. Written agendas operated to constrain what could be discussed. Minutes present decisions which have only been made in a 'technical' sense as decisions and suggest that conflict does not occur potentially precluding future decisions or expressions of difference. A lot of time was taken up by information giving so there was a constant sense of being too short of time for discussion. Secondary school committees were often referred to as where decisions happened but this did not necessarily mean these decisions had been subject to detailed discussion. The suggestion that they had

been discussed added legitimacy to decisions which were reported to the full GB. Conceptions of the common good and the valuing of consensus militated against discussion and the expression of difference which limited possibilities for decision-making. Some governors did not speak or engage in any decision-making and this was partly due to the ways of talking within the GBs. A lack of personal relationships and context specific confidence also constrained speech and hence engagement in potential decision-making. Some practices, such as 'greeting' (Young, 2002 [2000]), supported engagement although they were limited.

There was some variation within the four GBs. However, they were all simultaneously busy and passive and the performance of their meetings produced legitimacy for 'technical' decisions involving a small number of governors.

Chapter 6: Representation and Available Governor Subject Positions

Introduction

This chapter considers some of the implications of the ambivalences and ambiguities, outlined in Chapter 2, for the subject positions of the research participants in this study. There are varied and multiple subject positions from which governors speak, constituted by a range of discourses. These construct what it is that individuals are able to speak about and the ways they are able to speak.

Having a combination of parents, staff and community members on the GB was generally seen as positive by those interviewed except by Fraser, a foundation governor at Mersey, who thought staff should not be there. The diversity of categories and backgrounds of governors seemed to be valued in itself, for example, Sally said it was like 'a diamond' and everyone was needed. This reflects the NGA position that 'it is critical to good governance to have a diverse group of people bringing different skills, knowledge and experience to the discussions' (NGA, 2013b, p. 5). However, the subject positions available to these various members were differently privileged.

In my research, I found that, oddly, educational issues were not prioritised in meetings. A separate chapter, Chapter 7, explores subject positions in relation to educational knowledge. This chapter focuses on possible subject positions of citizen, stakeholder and skills-carrier through sections on the concepts of representation and view breadth in order to explore how particular subjects are constituted and differently privileged. It suggests those constituted as objective independent governors are elevated above those constituted as representing particular constituencies, attributes or experiences. Before the main sections on 'Representation' and 'View breadth', the membership of GBs is introduced followed by a summary of what is meant by stakeholders, citizens and skills-carriers.

The membership of school governing bodies

The law requires that GBs be made up of stakeholders (DCSF, 2010b, p. 3; DfE, 2012b, p. 5). Individuals from certain 'stakeholder groups' are elected or appointed to the GB but once there, they are meant to act collectively as a corporate body (see Chapter 5) and not for their constituents:

> The guiding principles prescribe which categories of governor must be represented on the governing body and what the level of representation is for each of the categories. There are four compulsory stakeholder groups for community and community special schools as well as MNS [maintained nursery schools] and VA [voluntary aided] schools (DCSF, 2010b, p. 3; DfE, 2012b, p. 5)

> School governors are drawn from different parts of the community and can be parents and staff or from the LA, the community and other groups. This helps ensure the governing body has sufficient diversity of views and experience but does not mean governors of a particular category represent that group on the governing body. For example, parent governors do not represent the parents at the school and do not report back to them. (DfE, 2012a)

At the four study schools, the four categories led to the following members: staff governors elected by staff; parent governors elected by parents; LA governors appointed by the LA; and community governors appointed by the GB. Tyne and Mersey also had sponsor governors and Mersey had foundation governors.

In their book which aims to clarify the role of the GB, Martin and Holt explain:

> Individual governors are, of course, elected or appointed, which suggests that each individual governor might be accountable to their constituency or appointing body. However, individual governor responsibility and accountability have rightly been subsumed by the corporate nature of school governance. Since individual governors have no authority other than by virtue of their membership of the corporate body, it has been argued that any responsibility is exercised on behalf of the corporate body and therefore it is of that body that accountability should be required. (Martin and Holt, 2010, p. 108)

They highlight ambivalences around representation as they go on to suggest:

It seems that in an effort to deter any politicisation of the governing body, the message has been strongly communicated in recent years that all governors should somehow deny their constituencies or appointing bodies. But if governors are to have equal voices that are truly representative and do not assert only their own personal interests and concerns, then some form of accountability would seem appropriate. Such forms of accountability would require regular communication and consultation so that the views of the parent body, LA, church or other group could be more properly taken into account. (Martin and Holt, 2010, p. 109)

Ambivalence about representation is also indicated by the 'although' in the following: 'A parent governor is a representative parent not a parent representative; *although* clearly s/he will be well placed to alert the governing body to any parental concerns' (*my emphasis*, NGA, 2009, p. 15).

Stakeholder governor categories of staff, parent, LA and community operate as dividing practices. Despite the national policy that once elected or appointed, governors should be equal, each governor's category has important implications for their subject position and for power relations, as will be seen in the rest of this chapter.

Stakeholders, citizens or skills-carriers?

There are many discourses operating in policy and practice which make diverse, shifting and multiple subject positions available to school governors. In the meeting observations and interviews, discourses of governors as stakeholders, citizens and skills-carriers were intertwined.

For the purposes of this chapter, the stakeholder subject position is understood as follows:

> Making the self and the social world intelligible and visible in terms of 'stakes' (preferences, interests, opinions) implies a particular kind of self-knowledge, different for instance from a legal or ideological self-understanding… this mode of subjectivation, as a stakeholder, is at the same time an inscription in technologies of power and control. Interests and opinions are included in procedures of calculation, modification, translation and decision-making and thereby can be acted upon. (Simons and Masschelein, 2010, p. 591)

Stakeholders come to a deliberation to assure their individual interests so 'stakeholder dialogue starts with the premise that there are legitimate, pre-established positions and interests and that these need to come to the table in an open way to be confronted, negotiated and reconciled' (Davies, Barnett and Wetherell, 2006, p. 34).

The citizenship subject position is premised on 'shared identity as members of a polity' (Davies, Barnett and Wetherell, 2006, p. 34). Davies *et* al go on to say that 'The quest as citizens is to find a course of action contributing to the common good' (p. 34). However, as set out in Chapter 2, this study is drawing largely on an understanding of citizens as concerned with collective problems (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 43), including public goods, rather than with a singular common good.

The skills-carrier subject position was explored in relation to national policy in Chapter 2. The movement in policy towards privileging skills has important implications, not only for who becomes a school governor, but for the subject positions available to them once they are governors. Skills-carriers have skills, often gained through business, which they and others perceive as neutral and transferable. They tend to be constituted as objective.

There is a move in policy to set up a binary between 'skills' and 'interests', for example, 'Governors should be chosen on the basis of their skills rather than the organisation or interest that they represent' (Gove, 2012b). The word 'interest' here can imply selfish behaviour, inappropriate for the public sphere. By considering the three subject positions above, Gove's statement can be seen as reflecting a double displacement from citizenship. Firstly, 'stakeholder' as a 'hollowed out' concept, amongst others, is replacing concepts like citizenship which are thereby 'stripped of meaning' (Ozga, 2000b, p. 6). Secondly, skills-carriers are being privileged above these narrow stakeholders, which, in turn, replaced citizens. This double displacement can occur more easily when citizenship is associated with one singular 'disinterested', common good. In this context, if stakeholder interests are associated with narrow self-

interest, it is possible for skills to be associated with the opposite - altruism and concern for a common good. As this move is taking place in policy, something similar is occurring in GBs themselves. Although governors are elected or appointed as stakeholders, once on the GB, they are not meant to represent their constituencies. This creates an ambivalence about having a stakeholder position. It is widely understood that parents and staff have particular interests, stakes and perspectives in the governing of their school, whether or not they come representing the views of their constituencies. The interests, stakes and perspectives of the other categories of governor (community, LA, foundation and sponsor) remain largely ambiguous and hidden as seen in the final section on 'View breadth'. This means that they are more easily able to draw on a citizenship discourse of a singular common good. As Young argues, understanding citizenship as concerned with the common good can lead to the privileging of those who are able to present their partiality as objective:

> Under circumstances of structural, social and economic inequality, the relative power of some groups often allows them to dominate the definition of the common good in ways compatible with their experience, perspective and priorities. A common consequence of social privilege is the ability of a group to convert its perspective on some issues into authoritative knowledge without being challenged by those who have reason to see things differently (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 108)

Discourses of citizenship, stakes and skills are intertwined in complex ways. This chapter will explore the subject positions made available and taken up by the research participants through considering two concepts: 'Representation' and 'View breadth'. An overly simple summary of the three overarching discourses described in this section would be that: a stakeholder discourse allows for a form of representation; a skills discourse allows for the appearance of neutral, broad views; and a citizenship discourse allows for representation and for broad views about collective problems.

Representation

Leonard was typical in telling me that those affected by GB decisions should have a voice:

> it would be extremely inappropriate if the employees of the school
> didn't have representation and a voice. In the same way I think it
> would be totally wrong for there to be a lack of representation from
> parents (Leonard, Tyne)

What this representation means is less clear. There are various understandings of representation drawn on in policy and practice all with implications for the constitution of governor subjects. On the one hand, representation can mean representing a constituency either by directly consulting that constituency or being positioned as somehow knowing their views. On the other, it can mean being representative of a certain attribute such as being a parent or being of a particular ethnic group.

Variations in understandings of staff and parent representation

The lack of clarity about the meaning of representation is apparent in the large variation in interpretations of it between and within the study schools.

There was a major difference *between* the schools in the prevailing understanding of, particularly parent, representation. At the two primary schools, there was a strong expectation that the parents should consult other parents when requested to. At Avon, the parent governors led the school uniform consultation with parents. At Severn, the parent governors conducted a questionnaire with parents about their views and the headteacher told me that when she sees parent governors, she tells parents to speak through them:

> if I see them [parent governors] in a parent session, so if I see
> them in the phonics or anything, I always point them out, I say
> "look, they are your parent governors if you ever want to speak to
> them" (Hazel, Severn)

These practices and expectations did not occur so explicitly at Mersey and Tyne possibly because parents do not spend so much time in secondary schools as in primary schools.

However, *within* each school there were also different understandings of representation. For example, at Tyne, I interviewed Hayley, Lucy, Tarun,

Parihan, Chaman and Leonard and they provided a range of understandings. The headteacher was clear about the subtle distinction in policy:

> I have had to point out to the teaching governors, they don't represent the staff. They're not spokespeople, you know they are not spokesmen and women for the staff; that is not their role. And neither are parents. They bring, you know, staff and parent governors bring a staff and parent governor perspective (Hayley, Tyne)

Lucy was a parent but was on the GB as an LA governor and said if she was a parent governor, she would 'feel a burden of having to go and talk to loads and loads of parents and find out what they think'. Tarun told me that not only teachers, but support staff and parents came to him with views to pass on. Parihan asked parents and children for their views. Chaman, a non-parent community governor said 'if you like we have got our hands on the community as parents, as community governors, so we know what they feel and we have got a network of, you know, mother and father who reports regularly to us'. In this, he seemed to see parent governors as representing other parents. The italicised section in the following suggests some form of representation:

> with the personnel subcommittee … things tend to be a little bit too bloody technical … I think people are more likely to participate at the governing body, partly because the discussions are more, you know more reflective and about the way that the school is seen perceived and, there is more of an opportunity for parents to report on what they think *and what parents think generally* than we have at a meeting of that kind (*my emphasis*, Leonard, Tyne)

Furthermore, I observed parent governors coming with complaints from other parents, for example, Prabit explicitly said that parents had asked him to raise the issues of the parents' evening being overcrowded and of the phone system not working (my notes, Tyne Full GB, May 2012). These issues were discussed briefly and with some annoyance from the head.

The variations in understandings of staff and parent representation indicate a lack of clarity as to what it should and might mean. It also suggests that staff and parent views are more welcome on some issues, such as uniform in the case of parents, than on others.

Elections, appointments and leaving

The ways in which governors join and can be made to leave their GB also have implications for their subject positions, including their sense of legitimacy. GBs have elections in which parents vote for parent governors and staff vote for staff governors. Elections were seen by many of the research participants as indicators of democracy. I understood this to mean that they were drawing on a discourse of representative democracy, which is inconsistent with policy in relation to the position of governors. Unlike in a model of representative democracy where representatives take forward the views of their constituency to a decision-making body, governors are explicitly not meant to take forward the views of their constituents.

Being elected seemed to be important to the understanding many governors had of their subject position yet, not only were governors not meant to represent their constituency's views or be held to account by their constituency but, in many cases, elections were undermined by the lack of competition and alternative governor positions were made available to those who lost elections. Some schools struggle to find governors so have no need for elections. Nationally, the 'overall level of vacancies runs at about 11%' (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 15). In the study schools, there had been occasional elections in recent years at Avon, Mersey and Tyne. At Severn, Hazel (who had been headteacher for eight years) had managed things in such a way that she had avoided elections. The position of associate governor[19] was used as a device at Mersey, Tyne and Severn to encourage membership and to avoid competition. Another notable phenomenon was governors shifting from one governor category to another. At Mersey, the headteacher described the associate governor position as 'just a way of getting people in the door' (Heidi). She was proud to tell me 'We just had our second [parent] election in 15 years you know' (Heidi). In that election, Parveen lost but Heidi invited him to become an associate governor anyway which might be seen as undermining the election which had just taken place. Sally had been a parent governor until it was realised that she worked at the school for too many hours to be a parent governor; she was made an

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[19] Associate governors can participate in GBs but cannot vote.

associate until a support staff governor position arose. Freya shifted from LA governor to foundation governor. At Tyne, Leonard referred to parents becoming LA governors when their children left and raised the category of associate governor describing it as 'a bit of a revolving door'. Lucy lost a parent governor election and became an associate then an LA governor. Adam was a parent but attended as an associate. At Severn, the headteacher avoided elections, suggesting they might:

> hold some of our parents back. So I said, if you're interested to come to the first governing body meeting and if you still think you are interested, have a meeting with me (Hazel, Severn)

Some dropped out after attending a meeting but when there were still too many for the vacancies, she invited a parent to become an associate until a vacancy arose. A community vacancy was advertised via a bank which the school had a strong connection to and two reading partners, Connor and Larry, both applied. They decided between them that Connor should take the position and Larry became an associate until an LA vacancy arose a year later. 17 years before the research period, Pam had been invited to stand for election as a parent but had lost the election. She said 'well I think they then co-opted me as a social whatever it was and then as soon as a parent vacancy became available, they moved me over to the vacancy'. Later, when her children had left, she became a community governor.

I was told by a number of interviewees that it did not matter if people were associate rather than full governors as voting was rare. An exception to the enthusiasm with which the headteachers at Mersey, Tyne and Severn encouraged associates occurred at Severn in relation to particular people who were seen as likely to cause trouble. The following was about the eight fathers who had been involved in the borough wide petition based campaign against SRE:

> Piali – parents have asked to become a governor
> Hazel – there are no vacancies at the moment
> Patty – I will leave next year as my son will finish

Lee - so the answer to [Piali] is that if there is a vacancy, it will be
advertised
Piali – there have been quite a few after the SRE thing. Can they
observe?
Pam and Hazel – yes, anyone can come
Lee - we even have Helen here
Clark – the eight dads [who have said most about SRE]
Pam [the chair] – they can observe but they can't participate
(my notes, Severn Full GB, Jun 2012)

Where the associate governor category is used and where individuals shift between governor categories, both the role of elections and representation is confused and the stakeholder basis for the GB is disrupted. There appears to be a lack of legitimisation through the process of representation. Parent and staff governors are authorised as stakeholders in that they are (usually) elected. They are then, however, no longer accountable to their constituencies. The link with the constituencies is blurred or stretched even further by the internal movement of governors from one category to another so representation is made more tenuous.

Appointments are the means by which community and LA governors join the GB. Individuals wanting to be governors can go to the LA or directly to a school. In either case, the category of governor which they become can just depend on the vacancies available. However, Avon found getting community governors more difficult as the LA actively helps with finding LA governors. LA and community governors with particular skills are sometimes sought (skills are explored under 'View breadth'). Being local did not appear significant in their appointment and many were not local. Incumbency seemed to be a factor in appointments so where the terms of sitting LA governors ended but they said they would like to stay, the GB's preference meant the LA did not propose an alternative.

In the course of our interview, Larry, an LA governor at Severn, started questioning his legitimacy and suggesting that he should be elected by parents:

I: … what would it mean for a governing body to be democratic?
Should governing bodies be democratic?

> L: that is a good point. I think it probably. Yeah contradicts what I said earlier doesn't it. I mean. I agree with the governing body as such as being a tool for running their schools but it's not elected in any way is it?
> I: is that what would make it democratic in your mind?
> L: yeah heh heh I've just fallen into a trap heh
> I: NO there isn't a trap. There is no trap honestly heh. I am completely open
> L: yes because actually. I have never thought about this but. All the 500 kids and their parents. I am sitting on a governing body they should. I mean they kind of broadly know who I am but should they not be more involved in selecting me?
> I: the parents?
> L: yeah the parents and, you know. We talked earlier. Me and [Conrad] turned up and said, you know, there is one space and there is two people, we looked at each other and I was like "why don't you do it then". That's not very democratic and we are making a decision there as to who is going to represent and vote on behalf of these stakeholders, you know the kids and the parents. And. That's not right then is it? Because you know they … should. So my answer you know, I think that parents should, if it is run democratically, should have much more input as to who sits on the board.
> I: OK
> L: you know the parents
> I: the parents, anyone else?
> L: well yeah, parents, teachers. I don't know. Local authority yeah

I tried hard to reiterate that I did not have any answers and told him I was a community governor myself in the hopes that this would prevent him from feeling negatively judged. He returned to this issue later, saying:

> It is like I turn up and. I am attending these meetings, I am voting for certain proposals and they, apart from the brochure they have just done recently [a leaflet with photos of governors was inserted in the school prospectus], they don't know that I have turned up in the last year. They don't know what my background is. Yet I am voting on some key issues. Yeah that's [unclear] yeah yeah. *It needs to be fully elected surely. Yeah* (*my emphasis*, Larry, Severn)

I found it interesting that the possibility of elections was seen to have the power to confer legitimacy despite all the limitations on GB elections described earlier. This seemed to be yet another aspect of the ambivalences and ambiguities in the role introduced in Chapter 2. More generally, it suggests the discursive power of representative democracy.

Over and against the issues outlined above, it is difficult to remove governors once they have been elected or appointed, except for non-attendance. Heidi told me about her past experience with an LA governor who 'was racist. He was really horrible'. She said 'actually it's almost impossible to get rid of a governor'. The process varies depending upon the category of governor. The GB is able to remove co-opted governors but others need to be removed by their respective constituency (DfE, 2012c, pp. 7-8). The Education Select Committee's response to this situation was to 'recommend that governing bodies be given the power to remove poorly performing governors' (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 35). The DfE responded, 'We have no plans to give governing bodies more power to remove governors' (Education Committee, 2013b, p. 12). Aside from statute with regard to removing governors, there are social pressures not to reject someone. On the other hand, some governors, particularly the three long established chairs, felt a responsibility not to leave. Some parent governors stayed after their children left but there was a higher turnover of parents than of other categories of governors.

This sub-section has suggested that how governors come to join the GB has implications for their subject position and legitimacy. The elections incorrectly imply a representative democratic discourse which causes confusion as considered in the next sub-section.

Representing staff and parents

As noted, both parents and staff are elected by constituencies. After this there are considerable ambiguities about their role in relation to their 'constituency'. A number of parents and staff said that they would pass on others' views *'if'* people came to them but were surprised to find that people did not come to them. For example (*my emphasis*):

> *if*, for instance, someone was to come with something that they wanted me to take to the governors, I would be willing to speak up and stuff like that (Piyal, Avon)

I was elected a parent governor and I am grateful for that and *if* anyone ever needs any help, as a parent governor I would support them and help them as much as I could (Priya, Mersey)

you know *if* someone. *If* a member of staff. Support staff said to me I don't agree with blah blah blah I feel that it is my role to take that to the governing body. To say that someone has come and seen me. But to be honest no one has. No one has actually from the support staff come and said blah blah blah (Sally, Mersey)

I would probably see myself. I see myself as, *if* there was an issue, big issue, so for example, I suppose with the restructuring, my role was probably to you know represent staff on the governing body but nothing has ever been passed through me to you know to be asked to be raised at a governors meeting from staff and I don't know if that's because the unions are quite strong here and it has gone that way but I think that would be one of my roles. (Tara, Mersey)

I would like to think I could represent the staff. *If* somebody came to me and said look, this is my issue, this needs to go, and I do hope one day, somebody does ask that question, because then I will be able to go and do it and. So I would like to think and, like I say, all the staff know I am a governor now and. I would like to think I could represent my staff (Trina, Severn)

It is not clear whether parents and staff did not take issues to these parent and staff governors because they felt that the GB was not significant as a decision-maker or because they understood that the parent and staff governors were not meant to represent them. What was striking was how all these governors had an unfulfilled expectation that one day a parent or member of staff would come to them. Severn parents and Tarun, a teacher at Tyne, seemed to be rare cases of the fulfilment of an expectation that parents and staff would speak through parent and staff governors. The following extract is from my interview with Piali at Severn:

Piali: I am a parent governor so if someone, a parent comes to me for a concern, I can take that to the meeting
I: does that happen much?
P: like the lollipop lady wasn't there [on the road outside the school], um and a lot of parents said "can you take that up" because the little kid nearly had an accident there and I took that up, I took it to the governing body and we discussed it and Hazel said "yeah that is a good idea" so she took it to the local authority. Within a year, we had a lollipop lady there

Patty also gave the 'lollipop lady' outside Severn as an example of when parents had come to her but felt that despite her expectation that parents should come to her, they rarely did. At Tyne, Tarun said staff came to him: 'And any sort of like issues or concerns they have, I'll try and raise in the appropriate environment whether it's the finance committee or the personnel or the full governors'.

The constitution of GBs as corporate bodies can mean that individuals are divorced from a constituency which might encourage them to take a stronger stand on particular issues. In a corporate body, once a decision is made by the body, there is an expectation that individuals stand by this rather than disassociate themselves from it. As Chaman said, 'once it is agreed by the majority members present, then it becomes binding on the other that they will have to buy into that' (Chaman, Tyne).

For this study, I did not interview non-governor parents or staff but it is not unreasonable to assume that they do not feel strongly represented on their schools' GBs. Layla's comment on this also makes a wider point about policy legitimizing certain decisions and not others:

> I do think that decisions need to be made by a combination, parents, teachers and community and so I think from that point of view. Governing bodies do bring together those people to a certain extent. But I don't think that. My impression is that none of those groups feel like the current governing body structure accurately represents their concerns because I think that, I mean again if you look at sort of the academies debate where, you know it really does feel like the governing body can just agree to be an academy without um without having to completely take on board the comments of parents or the comments of the community as a whole (Layla, Avon)

In meetings, I did see parent and staff governors take on roles involving relationships with their constituency, these can be understood as: consulters; conduits for complaints and suggestions; and communication advisers.

<u>Consulters</u> - Sometimes the GB specifically asks parents to consult other parents, for example, the generic written questionnaires at Severn and about uniform at Avon. This did not seem to occur at the secondary schools.

Hazel told me consultation by parent governors with other parents probably occurred more at Severn than at other schools but it 'tends to be better when it is set up'. Parent governors had recently gone into the playground with clipboards to ask other parents for their opinions. However, she (and Pam) also valued Patia's ongoing unstructured consultations: 'Patia does the fantastic getting out and doing parent, she'll go out and ask parents anything' (Hazel, Severn). Hazel included information about their 'systems for seeking the views of parents and carers from the governors' in the SEF.

The uniform consultation at Avon was the clearest example of parent governors leading a parent consultation and raises issues around the positioning of parent governors. The parent governors, Pakeezah, Piyal and Paula, had initially raised the idea of a uniform in the GB saying it had come from parents in the playground (Parvaiz, the other parent governor, rarely attended meetings and was not mentioned in this context). Parent governors were asked to take on the whole consultation process so 'Basically I think it was Pakeezah that did a timeline so we started... Letter sent out. Then the next thing was questionnaires then it was, we would be in the playground sitting down if anyone wanted to ask us questions to come to us. Then we had to talk to staff and stuff like that' (Piyal). Hannah and Tabitha were opposed to uniform but did not have strong feelings about it. They saw the uniform consultation as a way to get parent governors more engaged and to shape them into operating as the school would like:

> The school uniform thing. There is a bit of a strategic thing on my part. I'm not really that bothered. I mean if I could choose, I would just say "let's stay as we are" (Hannah, Avon)

> I mean obviously their school uniform thing is the first kind of big thing that they [the parent governors] have taken on and it feels like a good, a big learning curve for them in having to, um write questionnaires and work to a timeline and feel that they are taking

that on as their responsibility, not giving it over to us … you know, maybe this is kind of the first step in taking something on. Taking responsibility for something and following it through. And maybe then they will see that they should be providing challenge or offering other ideas (Tabitha, Avon)

Before the questionnaires went out, there was some deliberation in a meeting including a discussion provoked by Heidi, the headteacher at Mersey and a community governor at Avon, asking 'are we clear what this will do for the school? What are the aims? Is there any connection to raising achievement?' (my notes, Avon Standards Committee, Nov 2011). This link to attainment had not been a parental concern or something raised by others in the extensive discussions. Pakeezah told me there was a 'buzz in the playground'. On the GB, only the three parent governors who had been pushing for uniform seemed to care strongly about the outcome. The non-parent governors had views but did not hold them strongly. Layla felt governors 'should be spending as much time and energy talking about results and environment and other things like that' (Layla). In the meeting after our interview, Pakeezah gave an 11 slide PowerPoint presentation. There was some deliberation about, for example, the advantages and disadvantages; types of uniform and where it might be bought. It was decided to have a further consultation on the details (my notes, Avon Full GB, Nov 2011). I interviewed Piyal after the final decision had gone through a couple of months later and she felt this was the biggest decision made while she had been on the GB. There were no parent governors at the GB training session and, during it, Hannah raised the uniform consultation as a good 'lesson' in consultation for parent governors:

> we have done really well with the uniform. They've lead on it. They wanted to hand it back a few times. "They've done really well on it" It is good for parent governors to see that although 80% of parents want it, 20% are very passionately against it (my notes, Avon GB training session, Dec 2011)

This example of parent governors consulting other parents highlights some important points. Parents were encouraged to consult on a welfare, rather than a curriculum, issue which the school did not have strong views about. In addition, the headteacher and Tabitha, a staff governor, saw the consultation

process as a way to educate and shape the parent governors in how to fulfil their role.

Conduits for complaints and suggestions - Sometimes parents expect to and/or do bring complaints and suggestions from others to the GB. These are normally deemed inappropriate by the headteacher, chair and/or rest of the GB. Staff governors did not tend to use the GB in this way in so much as they had other routes for complaints and suggestions.

When asked what issues she would bring if there was more time, Pakeezah, at Avon, said 'more niggling things like. Probably not appropriate for the governing body *maybe,* I don't know what is appropriate for the governing body. What *can* you bring?' This lack of clarity about appropriate topics was common particularly amongst parents but I was surprised to hear it from Pakeezah as she had been chair for the previous year.

At Tyne, parental complaints, about issues such as the phone system, under AOB tended to cause tensions. At Severn, Shana, a support staff governor, raised an problem she was experiencing with PE kits. This was accepted as a topic but conversation on it was very brief. Patty felt that AOB was the main platform for parent governors.

Topics from parents were not necessarily the most welcome. At Avon, Layla gave the school uniform and having a language club for the main minority ethnic group as the two issues over which there was 'substantive disagreement … so the two areas which have been raised by parent governors and so that's, I think, quite interesting in and of itself' (Layla). It suggests that partiality is a strong motivator (Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010).

Communication advisers - In meetings, staff or parents sometimes suggested appropriate means for communicating with other staff or parents. Trina did not claim to represent staff views about the proposed staff appraisal procedures but did suggest how staff could best be consulted. Avon parent governors proposed a suggestion box and greater use of the newsletter. Heidi said she valued the

suggestions from the Inclusion Committee on how best to communicate with parents and I heard one of these suggestions from Polla in the Inclusion Committee which I observed. This role was less available at Tyne which seemed to face the greatest challenges in its communication with parents. Comments on the phone system not working and letters inviting parents being sent out too late were received as complaints which were inappropriate to GB meetings. The following comment from Lucy, an LA governor but also a parent, appeared to be received as an outburst to contain with a general comment from the headteacher acknowledging more work needed to be done on communicating with parents:

> Lucy – I would like to ask you not to underestimate parents (very assertive and bit upset) and to think more in the maths department about communication with parents. I got no information about my daughter doing GCSE in year nine. She told me that. I thought she was confused. I got no information at all. A term later, Science called us in to say that our children were in the top set and what they were predicted to get so we were able to support them to get that. You know some parents even have degrees. You need to talk to us (my notes, Tyne Full GB, Mar 2012)

Partly, it seems that the comment was unwelcome by the headteacher as it was a complaint but the reason other governors were keen to move on and not discuss it may have been that Lucy was seen as drawing too much on her own personal experience despite attempting to generalise from it. This is considered under 'The constitution of parents as having narrow views'.

Summary

All three roles, consulters; conduits for complaints and suggestions; and communication advisers were made more challenging by the absence of counterpublics (Fraser, 1997, p. 81; Vincent and Martin, 2005, p. 126) where parents could develop their views together before bringing them to the GB. There was an absence of deliberative parent forums in the schools through which more collective suggestions might be developed. The parent governors were not meant to represent constituencies and other parent collectivities which existed, such as PTAs, were not set up for debate and the formation of a collective voice and constructive proposals.

This sub-section has highlighted the ambivalences and ambiguities some staff and parents felt about their representative role. They had a largely unfulfilled expectation of representing a constituency. Many can be understood as taking roles in relation to their 'constituency', as consulters; conduits for complaints and suggestions; and communication advisers. The representation described shows how parent and staff governors are constituted as different to other governors.

'Piggy in the middle'

Sometimes parent and staff governors found the tension between loyalty to their constituency and the corporate body difficult:

> you do feel like you are in a battlefield sometimes heh and you are like oow. Because there'd be situations where, the governing body had agreed something and then I've gone out in the playground and the parents ask me what's happened, what's happened? And it would be like, there's only certain information I can reveal which is like aaargh, I really feel really bad and then the parents start thinking ooow she's going to, you know, she is one of them now. And you don't, you don't want to put yourself in that situation (Pakeezah, Avon)

Pakeezah's phrase, 'one of them', suggests a sense that governors are perceived by parents to be far removed from them. The 'piggy in the middle' tension was salient during the restructuring at Mersey:

> I am very aware of the fact that the confidentiality and the role as a governor and what that brings to the school, I'm very aware of that so it's kind of trying to get a split personality. Because you want to be fair represent the school and how I see the school and what the staff do and I also see the other side of it and the importance of, you know, for example, the restructuring. Things were said in meetings that couldn't be repeated. I understand that and think it's trying to marry the two together but but I couldn't. I can't really separate the two (Tara, Mersey)

> it was quite dicey. Quite early on when it was all happening because I've known me friends … for a very long time. I felt like I was a bit *piggy in the middle* because I was listening to them [colleagues] and they weren't saying too much because they didn't want me to go back and say anything (*my emphasis*, Sally, Mersey)

Some interviewees either thought everything was confidential or were unclear what was confidential in meetings. This had implications for how they spoke to others outside of the GB. It seemed that perceived or actual confidentiality exacerbated the feeling of being stuck in the middle and further constrained discussion between parent governors and parents and between staff governors and staff.

Having a staff or parent 'perspective'

'As a parent (or teacher, etc.) governor… You are on the governing body to give a parental (teacher) *perspective* to discussions and decisions' (*my emphasis*, DfE, 2011a). One possible way to make sense of this injunction is to draw on Young who, in her theorising of representation, introduces the idea of 'perspective', partly to avoid essentialising members of particular constituencies as having homogenous interests or opinions. She makes a distinction between 'interest, opinion and perspective' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 133) and suggests that 'Perspective is an approach to looking at social events, which conditions but does not determine what one sees' (p. 139). The distinction is useful as a way of thinking about 'perspective'. However, it potentially underestimates the ambivalences and ambiguities of giving a 'perspective' in the context of GBs. Firstly, the distinction between 'interest, opinion and perspective' (p. 133) seems more subtle in practice than in theory, as suggested by the examples below. Secondly, the parents and staff are expected to give their perspective on a body where other governors are constituted as neutral and perspective free (see the next section). The following three examples, involving Shana, Tarun and Paula hint at the difficulties of classifying a particular intervention as about representing a constituency or putting forward an interest, opinion or perspective. All three were received as appropriate comments by their respective GBs and could be understood as providing 'a perspective'. However, the first two could also be understood as representation and the third could be understood as talking about the governor's own child which parent governors are not meant to do. The first two could be seen as stemming from interests and the second and third from opinions. Firstly, there was a discussion about a slight change to the school start time and Shana, who rarely spoke, asked 'what

does it mean for staff time?' (my notes, Severn Full Jun 2012). Secondly, in a discussion about the carpark after the building works. Tarun said, 'can we keep car park to keep the staff happy … some people should have reserved places' (my notes, Tyne Finance and Premises, May 2012). He did not have a car and I was under the impression that staff members had not come to him directly about this but he had heard their discontent in the staff room. Thirdly, in a discussion about reading, Paula commented, 'comprehension is important too. My son talks about what he is reading' (my notes from Avon Full GB, Oct 2011). This comment provides a useful perspective on reading but does relate specifically to Paula's child. These three examples show the lack of clarity as to whether staff and parents were representing constituencies or 'a perspective' and what that might mean. Furthermore, they indicate the narrowness of the line which parents and staff are expected to tread between appropriate and inappropriate contributions. The idea of a perspective might suggest that staff or parents would have perspectives on issues already being discussed. However, some parents, for example, Patty, felt topics in which parents were interested did not appear on the agenda (which they rarely contributed to, as discussed in Chapter 5).

For parents, there was ambivalence around drawing on their own experience as they had been told not to talk about their own children. They were often unclear what knowledge they could bring. This is explored under 'The constitution of parents as having narrow views'.

For staff governors, their ability to give their views (and those of other staff) was constrained. They were in a different position to parent governors in the meetings as they tended to feel they should portray their school in a good light; make sure they did not expose their ignorance on topics they ought to know more about; and avoid challenging the headteacher publicly. I heard this from headteachers and from staff governors, for example:

> I think with my role… trying to put the positives across … I would
> have probably pick up the negative things that other governors
> was saying and then challenge that within the role (Tara, Mersey)

> I am there to support our decisions as a staff team… My role is
> supporting Hannah and putting that forward but also listening
> (Tabitha, Avon)

Some staff governors felt that their professional knowledge might be judged.

Trina's feelings echoed those of Tara at Mersey:

> sometimes I worry that if I say something and then get questioned
> and I don't know enough information, I'll look silly. So I try and sit
> back and then wait until I have knowledge or go back another
> meeting and say "oh yes", I have been and read that or read up on
> this and this is what I kind of found so. I do. In meetings I do tend
> to sit back quite quietly and not say a huge amount in case I look
> silly heh (Trina, Severn)

Not every staff governor felt like Trina and Tara. Tabitha at Avon was a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and spoke a lot to support the headteacher's position. Tarun at Tyne perceived himself as standing up for the staff and pupils and challenging the headteacher and the governors in meetings. He spoke confidently on a range of matters in meetings. Tarun was possibly the most outspoken staff governor I interviewed and told me:

> you feel sometimes that you want to say something then you think
> that if I open my mouth now then I will definitely, you know get into
> some harsh treatment somewhere, somehow. So in that respect,
> your hands are tied sometimes (Tarun, Tyne)

Although staff governors may play more of a role in supplementing staff presentations and supporting the headteacher in meetings, they do learn a lot about what is happening in the school and may then find other ways of feeding back to the headteacher.

In summary, parents and staff have to tread fine lines. Parent governors were unclear what they could bring and often wanted, but felt unable, to discuss other topics rather than provide a 'parent perspective' on the narrow items on the agenda and staff governors tended to avoid anything that would not be seen as supportive by their headteacher. These situations can be seen as resulting from techniques of depoliticisation (see Chapter 8) and the promotion of consensus over conflict (see Chapter 5). These issues go some way to explaining why

parent and staff governors tended to be the least vocal in the meetings which I observed. They are not much valued as stakeholders but it is hard for them to be citizens or skills-carriers either. The idea that they were meant to bring a staff or parent perspective, however unclear that idea was, made them different to the LA and community governors below.

LA and community governors

These governor categories are being considered together as there was little difference between them in terms of representation. This was partly because Riverford does not have political appointments for LA governors. Larry did not notice any difference and Christopher said 'I don't fully understand the difference between them'. Leonard, who had been an LA governor for far longer than Larry or Christopher said:

> I think the distinctions have um really eroded themselves over the years as to what the local authority governors, how they constitute a different section … within the governing body. There isn't any great deal of two-way communication between the governor and the local authority. We don't get anything from the local authority that's aimed at us as in any way local authority nominees. We get the report but then so does every other governor. There aren't any sort of specific instructions to pass as local authority governors to promulgate a particular line… the nature of the distinction between those two groups of nominees is hardly there at all … And I don't think the community governors see themselves as being any different to the local authority nominees either (Leonard, Tyne)

Pakeezah, at Avon, described community governors as 'just really sort of random people'. There was an overwhelming sense that LA and community governors did not represent anyone, for example, the following comments were from LA governors:

> I've never felt like I'm representing the local authority or I am representing anyone other than me really (Layla, Avon)

> I feel that I am just making sure that the school is being run in the best interests of, you know, of the kids and the parents. Just, you know, overall best interests. I am not in any way asking questions because of, from an angle of local authority representative (Larry, Severn)

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There was, however, some confusion about LA governors from other governors, for example, Pakeezah, at Avon, thought that LA governors had 'background information about how the local authority helps the school'.

Leonard, at Tyne, described LA and community governors as a 'false construct' by which I assumed he meant that being an LA or community governor did not coincide with a specific role. They are not (directly) affected by GB decisions so it is not clear in what way their views can be considered as those of stakeholders. For example, Christopher, at Mersey, said, 'Because I don't live in that area, I don't have children. I mean I'm actually not affected by the things that happen'. This position allowed them to feel that they had broad views as discussed under 'View breadth'.

Rather than representing anyone, the LA and community governors in the study schools mostly described themselves as giving something back (see Chapter 4 on governors' motives). Their overriding motive seemed to be an 'apolitical' helping of the children through supporting the school. They also talked about learning a lot through being governors. In summary, these governors did not feel that they needed to represent anyone by virtue of being LA or community governors.

Ethnicity, class, religion and localness

Overall, the makeup of the GBs was whiter and more middle-class than the student populations described in Chapter 4. This is consistent with national studies (Dean *et al.*, 2007, p. 22; Ellis, 2003, p. 9; Ranson *et al.*, 2005a, p. 360). Furthermore, as Dean *et al* found in their study (2007, p. 20), many governors were not local.

There is an intersection of ethnicity, class, religion and localness with governor category. Parent governors, who already have the complicated representative position described earlier in this section, sometimes found themselves also expected to represent one or more of these attributes as well, whilst, as seen in the next section, whiteness and being middle-class tended to be made invisible.

The four headteachers were white women who did not live locally to their schools. Echoing Stuart Hall's 'black person's burden' (1996 [1992], p. 262), the headteachers sometimes constituted minority ethnic governors as explainers of culture and religion, for example:

> Offering that advice about community and culture that I might not necessarily be aware of …so for example, you know, when, talking about leave for staff and the amount of time for weddings. The sex and relationships education policy. Sort of having that, opportunity just to talk to someone … you know the Muslim and the community and the families within the community weren't happy with the sex relationship education policy. And sort of talking to them through it and giving their sort of, their views on it (Hazel, Severn)

In a display of whiteness, non-white ethnicities tended to be referred to in homogenising terms which obscured difference. I did not really hear about representation in relation to class. Class was rarely mentioned explicitly except by Heidi, Christopher and Sally at Mersey. The class divide there was particularly stark; the school had a predominantly working-class student population whereas the foundation governors were 'posh' and 'a different kettle of fish, you have to remind them that people do work for a living' (Heidi). In a further display of whiteness, class was sometimes mentioned as intersecting with (or as a synonym for) particular ethnicities, for example:

> particularly our middle-class governors talk more about standards. And our Bangladeshi and Somali governors, their perspective tends to be more about community. I mean I am massively generalising (Hayley, Tyne)

In this, Hayley makes a sweeping generalisation to attribute particular perspectives to particular governors on the areas on which they think the school needs to be pushed (or can least be trusted on). The perspective which she attributes to the 'middle-class' governors coincides with that of the DfE and Ofsted. I took a number of references to 'we', 'they', 'parents', 'our students' and 'local' to refer to class. What stood out was that there were disproportionately more middle-class governors than students in all the schools and the

headteachers sometimes explained issues which the governors might not otherwise appreciate about '*our* students'.

Many of the community and LA governors did not live near the school. The change of governor category from 'community' back to 'co-opted' (DfE, 2012c) indicates and encourages a lack of localness (and community representation, itself an ambiguous concept). (The 'polymorphous language of community' (Dean, 2007, p. 90) was considered in Chapter 2 in relation to the 'Big Society' and 'Citizenship'.) The word 'community' in the following quotes can be understood to refer to locality and, potentially, to ethnicity and class:

> I am not from this community. I am not part of this community. And I like hearing what things have been said, good or bad and parents in particular give me that perspective (Hayley, Tyne)

> I think the links with the community actually come much more through the parent governors (Christopher, Mersey)

Representation as reflecting ethnicity and representation as bringing the views of others are related in that, for example, parents tended to speak more to parents of the same ethnicity. For example, Patty, who is white British, said:

> there is a few parents, about three or four parents that I know that I get on really well with. And it is usually them that will come to me. And then the Asian, funnily enough, the Asian mums will go to the Asian parent governors (Patty, Severn)

This relates to the lack of counterpublics as sites where all parents might come together as mentioned above. Similarly, the GBs are not tied to other local decision-making bodies. This situation resonates with the findings of Dean *et al*'s study that governors had a 'lack of connection into wider decision-making bodies that might increase their power… [and there were] few links … between governors and activist community organisations … political affiliations were viewed with some suspicion' (2007, p. 44).

Tyne's GB probably had the strongest local institutional links. A former councillor and a local imam were governors. A number of governors attended

the local mosque. However, these connections tended to be perceived as valuable for promoting the reputation of the school rather than for gathering the views of the local community; as 'outreach' (Leonard) rather than representation. Tyne's GB was unique in having a community committee (albeit one which was not fully functional) but its main role seemed to be marketing the school to address the falling roll rather than gathering the views of the community (however this might be understood). Tarun, at Tyne, discussed aspects of GB business in school union meetings but his active engagement with a union was unusual among the teacher governors I interviewed.

This lack of local connections has significant implications for the bases for deliberation within the GB. As Dryzek suggests, 'the contestation of discourse in the public sphere is the most defensible way to think about discursive democracy on a society-wide basis' (Dryzek, 2002, p. 79). Furthermore, 'The scope of activity, interaction, contradiction, and conflict requires an open flow of communication across neighbourhood, region, and associational networks' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 171). Governors have little chance of representing local views or of challenging specific discourses if they are cut off from such 'traces' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 127).

Summary

National policy and the headteachers in this study both assert that parent and staff governors are not meant to represent constituencies and that parent governors should not bring issues about their own child. Nonetheless, there are variations within and between schools in understandings of representation. Elections were understood by some to confer legitimacy even though they were undermined by a lack of competition and the use of mechanisms such as creating associate governors. LA and community governor appointments did not confer any sense of representation on these governors so the election of parent and staff governors and the appointment of LA and community governors can be understood as a dividing practice. Many parents and staff had a largely unfulfilled expectation that they would represent their constituency and took on various roles in relation to their constituency. There was a lack of forums within which parents or staff could form collective views. Parent and staff governors

are meant to come with a parent or staff 'perspective'; this is ambiguous and means that they find themselves trying to tread a narrow line. It was hard for parents and staff to take on the subject postitions of stakeholders, citizens or skills-carriers. Further representative positions were associated with the ethnicity, class, religion and/or localness of certain governors. Of significance for possibilities for citizenship is the lack of connections to other decision-making bodies. In summary, certain governors are constituted as representing constituencies and/or attributes in multiple and complex ways. Other governors are not. These positions intersect with the positions under 'View breadth' below.

View breadth

Some governors were constituted as having narrow views and others as having broad views. This section attempts to explore how these subject positions are constituted by policy and practice and to consider how the possibility of a subject position of independent governor with a broad view masks the specificity and privilege of those subjects. Parent and staff governors have a clear constituency and personal interest although they are not meant to draw on these beyond having a 'perspective'. The LA and community governors in the study schools tended to be understood and see themselves as independents with broad views and as carriers of transferable skills. Ideas around view breadth resonate with debates within political theory, including on deliberative democracy, around universality and partiality. Much normative political theory has derived from Kantian universalism and the possibility of a '"view from nowhere"' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 113). However, in relation to the conceptualisation of citizens as concerned with collective problems (see Chapter 2), Young suggests:

> At least while circumstances of structural privilege and disadvantage persist, a politics that aims to promote justice through public discussion and decision-making must theorise and aim to practise a third way, alternative to either private interest competition or difference-bracketing public discussion of the common good. This third way consists in a process of *public* discussion and decision-making which includes and affirms the *particular* social group positions relevant to issues. It does so in order to draw on the situated knowledge of people located in different group positions as resources for enlarging the

understanding of everyone and moving them beyond their own parochial interests (*my emphasis*, p. 109)

Similarly Nagel suggests:

> Justification in political theory must address itself to people twice: first as occupants of the *impersonal* standpoint and second as occupants of *particular* roles within an impersonally acceptable system. This is not capitulation to human badness or weakness, but a necessary acknowledgement of human complexity. To ignore the second task is to risk utopianism in the bad sense. And to attempt it is not to abandon the primacy of moral justification in political theory, but simply to recognize that personal as well as impersonal justification has a part in morality. The requirement of dual justification is a moral requirement. (*my emphasis*, Nagel, 1991, p. 30)

His placing of the two standpoints within individuals, rather than theorising around institutions or abstract ideals, is helpful for considering the subject positions of governors and how they are constituted as taking on a particular and/or an impersonal standpoint. He is emphasising that both standpoints are 'intertwined' (Vincent and Martin, 2005, p. 132) for each individual rather than suggesting that some individuals have an impartial standpoint and others a particular standpoint. In the case of school governors, this intertwining is obscured by the dividing practices of the different election and appointment processes which can imply partiality for parents and staff governors and impartiality for LA and community governors even though they are technically all equal. This section considers the practices of GBs where it seems that parent and staff governors, whose particular standpoints are foregrounded through their representative and experiential knowledge, struggle to be seen as also impartial. Independents, on the other hand, are constituted as impartial and the particularity of their, often privileged and/or business related, position is obscured.

The constitution of parents as having narrow views

Most parents were positioned as having narrow views in two ways. Firstly, as discussed in the previous section, they represent, through direct means or a perspective, a specific constituency. Secondly, they sometimes refer, or are

understood by others to be referring, to their own children which they are not meant to do. The following quotes from Tyne, from the headteacher and a parent who was there as an LA governor, refer to the second issue:

> One of the things that I think is. It needs some clarification on. Is the role of parent governors. That sometimes it becomes about their child, not explicitly but clearly that what is working. Rather than looking at parents as a … whole. And so you can get, for example, a couple of times it has happened, where something hasn't gone right for that parent and their child, and they have wanted to bring it up at governors. And that is just not appropriate (Hayley, Tyne)

> I have to be careful. I have occasionally talked about experiences of my own children …but tried to think of them as being, having wider relevance, so it is definitely not the forum that I should bring moans in about what has happened to my child. That's not, that would be inappropriate (Lucy, Tyne)

Phillips suggests that an 'injunction against partiality may … work to silence the most disadvantaged' (2005, p. 93). Some parents are better than others at framing concerns about their children as broader issues. Hannah gave the example of a parent governor who was a link governor for key stage one 'basically she wanted to know more about, you know what we're doing with the more able and challenging the more able. It was really all about her son. I mean I know that heh.' (Hannah). This parent had not managed to present her concerns in general enough terms to be accepted as legitimate. Fraser commented:

> there may be some governors that have really good ideas and a really important thing to say but they just not always lacking. Don't. Sometimes lacking in confidence. You know they're very confident talking about something that has happened to their child. But not always comfortable that something has happened generally (Fraser, Mersey)

Parent governors' views based on representation and their personal experience were not universally discouraged. As a teacher governor, Trina said,

> we have got a couple of quite vocal parents who will sort of stand up and say, you know, yeah, this is how the parents feel, or, you

know, this is what I've experienced as a parent, which I think is really useful and I like it when the parents give their opinions because that, you know, they are going home and getting it from the children, they are getting experience from the staff and I think, I do, I do like it when the parents speak up. I think it is really important (Trina, Severn)

This is a case of valuing the use of storytelling or narrative essential for Young's communicative democracy:

The general normative functions of narrative in political communication, then, refer to teaching and learning. Inclusive democratic communication assumes that all participants have something to teach the public … It assumes as well that all participants are ignorant of some aspects of the social or natural world (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 77)

However, despite the occasional valuing by some governors of such narrative approaches, there is an injunction in policy and from these headteachers that parent governors should neither bring other parents' views nor draw on their own experiences. Largely due to this, parents are not always clear what they can bring, for example, a teacher governor told me there had been some undermining of a mother's sense of her right to speak:

one of the parent governors, at her first meeting said something inappropriate … [Hannah] just said, "oh, we don't discuss individuals in governing body meetings … You can speak to me about that in school". Kind of explained the process to her. And it wasn't confronting. And I said to her afterwards, "oh, I don't know what to say sometimes either" but I imagine that she walked away going "oh". You know, the way [Hannah] fed back to her, wasn't an uncomfortable thing. But I imagine she went [intake of breath] "should I say any more?" (Tabitha, Avon)

The lack of clarity about the spaces available to parent governors can lead to what Phillips describes as a 'perverse form of self-censorship [which] testifies to the coercive power of notions of impartiality' (2005, p. 94).

My findings about the narrowness of the topics which parent governors felt able to talk about resonate with those of Deem *et al* who discuss knowledge which is deemed inappropriate and/or low status:

> mothers with wide experience of bringing up children and/or voluntary work often did not draw explicitly upon this knowledge in governing body meetings, although they sometimes did in working groups or sub-committees. But governors with industrial and commercial knowledge used that knowledge frequently in the context of the meetings (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 77)

There were exceptions to the constitution of parents as having narrow views. For example, Pam was a white, middle-class parent at Mersey with a high status position in a bank. (She was also a community governor and chair at Severn.) I did not hear her refer to her children in meetings. There was an interesting moment when, a teacher, Tania commented that there were no parents at a meeting when Pam was sitting right in front of her. It was as though Pam's class and ethnicity meant she was not seen as a parent or at least she was seen as more than 'just a parent' on the basis of her other skills or knowledge (my notes, Mersey Finance, Jul 2011).

Other parent governors tended to feel they were not full governors. Patty said that topics she was interested in rarely came up on the agenda and she sometimes felt they were 'spare parts':

> when we have the governing body meeting, very few of us parents speak… we more just sort of sit and take in and listen. One or two might contribute or might ask a question or something but very rarely. And whether that is because they don't feel comfortable, I don't know. But for me it is just that I don't feel that the opportunity is there. You know, the doorway is not opened up to us (Patty, Severn)

The data hint that it is easier for fathers than mothers to move beyond a narrow parent governor subject position. This was certainly the case in the pilot study at Thames (Young, 2010). Gender was referred to more in interviews at Tyne than in the other three study schools. Parihan responded to my question 'do you think some people talk much more than some other people in the meetings?' by pointing out that 'studies have shown that men speak more than women … in meetings'. Patrick and Lucy were both white, middle-class parents. Patrick's professional expertise was often raised by him and others in meetings whereas

Lucy felt that, despite her interest in being a link governor for English or being invited to talk about careers with students, her academic and professional expertise was not valued:

> Because people know I am a mum and a local person, they never think that I got a kind of academic heh um anything academic to offer, even though, you know, I have got really good English literature degree. Just because I'm kind of hanging around with parents and things so all the people who work in banks or law firms or whatever, they are the people who are called upon to do um the academic side of things and that kind of, your future, your university prospects, and I just, I think it is quite funny how I am, I am ignored (Lucy, Tyne)

Further research would be needed to explore this in contemporary GBs. If it is indeed the case, it would be consistent with both literature on parental engagement in schools and feminist understandings of citizenship. The conclusion chapter of a collected work on parental participation includes the observation that 'the chapters vividly describe inequalities of gender' (Crozier and Reay, 2005, p. 157). Conceptions of public and private are strongly gendered and 'despite its claims to universalism, citizenship was drawn according to a quintessentially male template' (Lister, 2007, p. 52).

In theoretical debates, deliberative democracy 'has traditionally been defined in opposition to self-interest' (Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010, p. 64) and this resonates with the corporate body basis for GBs. However, there are significant implications arising from not allowing the explicit expression of self-interest and partiality. Mansbridge *et al* (2010) and Young (2002 [2000]) give instrumental reasons, based on the motivation and valuable knowledge that the expression of partial perspectives brings to deliberation. Furthermore, allowing partial perspectives can help avoid a narrow, privileged consensus on a 'common good' which may not, in fact, be in the interests of all (pp. 43-44).

Encouraging greater emphasis on parents' partial standpoints is not unproblematic.

Phillips raises concerns about 'promoting a narrower politics of self or group interest that fails to engage with wider concerns' (2005, p. 95) and Vincent and Martin note:

> it has been argued that it is those parents *already* in a position of social advantage who are using their particularity to consolidate that advantage … particularity can sometimes work against disadvantaged groups as well as in their favour (2005, p. 132)

Over and beyond these potential problems associated with partiality, the context of the GBs highlights the problems raised by the elevation and lack of recognition of their partiality of those governors who are able to present themselves as impartial independent governors. This is described in the following sub-section.

Independents

Young suggests that 'Confrontation with different perspectives, interests and cultural meanings teaches each the partiality of their own and reveals to them their own experience as perspectival' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 116). This sub-section suggests that the constitution by the stakeholder model of some governors as representatives and others as independents acts as a dividing practice which obscures the partiality of the latter despite them being confronted with the presence of the former.

The independent position appeared to be available to governors who were not constituted as representatives or as having particular interests. Furthermore, they tended to be white and middle-class and the near invisibility of their class and race (Gillborn, 2008) added to their constitution as objective.

> Modern thought has often conceptualized objectivity as achieved by transcending particularities of social position and experience, abstracting from them to construct a standpoint outside and above them that is general rather than particular (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 113)

This 'objectivity' appears, at least in part, to be the discourse drawn on as LA and community governors talked about the importance of independents and constituted themselves as such:

> [we bring] other angles to it (Frederick, Mersey)

> you've got people who aren't bogged down in the day-to-day (Christopher, Mersey)

> [Conrad and I] are completely independent … Sometimes [as the headteacher], you don't see, sometimes, you know what that, what the bigger picture is (Larry, Severn)

> [governors can] step back [and say] hold on a moment (Pam, Severn and Mersey)

Layla was a civil servant so can be seen to personify a link between the position of independent governor and the 'generalist' idea underpinning the traditional civil service:

> I think that external challenge is really important. Because I think it's very difficult to, when you're in a school. When you're in any position, to maintain that sort of wider view of people outside of the education community and people outside parents …Because I'm not a parent and because I'm not a teacher um I can be more questioning about what we are doing about results which is really what I'm sort of most interested in. And about how we get there. So I think I am probably a little bit more hard edged in some ways than some of the others (Layla, Avon)

Lucy is an LA governor but is also a parent so it was interesting that she did not appear to consider staff and parent governors in her summary of the GB's role:

> We are meant to be one step removed from the day-to-day running of the school so that we can um have a have a point of view that is not biased by being, you know, we don't have jobs there, we are not dependent on the school doing, for anything about our own income or our own um sort of development (Lucy, Tyne)

The key conclusion of Thody and Punter's work is that 'there are considerable benefits to be derived from business managers being co-opted onto school

governing bodies' (2000, p. 196). They base this conclusion on their suggestion that it is possible to be an impartial outsider. The terms they quote all elevate objectivity over subjectivity and partiality:

> Headteachers perceived these business governors as objective outsiders without "a vested interest" in the schools they governed so able to engage in unemotional, non-partisan debate about sensitive matters concerning school pupils, staff, politics or parents. All the other categories of governors were deemed by the headteachers to have "preconceived ideas or could be too close to the issues". In contrast, the business governors were viewed as taking an objective stance which was often found by headteachers to be invaluable in defining, making, executing and supporting difficult decisions. Headteachers welcomed the "new blood", the "outsider's realism", the sharper "uncosy" focus and the "dispassionate friendship" (Thody and Punter, 2000, p. 189)

In a similar manner, Hazel associated being an impartial independent with being a 'professional':

> I can rely on certain people within the governors to support and to be professional in their judgements. And they are not, then not influenced by community, parents. It is about what they think is right and the advice that they are given (Hazel, Severn)

In this, she is suggesting that it is possible and desirable to be objective. By contrasting parents and the 'community' who have a clear basis for their partiality, the partiality of the other governors described as 'certain people' is obscured. Compared to the representative positions, the independent position seems both more clearly intelligible to others and give those able to take it up a greater confidence in their position. Independents tend to have higher status and form the core, more active group within the GB. The presentation of their skills as neutral and objective contributes to the position of objectivity which the independents are constituted as having.

Skills-carriers

As set out in Chapter 2, there is strong move in policy towards increasing the number of skills-carriers on GBs[20]. This sub-section sets out the lack of clarity

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[20] Also see 'Appendix A: May 2014 policy ensuring newly appointed governors have 'skills''.

about what skills this might refer to. It summarises some ways in which governors in the study schools were constituted as skills-carriers and discusses how these skills can appear neutral and objective. In national policy debates, there are different understandings of what skills governors might have. Some skills are more tangible and, therefore, easier to talk about than others:

> We recommend that government suggest the types of skills that school governing bodies should seek to recruit, such as strong financial skills or human resources expertise (CBI, 2013, p. 3)

Such skills might be consistent with a volunteer or Big Society discourse, but James *et al* and the NGA explicitly warn against governors drawing on such skills to do *pro bono* work:

> Recruiting governors because of their functional skills may suggest that they have operational responsibility, which is not part of the governors' remit (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 17)

> there has been a trend to recruit lawyers to governing bodies, but a number of lawyers have found that once on the governing body, they are not being asked to bring their analytical skills to governance, but are being asked to provide the school with "*pro bono*" legal advice. Given the time which has to be taken to explain to both governing bodies and school leaders what is strategic and what is operational, it is not helpful to promote the misunderstanding that you are strengthening your business functions by bringing people with business skills onto the governing body; governing bodies need to ensure that the school staff are capable of undertaking their roles… the key skills required include such things as influencing skills, negotiation and data analysis (NGA, 2013b, p. 4)

It is interesting that the NGA associate functional skills with business. However, their key point seems to be the importance of 'key skills' which are different to the functional skills advocated by the CBI and others. In the interviews and observations, there were numerous examples of governors doing *pro bono* legal, financial and HR work, for example:

> I am a free source of expert HR advice to them in the personnel committee meetings. And we have got people who are financial experts who provide that sort of consultancy work on finance. We have got people who work in, you know various roles, including IT,

> that allow them to give expert advice on a consultancy basis
> unpaid (Leonard, Tyne)

> we have got [Leah] who is a lawyer. And so when we came, the
> community house… a 15 year lease and we thought we couldn't
> get out of it. [Leah] read through the contract and said you can get
> out of it. Um so that was brilliant … [Pir] will do translation for us
> (Hazel, Severn)

> [Fraser] puts in a huge amount of time *pro bono* on legal issues
> for the trust (Frederick, Mersey)

> So you've got someone like [Frederick]. Extraordinarily hard-
> working, helps with the budget, helps with all that sort of stuff…
> They do a huge amount of additional free work… there is not
> enough money for the school to hire someone to do the work that
> someone like [Frederick] does with the finances (Fraser, Mersey)

Apart from Pir's Somali-English translation skills, these
'functional/operational skills' (James *et al.*, 2010, p. 17) are associated
with the finance and personnel committees which are the higher status
committees (see Chapter 7):

> I think when they are looking to involve parents who haven't got an
> obvious um skill set that corresponds with the finance or
> personnel, then the obvious choice is to try and involve them in
> the community and curriculum committees because it is more
> immediate to their interests as parents (Leonard, Tyne)

Unlike the experiences of parenthood, skills tend to be presented as valuable,
neutral and context free even though they are often associated with business.
Reflecting the 'Policy discourses on the role of school governors' in Chapter 2,
there can be an assumption that parents and staff do not have appropriate skills
if they have not worked in business and that business experience will provide
appropriate skills. The business influence, in the study schools, was not as
crude as suggesting the school should become an academy or buy more
services from private companies. In fact, business governors spoke against
both of these things in meetings which I observed. Their influence was cultural
and more subtle and provides examples of how 'neoliberal rationality
…functions as a "politics of truth"' (Lemke, 2002, p. 55). Connor equated
business with positive qualities which had no logical connection to business a
few times in each meeting. These positive qualities ranged from punctuality to
clear referencing in policies. The phone system at Tyne was not good and he

said you would not expect that in a business (my notes, Tyne Full, May 2012). Hayley talked about staff who were leaving and welcomed Cathy's offer of the template which they used for exit interviews in a bank (my notes, Tyne Full, Jul 2012). Larry, who worked in another bank, referred to drawing on his planning skills as a link governor. He first presented these as generic skills:

> I work closely with a teacher one-to-one. So this is in IT, sort of the technology side so you get partnered up and you work closely with that teacher to provide, to present, to put together plans for instance, for one year, three year plan in terms of how they are going to develop the teaching in that area. So that's again, again, you know, because putting together plans and putting together, you know, where you want to be some way ahead, three years' time, is something I am relatively comfortable with so, genuinely feel that I can provide a lot of sort of input and support there through the governing body and then through this sort of one-to-one type sessions (Larry, Severn)

However, when I asked him specifically about the difference between business plans and school plans, he suggested there were differences after all, saying, 'I think they're coming more from these subjective intangible. I am coming more from a very tangible, very black and white side of things' (Larry). The idea that banking practices are black and white can mask the values inherent within banking hence 'Depoliticisation is effected by the invasion of cultural, social and political life by systems of power and money subject to evaluation only within their own truncated terms' (Ozga, 2000b, p. 7). Several, mostly staff, governors identified problematic differences between the cultures of business and education in our interviews. These differences are explored in Chapter 7. Depoliticisation is explored in Chapter 8.

Summary

This section has drawn on Young (2002 [2000]) and Nagel (1991) to explore ideas of partiality and impartiality. It shows how many parent governors are constituted as having narrow partial views whereas other governors are constituted as independents with impartial, objective views and neutral skills. Parents were often unclear what they could bring whereas independents were comfortable to discuss most topics. The section suggests that the constitution of

some governors as independent skills-carriers is associated with a depoliticising business rationality.

Reflections

In response to Government attempts to base GB membership on 'skills' (e.g. Gove, 2012b) the NGA has said 'We do not believe that that skills and representation are mutually exclusive' (NGA, 2013b, p. 5). In an attempt to move beyond this binary but also to show how it is constituted, this chapter has explored the possible subject positions of stakeholder, citizen and skills-carrier through the concepts of representation and view breadth. The chapter has suggested that governor categories operate as dividing practices and that the ability to speak for those positioned as representing a constituency or attribute is complicated and constrained. Those constituted as independents are more able to present themselves as objective and to take on core positions within their GB.

This chapter is not intended to suggest either that the partiality of the staff and parent governor positions is a reason for less representation or that parent or staff governor partiality should be privileged. Rather it has attempted to show how the constitution of *some* governors as only ever partial masks the partiality of *all* governors. Furthermore, this masking allows those constituted as independents to be more closely associated with a citizenship discourse of concern for 'the common good'. This chapter and Chapter 2 have drawn on the work of Young (2002 [2000]) to problematise this conception of citizenship as concerned with a singular common good and to suggest instead a conception of citizenship as concerned with collective problems (including public goods). Such a conception can operate to distinguish citizens from skills-carriers.

The implications of these points are further explored in the next two chapters. Chapter 7 considers educational issues from the perspectives of who gets to discuss them and the knowledge on which they draw. Chapter 8 explores the implications of the privileging of independents for two absences: the lack of recognition of the political nature of GBs and the absence of challenge to state discourses of education.

Chapter 7: Knowledges, Experts and Accountability

Introduction

This chapter explores how power relations operate through struggles, within GBs, over which knowledges are claimed and valued. Policy and governors themselves, tend to see lay involvement as a 'good thing' but it is unclear what lay knowledge might be apart from an absence of educational knowledge. Educational and managerial knowledges are expert knowledges and as such, 'play a key role in determining how we should act and who we are' (Ball, 2013b, p. 15). The main theories of deliberative democracy drawn on in this study (Dryzek, 2002; Young, 2002 [2000]) are unhelpful in relation to the place of experts, partly because they are premised on everyone involved in deliberation being equal in significant ways. Dryzek and Young tend to treat expert knowledge as just another perspective whereas, as Foucault suggests, expert knowledge is more than this. It is able to constitute objects in the world (Walter, 2008). Ball's 'performativity' (2006 [2003]) is a striking example and shows how (managerial) knowledge works to constitute 'good' education and the role of teachers.

The relationship explored in this chapter is not just a binary between lay knowledges and expert knowledges. There is a move, in society more broadly, from valuing professional expertise such as educational expertise to valuing managerial expertise (Rose, 2005 [1996]). This means that there are complex interactions between lay, educational and managerial knowledges within GBs. Educational and managerial expertise are privileged over lay knowledges and the concept of 'lay' governors is easily co-opted by managerial knowledge as it does not have alternative expert knowledges attached to it. Managerial, educational and lay are being described here as three forms of knowledge as a heuristic device to explore the knowledges which actors bring to the governing arena. I am not suggesting there is an empirical division of three pure and discrete forms of knowledge. They all merge into each other, for example, there

is no pure educational knowledge; it increasingly incorporates managerial knowledge.

The first section considers lay knowledges as an absence of educational knowledges. The second section considers the importance of educational knowledges. Governors are not generally educational experts and headteachers tend to lead in meetings. Governors do have various forms of educational knowledge and where they have educational or managerial knowledges, they make a point of drawing on it, suggesting such knowledges are valued. Few topics were contentious in meetings but those which were illustrate the complex nature of attempts to draw boundaries around what counts as an educational issue. The third section explores how constituting education as a product makes it intelligible to those with managerial knowledge and suggests governors who are able to claim managerial knowledge are, therefore, privileged in relation to this. The fourth section considers the shifting meanings of accountability in relation to lay, managerial and educational knowledges. An underlying conception of democratic public accountability gives accountability a positive connotation. However, there is little space for accountability around the aims of education as the government sets performance targets. Although governors are meant to be 'strategic' (DCSF, 2010b, p. 3), they are unable to set aims for the school which might be seen as a key aspect of being 'strategic'. In this context, the two main meanings of accountability drawn upon by governors were of compliance checking and data-based accountability. Knowledge of the school and of certain aspects of education is needed for compliance checking. Since the headteachers tended to take the lead in the GBs I observed, I suggest compliance checking is difficult for governors to carry out. Data-based accountability draws on managerial knowledge of finances and data and requires managerial (and educational and contextual) knowledge in order to scrutinise data. GB accountability is accompanied by other accountabilities including through Ofsted and audit and these reinforce the compliance checking and data-based understanding of accountability.

The complexities of the relationship between different knowledges mean lay knowledges tend to be marginalised in a context of the ongoing displacement of educational knowledges by managerial knowledge.

Lay as an absence of knowledge

'Lay' is an ambiguous term. I am largely taking it to refer to those with an absence of educational knowledge. However, its association with democracy, local community links and conceptions of 'common sense' give it positive connotations (the positive connotations attached to 'outsider' views were discussed in Chapter 6). This section explores how conceptions of lay are drawn upon in GBs. Much of the GB literature argues for the importance of lay involvement in education. For example Holt and Hinds say, 'It is hazardous to make education the province of professionals only' (1994, p. 8). This view was common amongst governors in the study, for example:

> Without making it sound too sort of glib … actually I think we should, all of us in society, be much more focused on what goes on in schools. Not the micro detail of synthetic phonics or Latin or all those kind of things (Christopher, Mersey)

The valuing of 'lay' governors is part of a wider approach to public services. 'In the UK, particularly, public service reforms have been accompanied by an approach to organizational governance that allocates a central role to "lay" representation' (Clarke, 2013, p. 210). As a longstanding example of this, governors have long been positioned as not needing educational knowledge:

> Governors are … lay people and their strength has always been seen in these terms (Creese and Earley, 1999, p. 71)

> According to Anne Holt, a long-time campaigner for governor power and the person selected by the DES to run its governor recruitment campaign in 1992, governors need only to be "ordinary people with commonsense and a reasonable level of literacy" (Tester 1992) (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 74)

Most of the governors in the study schools emphasised that they did not need to be experts to be governors, for example:

the most important thing is obviously a love for the education. And also a sense of commitment. And a head full of common sense. That is all you need. Because at the end of the day anybody [can] understand hopefully, what is right and what is not right (Chaman, Tyne)

As mentioned by Deem *et al* and by Chaman above, the valuing of lay governors is often associated with conceptions of 'common sense' which tend to imply some form of neutral knowledge. As Clarke says, 'a powerful feature of the figure of "ordinary people" involves a view of them as not political' (2013, p. 212) (Chapter 8 discusses how claims to neutral knowledge are always inevitably political). Linked to this, the valuing of 'lay' governors has, to varying degrees, been accompanied by the derision of professional educational knowledges. In the early 1990s, New wrote about how teacher governors were valued less than lay governors and said of the policy context:

> Clearly, knowledge of the education system is not considered to be a prerequisite for those desirous of governing part of that system, with lay governors being valued precisely because of, not in spite of, their non-educationist perspective on the schools in which they govern; they are assumed to have at heart the wider interests of the consumers of the educational process, rather than the narrower interests of educational producers (Deem, 1990)… too much educational knowledge is clearly considered to be a dangerous thing (New, 1993, p. 72)

Furthermore, New's empirical research showed considerable derision aimed at education professionals within GB meetings. In the study schools, I did not hear overt derision of education professionals in meetings and it was not raised in interviews. One partial exception was Fraser. He was not convinced that teachers working in the school should be governors but said this was because they were employees rather than because of their knowledge. The differences between New's findings and mine may be partly because those she describes as a vociferous minority were all Conservative LEA governors and there were none of these in the study schools. It may also reflect the transition to managerialism occurring at the time of her research. Managerialism has been asserted more strongly within education over the last 20 years, moving from something for which there was a battle to the new 'common sense'.

Also in the early 1990s, Deem *et al* noted the limitations of the supposed benefits of governors' naivety:

> schools are principally about teaching and learning … there can be immense problems if lay governors have limited knowledge of education systems and/or the school they attempt to govern. These difficulties are not entirely compensated for by the fact that being unfamiliar with something can also help to ensure that taken-for-granted practices in schools are subjected to naïve questioning, which can ultimately be beneficial to those working in schools (1995, p. 160)

Sally seemed to value this conception of a naïve outsider:

> I couldn't say why I think, you know, you do need someone else to be a critical friend and you do you do need, you know, if there is something that you think "Hang on a minute" there should be a voice. There should be someone to say "Well why are you doing this?" "You know I don't think we should go down that road". And I think that's really important. Because you can lose sight of it especially the teaching staff... You can lose sight of other things because you you're just you're trying to do your very best to your ability ... You can't see other things. So I think it's important for someone outside of that to see any other thing. I mean I can't think of any examples. I know what I mean but I just can't think of what I'm trying to say (Sally, Mersey)

The naïve outsider made sense to Sally in theory but she struggled to think of actual examples. Some research participants saw governors' lack of education knowledges as problematic. For example, as a parent, Pakeezah recognised the limitations of lay involvement:

> [school staff] are in the day-to-day running of it, maybe some of the suggestions we throw would be ridiculous to them, that may not be realistic. So sometimes we have to bear in mind OK actually they are going through this on a day-to-day basis or maybe they've already done this, it's not worked or they've done this 10 months ago (Pakeezah, Avon)

Despite Davies *et al*'s concern that the 'requirement that citizens "become informed" potentially undercuts the aim of deliberation to strengthen and extend democracy' (2006, p. 165), they suggest naivety is a fragile basis for action as:

> It is difficult to organise a collective response or "do democratic politics" on the basis of being down to earth alone. As Hogg and Williamson (2001: 4) have argued, the legendary "wise fool", possessing nothing but common sense, is an ambiguous and precarious basis for democratic participation (2006, p. 165)

Chapter 6 described the lack of status attributed to representative roles so those affected by GB decisions are not necessarily those who are heard in meetings. This makes lay voices an even more fragile alternative. Furthermore, if governors do not have educational (or managerial) knowledge, it is hard for them to challenge discourses of education which they do not feel that they fully understand. According to theories of deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2002; Young, 2002 [2000]), expertise, whether in the form of educational expertise or managerial expertise, is just another perspective (Walter, 2008). Yet as Walter, following Foucault, points out, 'expert knowledges give rise to much of what we "say" and "see" or the objects that we take to exist in the world and how we talk about them' (Walter, 2008, p. 540). Therefore, 'Expert discourses have a greater capacity to register problems than do non-expert discourses, and this relates to their ability to constitute their objects as elements of the world, as "seeable"' (p. 543). Amongst policy discourse and educational and managerial knowledge, lay knowledge can be subjugated, marginalised and rendered unspeakable or untrue. Significantly, governors in the study schools often drew on the educational knowledges which they did have suggesting that this was valued (see 'Governors' claims to educational knowledges').

Governors' lack of educational knowledge combined with their legal powers can cause tensions, for example, the NAHT evidence for the 2013 Education Select Committee Inquiry into the role of GBs says:

> The government's desire to increase the autonomy of head teachers has led to some conflict with governing bodies. Decisions relating to the length of the school day, the curriculum, etc. still require governing body assent, for example. However, some governing bodies may not have the necessary skills and knowledge to assess fairly the recommendations of the head and therefore either reject outright any change to the status quo or force through inappropriate change (NAHT, 2013, p. 1)

It is difficult for lay to be defined as more than an absence and lay governors are partly valued for their absence of educational knowledge. Furthermore, as Chapter 6 explored, 'outsiders' were valued over those with specific lay knowledges such as parental and local knowledge. However, within the absence of educational knowledge there is an increasing expectation of another presence: that of managerial knowledge, as described in Chapter 2 in relation to the move towards governors with 'skills'. Managerial knowledge, therefore, is able to co-opt the label of 'lay'. Walter (2008) is helpful in considering how educational knowledges and managerial knowledge are valued over other knowledges. They are forms of expertise which constitute objects such as 'good education' or 'performance'.

The place of educational knowledges

Non-staff governors are not meant to need educational knowledges to be governors. This section explores the power of educational knowledge as a form of expertise and suggests that it tends to be valued over lay knowledges.

The word 'knowledge' is slippery, complex and contentious. It includes *savoir et connaisance*. It tends to incorporate information, experience and expertise and is more or less powerful. Furthermore, what is understood as knowledge is transformed by the dominance of managerial knowledge which tends to operate as a meta-knowledge and reduce other knowledges to information and/or technical skills. In exploring struggles over knowledge, this chapter does not attempt to pin down a fixed conception of knowledge but, rather, exemplifies the slipperiness of the term.

There are various elements to what might be seen as educational knowledges, for example: teaching; school organisation; social context of teaching; local policies, support and funding; national policies and their implications. Educational knowledges are configured differently depending on the context and speaker. Some overlap with other fields so it is not always clear what knowledges might be counted as educational.

This section explores governors' limited engagement in discussing their school's vision and values. It describes how headteachers talk about taking a lead partly due to governors' lack of educational knowledge in relation to these. It considers how governors learn more about their school and about education and how they draw on the educational knowledges they do have. It explores a number of contentious topics which show the fuzzy boundaries of educational knowledges and the topics which governors are able to claim knowledge of. It ends with a brief description of the wider shift from educational professionalism to managerial professionalism.

Non-staff governors may start with a double ignorance. Some do not know about education and some do not know about the school. They gather some knowledge about both and attempt to draw on this. There are two key sites of struggle: firstly, claiming valued knowledges and, secondly, claiming which forms of knowledge should be valued.

Educational knowledges and the school vision and values

Central within literature about GBs, is the idea that the GB should set out the 'what' or the ends and the headteacher should decide the 'how' or the means (e.g. Walters and Richardson, 1997, p. 40). Simkins cites Winstanley *et al* (1995) in making a distinction between 'criterion' and 'operational' power:

> Criterion power is the ability to define the aims of the system, determine its overall structure and establish the performance criteria against which actors within it will be judged... Operational power, in contrast, is the power to decide how a service is delivered and to allocate resources to its delivery (Simkins, 2012, p. 4)

The role of GBs in 'setting aims and objectives for the school' (DCSF, 2010b, p. 13; DfE, 2012b, p. 15) might suggest that GBs would have 'criterion' power and be very much concerned with discussing the vision and values of their schools. Firstly, this suggests that educational knowledges are not needed to discuss these. Secondly, it implies that 'criterion' power is located in the school and not elsewhere. This sub-section questions the first suggestion and the sub-section

on 'Multiple accountabilities' questions the latter, partly because 'criterion' power is exercised through the rationalities of national government and Ofsted.

Governors in the study schools did not engage much in discussions specifically about an overarching vision for their school. This seemed to be due, at least in part, to a lack of relevant educational knowledges. Some governors expressed particular visions of education in interviews but questions of vision and values did not tend to come up in the meetings I observed. There was some variation here by phase. In the primary schools, the headteachers said they would have welcomed more input (whether they actually would have is a different matter). In the secondary schools, the headteachers were clear in their interviews that the core vision of their school had been set by them and was not negotiable.

At Avon, there had been a discussion of the school's vision statement before the study period which the headteacher and the chair both referred to, saying that governors did not know enough to be able to contribute:

> we had a vision statement from 2005 which we just, last term kind of refreshed and updated… we did discuss it but to be honest. Again, they are not really. I mean, you know we did all the work with the staff and all the work with children. And you know [the governors] just didn't really send. They didn't come up with any ideas or anything different. They were all "oh yeah, that's fine". And um when we came with the draft and then they were supposed. You know. That was sort of any comments you've got, e-mail them before the next meeting and so on. Nothing really came of it. (Hannah, Avon)

> we recently did a new school vision statement. And that was a very consultative process the headteacher ran. With the sort of our key objectives, the learning environment. I don't feel as a governing body, we had a huge amount of input into it. And that wasn't because we weren't given the opportunity to, it was because I don't think people particularly felt confident in engaging in that sort of wider discussion (Layla, Avon)

Governors' lack of engagement might be partly due to the language in which vision statements are expressed which tends to be very broad and hard to disagree with. However, it seems that staff (and pupils) did engage to a much greater extent than governors did. With regard to the SDP at Avon and SEF at

Severn, there were comments on the excessive length but governors had little to say about the actual content. At Severn, the sense of the vision being driven by Ofsted was very strong (see Chapter 8).

Hayley and Heidi had clear visions for their secondary schools which they both said they had made clear when they were appointed as headteachers. They both perceived themselves as having considerable autonomy and control and did not refer to the considerable constraints of national policy in describing their visions. This is consistent with the discourse of strong and visionary leadership promoted by organisations such as the National College. Their visions were different to each other showing there is some space for variation within the constraints of the national performative system. However, both stem from particular policy discourses. Hayley said, of Tyne, 'we are about results' as the 'students here get one chance [in life]' whereas, at Mersey, Heidi placed a greater emphasis on inclusion (in terms of SEND and behaviour). They both told me clearly that their visions were not up for debate. The issues discussed below around secondary governors feeling they were not allowed to discuss the vision echo the agenda setting role of headteachers discussed in Chapter 5.

At Tyne, Hayley laughed when I asked how much the governors influence the SDP. She even said the priorities came entirely from her and not from the SLT. The school's vision was written above the budget and was about exam results. There were no indications that it was up for discussion. On the role of the GB in developing the SDP, Tarun said that, as governors, 'we just give it a stamp of approval really'. In response to me asking about the vision at Tyne, Lucy said, 'I think Hayley is very, very forthright about what that is and uncompromising. So I do. I do think it is not really a conversation that we are allowed to have' (Lucy, Tyne).

At Mersey, Heidi had instigated and maintained an inclusive ethos and Frederick said 'I think we have a common vision as to what we are trying to do at Mersey'. He felt that this inclusive ethos would 'soon grow on' new governors. It did seem to be the case that people who became governors at Mersey supported its vision (except Fraser who said 'I think I'm an intellectual and I

don't really understand the concept of inclusion'). However, in response to my question about Mersey's governors raising social justice issues, Heidi exclaimed 'No they wouldn't raise. God no no no. Come on!' Interestingly, Heidi subsequently left the school and the advertisement for a new headteacher placed a strong emphasis on Mersey being an inclusive school. Christopher felt that big values based decisions did not arise in meetings as governors were informed about 'values decisions' rather than being involved in making them:

> I mean we don't very often get big and significant decisions and things on a par with the restructure. And where decisions come through the committee structure, they tend to be of a more technical variety. So signing off of policy. Or agreeing to expenditure. So I'm actually just trying to think whether we ever really have any of the sort of values decisions. Because I think a lot of those are more what we learn about as the governing body. So what we learn about is what the school is doing. Rather than where do we want the school to go (Christopher, Mersey)

In summary, there were no significant discussions on the vision or values in any of the GBs. This was partly due to a lack of knowledge and partly because the headteachers tended to monopolise vision making (which is consistent with the national discourse of leadership which emphasises 'vision'). The schools did vary. Hannah at Avon was fairly open about the school's vision but governors did not feel able to engage. Severn's GB was very focused on impressing Ofsted and any vision beyond that did not seem to be discussed. At Tyne, Hayley made it clear that the vision was not up for discussion. At Mersey, it might have been possible to have had a discussion but Heidi was clear that she would not stay in a school which did not have a strong focus on inclusive education. The limited discussions which governors engaged in on the schools' visions and values challenge the idea that governors have 'criterion' power to set the strategic direction in schools. Lack of educational knowledge was a key factor here.

Headteachers take a lead

The way in which headteachers took a lead showed the effectivity of their educational knowledges in combination with their other forms of power. Headteachers know more about education and about their school and the

governing role is part of their full time job. It is not, therefore, surprising that they should want to set the agenda and be well placed to do so. This sub-section focuses on the role of educational knowledges in the lead taken by headteachers. It provides headteachers' views on their lead and raises issues around governors' lack of knowledge. My finding that headteachers take a lead resonates with my experience as a governor and with other studies (Arnott, 2000, p. 71; Farrell, 2005, p. 108; Munn, 2000, p. 103; Radnor, Ball and Vincent, 1997, p. 213). However, it is important to point out that, as in Dean *et al*'s study, 'it was not necessary for heads to be manipulative in order for governor involvement to be limited. Governors were quite capable of putting limits on themselves' (2007, p. 42). The headteachers tended to take a lead based on setting the agenda (see Chapter 5) and developing plans to present to governors for approval. The headteachers all told me how they took a lead, in a manner consistent with the national discourse of visionary leadership:

> actually you, as the head teacher, are telling them what has to be in place. You are leading them all the time (Hazel, Severn)

> I think a lot of things, it's that I've decided what I want and then I present them in a way that I hope they might agree… it's very rare that they don't agree something that I've suggested, to be honest. We did have. We have had it with a couple of things over the staffing recently. And that's. About how quickly to implement the shadow structure. The expansion and that's about kind of anxiety around money … You know perhaps we, by almost coming ready with the decisions, I prevent them from doing that. As a body. Probably. Because we [the SLT] are really very clear about what we want to do and why we want to do it… I mean you know I've got a nice, friendly governing body who you know want the best for the school are also very willing to essentially you know to let me um have control of things, and run things (Hannah, Avon)

> I think, I mean it says in the handbook, [governors] are supposed to set the strategic direction of the school which. I don't think they do and I wouldn't want them to do. Because the head does but … it depends on their expertise. I have ones who have a variety of skills and expertise and all the rest of it but they're not educationalists so I suppose they have to pick the … head first of all then they have to *trust* you to get on with it but you know they ask you questions along the way and … get involved in supporting as much as they can … Usually to be honest by the time you're dealing with governors you've got it all sort of sorted or you think you have. And you go in with a point of persuading them to think

likewise, and to do anything else I think it would be foolish (Heidi, Mersey)

At Tyne, Hayley also set the agenda and took a lead. As mentioned, she laughed at the idea of governors having a say in the SDP. It is difficult for governors to get alternative perspectives to those provided by the headteacher:

> some of the things I'm talking about they have to take my word for it because they wouldn't unless you understood the issues unless you had a really good working knowledge of the school is quite hard to question what's going on and some of the things I think are quite difficult to do. I mean mine are very bright so they can do that. In lots of governing bodies where there's and I mean not people aren't bright but it depends on what education background they've got and what knowledge and experience they have of the education world so it is a kind of tough job for governors to do and requires lots of time and energy to do that. (Heidi, Mersey)

Governors' lack of educational and contextual knowledges is an important factor in headteachers taking a strong lead in GB meetings. Headteacher's strong lead in relation to governors should not be taken to mean that headteachers are actually as autonomous as the national leadership discourse might suggest. As Ozga says of 'leadership', it 'is now associated with energetic followership of government policies' (2000a, p. 356). Much of the validation and demarcation of 'proper' knowledge is done elsewhere in leadership manuals and courses, in the media and in national policy texts and output requirements.

How governors get informed or educated

As described above, governors are not experts and headteachers tend to lead. However, it seems governors need to gain some understanding of education in order to engage in discussions about schools. Apple and Beane are talking about 'adults' more generally than just governors but the idea that they might be 'fully informed' raises important questions about governors' (lack of) knowledge:

> Democratic schools are meant to be democratic places, so the idea of democracy also extends to the many roles that adults play in the schools. This means that professional educators as well as parents, community activists, and other citizens have a right to *fully informed* and *critical* participation in creating school policies and programs for themselves and young people (*my emphasis*, 2007, p. 8)

Despite Apple and Beane's use of the word 'informed', its concurrence with 'critical' implies a conception of 'knowledge'[21]. Importantly, the educational knowledges required are different for 'state volunteers' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 162) within a performative national context and for critical 'citizen' governors who challenge complex discourses. This sub-section considers steps taken towards governors becoming informed and knowledgeable about education and the school context.

The headteachers spent a lot of time trying to 'inform' their governors. This operates as a kind of managing pedagogy determining what they need to know and hence what they do not. The teacher governors also felt they had a role in informing the lay governors and reinforcing what the headteacher said. In addition to the information and persuasion provided by headteachers and staff governors during meetings, governors learnt about their role, education and their school through staff presentations, visits, being link governors (for example, 'maths governor') and training. All this inducted governors into that particular school's approach. Training provided by the LA (or, for example, Modern Governor) tends to focus on clarity about their role and to induct governors into an effectiveness discourse in which education is an auditable product. As a result, governors do not gain 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson, 1979) which they might use to challenge prevailing discourses of 'good' education and articulate others.

Staff presentations in meetings also tended to be more about informing governors than offering them opportunities to participate. Chapter 5 describes how they often felt too rushed for discussion. Presentations tended to focus strongly on data and some participants said they would like more qualitative input in order to 'really get the flavour' (Leonard, Tyne). At Avon and Severn, the headteachers had successfully encouraged a few visits and learning walks

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[21] However, their language might indicate that, unlike Walter (2008), they see different knowledges as providing different perspectives on issues rather than suggesting that expert knowledges are qualitatively different in that they constitute objects.

each term. At Tyne, Hayley emphasized, to me and in meetings, the importance of governors gaining an 'independent perspective':

> I mean I am very honest about things. About things that have gone well. But again, I have … my own agenda. I have a perspective on things and they need to have something that is, that is independent of me. And I think that is really important. That they do, that they come in and have those conversations with the students (Hayley, Tyne)

However, I did not see evidence of her taking strong steps towards actually encouraging or organising visits in the way the primary headteachers did, suggesting an ambivalence about governors' actually developing an independent perspective. At Mersey, Heidi said she had encouraged visits to give governors 'a sort of a true picture' but most of them had not visited. At Avon, Severn and Tyne, governors who I interviewed referred to having learned more about the school through being linked to a particular department or key stage. Although fairly limited, all this school based orientation contributed to governors' support for their particular schools. My findings echoed those of Radnor *et al* who suggest that 'Most governing bodies could be described as "incorporated" into the school, not as external to it. They become "acculturated" into the interests of the school …. An "outsider" critical perspective is usually unwelcome' (1997, p. 214). There are limited alternative spaces for governors to develop alternative, critical educational knowledges.

Beyond their schools, some governors attended other training. It is not currently mandatory for governors to have any training. This is a topic of national debate as seen in the Education Select Committee Inquiry (Education Committee, 2013a, pp. 18-21). There seems to be an emphasis in these national debates on governors being trained to be clear about what their role is rather developing knowledge about education itself. Training courses have not been specifically analysed during this study but the courses which I have attended and the training evening at Avon (December 2011) are firmly entrenched in the effectiveness discourse of the national performative system explored under 'Accountability relationships'. Riverford's induction training followed the national training programme in which an effectiveness discourse is central:

> The intended learning outcomes are that governors will have increased their understanding of:
> - the characteristics of effective schools
> - the key roles and responsibilities of governing bodies in improving schools
> - the different and complementary roles of governors and headteachers (distinction between governance and management)
> - how to be effective on their own governing bodies
> - the importance of sound working relationships with all staff, parents, LAs, Diocesan Boards and local communities
> - how to access further support and training (DfES, 2005, p. 2)

This programme does not encourage governors to reflect on the broader aims of education. Rather it inducts them into the existing national performative system. This is far removed from Apple and Beane's '*fully informed* and *critical* participation' (2007, p. 8). I have not analysed the plethora of courses offered by private providers but they are likely to play a similar role. Notably their quality was of concern to the Select Committee Inquiry. They were 'concerned at suggestions that few quality alternatives are emerging to the training traditionally provided by local authorities' (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 21).

In summary, much of the understanding of governors, not working in schools or education, came from the headteacher and staff of their particular school inducting governors into their understanding of education and from largely instrumental training courses. The information and knowledge which they gain from the school and from training courses co-opts them into the school as it is and into the performative national system. Where they had educational knowledges, governors tended to claim these in making interventions as discussed next.

Governors' claims to educational knowledges

As discussed, non-staff governors have limited educational knowledges. However, they do have some from a range of sources, for example: being a parent; their own education; work in other schools; being a governor elsewhere; being a trustee of an educational trust; governor training; the media; and Ofsted. They tended to refer to the sources of their knowledge frequently to give

authority and credibility to their interventions. This suggests that educational knowledges had considerable significance for them. Deem *et al* generated a similar list of sources of knowledge. It differed in that their participants referred to more connections to religious and community organisations, voluntary work and political parties (1995, p. 77) although they said 'Knowledge of pupil, parent and community views was invoked much less often than we expected' (p. 78). However, as mentioned in Chapter 6 in relation to representation, a more recent study, Dean *et al,* found, like in this study, there were 'remarkably few governors who had clear affiliations to community groups in such a way that they could be said to be authentically representative of one or other section of the community' (2007, p. 24).

Parent governors had experiential knowledge of the school through their children. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, it was difficult for them to refer to such knowledge explicitly without being seen as having a narrow, self-interested view.

Drawing on knowledge from governors' own education occurred implicitly and explicitly. However, a number had attended private schools or schools in other countries. Even if governors had attended state schools in England, schools are now quite different:

> I have sat in on a number of classes and the teaching there oh it is just phenomenal, just phenomenal…it's so different to when I was at school heh (Larry, Severn)

Having attended school at some point is something that everyone had in common. Therefore, despite this form of knowledge being pupil knowledge and being outdated, it still carried some credibility. It appears that schools are seen more as something everyone can have a view on than is the case with other public services such as health. Given the limits outlined above, Toynbee suggests that 'The curse of the teaching profession is that everyone thinks they know how it should be done' (2013). People feel that their 'common sense' knowledge is valuable and valid. This wider conception of teaching as 'common

sense' is further asserted by the discourse of derision (see Chapter 8) and the de-professionalisation of teacher education through direct entry schemes.

In addition to the staff governors, some other governors had direct experience of working in schools. Pam, a governor at Mersey and Severn, had trained as a teacher before becoming a banker. At Tyne, Adam was a member of the support staff at Mersey. At Avon, Carl worked in school sports across the borough and Paula, a parent governor, was a secondary teacher elsewhere. Heidi was headteacher at Mersey and also a community governor at Avon. She said she did not need governors with educational expertise on her own GB as she had a strong SLT who provided her with as much educational expertise as she needed. However, with regards to being a governor at Avon, she felt her educational expertise was valuable:

> I think it's important to do it. To be part of that. And to sort of help because I can support. I do have an education background so I am sort of able to help with some sort of quite difficult things and have a good understanding and so for example to explain the difficult things. Yeah I think it's an important thing to do. Civic duty! But I actually enjoy it. Because it's a primary school it is quite different than a secondary school. I mean a lot of things are the same but a lot of stuff is different as well (Heidi)

Her position at Avon is an interesting example of an education professional being an active governor. She did emphasise the differences between the schools, for example, by saying of the nursery aged children, 'I can't imagine how you teach them!' (my notes, Avon committees, Oct 11). She spoke frequently in meetings and brought considerable 'knowledge' about national and local policy, funding and support. Heidi was conscious that the GB was judged 'Satisfactory' in the 2010 Ofsted inspection even though the school overall was judged 'Good'. She was very focused on ensuring that governors did what was necessary to impress Ofsted. In my Avon observation notes, I have described Heidi as dominant but she was also very warm and helpful. Hannah and Tabitha, the headteacher and a member of the SLT, found Heidi helpful but also, sometimes, the most challenging. Hannah sometimes seemed defensive about Heidi's comments in meetings but was positive about her in our interview:

of course [Heidi] does know what to ask. But she also knows what, you know what not to pursue and to tell them. "You know that's not up to us, we should leave that to [Hannah]". And she is. Because she's just got a good sense of obviously of what is helpful (Hannah, Avon)

Tabitha was more defensive about Heidi in our interview:

[Heidi] is an influence. She will. She is very supportive and will put arguments for [our views]. But it can be frustrating. I guess that, you know, that is that whole thing about support and challenge … Different thoughts about what she does sometimes. She very much brings in what she does in her school, into our school and it doesn't *fit* and sometimes I get really annoyed and I think she is just trying to impose how she runs her school on how we run our school (Tabitha, Avon)

In relation to the disagreement about the new staff structure, Tabitha said:

we do have to justify why we do things our way but one example, at the moment, that is the. Having so many assistant headteachers. Heidi is really against us having that. And actually she came into the conversation about the learning mentor and made that comment, "is it sustainable? Do you have the money to sustain it?" … So that is what we believe, based on our knowledge of the day-to-day running. But Heidi is moving away from that in her school, she wants less managers. So. She, she doesn't support us. Yup (Tabitha, Avon)

This feeling of betrayal may have been related to Heidi being a fellow professional. It did not seem consistent with Tabitha's later general assertion: 'we do like to be challenged' although this assertion could be seen as a sentiment she felt she *ought* to have. Hannah described the disagreement about the staff structure as having been useful and said that the structure which they had finally chosen was more sensible than what she had originally proposed to governors. This seemed a rare example of a governor not rubberstamping a proposal. It may say something about the considerable power that Heidi had, as headteacher of a successful secondary school in the role of primary governor. In some ways, Heidi's atypical power suggests what other governors might be, but tend not to be.

Some of what Heidi brought to curriculum committee meetings could have been brought by a non-educationalist who was focused on the aims of the committee (although it rarely was), for example:

> Heidi changed the dynamic in the uniform discussion by coming in and asking what the purpose was and how it linked to achievement (my notes, Avon Curriculum Committee, Nov 11)

On the other hand, she also brought a perspective that required detailed knowledge:

> There was a discussion about Community Cohesion not being in the new Ofsted framework. Heidi said it will be under SMC [meaning Social, Moral and Cultural] but it is worth doing anyway. I wondered how many people understood that conversation (my notes, Avon full GB, Nov 11).

Many pupils from Avon went on to Mersey so there were additional aspects to the relationship between Hannah and Heidi than just the governor relationship. Hannah wondered about getting statements of SEN for Year 6 pupils as the process took time. Heidi asserted strongly that they should do it for them now before they left primary.

In summary, the example of Heidi's role at Avon shows the effectivity that comes with being a headteacher of a (local) secondary school as a governor in a primary school. She has direct knowledge and experience of education *and* management. In this way, she exhibits 'bilingualism' (Gewirtz *et al*, 1995 cited in Ball, Vincent and Radnor, 1997, p. 157) in both of these powerful forms of expertise.

Carrie was a teacher at Mersey and, at Heidi's suggestion, a governor at Avon. It is unclear whether Heidi brought her in hoping that she would reinforce Heidi's views or whether it was solely about finding a forum for Carrie's professional development. She tended to be very quiet in the meetings. Unlike Heidi, she consciously tried not to draw on her educational expertise, possibly due to her perception of GBs as lay bodies:

> Carrie - I don't say much. I try not to look from a teacher
> perspective (my notes, Avon GB training session, Dec 11)

At Tyne, Leonard felt that governors would need knowledge of other schools in order to be able to outline a future vision for the school:

> I think really what we need to do is to have more comparison,
> exposure to what different schools are like… I have been on
> [Tyne] for 16 years and I have only ever set foot in one other
> secondary school in that time (Leonard, Tyne)

Although he had not been a teacher, Leonard worked for a teachers' union. He understood policy around school staffing issues very well and drew on this a lot. He was also a member of the LA Schools' Forum and used this to update governors on LA plans.

Spencer, a management consultant and trustee of an educational foundation, seemed familiar with a lot of educational research through his trusteeship so would frequently raise questions informed by recent research, for example:

> Spencer - I wonder if there are any advantages to finding a school
> where TAs are used well. There is some research that they do
> more harm than good (my notes, Tyne full GB, July 2012)

In addition to Heidi and Pam as mentioned above, a number of governors were or had been governors elsewhere. This gave them a variety of knowledge, experience and information. The following list is not exhaustive as I did not interview everyone. At Mersey, Laurence was and Priya had been on primary GBs and Frederick was a governor in the private school which his children attended. At Severn, Lee was governor at a local church school and Patty was a governor at the special school which her child attended part time. At Tyne, Leonard had been an inactive primary governor nearby before becoming an active secondary governor. I did not hear Patty or Leonard refer to their other experiences in meetings. The others sometimes drew on their other experiences to add authority to their interventions. Laurence did this a lot. In addition to being a governor, Laurence was on other bodies such as an admissions panel. These experiences were valued by other governors. Fraser

valued Laurence as he 'is a governor of a number of schools. And has you know a lot of experience, a lot of things to offer'. Frederick said, 'I'm not particularly experienced on the curriculum side. I leave that to Lawrence and his team' (Frederick). Laurence drew on these other experiences frequently (although I observed that he often seemed to misunderstand discussions).

The media is another key source of educational knowledges for governors. Layla, at Avon, described it as 'a massive influence'. Frederick talked about how 'There may just be something that we have picked up you know listening to the news' as a source of challenge. Overall impressions that can come from the media are raised in relation to 'Discourses of derision' in Chapter 8.

Ofsted plays a key role in constituting what 'good' education 'is' (see Chapter 8) and part of this is constituting education as a product as set out in the section below. Ofsted's version of 'good' education appeared to be shared largely uncritically by governors. As described below under 'Multiple accountabilities', governors tend to focus their questions on what Ofsted will ask for. It provided a concrete and clear framework in contrast to the messiness of most educational knowledges. Importantly, in these terms, Ofsted has considerable sovereign as well as discursive power.

Where governors had educational knowledge, they tended to emphasise it (apart from Carrie as described above). There was a discussion at Tyne about a proposed new behaviour unit. Cathy drew on her experience both as a pupil some time ago and as a governor coming in specifically to issue 'warnings' to pupils in danger of exclusion:

> Cathy – I am concerned about it being an ASBO pool. Students might aspire to be in it. Going back to [Spencer]'s point, what can we learn from other schools? I was always in trouble at school and would have aspired to be in something like that
> Teacher7 - it will be separate from the rest of the school so others will rarely see it. They are in for eight weeks
> Hayley – the important thing is that pupils' behaviour must never have an impact on others. This is a long-term alternative to the exclusion room

> Cathy – we want to be sure about the connotations of the unit. I
> see the majority of pupil exclusions
> (My notes, Tyne full GB, Jul 12)

This sub-section has considered the range of educational knowledges which governors in the study schools had and claimed. The way in which governors tended to draw on any educational knowledge they had suggests that they perceived such knowledge to be particularly valuable and relevant, over and above lay knowledges.

Shifting boundaries of educational knowledges

This sub-section uses contentious topics to consider the boundaries of educational knowledges. Few contentious topics arose in the observations or interviews. However, exploring those which did arise draws attention to struggles over the boundaries between lay and educational knowledges. By contentious, I am referring to topics which governors felt it acceptable to express a variety of views about, either in meetings or interviews. The technicist demarcation of education professional and lay governor roles given in the statement: 'Governance is strategic and management is operational' (ASCL, NGA and NAHT, 2012, p. 1), does not help with drawing boundaries on whether the topics below should be discussed by governors or not.

In considering the topics discussed overall, I found a lack of attention to teaching and learning comparable to that found by Deem *et al*:

> It might reasonably be thought that teaching and learning
> constitute the core of a school's activities and hence would be the
> main focus of discussion at governing body meetings. But this was
> not evident from many of the discussions held by governing
> bodies in our study (1995, p. 83)

There were differing approaches to governors' engagement in teaching and learning from different headteachers with Hazel and Hayley exemplifying the two extremes. Hazel was very open and managed her governors through persuasion. Hayley was more protective of her role and tended to limit possibilities for dissent. Their different comments on the role of the GB on

teaching and learning reflect this. Hazel wanted all governors to be involved in discussions about curriculum issues:

> curriculum, we stick in the main governing body [rather than having a separate Curriculum and Standards Committee]... I wasn't sure what we were going to talk about in the main governing body if we had all these different [committees] …and I actually think that's where they should have more influence, say and understanding. Because that's our delivery. That is what we are about. We are about children, curriculum, standards and attainment (Hazel, Severn)

Hayley demarcated lay and professional knowledges and capabilities and did not want governors to be very involved in teaching and learning because she led on it. Instead, she allowed them to focus on issues which she saw as less important:

> So they can focus on the things they understand that aren't necessarily, in my view [I: yeah] the priority [I: OK] but then that is a balance because I expect it. To lead on learning and teaching so how much input I would accept from them is another matter (Hayley, Tyne)

Although issues around teaching and learning were not prioritised in the GBs, there are a number of issues which did not fit easily into a lay/educational binary and that were occasionally raised in meetings and interviews, for example: SRE; early exam entry; school uniform; discipline and exclusions; and academy status. This sub-section explores these topics and how particular knowledges were drawn on to consider them. Possibly the most controversial topics were kept off the agenda entirely (see Chapter 5). Observable conflict does not necessarily reflect the topics which governors feel most strongly about. In some cases, headteachers allowed governors to debate certain issues but kept them away from others (see Bachrach and Baratz in Lukes, 2005). The following examples go some way to demonstrating the fluidity of the lay/educational boundary in relation to some specific contentious topics. Broader general principles behind the issues were rarely evoked.

<u>Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)</u>

SRE provokes controversy in the national media and is often taken up by national and local religious organisations. Many lay people have a view on what pupils should learn in SRE and how they should learn it. In the pilot study at Thames (Young, 2010), there had been a discussion of SRE six months before the research period and three interviewees mentioned this without prompting from me as something very controversial.

At Severn, SRE was not controversial within the GB meetings themselves. However, it was presented there as a very controversial issue as there had been a petition and protest amongst parents about it. The discussions were more about how the existing SRE policy was presented to parents than what it was appropriate for the children to learn. The overall focus of the discussions was on supporting the headteacher who was under attack from the anti-SRE campaigners who, from the school's perspective, did not understand what was really happening in SRE lessons (my notes, Severn Full GB, Mar 12; Severn Committees, May 12; and Severn Full GB, May 12). The change from teaching using a DVD to using pictures was suggested by staff not by other governors. The governors all seemed to take on the school's position that if people knew more about SRE and how it was taught, they would accept the schools' policy as common sense. This example suggests that values/principles and pragmatic and pedagogical issues are tightly entwined and difficult to separate out.

<u>Early exam entry</u>

At Tyne, early exam entry was common practice but did not seem to have been discussed with governors. Lucy was not convinced by aspects of the results focus such as this early exam entry but found it hard to challenge the headteacher:

> [Hayley] will just say, you know, I am relentless in my pursuit of them getting the best possible academic outcomes, because that's the best um basis for their, you know, them being able to make their choices in the future. Um and so I feel that's not something we've really discussed. Because she's just very strong about it … I mean, I think, an issue, and I just saw something on the news about it this week, you know or it's something I read this morning,

about, you know, risks of children being entered for exams too early and things. I mean they are definitely there, what I am seeing from my own children is sort of two and a half years of exams which … my eldest daughter who is going through that at the moment is, is clever. And has parents and grandparents who can support her and, you know, she can get by still with doing not very much homework and still have fun. I think it could be a bit galling and, what, the thing I read this morning was suggesting that the evidence says that you get worse results if you start entering your exams too early so, you know, there's a different view to the view that [Tyne] is taking. And sometime, you know, we don't as, we haven't had that discussion as a governing body (Lucy, Tyne)

Lucy had parental experience and had heard about research evidence but this was an example of an issue which the headteacher had taken a view on and not seen as a 'strategic' (ASCL, NGA and NAHT, 2012, p. 1) issue that she should discuss with governors. Where headteachers are not specifically required to take particular issues to their governors, it is easier not to do so. The absence of issues from meetings despite governors' interest in them may indicate something important about the lay/professional boundary and professionals' control of the agenda. If something is considered as largely an educational issue, it may be difficult for governors to raise it despite their concerns.

School uniform

Uniform was another issue which was discussed at length in the pilot study at Thames and which provokes considerable debate nationally. As discussed in Chapter 6, there was a time-consuming consultation on uniform at Avon. It was controversial in that the parent governors were in favour and the headteacher and SLT were against uniform. Hannah said she was happy to be challenged about uniform but would not accept a challenge to the school's policy of pupils using teachers' first names:

I mean there would be some things that I would be much more. If the parent governors came and you know [Piyal] has certainly said this, and said "well, you know, actually the parents want us to not use first names". I would take a much. I would feel much more strongly about that (Hannah, Avon)

Uniform at Avon, therefore, was an example of a decision which governors were able to make in opposition to the headteacher as the headteacher did not have strong views. Despite Heidi's attempts to encourage parent governors to consider the introduction of uniform from the perspective of teaching and learning, it was discussed and decided upon largely as a non-educational issue.

Discipline and exclusions

Fraser included discipline in the issues which he felt governors should be involved in but for which there was rarely time (along with the vision as discussed earlier):

> it is the big decisions that the governing body should be making. For example, the Building Schools for the Future funding. You know should a school move premises? What discipline should we do? What type of pupils do we want to attract? How should we present the school? What sort of education should we offer? Those are the very, very big decisions that the governing body is rarely involved in (Fraser, Mersey)

In the secondary schools, governors had been involved in exclusions which gave them views on discipline. In telling me at length about Mersey's discipline policy and the changes for which he had pushed, Frederick also drew on his experience of bringing up his own children:

> some people would say it is better to treat every case as a unique case and look into it to the Nth degree and decide what the appropriate sanction is. Other people were saying actually children like structure. They respond well to knowing what is going to happen if they do this or that. Giving children a very clear structure in which to develop is beneficial so that you know, there is counter philosophies going on [within the governing body]. I believe that a fair amount of structure is very healthy for children and certainly my children have developed very well under a fairly clear structure. Not only at home but at school. (Frederick, Mersey)

As mentioned earlier under 'Governors' claims to educational knowledges', Cathy drew on her experiences as a child and as a governor involved with pupil exclusions to make assertions around discipline.

Discipline seemed to be an area where governors' experience of exclusions and/or some idea of common sense was adequate for some governors to challenge education professionals. Like SRE, behaviour in schools seems to be a matter of media interest (and sometimes outrage).

Academy status

Academy status was hardly mentioned in relation to the primary schools. The two secondary headteachers mainly kept it off the agenda as they did not want their schools to become academies. At Tyne, Chaman said academy status had been raised and he had put forward his view that they should stay with the LA. Leonard told me he was against academies and Lucy said that before she joined, 'there had been some discussion and a very clear um consensus that it wasn't the direction that Tyne wanted to … go in'. Hayley told me:

> it is something I can't be bothered with. Um I am not interested in it. We don't have discussions on it. Because we don't have to make a decision. I am very happy being part of [Riverford]. I have no doubt whatsoever, when the Tories win the next election which I think they will do. Um that we'll be forced to become an academy. And then we can talk about it. I am not wasting time on it. Not interested. I am not into structures. Because, as the head teacher, in all the ways that matter, I have the freedoms to do what I need to do. And all an academy will do, is give me a whole load of grief. So I am not interested … governors would not be in favour of academy status. But I have flagged up to them … yeah, not long after the general election. And the whole thing about academies came up. I was asked what I thought and I said well we don't need the discussion because it is not on the table (Hayley, Tyne)

At Mersey, academy status might have received more support from the governors. Christopher told me he would like to discuss academy status if only to dismiss it. Fraser told me that he thought they were a good idea in general. Heidi said,

> I don't think there's any subject we don't go near. Although we haven't gone near the academy one yet. I'm hoping that's not going to spring out at us at some point (Heidi, Mersey)

Academy status seemed to be a topic avoided by headteachers with a slight variation in compliance by governors. Technically, governors are key in deciding about the status of their school so it is an area around which headteachers need to consider and manage their relationship with governors carefully.

Summary

The boundaries of educational issues are unclear and shift as discourse constitutes what is understood as speakable and as controversial. Being controversial in the media is significant in what can be named as controversial. The contentious topics discussed in this sub-section are all issues which did not fit easily into a lay/educational binary. As discussed in Chapter 5, the headteachers' avoidance of discussion was a significant way of dealing with potentially contentious issues. Along with governors' lack of engagement with the school vision, discussed earlier, issues raised tended to be dealt with in a technical and piecemeal fashion rather than through the discussion of broader principles. Although the knowledge used to challenge education professionals was often presented as common sense, not all governors had equal access to this argumentation strategy. This section has suggested that, although educational knowledges are very important in GBs, what counts as educational knowledge shifts, providing fragile spaces for lay engagement. The spaces are also open to managerial knowledge as explored in the rest of this chapter.

Shifting conceptions of professionalism

Educational expertise is now less valued than it was. In the 'state of welfare', experts had 'the capacity to generate "enclosures", relatively bounded locales or fields of judgement within which their authority is concentrated, intensified and rendered difficult to countermand' (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 50). Educational professionalism as described by Vincent and Braun has been powerful:

> the label of "professionalism" and the source of its appeal rest on societal assumptions of the autonomy, discretion, status and self-regulation open to "professional" occupational groups (2011, p. 777)

Education professionalism is increasingly undermined and displaced largely by another field and conception of professionalism, that of managerial

professionalism. This is generic and has no specific relevance to education. There is a movement away from educational professionals to the "grey sciences" (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 54). 'Michael Power has suggested that audit, in a range of different forms, has come to replace the trust that formulae of government once accorded to professional credentials (Power 1992, 1994)' (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 55). This shift and the resulting understanding of 'Education as an auditable product' is discussed below.

The derision of education professionals at a national level is described below in a Guardian article and by Clark, the clerk at Severn and Tyne, who makes a link between governors' lack of educational knowledge and Gove's disdain for education professionals:

> The education secretary's determination to dismiss informed opinion is typical of a government that has been one of the most hostile to expertise since the second world war (Priestland, 2013)

> Clark: … personally I would think if you should become a governor, you should be trained. We've got this idea of the, typical British idea, the amateur
> I: yeah
> C: yeah
> I: you are not convinced by these amateurs?
> C: no, I am not. No, paths to hell. You have got Michael Gove, isn't he. And he's Secretary of State. He is an amateur. He hasn't got a clue, has he. He is. He was actually thinking of schools in 1955 when I went to primary school. Heh. We'll test everyone. It is the English education system, obsessed with failure.

The national derision of educational professionals opens up space for both neoconservative 'common sense' and for the valuing of managerial knowledge. This displaces reflexive and deliberative practice based on considering principles with narrow skills and competencies. In the micro-contexts of the GBs studied, there was not so much neoconservative 'common sense' but managerial professionalism was valued alongside educational professionalism (which has already itself been transformed by managerialism) limiting the space for non-expert/professional knowledges.

This section on 'The place of educational knowledges' has explored how educational knowledges are highly valued and how knowledge claims are made. This final sub-section introduced the way in which educational knowledges are, at the same time, displaced by managerial knowledge.

Education as an auditable product

Education is being transformed into an auditable product with significant implications for the knowledge which is valued within GBs. As described in Chapter 2 under 'Data and the commodification of knowledge', this transformation into an auditable product makes education 'intelligible' to those with managerial knowledge through data analysis. As mentioned above, education is permeated by 'these "grey sciences"' (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 54). 'The powers once accorded to positive knowledges of human conduct are to be transferred to the calculative regimes of accounting and financial management' (p. 54). It is a powerful discourse as it constitutes what education actually is. An illustration of the power of the discourse of measurement can be seen in Creese and Earley (1999). They make the point that 'Governors should beware, however, of concentrating upon easily collected statistics – examination and test results, attendance rates, etc…Important though these are, they only provide part of the jigsaw of effectiveness. We must all learn to measure what we value in education and not simply value what we can easily measure.' (p. 64). The elements of these imperatives seem to flow from each other and the mantra to 'measure what we value' is so often repeated it seems indisputable. It seems unsayable that maybe what is valuable cannot always be measured.

Governors are increasingly expected to understand education as a product and to focus on 'performance'. James points out that 'Performance was not specifically referred to' in the 1988 ERA (2012, p. 6) whereas now, 'the performance of schools couched in terms of pupil attainment has become a central concern in both governance and governing (James *et al*, 2011)' (p. 6). This shift is partly illustrated by the second of Ofsted's 2011 list of 'Key characteristics of effective governing bodies' which says, 'Governors are well informed and knowledgeable because they are given high-quality, accurate information that is concise and focused on pupil achievement. This information

is made accessible by being presented in a wide variety of formats, including charts and graphs.' (2011c, p. 5). This quote indicates the slipperiness of 'knowledge' and the way that managerial knowledge can operate as a meta-knowledge reducing other knowledges to information. The quote suggests that governors become knowledgeable by receiving information. This presumes their knowledge is managerial knowledge which enables them to understand the statistical information.

In some GB meetings, it was almost possible to forget the meetings were about schools. As mentioned earlier, there were limited discussions about educational issues. Discussions could have been about any product. This sense was reinforced by the materiality of the rooms in which secondary school GB meetings were held. Meetings at Tyne were held in a conference room with no indication that it was part of a school and Clark commented,

> I thought the library was a better environment because there are books around there. Make you think actually what we are about: books and teaching kids and if there weren't children here, we wouldn't be here (Clark, Tyne)

At Mersey, meetings were sometimes in the library and sometimes in a sparse meeting room. Those I observed were in the library but I conducted interviews in the meeting room where meetings were apparently usually held. Priya said:

> You know there's a completely different atmosphere. Just sitting in the boardroom during the meeting is different to coming into classrooms and seeing all the children (Priya, Mersey)

Leonard talked about the importance of presentations for reminding everybody they were discussing a school:

> we try to make sure that everybody knows that they are at the governing body meeting of a school by having a presentation every time …I don't see enough of the school in session (Leonard, Tyne)

Understanding education as a product leads to the privileging of managerial perspectives, largely from business:

> One consequence of this is new kinds of "professional
> dominance", that is, the logics of accountants, lawyers and
> managers, are made more powerful over and against the
> judgements of teachers, doctors and social workers (Ball, 2008, p.
> 50)

Managerial knowledge is understood in policy around GBs and by the
governors in the study to stem largely from business. Simkins lists five beliefs
which are central to managerialism. One of these is 'that the techniques for
achieving better management are knowable: indeed they are known and
generally applicable – they can often be found in best practice in the private
sector' (Simkins, 1997, p. 31). In her DfES research report 10 years ago, Ellis
(2003) felt there was a lack of business people as governors but this was not
the case in the four which I studied where there were a large proportion of
business people. Her study was national and this study was in London so time
and place might both be factors in the variation seen.

As someone taking a managerial approach, Connor expected data could make
sense of what was happening with a class of children and was surprised that it
was not possible to 'nail' a determining correlation between gender, ethnicity
and attainment:

> Deidre clarifies about the boy/girl attainment gap. There is a focus
> on supporting year 11 girls.
> Connor – is there an ethnic dimension? Are they Somali?
> Deidre - no, they are a mixture
> Connor – "so interesting, you can never really nail it can you?"
> (my notes, Tyne Curriculum, July 12)

Some aspects of managerial discourse were more visible and were raised as
problematic. However, the discourse of education as a product never really
seemed to be challenged. Critiques of business governors with managerial
knowledge tended to relate to other issues and were heard in interviews much
more than in meetings. Hayley found that business governors could be
impatient about change as they do not, she argued, understand how schools
work and that 'change takes time'. As staff governors in secondary schools,
Tarun and Sally referred to the lack of empathy and understanding of the public

sector ethos and realities and complexities of schools by some business governors:

> big investment bankers. They miss meetings because they are in Hong Kong or they went to Switzerland. And that they have got no idea of probably how to make their own toast or something like that. So they really haven't got an idea of bog standard, you know what they need to do in a school. I think they are completely unrealistic sometimes and that is obviously, you know, supported by the fact that you know, some of these governors are saying, you know what if they don't perform, sack them, you know, it is like we can just get rid of them at the click of a finger, that is sort of, some of the attitude that, you know, things that come out of their mouths sometimes, and I think, you know, you don't know what is happening on ground level. And then you're just saying a silly statement like that (Tarun, Tyne)

> Maybe most of the people on the governing body... They're not as aware of the school. They think more businesslike. I sometimes feel. Sometimes some of the questions or some of the things that are said, some of the comments. They're from business people. And although I said that the school. I'm not trying to contradict what I said. Although I think the school is a business. Sometimes I think they're more, too businessy. Because with a school you've got to be flexible. In a business it is duh duh duhr. But you can't be that way in a school. You know you have to be flexible and we're all equal. All different all equal. And there might be a child that has really bad behaviour problems. And if it's set in stone that if you do such and such, you'll get a day's exclusion. Sometimes you have to make an exception. You know I'm trying to think of an example. So if you have a child who you know can't stop swearing. Tourette's is it called? ... If you've got one of them children and a three strokes and you're an exclusion. You know that's a bit unrealistic for a child that has got that problem. So in a school situation, you have to be flexible, you have to react to. To deal with things that won't necessarily come up. Whereas with business people. They're not involved in that. They don't see that. They just see things as it should be: this, this, this. So I think the only disadvantage is that they haven't got a real good knowledge of the workings of the school. They might have it on the education. What should be in the curriculum and all of that. But the actual day-to-day runnings and how things are done and um why some decisions are made. I think that they don't understand as well as someone who works in the school (Sally, Mersey)

Over and beyond the issues raised above, there are theoretical and practical limitations to what governors, with managerial knowledge, can understand from decontextualized data, as the signified is detached from the signifier:

> Hot knowledge grows cold when far away from its point of origin. The knowledge which takes pride of place in official thinking is very cold indeed ... Performance indicators are prime examples of decontextualized and cold knowledge ... They have the advantage of producing easily comparable data whereas everything we know suggests that the components of school performance include subtle and complex processes and contextual factors (Kogan, 2002, p. 338 cited by Glatter, 2012, p. 569)

Hayley seemed to be referring directly to this 'cold' knowledge when she pointed out that governors' lack of educational knowledges means that there are limits to what they can understand from the data:

> [Governors] can look at the headline figures but won't necessarily understand what underpins that, that you can get variations in the ability levels in a year group (Hayley, Tyne)

The move to understanding education as a product has many significant implications. In the context of this chapter, a key implication is the devaluing of knowledges other than managerial knowledge and the implications of this for democratic engagement. James suggests that:

> Arguably, the legitimacy of schools in England – and therefore their governing bodies – is seen increasingly in terms of performance, narrowly construed, more than other wider considerations. This shift has implications for the democratic accountability purposes of school governing and is reflected in the responsibilities of school governing bodies and the governance system as a whole. (2012, p. 15)

There is a (limited) struggle between educational and managerial knowledge in relation to education as a product. Furthermore, when education is seen as a product, a managerial discourse pre-empts alternative understandings of lay engagement such as a democratic discourse. There is limited space remaining for lay voices who can claim neither educational nor managerial expertise.

Accountability relationships

The role of GBs in 'holding schools to account' came up frequently in policy documents and in interviews. 'Criterion' power (Simkins, 2012, p. 4) is about setting aims. In contrast to this, accountability seems to be largely about checking that the school is meeting specific ends rather than addressing questions about what those ends should be. Governors are meant to do both. These two sides to the role are reflected in Hannah's description of what she thought the role of GBs should be, despite feeling that her school's GB did not actually fulfil either of these roles:

> I mean it *should* be about you know shaping the direction of the school, kind of the direction the school is travelling in and um focus on the kind of big picture development of the school, strategic development. And then monitoring and evaluating against those key priorities, objectives I guess… I think it's a really hard thing to achieve. That's what we've found, I think here … so sometimes it does feel as if they just kind of you know stamp of approval stuff. Um. But they are doing. It's an important function to kind of go to end of line check up on us as well (Hannah, Avon)

The knowledges required for accountability (checking prescribed ends are met) are entirely different to those required for setting the strategic direction of the school. This section considers how accountability operates as a slippery concept allowing managerial discourses, partially cloaked as democratic discourses, to dominate education discourses. It considers the two main types of accountability which dominate: data-based accountability and compliance checking. It sets out how multiple accountabilities including Ofsted and financial audit shape GB accountability and reinforce the compliance checking and managerial elements.

Accountability as a slippery concept

Accountability was unanimously seen as a good thing by all those who raised it in interviews and observations. However, its meaning shifted and these shifts appeared to be hidden and unrecognised. Some sense of democratic accountability may be at the root of the positive feeling it engendered. However, common concrete themes seemed to be highly reductive and simply about analysing data and about preventing wrongdoing, with implications for the

knowledges which are valued. The first theme is explored under 'Data-based accountability' and the second under 'Compliance checking' below.

In their evocatively entitled article, 'Into confusion: LEAs, accountability and democracy', Ball *et al* (1997) distinguish two types of market accountability: 'accountability through service provision' and 'accountability through effective financial management' (p. 148) and two types of political accountability, 'accountability through elected representatives' and 'outward accountability' (p. 148). They describe how slippages between forms of accountability have led to consumer-based understandings displacing citizen-based understandings. The same confusion seems to exist with governors and the meaning of accountability often slips between these ideal types. Another aspect of the slipperiness of accountability is the way it constitutes managerial accountability as responsible conduct:

> As Bruce Charlton has argued, accountability is a "slippery rhetorical term" with at least two largely distinct meanings: a technical-managerial meaning and a looser, more general meaning. In general discourse, accountability has to do with responsibility and carries connotations of "being answerable to". The technical meaning on the other hand, refers narrowly to the duty to present auditable accounts. Charlton observes that originally "accountability" referred only to financial documentation. The current *managerial* use of accountability is, however, a direct extension of this financial usage: an accountable organization is one that has the duty to present auditable accounts of *all* of its activities. The link between the two meanings of accountability is weak… Yet the rhetoric of accountability operates precisely on the basis of a "quick switch" between the two meanings, making it difficult to see an argument against accountability as anything other than a plea for irresponsible action (*emphasis in original*, Biesta, 2004, pp. 234-5)

Slippages in accountability discourse are a key way in which a lay discourse is overlaid with a managerial rather than an educational discourse. Political accountability is displaced by market accountability and challenges to this market accountability can be constituted as calls for irresponsible action. Perhaps, education professionalism could not be so easily displaced by a managerial discourse without the positive connotations suggested by 'lay' involvement.

Data-based accountability

As Glatter (2012, p. 559) says, accountability has been increasingly associated with performance. Hence, by the time of the Coalition government, 'accountability' could be equated solely with 'systematic and external pupil-level assessments' (DfE, 2010, p. 51). After the research period, the 'Governors' Handbook' was published further strengthening the emphasis on governors' access to 'objective data' as central to 'Holding the headteacher to account' (DfE, 2014c, pp. 8-13).

When education is recoded as a product, as described in the previous section, it follows that accountability becomes primarily associated with managerial knowledge. In this way decisions are made about education without necessarily drawing on educational knowledge. Privileging managerial knowledge can exclude non-managerial lay voices, for example, Pakeezah, who had been chair at Avon, found the figures with which she was confronted difficult to understand:

> Sometimes there are a lot of figures and I'd be like, ooow level 2, 2b and there is this criterias and I am still not totally in grasp of it but they do say, you know if you are not sure, this is bad, or we're dealing with it so I've got the gist of what is good and what is bad (Pakeezah, Avon)

The state sets outcomes which schools are expected to achieve. The performance based accountability structures such as league tables and Ofsted could be seen as encompassing goals. However, these goals differ from aims about 'What schools are for and why' (White, 2007). This state based outcome setting appears to mean that GBs are left to monitor these outcomes rather than set or even discuss aims. This is partly a question of the level at which democratic decisions are made and the conceptions of democracy drawn on. State based outcome setting could theoretically stem from nationwide democratic debate on national entitlements. However, the limited nature of national democratic debate challenges this perspective. Furthermore, under neoliberalism, there is limited space for discussions of aims at a national level as,

> under the culture of accountability, the state only wants to be held
> accountable in terms of the "quality" of its delivery of public
> services, and not in political, let alone democratic terms (Biesta,
> 2010, p. 70)

The relationship between parents, local communities and the state in setting aims and outcomes is complex. Where the state sets rigid outcomes, there is little space for parents and local communities to set their own aims. It is questionable, then in what sense and to what extent governors have a 'strategic' role if their primary function is that of using managerial knowledge to push schools to achieve targets set by the government.

Compliance checking

Another commonly deployed meaning of accountability was about checking the headteacher was not doing anything wrong. The two secondary headteachers told me:

> I think the head has to be accountable to *somebody*. Otherwise
> you can run amok and do what the hell you like (Heidi, Mersey)

> they have to have that level of accountability. Um so I and I think
> that you do need that. Because, not least the fact that we could
> very quickly become megalomaniacs (Hayley, Tyne)

This form of compliance checking was difficult for governors, since, as mentioned earlier, the headteacher tends to lead and a lot was invested in developing a trusting relationship between the headteacher and the rest of the GB. With reference to governors' surveillance role, Deem *et al* stretch Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon (Foucault, 1977 [1975]) by suggesting that 'a governing body, for most of its members, is a panopticon with few windows' (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 69). Compliance checking can feel like an explicit display of mistrust of the headteacher which is socially awkward and especially difficult when discussion is constrained (see Chapter 5). For certain matters, all that is needed for compliance checking is a disregard for this social awkwardness. For example, when the fact that Tyne had a minibus came up, Chaman said he would ask to check the logbook at some point (my notes, Tyne Finance and Premises, May 2012). For other matters,

compliance checking is even harder as it depends on both contextual and educational knowledges. Challenging the headteacher is difficult enough when the headteacher is being fairly open so would be much harder if the headteacher was intentionally hiding things. In some cases, such as the case of 'rogue' headteachers not providing proper induction for new teachers (Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005), it is unlikely that governors could be aware of the situation. Whistleblowing policies in schools tend to be about finance and child protection[22] rather than about wider issues such as those raised by Bubb *et al*.

Tarun felt that the governors were not well informed enough to raise certain issues and their lack of contextual knowledge meant that they did not appreciate deeper reasons why so many good staff were leaving Tyne:

> [The governors] have just been like wrapped up in cotton wool, "oh that person is retiring" "oh that person wants to go for a promotion somewhere" without really discussing what is happening here because 20, 30 staff have left in the last one and a half years after the September. That is not a coincidence is it? So, those sorts of major decisions about letting staff go. People need to, especially parents and governors need to be involved in more (Tarun, Tyne)

The social awkwardness of challenging the headteacher, considered in Chapter 5, might also be a factor in the scenario Tarun described. Below Clark is referring to the former headteacher at Severn and Heidi is talking about her experience of other schools. In both cases, governors' lack of knowledge, and some social awkwardness, meant they were unable to fulfil their compliance checking role when a head did not want them too:

> he gave the impression everything was wonderful and it wasn't. And certainly, standards weren't very good but he always had a … tried to explain it away. And the governing body with their. Because of their background, weren't really able to challenge him sufficiently (Clark)

> I think they're proactive and whatever but the point is I'm not out here bullying my staff and I'm not doing [anything] terrible. I know

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[22] Increasing concerns about these are raised in a recent report on whistleblowing by Public Concern at Work (West, 2012).

I'm not, you know, so I'm open on that. So I'm not fiddling the books or doing anything illicit or you know or but you know I have worked in places where you know there are some terrible things going on and the governors just sailed on right past [unclear] can happen if they don't know about it. If there is an atmosphere of fear and you know and that is quite difficult because you know sometimes people can be very manipulative and they can collude and you know so I've seen that happen. But you know they've employed me and I'm not saying I'm perfect because I'm far from perfect but I'm not a bully and I don't operate in that way. I'm quite open. If I make a mistake I put my hand up to it. But there's lots that don't and you would need to be a very brave governing body you know. I've worked for a headteacher and there was, you know, she was quite scary to everybody. She really was, she terrorised us all, you know. And if you're a governing body who wanted to question her on anything you know she would make your life. So [it would] be very difficult and very brave for anybody to be able to do that and so they didn't. So I'm just conscious of that. I've lived through different experience. So I give them what they want. I admit if I've made a mistake if I've done or something's gone wrong or whatever. I don't try to hide it (Heidi, Avon)

Both contextual and educational knowledges are needed for much compliance checking. There seems to be a paradox in that the GB is only able to hold the headteacher to account if the headteacher allows them to do so by being open. The 'Governors' Handbook' refers to the 2002 Education Act (S.30) and states, 'It is the headteachers' job (and in maintained schools it is their legal duty··) to give governing bodies all the information they need to do their job well' (DfE, 2014c, p. 9). As the headteacher, Heidi explained:

I have to make sure, you know, that I keep all the sort of the statutory regulations and to make sure that they … do what they need to do and they have the right information because they wouldn't necessarily know what they're meant to do so tell them (Heidi, Mersey)

For compliance checking, narrowly defined, it could be argued that it does not matter to whom schools are accountable, so long as there is some form of compliance checking. However, who governors are has implications for the areas that, within the narrowly defined performative national system, they choose to focus on and their ability to do so.

Multiple accountabilities

The performative national system means governors' space for action is very constrained. Governors are part of complex 'networks of accountability' (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 56). They serve and are served by the others, such as league tables, Ofsted and audit. These largely reinforce the compliance checking and data-based accountability approaches. Ofsted was frequently referred to as important in all of the GBs.

Hazel talked about the limitations of GBs' lack of educational knowledges and the need for other forms of accountability:

> unless you have maybe another headteacher on your board or etcetera but that is. I find [the GB], not the most um. It isn't the most effective way of judging a school's performance at all (Hazel, Severn)

I asked her, 'do you have other kind of alternatives in mind?'

> well from a financial point of view, audit do something, Ofsted do check. And the audit check. Audit also check your statutory policies so your charging policy, I mean I know that is linked to finance. But they would check your Equal Ops policy and Ofsted for them check your safeguarding and whether your statutory duties of delivering RE. So you've really got two bodies that are checking what you are doing (Hazel, Severn)

She went on to reiterate the governors' limited abilities:

> [Ofsted] have confirmed what I am doing, my judgements. I think they [the governors] feel comfortable. Would they [the governors] have been able to independently assess that on their own? With their own abilities? No (Hazel, Severn)

Ofsted not only inspect school performance but increasingly, governing bodies themselves. Governing bodies therefore, operate in an uneven network of accountability with national government governing at a distance (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 43) through Ofsted:

> Governing now features more prominently in school inspections (Ofsted, 2013), with significant implications for school governors…

> Governing bodies are at the focus of considerable accountability
> pressures from central government via Ofsted and a range of
> other stakeholders, which have a sharp focus on pupil attainment.
> Not only is the accountability pressure strong, the requirements
> have been stiffened and the stakes are higher (James *et al.*,
> 2013b, p. 87)

The primary school governing bodies were particularly focused on demonstrating their engagement to Ofsted. Lee, at Severn, talked about it constantly as though they were all revising for an exam, for example, he said 'governors need to know the school goals by heart. Put them by your bed to remember' (my notes, Severn Full GB, March 2012). Hazel was focused on providing evidence of governors' engagement, for example:

> we have got those logs of the governors coming in, and I now
> keep a spreadsheet of every time they come in, every course they
> attend, so that is there as evidence (Hazel, Severn)

Frederick also talked about revising for Ofsted: 'I thought it was a very good [headteacher's] report. Very comprehensive. If you haven't, do read it. When we're interviewed by Ofsted, we'll have all the answers' (my notes, Mersey Full GB, July 2011).

Avon's 2010 Ofsted report, judged the school to be 'Good' but the GB was only judged 'Satisfactory'. Extending the governors' evaluation systems was given as one of the key areas which the school needed to improve. Each meeting at Avon seemed to involve performances of governing which were minuted to impress Ofsted. In one meeting there were three references to writing minutes in such a way as to impress Ofsted. Firstly:

> Latif – it is important if our resources are constrained that we
> focus our energies. We could lower our expectations
> Heidi – don't write "low expectations" down! (my notes, Avon Full
> GB, Nov 11)

Secondly, with regard to the uniform consultation, Heidi said 'it's a great example of governors leading. Clara, write it down. Very good' (my notes, Avon Full GB, Nov 11). Thirdly, the governors were focussed on ensuring that all

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visits to the school were minuted (my notes, Avon Full GB, Nov 11). Clark, the clerk at Tyne and Severn, was unhappy with the Ofsted expectation that challenge appear in the minutes, saying that it 'runs counter to how one does minutes' (Clark). This practice of asking the 'right' questions and recording them is explored in Chapter 8 under 'Prescribed criticality' where it is considered as a 'fabrication' (Ball, 2006 [2003], p. 149). There were limits though to how far people would make changes for Ofsted. Heidi questioned the value of link governors: 'I'm just thinking, is this just for Ofsted? It is heavy on staff time. I met Debra, I'm not sure if it was useful to her' (My notes, Avon full GB, October 2011). Interestingly, in this, Heidi did not refer to the potential benefits links might have for governors' developing understanding of the school. Governing bodies are accountable to Ofsted (DfE, 2013, p. 5). This has implications for them being accountable to anyone else in the community (McCrone, Southcott and George, 2011, p. 11) and can be understood as marginalising the possibilities for more direct forms of accountability to parents, students and the local community.

Riverford's role was being reduced during the research period. Nationally, the requirement to have a SIP, who provided a particular form of educational expertise, was ended by the Coalition government. This had implications for the sorts of educational expertise that governors could draw on. Despite this, Ofsted's (pre-Michael Wilshaw) thematic report, 'School Governance: Learning from the Best' (Ofsted, 2011c) values the role of local authorities as summarised by Baxter and Clarke (2012):

> But the relationship between professionals and lay groups has rarely been an easy one and the report's examples of excellence make heavy reference to the role of local authorities in supporting and guiding of governing bodies (p. 27)

Potentially at least, the LA provides a space for community accountability beyond the compliance checking and managerial accountabilities.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the lack of 'criterion' power resting with governors and schools. Simkins goes on to describe the public service reform from the 1990s:

> These changes comprised governments, on the one hand, devolving operational power to service providers while, on the other, maintaining, or even enhancing, criterion power through the replacement of direct forms of hierarchical control with various "steering" regimes. These regimes set performance objectives centrally and then use indirect mechanisms, such as performance management or inspection, to steer operational activities in desired directions (2012, p. 4)

These regimes have been alluded to throughout this section. In summary, the audit focuses on money; Ofsted on attainment data; and the LA can provide some local as well as 'performance' related educational knowledge. All three are supported by the GB emphasising data-based accountability and compliance checking. These complex 'networks of accountability' (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 56) pre-empt the 'criterion' power that might be invested in governing bodies.

Reflections

This chapter has explored knowledges, experts and accountability using three forms of knowledge, educational, lay and managerial, as a heuristic device.

The relationship of democracy to expert knowledges has provoked debate since at least the time of ancient Athens. This chapter has explored aspects of the relationship based on empirical data. Debate about this relationship is often reduced to a simple binary; setting expert knowledges against lay knowledges. However, in the case of governing bodies, there are at least two significant forms of expert knowledge in play; educational and managerial. The complex interplay between educational and managerial knowledges and the way in which the positive connotations of lay knowledges can be co-opted by managerial knowledge mean the relationship between lay and expert is a complex rather than binary relationship.

There is an ongoing trend in education towards the displacement of educational knowledge by managerial knowledge. Nonetheless, lay governors make claims in terms of both managerial and educational knowledge whenever they can suggesting both forms of expertise are valued. Conceptions of 'lay' and of 'accountability' both have positive connotations which stem largely from vague ideas of democracy. However, in the context of a larger struggle between managerial and educational knowledge, lay knowledge, with its lack of associated expertise, is easily marginalised and displaced by managerial knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 6, 'outsiders' are valued but largely when these 'outsiders' have managerial knowledge.

Two dominant understandings of accountability in play within governing bodies have emerged from the data; they are data-based accountability and compliance checking. Both require managerial and/or educational knowledges. Both understandings of accountability are about checking that the school meets aims set elsewhere. They are not about setting strategic aims for the school.

The power of expert knowledges to constitute that of which they speak about is an important reason why lay knowledge is marginalised and provides only a fragile alternative. I understand Ball to be referring to what I have called 'lay knowledge' when he describes the 'empowerment of community discourse' (Ball, 1994, p. 89) of 20 years ago. He said then it was 'represented primarily in rhetoric rather than in widespread practice (Vincent 1993). Its historical status in the post-war UK politics of education is one of irritant and unrealised hope' (Ball, 1994, p. 92). It seems that the complexities of the relationships between different forms of knowledge mean that lay knowledge is now being further displaced by managerial knowledge even within policy rhetoric.

Chapter 8: Discourses of 'Good' Education?

Introduction

This chapter focuses on two absences: the lack of recognition of the political nature of governing bodies and the absence of challenge to state discourses of education by governing bodies. Exploring absences empirically is challenging as it involves analysing silences and unstated assumptions. The chapter consists of three main sections. The first revisits the positive conceptions of the 'political' underpinning this study then explores the data, in which 'politics' is seen negatively and education and the work of school governors are constituted as apolitical. The second considers the limited educational alternatives which are thinkable or sayable. The third describes how governor criticality is co-opted as *prescribed criticality* by the provision of the 'right' questions for governors to ask.

As described in Chapter 5 governors are taken up with busy-ness. This busy-ness is paradoxically combined with passivity and a reluctance to challenge or to experience conflict. 'Politics' is seen negatively and this limits possibilities for discussing and debating conceptions of 'good' education beyond the singular conception normalised through the national performative system. Constituting education and governing as apolitical almost entirely excludes possibilities for taking up alternative positions. Passivity stemming from the affective reluctance to experience conflict, described in Chapter 5, is reinforced by the broader educational context which is informed by neoliberalism. Paradoxically, the increase in passivity is accompanied by an increase in busy-ness as governors busily receive endless information and ask the 'right' questions.

Conceptions of the 'political'

This section explores positive and negative conceptions of the 'political'. It first reiterates the positive conceptions of 'political' underpinning this study which recognise difference and value debate. It then considers conceptions of the 'political' emerging from the data, suggesting that the 'political' is understood in a variety of ways but is largely seen negatively and as something that should be

kept out of education. The next sub-section considers the constitution of 'non-partisan' education or teaching, suggesting this is linked to broader conceptions of education as apolitical. The section ends with a summary of the multiple ways in which school governing is constituted as apolitical. Through these, power and exclusion are hidden by a depoliticised effectiveness discourse and spaces for debate and discussion are displaced. As Rose says:

> The term "politics" can no longer be utilized as if its meaning was self-evident; it must itself be the object of analysis. Indeed, at stake within our own unsettled political reason is the very meaning, legitimacy and limit of politics itself (2005 [1996], p. 38)

Conceptions of the 'political' underpinning this study

As introduced in Chapter 2, the understanding of 'politics' underpinning this study is one of ongoing contestation, diffused power and a recognition that things could be otherwise. This understanding has been deployed as a sensitising concept for the empirical research. The recognition that things could be otherwise arises from Foucault's approach to genealogical analysis which 'renders what we took to be natural, ontologically stable, historically immutable into something that is historically contingent, produced, mutable and thus open to transformation, revision, abandonment and challenge' (Mendieta, 2011, p. 113). Furthermore, my understanding incorporates a view that education is a collective good, not merely an individual consumer good. Education has important implications for society:

> all educational concepts are informed by ideals and values which are in some sense political. Rather than ignore these, we should make them the focus of a rigorous debate and acknowledge that the primary question in this debate may very well be not "what is education?" but "what kind of society do we want to live in?" (Suissa, 2000, p. 374)

Conceptions of the good society are always provisional and, as part of this, education needs to be a matter for ongoing debate and contestation without an expectation of a final answer. With Mouffe, I suggest that

> Instead of trying to erase the traces of power and exclusion, democratic politics requires bringing them to the fore, making

them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation. The fact that this must be envisaged as an unending process should not be cause for despair, because the desire to reach a final destination can only lead to the elimination of the political and to the destruction of democracy (1996, p. 255)

Political debate is important and healthy. My approach resonates with that of Deem *et al* (1995) who say,

> power relations are an ineradicable feature of the fragile character of governing bodies … the governance of schools is a political activity, both because it deals with the distribution of allocative and authoritative resources (Giddens 1984), and because it involves both education professionals and lay people, all of whom have their own views on what schooling is about and how it should be organised' (p. 133).

The suggestion from Holt and Hinds, below, that education is inherently political and should be the subject of debate also resonates with the work of some democratic theorists such as Mouffe, above, and with the approach underpinning this study:

> Can't we all keep politics out of education? We think the answer to this question is and should be "No". Education is an area of public life. The policies which determine it are framed in the national and local political arenas ... There are too few arguments about the values of education for the governing of schools to be in a healthy state. Arguing is part of the politics of governing and of education (Holt and Hinds, 1994, p. 38)

Conceptions of the 'political' emerging from the data

Participants tended not to talk about 'politics' in the manner outlined above. Here, I consider the moments when they did talk in this manner and the moments when they used the words 'politics' or 'power'.

A number of interviewees in the current study saw 'politics' negatively. This echoes Deem *et al*'s finding that governors felt politics should be kept out of governance (1995, p. 134). However, 'politics' was not as strongly associated with party politics as I had expected from the literature (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, pp. 133-4; Hatcher, 1994) and from the deployment of 'politics' in the national media. Participants' largely negative responses to politics in

education were based on a number of different interpretations of 'politics', as: first, party political views; second, individual agendas which are perceived by others as against the common good of the school; third, governors' power over schools; fourth, engagement with national policy; fifth, 'progressive' ideas about education; sixth, 'scheming' for GB positions; and, seventh, holding public office.

First, I will explore the relation of 'politics' to party politics. Riverford LA governors are no longer affiliated to particular parties (see Chapter 4). In describing this shift, 'politics' was equated with 'party politics' by both clerks. Clara described Riverford LA governors as 'non-political'. After saying that parents, the local community and staff needed to be on governing bodies to give their views, Clark said 'Because of the politics of it all, you, you know you end up with… local authority representatives. The political dynamic thing. Which actually is quite, quite weak'. Leonard, at Tyne, had originally been a Labour party nominee but had not been for some years. There may have been other long serving governors who had once been party nominees and whom I did not interview. Formally, at least, party politics no longer had a role to play in governing bodies in Riverford (there are still party political nominees in some LAs elsewhere in England). Given my expectations that interviewees would equate 'politics' with 'party politics' (beyond the party politics of nominated LA governors), I sought to check if this was what interviewees were referring to when they described something as political. Mostly it was not. An exception was from Pakeezah, at Avon, who expressed the following concerns about party ideology in response to my question, 'So are they [school governing bodies] kind of democratic or should they be democratic?', suggesting that children and their learning should be above politics:

> I hope, I, I don't know actually, I think that would bring up a whole can of worms because you can feel really strongly about a certain way. You can, you know, feel strongly about a certain political sort of party and their ideas and their ideologies. But I don't know if it's really fair to bring it into a school environment as such in their learning. But it does, it is still relevant because obviously however the government works, it does relay into how businesses work and how schools work (Pakeezah, Avon)

With particular reference to LA nominated governors, James describes the shift away from party politics in governing bodies:

> school governing is potentially an arena of conflict but … over time the nature of that conflict has shifted from one related to politics in a "party political" sense (James *et al*, 2010) to one related to the politics of ensuring proper management (James, 2012, p. 7)

In the second, perhaps most significant, understanding of 'politics', the secondary headteachers, Hayley at Tyne and Heidi at Mersey, both saw 'politicised' governors as being those with their own 'agenda'. This may suggest that headteachers encouraged a conception of education as apolitical to reduce challenges to their own educational approaches. Furthermore, they both talked about carefully controlling who they allowed onto their governing bodies:

> Hayley: yeah and you have to be very careful with your governing body. Because some places have very politicised governing bodies. I am lucky mine aren't but some do
> I: politicised. Do you mean party political?
> H: well. No. Party political you can deal with. They have got a very clear agenda of why they are on the governing body. And what they want to see happening and that, that can be interesting in terms of like the effective running and what the role of the head is. And I don't have that problem at all.
> I: OK
> H: I am very lucky with my governors. They have a very clear sense. They can have an opinion on all manner of things. That is fine. But what is my role and what their role is and the difference between the two
> … [interruption by a teacher] …
> I: so how do you avoid getting politicised governors on your governing body?
> Hayley: the previous head and the chair of governors are very good at having conversations with governors beforehand. People beforehand and exploring why they want to be. Um and with the governors I have, they have got a real deep commitment to our youngsters achieving. No other agenda running. While other people can have broader agendas in terms of um things that we'd have in schools. So you hear horror stories and how much of it is true, you don't know, because some of it can be things like um governors saying things like, you know you can't have things like Christmas trees and stuff like that and, again, you don't know how much is that is true. My governors would never be like that. Well A, they wouldn't agree with it and secondly, they know that is not their business. So I am incredibly lucky with the governors. It

doesn't mean that I don't [pulls face] have words, and they don't
have words with me

In this, as well as talking about how careful she is about who she allows to join
the GB, Hayley also seems to suggest that it is or should be a consultative body
entitled to an 'opinion' rather than a *governing* body which technically does have
a have a role in deciding on the role of different religions within the school. Both
secondary headteachers referred to others as having 'interests' but their own
interests are obscured. Heidi, at Mersey, talked in similar terms about individual
'agendas' but with the additional dimension of suspicion of governors' professed
altruistic motives. She did not want anyone with particular 'interests' but at the
same time was suspicious of altruism, seeming to disregard the possibility of
altruism motivating anyone except education professionals:

> Heidi: … I mean we haven't got and I'm glad I'm glad we haven't
> got anybody with any sort of political agenda. Which would worry
> me because some governing bodies are destroyed by people
> coming in with their own individual agenda.
> I: party political you mean?
> H: well sometimes it's party political, sometimes it's more to do
> with them and you know what they want and they're joining for
> their own you know. I'm sometimes a bit suspicious of governors.
> Why would anybody want to do it? You know if you're in education
> you've got an interest in education and you … you know you have
> that sort of commitment. You know if you work in this area one of
> the things you do.
> [She's distracted as signing papers]
> H: So you sort of wonder why. What's in it for somebody else and
> it might be that somebody is wanting an interest and they are
> retired. They are particularly passionate about education and want
> something to do in the inner-city and whatever but some
> governing bodies I've seen it, are destroyed by people who it's
> about them. It's their own ego. You know people who want to be in
> positions of power. And that often isn't a good thing. So
> sometimes I'm a bit suspicious of people as to why they want to
> be there. And I've seen that happen in other governing bodies. It
> hasn't happened in mine.
> I: and that's particularly the community and local authority
> governors?
> [we had just been discussing them]
> H: yes so you just have to be careful about who comes on really

Both of these secondary headteachers seemed to be constructing negative
conceptions of politics, and to use the term very loosely, to protect their domain

against 'outsiders' (see Chapter 7). An important aspect of this is the disallowing of individual 'agendas' or interests and the suggestion that it is possible to be free of interests.

A third understanding of 'politics' was related to governors having power over schools. As headteacher at Avon, Hannah recognised the power relations of the GB and talked about the apparently informal nature of the interaction allowing the politics to remain hidden. As in the rest of her interview, she was more ambivalent than the secondary headteachers about how much she *should* lead or allow the governors to lead. She felt that in the SLT, she and others were able to acknowledge mistakes and what could be done better but in the GB, the power relations were such that she tended not to reveal the school's shortcomings. She commented, 'the chair of governors is my boss really' and we had been discussing the role of the governors in appointing her when she said:

> there is that kind of informality. But also being, you know, being aware of the formal structures behind that. For me that is important and I think you know any headteacher would be mad not to have that in the back of their mind. There is some kind of political. That there is something political going on there… and you have to know that... That's what makes it different from the senior leadership team meeting I guess. So in the senior leadership team meeting I think, it's much easier to say "actually, we are doing so badly in this area" you know what's, it's much easier, or to say "you know look at this, this is just not good enough, what can we do? What have we done, what hasn't worked?" You know I don't think we. Maybe we need to do a bit more of that in governing body meetings (Hannah, Avon)

Hannah's sense of 'political' seemed to relate to governors having power over her and the school, even though this was sometimes obscured by the apparent informality of meetings. Overall, headteachers were more likely to recognise the power relations of the GB than other governors were. This is shown above, and through the ways in which they led their governing bodies (see Chapter 7). This resonates with the findings of Deem *et al* who found that 'only heads, teachers, chairpersons of governing bodies talked explicitly about power' (1995, p. 139). In the study schools, Christopher and Leonard, who were both vice-chairs, also

recognised the power of governors, as did Clark, at Severn and Tyne, who said, 'Sometimes it is just power isn't it? Power and authority status. "I'm chair of governors"'. Despite this sense that being a governor was about power relations, the scale and form of that power was unclear. Hayley talked in terms of 'negative power' saying, 'they have got quite a bit, if they choose to exercise it, of negative power. They can be, they could be if they wanted to be really bloody-minded and difficult' (Hayley, Tyne). It seemed heads worked hard to avoid this exercise of 'negative power'. On the other hand, Heidi said 'there isn't really any power in it' suggesting governors were unable to exercise independence. Despite her cautiousness about governors with an 'agenda', Heidi laughed about the scenario of Christopher applying to be vice-chair when Laurence did not want to give up his long held position, saying that governor positions had limited power despite their apparent power being an attraction for some governors:

> I think we're going to go for a joint [vice-chair]! Yeah I mean honestly trying to move new blood in and people just. It's about power. I don't understand what it's about. I don't care really. Some people want to be chair forever or vice-chair. So you've just got to laugh really. But know there's no malice in it. And there isn't really any power in it (Heidi, Mersey)

A fourth meaning of 'political' was in relation to national policy. Headteachers introduced governors to national policy, often in negative terms. Heidi, at Mersey, was perhaps the most outspoken headteacher in opposing government policy. Christopher recognised that changes in national policy meant that there were significant decisions to be made and saw 'personal political views' as unhelpful. He wanted 'horizon scanning' and to discuss the policies further in a rational way, suggesting that this discussion should not be affected by emotion; 'really starting to analyse that rather than just be aware of things or start worrying about it or get kind of angry about it' (Christopher, Mersey). Fraser, Christopher and Heidi, all at Mersey, most explicitly recognised difference in governors' views on national policy, for example:

> I'm just ignoring it [academy status]. There's too much else to do anyway so um. You know there's a few who will you know read papers I don't read and have political views that I don't agree with

and that's fair enough. But I just keep, keep on going battering my way through (Heidi, Mersey)

My interview with Heidi took place in July 2011. It is likely that the national push towards discussions around academy status has become stronger since that time. More subtle differences in views and visions are explored below under 'Limited (but differing) visions of 'good' education'.

With another angle on national policy, Clark, used 'political' in a meeting, to mean that Ofsted was supporting the agenda of the current Government:

> Discussion of local schools which had had bad Ofsted reports …
> Clark said there is a concern that Ofsted is doing it for political
> reasons to get academies [to force academy conversion] (my
> notes, Severn Full GB, March 2012)

Fifth, 'politics' could be associated with progressive approaches to education. Fraser, at Mersey, said that he was referring to party politics. However, it appeared that he valued a didactic, knowledge based approach to education and his opposition to 'politics' stemmed from his association of it with educational approaches of which he disapproved and which he linked to teachers from the 'left of centre':

> I: by political agenda, do you mean party political? Or
> Fraser: yes. I think so yes I think so although on education.
> There's not a lot of difference between the political parties but
> there is nothing wrong with teachers coming from a left of centre
> political point of view. Many of the people that taught me were
> also from that point of view at a grammar school. That is why they
> were teaching in [area] you know instead of in Harrow or Eton or
> something. So I understand that but I think that the, you know. We
> seem to get. The school seems to get involved in so many
> initiatives and matters that are sort of indirectly related to
> education and I think in the course of doing that we lose a bit of
> ability to teach the children in a proper way

Reinforcing this association of politics with educational approaches and a focus on wider social issues, of which he disapproved, Fraser went on to blame 'politics' in education for students' inability to write letters, suggesting that, without these 'politics', students would be able to write better:

> Can you take education out of politics? I doubt it. But should you?
> Yes, if you can. There are big prizes to be had... how can anyone
> going to university at the age of 17 or 18 write a poor letter? It
> doesn't make any sense to me. We are doing something wrong.
> (Fraser, Mersey)

Fraser's equation of 'politics' with particular approaches to education resonates with the way 'the Coalition has set itself against what ministers call educational "progressivism"' (Ball, 2013a, p. 111). This follows a trend from the Black Papers of the 1970s and beyond.

Fraser's particular views on education were fairly unusual amongst the four governing bodies which I studied where neoliberal views were more prevalent than neoconservative ones (potentially reflecting a wider shift in the balance of these two components of the New Right (Trowler, 2003, p. 104 cites Gamble, 1988 and Ball, 1990b on this uneasy coalition)). However, the apparent dissonance which Fraser felt in relation to the place of politics may be less unusual. On the one hand, he felt that education was uncontroversial common sense and should not be a 'matter of politics'. On the other hand, he considered there was a 'kind of philosophical difference' between his thoughts on what education should be and those of 'the majority of the governors'. So the position that politics should be kept out of education seems to sit paradoxically alongside the incompatible recognition that people have different views on education. These paradoxical beliefs perhaps reflect the point made by Rose (2005 [1996], p. 38) at the beginning of this section. Defining what is political is potentially more significant than political debates within the, increasingly constrained, space of what is widely understood as political.

There were two other remaining uses of the term 'political' which I heard. Sixth, Tarun, at Tyne, used it to refer to Prabhat, a former local councillor, who Tarun thought was building support to become chair at a future election in the manner of a national politician:

> he's like, kind of like a politician really, isn't he? So he knows what
> to do. Because you need to, within the governing body. It is very

political as well. You need to build allies outside these hours. You
know, when we go to our governing body meeting now, when they
are having their sandwiches, there will be little whispers here, little
whispers there, like in the House of Commons, like this is what is
going to be discussed, this is going to be talked about, make sure
you talk about this, that is what is going to happen. And again it is
going back to the manoeuvring of what I said, of how you get into
a position of authority really. Unless you make these moves and
unless you get these allies. It is like the American primaries isn't it,
the presidential primaries? These are the people who are going to
put you, elect you into this position (Tarun, Tyne)

I did not hear anyone else using 'political' in this sense and was surprised by
Tarun's description. However, it was consistent with his description of himself
as 'a conspiracy theorist' and also with the more confrontational atmosphere at
Tyne.

Seventh, 'political' was once used to refer to an, apparently illogical, decision
made by local councillors about the timing of a youth service contract (my
notes, Tyne Finance and Premises Committee, May 12). The 'political' in this
case referred to the considerations of elected councillors in decision-making.

In summary, 'politics' was used in a variety of different ways, and sometimes
pejoratively. It was not understood as a *process* which might involve particular
deliberative practices and modes of contestation. 'Politics' was largely seen
negatively and as something that should be kept out of education. This
understanding of politics as negative is intertwined with related discourses. As
mentioned in relation to consensus in Chapter 5, the constitution of the
'common good' of a school suggests that it would be against the interests of the
children to challenge what the school was already doing. As mentioned in
relation to 'neutral' skills-carriers in Chapter 6, disagreements were not
encouraged as education was seen as a technical matter.

The constitution of 'non-partisan' education

In discussing education as apolitical, it is important to mention how a broader
'rational' sensibility assumes politics is a bad thing and that it is possible for
education to be neutral and unbiased; despite the inherent biases of
mainstream education as described by generations of social scientists (e.g.

Ball, 2013a). This obscures possibilities for the conceptions of the 'political' underpinning this study and for debate about alternative understandings of 'good' education.

The belief that teaching can be non-partisan is set out, for example, in the Education Act 1996 (see Appendix L). It can be seen as an example of how legislation both reflects and constitutes public attitudes about the possibilities of education avoiding 'political indoctrination' and being 'balanced'. Under the heading of 'Political indoctrination', it forbids 'partisan political activities' for 'junior pupils' and the 'promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject'. It creates a duty to ensure the 'balanced treatment of political issues' under which pupils must be 'offered a balanced presentation of opposing views'. In this, the Act suggests that issues can be presented in a neutral, balanced and unbiased way. The conception of 'partisan' has shifted slightly over time and is now, not only seen as party political. In the case of Dimmock v Secretary of State for Education and Skills (2007) in which it was ruled that Al Gore's film about climate change, 'An Inconvenient Truth', could be sent to schools but with specific guidelines, the judge, described 'partisan' as meaning 'one-sided' (Hadley, 2008, p. 240). All this suggests it is possible to avoid the 'problem' of politics by presenting two sides, when discussing 'controversial issues'. Briefings for teachers about teaching 'controversial issues' which attempt to support teachers in complying with the 1996 Education Act suggest it is possible to present a balanced view and to avoid bias (e.g. Huddleston, 2003). There need to be some attempts at balance in education. However, the premises that, one, there is a clear line between facts and opinions and, two, a true balance of opinions is possible both mask the inevitably political nature of all education. There have not been the same philosophical discussions within teaching resources about the impossibility of avoiding 'bias' as there have been within social science research methods texts (see Chapter 3).

The idea that what is taught in schools is or can be non-partisan and balanced is a powerful one. It seems to seep across into conceptions of education more broadly and positions the work of governing bodies as apolitical. This further

operates against the conception of political outlined at the beginning of this section and, by 'excluding' politics, is in itself political.

School governing is constituted as apolitical in multiple ways

School governing is constituted as apolitical in multiple ways and many have been discussed throughout this study. Most derive from the constitution of education generally as apolitical but some are more particular to governing bodies. This sub-section provides a brief summary of each of these multiple technologies of depoliticisation.

An important way in which education is constituted as apolitical was described in the previous sub-section. That is, how there is a strong sense that there is a possibility of 'non-partisan' unbiased education that avoids political indoctrination. This understanding of education as being potentially apolitical has implications for governors' understanding of their role in governing schools.

A related but distinct idea is that trust should rest in autonomous education professionals as experts. This has been considerably weakened by the distrust of 'producers' and the growth of managerial experts over the last 40 years. However, it still has implications for understandings of education as apolitical as it divides the social into spheres and suggests certain spheres should be protected from political debate. This discourse suggests experts know best so there is no need for political debate about education. As shown in Chapter 7, the boundaries of this education expert sphere are fuzzy and shift. They are further disrupted by the constitution of education as a product which makes it apparently intelligible to those who have managerial knowledge and can understand data.

Not only do governors find it hard to challenge education professionals (see Chapter 7), but they find disagreement itself uncomfortable. Disagreement and contestation are characteristics of politics yet governors found them to be socially uncomfortable (see Chapter 5). The emotional aspects of conducting debate are important, but often neglected, considerations for any political theory. There was also a sense that disagreeing would be against the common

good, and hence against 'the interests of the children'. Different interests are therefore erased. Chapter 5 explored how a singular conception of the common good can militate against the development and expression of alternative views.

Linked to this idea of a singular common good is a feeling that 'politics' is about self-interest and should be avoided for the promotion of the common good. Chapter 6 explored how this understanding positioned governors who had little connection with the school as independents with a broader and more valued view than those who had an experiential and/or representational position. There is a sense in which coming with interests is not valid. This obscures difference and the partiality of all participants.

In referring to 'depoliticisation', it is important to recognise the 'so-called end of politics itself as a political program' (Lemke, 2002, p. 57). The multiple ways in which the work of school governors is constituted as apolitical, including those described above, all operate in conjunction with the performative national system and the positioning of governors as skills-carriers ensuring technical effectiveness. The performative national system was discussed largely in Chapters 2 and 7. It involves an effectiveness discourse that pre-empts discussion of the aims of education and assigns to educators and governors the reductive role of ensuring prescribed outcomes are met. Matthew Clarke, in his work on depoliticisation, describes how the 'consensual discourse' (what I have described in terms of the common good) and the 'instrumental discourse' operate together 'as a form of discursive duopoly, each supporting and reinforcing the other, reflected in the global nature of the consensus around the instrumental purposes of education' (Clarke, 2012, p. 306). Hence:

> Education has been drained of overt political content and re-cast as a predominantly technical exercise, consigned to a coterie of experts, technicians and businesses whose main task is to define, improve and assess correct standards of performance. Of course, the whole neoliberal project is saturated with politics. But its status as a dominant discourse means that its values, assumptions and beliefs are rendered invisible, naturalised and neutralised, the taken-for-granted currency of everyday education. What has been lost, when most needed, is vigorous and agonistic public debate about political questions (Fielding and Moss, 2012, pp. 6-7)

A depoliticised 'effectiveness' discourse hides power and exclusion. All the ways of constituting education and the role of governors as apolitical summarised in this sub-section militate against discussion of the aims of education and of alternative approaches to education. In brief, discussions of what 'good' education might be are elided.

Alternative discourses

The constitution of education as apolitical, as discussed in the previous section, is combined with a lack of recognition of, or at least discussion of, alternative discourses of education. Some governors do have an understanding or sense of 'good' education beyond Ofsted's definition but this was rarely expressed in meetings. The first sub-section below considers the limited visions of 'good' education which are thinkable by governors. It raises the hidden nature of the small variations which do exist between governors' visions. This is followed by a sub-section on how participants' experiences of being governors challenge national discourses of derision. The final part of this section explores the limited challenges which governors do make and what an 'otherwise' of education might be.

It is worth noting here that, as discussed in Chapter 7, educational debate in GB meetings is constrained by a lack of discussion of teaching and learning. Differing educational philosophies do not arise when educational topics are rarely discussed.

Limited (but differing) visions of 'good' education

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 7, there is a strong performative national system which operates through both sovereign and discursive power, displacing as 'unthinkable' alternative visions in schools. This regime operates on and through school staff as well as governing bodies.

Despite their emphasis on attainment in meetings, a number of governors did talk, in interviews, about education as being broader and I did find some variation in their conceptions of 'good' education. However, these are largely hidden within the GB meetings. The small differences in governors' visions of

education suggest some limited space for alternative visions to be formulated, despite them not being expressed in meetings. As Clark (clerk at Severn and Tyne) pointed out, discussions of visions do not come up much in meetings. He was talking about how the education system was obsessed with failure and how GCSEs had been meant to put a stop to this but anything below C was now 'crap'. I asked him:

> I: do those sort of conversations come up much in the governing body meetings?
> Clark: no heh
> I: those semi-philosophical topics
> C: no, not too often do they. Sometimes the head will raise it
> I: yeah
> C: but it's. It's not there. Perhaps you should have more of that. It could happen. It could come if the governing body had more of a free ranging day [very occasionally some governing bodies have 'away days' although none occurred during the research period]. And some schools have done it through training

Having considered all four study schools (see Chapter 7 on school visions), I have presented case studies of the variations between interviewees' visions of 'good' education at Mersey and at Severn below. Pam was at both Mersey and Severn and thought that Severn had a 'Pretty good shared vision'. When I asked her if the shared vision was as strong at Mersey, she replied 'I would say "no" but I am not quite sure why I would say "no" … I don't think the governors at Mersey are as sort of, working together as well as maybe at Severn'. It maybe that the apparent unity at Severn was largely due to closely adhering to the external imperatives of Ofsted. These two case studies suggest there were some variations in individuals' visions within each GB but the articulation of these was weak, unfocused and not developed into collective voices. Interviewees also varied in how much they thought there was a shared vision amongst all the governors, partly reflecting how little 'good' education was discussed in meetings.

Variations within Mersey's GB

The chair at Mersey said:

> I think we have a common vision as to what we are trying to do at [Mersey] (Frederick, Mersey)

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The headteacher felt differently, suggesting that the vision came from her and was not totally shared:

> I: … this sort of idea about what a good school is and what education is for and stuff. How much of a shared view of that is there and how much do you discuss that, do you think?
> Heidi: I don't know. Probably not as much as we should do I mean you have different points of view and you know because you know. My big thing is inclusion in which I've pushed you know at every opportunity and I think governors get it now and do fight for that. What will happen if I'm not here, I don't know

Tara talked about inclusion and high expectations as core to her vision of education at Mersey. As described in Chapter 7, Sally talked about her vision being different to that of business people who did not appreciate that flexibility is required in education. Frederick described his idea of good education as broader than attainment:

> It is helping pupils to come out at the end of the education process with a good education, however that is defined… but also um with the development to be good citizens (Frederick, Mersey)

Christopher gave a long description of his views of what makes good education which included 'the concept of work', 'life experience' and 'life skills' although he said 'education is not just about work'. However, he felt that questions around what makes good education were not really discussed in the GB. His views were in contrast to Fraser's views, outlined in the previous section, on 'academic excellence' and trying to keep wider social issues out of school. Priya's clarity and narrowness of vision, contrasted with the broader visions expressed by other interviewees at Mersey but was more consistent with the discussions in meetings:

> I: … what would you say is a good school? What does a good school look like?
> Priya: a good school is where there is 95% attendance, good punctuality, good behaviour and overall good GCSE results. That is a good school
> I: OK so that is an Ofsted definition of a good school.
> P: yeah

I: Do you agree with that definition?
P: I totally agree with that
I: exactly? You wouldn't think that there was anything at all
different? You think Ofsted is perfect?
P: Ofsted is perfect, yes

Aside from the views of Priya and Fraser, the various conceptions of good education amongst Mersey's GB tended to include seeing 'good' education more broadly than Ofsted did. These variations were not raised in meetings where principles tended not to be explored.

<u>Variations within Severn's GB</u>

At Severn, the sense of the vision being driven by Ofsted was very strong. Hazel seemed to partly equate the shared vision with compliance with Ofsted requirements. Furthermore, as described in Chapter 7, she referred to governors' inability to make judgements and evaluate the school without Ofsted, suggesting a lack of trust in governors:

> I: Do you think there is a sort of shared vision in the governing
> body about [what a] good school is and what a good education is?
> Hazel: yeah I think so. Yes I do. Because I, I think we had
> struggled for a very long time. I think they use the Ofsted report as
> their, I think if Ofsted had turned round and said look the teaching
> is awful and this that and the other,
> I: yeah
> H: then they [GB] would have had something to say about it. I
> think because, we had so much input from the local authority
> when I first came here, and then there was the, our first Ofsted,
> then there was still input from the local authority and. The national
> strategies. And then Ofsted again. They [Ofsted] have confirmed
> what I am doing, my judgements. I think they [GB] feel
> comfortable. Would they [GB] have been able to independently
> assess that on their own? With their own abilities? No

Trina reiterated the importance of Ofsted in setting the vision:

> I tend to feel quite positive when I leave a governors meeting that,
> you know common goals [are] there and we are heading in the
> right direction and, you know, Ofsted, has a lot to do with that and,
> you know, and what what we are striving to achieve here, based
> upon Ofsted inspections (Trina, Severn)

On the other hand, she also said:

> we are not just preparing for Ofsted. I think equal measure is
> about what is best for our school, and what is best for our children
> and I think that shines through a lot more…we are not Ofsted
> robots (Trina, Severn)

Larry said the Ofsted priorities drove the vision. However, he said governors did not discuss 'what's a good education'. He concluded 'I don't think there is a shared vision of what the education should be', suggesting a vision of 'good' education should not/may not be synonymous with Ofsted's vision.

Piali said governors had 'almost the same' ideas about what a good school was. She also seemed to draw on Ofsted in saying: 'we want to be good and outstanding. So I think that has been the main focus' (Piali, Severn). When I asked her why it was a good school, she did give a different emphasis to Ofsted's priorities:

> I think we have a diversity. And equality. There are a lot of people
> from a lot of background here. We have different religions,
> different experiences, and we have good staff and they come from
> a background as well, you know. With different knowledges and
> things like that, so and the kids here are brilliant. They are well
> behaved, some of them. Um parents, I think a school is made up
> of everyone (Piali, Severn)

Ofsted's 'vision' seemed to have a particularly constraining effect on the possibilities for a wider vision amongst governors at Severn. This narrow shared vision did mean there was an even stronger sense of common purpose at Severn than in the other schools.

Summary

This sub-section has described some small variations which exist in individuals' visions of good education within the governing bodies of Mersey and Severn. The variations are small but even these were unarticulated in GB meetings; as Patty, at Severn, said 'we don't really get to talk much in general just about the school'. Furthermore, there are variations in how aware individuals are that such variations exist. It may be in the headteachers' interests that differing visions remain unspoken in order that their own prevails. However, there is a

larger issue that possibilities for school development are constrained by the national performative system. Despite this, it may be that collective exploration of governors' differing visions, particularly in terms of broader principles, could lead to consideration of previously unthought possibilities.

Discourse of derision

Governors' were often surprised that the national 'discourse of derision' addressed to schools was challenged by their experiences at their schools. However, their experiences did not necessarily mean that they contested the particular discursive form of 'good' education prevalent in pronouncements by national politicians and in the media. It meant, merely, finding that their schools were not as bad as they had expected within this narrow discourse of 'good' education.

Ofsted's 2011 annual report said 94% of parents of pupils in maintained schools agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: 'Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school' (Ofsted, 2011a, p. 44). However, the 'discourse of derision' which Ball (2006 [1990]), borrowing from Kenway, first described in the 1970s and 1980s is still prevalent in parts of the media, among right leaning think tanks and in DfE justifications for education reforms today. The focus of derision may have shifted from state schools generally towards those which are not academies, but it still 'deploys exaggeration and "ludicrous images, ridicule, and stereotypification… A caricature that has been developed and presented to the public as an accurate depiction of the real" (Kenway, 1990, p 201)' (Ball, 2013a, p. 104).

Interviewees talked about how being a governor challenged these discourses of derision:

> I've certainly found from being involved in the school that my experiences do not match popular discourse… there is sort of a general feel that education in the UK is really bad and that there's not very much that you can do to improve standards in particular communities. Um and I certainly have felt that actually a lot of people with those views, if they only spent a bit more time in some

of the schools in [Riverford] Borough, they would probably change their minds as well (Layla, Avon)

when I first came to [Mersey] … people were talking about the school in ways that I completely did not recognise when I got into the institution. They were, you know assuming that there was a sort of rioting inside and you know all they could do was contain, a kind of kettling, the children for the day until they were able to release them and that is so much not how it goes on (Christopher, Mersey)

As a secondary headteacher, Heidi commented:

You do get people in, they're astounded and particularly the parent governors. What they believe! You know that the kids are hanging from the ceiling. And actually going round and there are kids sitting there and you know there's really good teaching so we just continue with that and get more people involved so they can actually see the school at work. See what goes on in a lesson. Because myths are you know. Myths abound! (Heidi, Mersey)

These comments resonate with Benn's observation about some school governors that 'Their close involvement with a number of local schools has profoundly impressed and changed them' (Benn, 2011, p. 85).

Governors' discovery that their schools are not as bad as expected has two potential effects. Firstly, governors may be more supportive of their schools than they might be if public discourse was less hostile. Secondly, their greater understanding of actual, rather than imagined, schools may mean governors are better placed to engage constructively in wider public debates about education. This resonates with Dryzek's (2002) discursive democracy across spheres. Challenges to the discourse of derision are challenges to the 'rhetorical spaces' which policy makers create within which to 'articulate reform' (Ball, 2013a, p. 104). In this way, they have the potential to challenge reforms premised on the discourse of derision. Challenges to the 'discourse of derision' may not challenge conceptions of 'good' education but may be significant in influencing governors' engagement in wider local or national debates about education.

Challenges from governors

In considering challenges to narrow conceptions of 'good' education, 'Challenge discourse' was one of my codes for looking at interviews and observations. The code description was: 'Challenge neoliberal discourse; Challenge discourse of derision about schools; Challenge prevailing discourse in school'. I was surprised how little appeared under this code in all four schools. This sub-section explores alternative visions of education and challenges that did emerge from the data. I was particularly interested to consider how challenges might occur to the narrow attainment focus of the national performative system. Such challenges were extremely limited (especially from non-staff governors). However, the way these challenges operated may provide some indications regarding alternative challenges in the future. The challenges described here came from: those with a business perspective; those with experiences of private and privileged schools; and headteachers' non-acceptance of new national policies.

Those who perceived themselves as presenting the strongest challenges did not necessarily actually do so. This disconnect was particularly noticeable with Parihan and Tarun in the confrontational context of Tyne's GB. Parihan was suspicious of a lot of what was discussed in GB meetings; feeling that financial documents were being hidden from her and there was a conspiracy to keep her off the finance committee as 'they want to keep it secret'. She also felt that she challenged the school on achievement. Tarun described himself as a 'conspiracy theorist' and said, 'when I go to these meetings, I, you know, give them a good grilling' (Tarun, Tyne). From what he said elsewhere in the interview, 'them' may refer to the headteacher and those governors he felt she was too close to. Their self-perceptions, expressed in their interviews, of being bold and challenging were, however, not borne out in the meetings I observed. Another preliminary observation is that governors tend not to be representative of the local school community (see Chapters 2 and 4). They are more likely to be white and middle-class. This has implications for the types of alternatives they might think of and support.

Challenging the school: Business

Challenges to the schools did come from business. A number of governors came from a business background and provided ways of thinking about education and challenging the school from that perspective. Deem *et al* (1995) found 'most lay governors [did not] have clear ideas of the purposes they wanted access to power for' (p. 155) 'with the exception of business people who wanted schools to be run more like businesses' (p. 155). The influence of business perspectives is a strong finding of the current study. Chapter 6 described how business skills were valued and seen as neutral and how their influence was cultural and subtle. Chapter 7 discussed the constitution of education as a product where data can be understood easily by non-educationalists.

Interestingly, business culture may not always be consistent with what Ofsted wants. For example: Larry said 'unfortunately to the eyes of Ofsted'. I repeated the 'unfortunately' and he said 'I am not saying that is a bad thing actually. No no no. I just, whenever you mention a regulator or an Ofsted or, it is like, you use it as a negative connotation, isn't there?'[23]. Hannah told me about the views of a banker, who used to be Avon's chair, on data: 'he used to make a big thing about "well you know we're talking about such a small number, it's not really statistically viable anyway, I don't know why you're making such a fuss about 10%" sort of thing and it was quite interesting having that perspective'. However, these two examples are not typical.

Apart from the minor exceptions above, challenges from a business perspective probably do not provide a model for alternative challenges as they reinforce the dominant neoliberal discourse (see Chapter 2 and 7). Business based challenges tended to operate through confident personalities who saw their views as obvious and common sense.

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[23] Larry's bank subsequently had some difficulties with their regulator. Business failure was not mentioned in meetings or interviews.

Challenging the school: Private schools and the 'more able'

There were a disproportionate number of the governors who had had experiences of private and more privileged schools. I had expected some challenge based on the differences they saw between schools and thought their different experiences might have shaped and raised the expectations which they had for the schools where they were governors. However, the differences which they saw between schools seemed natural and inevitable to them.

A challenge discussed earlier, the parents' call for school uniform (see Chapter 6), was partly inspired by the idea, expressed by Parvaiz, that private schools had uniform and they did well (my notes, Avon Full GB, November 2011). Frederick was conscious of the differences between Mersey and the private school, X, which his children attended but attributed these to the 'intake' rather than to the differing resources and class sizes in the two schools:

> I: what would you say are the main differences?
> Frederick: um. The … essential provision is the same... But there are relative differences. Will [Mersey] ever aspire to all of their pupils getting five or more A*s to C in GCSE? Probably not. Because it is sort of completely out of their reach given … the intake that they've got whereas at [X] school, that is an absolute. They would expect all of them to get that. And I would disappointed if only 98% get it. Whereas [Mersey] would be delighted if, you know, this year, 45% get it
> F: … My wife says to me "do remember which school you are a governor of at particular meetings won't you" heh heh

Sometimes headteachers specifically put forward a sense of their students as different. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the two secondary headteachers both referred to '*our* students' as if to remind the governors that their students were different to students whom the governors might know.

One form of challenge which did stem from governors' experience of more privileged schools was a push for support for the 'more able'. For example, Pam thought that it was 'very good' that Carolina, a community governor at Severn, constantly pushed for support for the 'more able children'. Further studies would be needed to assess whether governors do generally emphasise the 'more able' more than other 'groups' (my experience suggests this is very likely). An

emphasis on supporting the 'more able' in GB meetings, with their disproportionately white middle-class participants, would be consistent of the findings of Crozier *et al.* They conducted research with 'white middle-class parents who chose to send their children to urban comprehensives' (Crozier, Reay and James, 2011, p. 199) and found these parents used becoming a governor as a strategy for 'acquiring educational capital and positioning themselves as powerful and influential' (p. 206). These parents thought their children were 'more able'. They say that the 'sense and belief in their children's self-worth was frequently expressed in psychologistic terms such as "able", "bright", "clever", "very intelligent"' (p. 203) and point out that the 'Gifted and Talented scheme educationally privileges the white middle-class children still further' (p. 208).

Related to this discussion of the more able, I did not hear any challenge to the idea that pupils can be categorised according to some form of natural 'aptitude'. Furthermore, student attainment levels and grades were naturalised as providing a 'true' picture (Gillborn, 2010). I did not hear any challenge to this. However, despite my suspicions, I cannot assert an absence of challenge based on the research. Assessment data apparently made education, like any other product, measurable by those with a good understanding of statistics (see Chapter 7). There was a lot of discussion about judgements being 'accurate'. For example, there was a long discussion about this at Avon in October 2011. Debra, the deputy headteacher, struggled to get beyond a mechanical metaphor when she said, 'It sounds like we talking about machines. They're children but we need to accelerate them' (my notes, Avon Full GB, October 2011).

Conceptions and experiences of private schools did not provide significant challenges as they were seen as very different. There were challenges related to supporting the 'more able' which seemed to be premised on conceptions of people having singular and fixed IQs.

<u>Challenging national policy</u>

Some challenges were very specific and were articulated in relation to one or other new government policy, mostly by headteachers. Some manifested more as grumbles rather than challenges. At Mersey, Heidi raised concerns about proposed changes to policy around SEN in a number of meetings and encouraged governors to respond to the consultation. At Severn, Hazel explained at length that the pupil premium was not new money (my notes, Severn Full GB, May 2012). After a speech by the head of Ofsted, Hazel said: 'with the staff, Michael Wilshaw would like them to be demotivated! Our approach is to keep on with the coaching model' (my notes, Severn Full GB, Mar 12). Heidi also told governors at Avon about Wilshaw's comment about low staff morale being a sign that you are doing something right (my notes, Avon Training session, December 2011).

Non-staff governors do not have much access to alternative sources of knowledge about education, including education policy. Those with long experience of education may have the greatest potential to recognise that things can be otherwise. Chapter 7 outlined how headteachers tended to lead and this also applied to thinking otherwise about possibilities for education, at least in as far as resisting or grumbling about new government policy. Discussions of national consultations, such as the SEND Green Paper (DfE, 2011b) at Mersey and Avon, operated as ways to challenge the government. However, these challenges were conservative in the sense that the headteachers did not want change from their current situation rather than feeling there was a possibility for positive reform or change which they would support. It tended to be only the new policies and policy consultations of which headteachers were critical. It is hard to make empirical judgements about whether this is because these are new so headteachers need to mention them or, in the case of consultations, may feel able to challenge them; or whether they do not feel the GB is a valuable forum for deeper national policy discussions; or whether existing policy has become naturalised and hence less visible, and challengeable.

A clear exception to the pattern that challenges to national policy came almost exclusively from headteachers appeared in relation to academisation. Many governors expressed their opposition to academies. Fraser, at Mersey, was a rare exception in thinking they were a good idea, although I did not hear him say this in a meeting. Christopher, also at Mersey, took a more pragmatic approach, saying that the school should consider all options. All other mentions of academies in interviews and in meetings were negative and both staff and governors greatly valued their relationship with Riverford as maintained schools.

<u>Notes on an 'otherwise' of education</u>

It is questionable whether the forms of challenges outlined here provide models for challenges to the national performative system from any governors beyond some staff members. I began this sub-section by speculating that there might be something to learn from the challenges which did emerge in meetings that might inform future challenges to the narrow attainment focus. This was despite the main challenges being from the perspectives of business and privilege. This stemmed partly from Apple's suggestion:

> we have much to learn from the Right's social/pedagogic project. Understanding how they were and are able to create new hegemonic blocs and transform commonsense requires that we devote much more attention to the processes and networks that enable the Right to do much of its work (2013, p. 214)

In this sense, the material presented in this sub-section suggests failure. However, what it does hint at is that it is the small micro-practices that constantly reinforce the dominant discourse. These include the reinforcement of the valuing of business practices and of the division of pupils into a hierarchy of ability based on their variable attainment at particular points in time. There may be some space for challenge in that nothing is ever totally fixed

Prescribed criticality: 'Asking the right questions'[24]

The previous sections have described how education is constituted as apolitical and how visions of education are limited. Questioning is central to the role of

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[24] This is the heading of a section in the 'Governors' Handbook' (DfE, 2014c, pp. 8-9).

governors, both as articulated in national policy and in literature on governance (see Chapter 2). Questioning may appear to be a way in which the positive conceptions of the 'political' underpinning this study might emerge. However, questioning is conceived narrowly in policy to the extent that lists of questions are produced by governor support organisations and national policy makers for use by governors. This form of questioning is extremely far removed from Foucault's conceptualisation of critique:

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest... Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such. Practicing criticism is a matter of making facile gestures difficult. (Foucault (1988: 154) cited in Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 40)

The limited questioning which governors engage in might sometimes *appear* similar to this form of critique but it is, arguably, a largely technical process. Their 'critical' questioning can be seen as a performance or fabrication. Ball is referring here to the inspection of teachers:

> What is produced is a spectacle, or game-playing, or cynical compliance, or what we might see as an "enacted fantasy" (Butler, 1990), which is there simply to be seen and judged – a fabrication (2006 [2003], p. 149)

Governors provide another layer to this. Teachers and headteachers perform for governors who perform, in turn, for Ofsted. As described in Chapter 7, governors specifically ask questions which are minuted by the clerk in order to demonstrate criticality to Ofsted. Governors might be described as performing *prescribed criticality*. This is a technology through which the 'right' questions to ask are provided for governors through training, policy documents and headteachers' instructions.

Governor training sessions and literature provide lists of appropriate questions that governors can ask to ensure that their school is complying with national

policy. Despite hearing about others, the only training session I observed during the research period was at Avon. In this, the concept of 'challenging questions' was discussed and a long list of 'challenging questions' was provided in the handout[25]. These questions focus on governors taking a significant role in asking questions about attainment data and in compliance checking.

Ofsted provided additional guidance to governors on how to do compliance checking in 'School Governance: Learning from the best' (2011c) which provides a number of examples of questions asked by 'effective' governing bodies. This report was a specific agenda item at Avon (my notes, Avon Full GB, 3 October 2011). At Mersey, Frederick referred to the 'Key characteristics of effective governing bodies' in this document as 'The 10 commandments' (my notes, Mersey Finance Committee, July 2011). Heidi described the document as the 'new regulations'. I did not hear it mentioned at Tyne or Severn but the study period there was 12 months after the report had been published.

As described in Chapter 5, meetings consisted largely of information giving and questioning beyond basic information gathering was limited. However, 'good' questioning was encouraged and minuted in all four study schools. Since the time of the research there has been an even greater push in national policy for governors to ask the right questions. A 2012 Ofsted report, below, reflects what Hannah said:

> So I kind of feel a responsibility to try to make it work and try and get them to ask the right questions of me. Rather than being them asking the challenging questions. Heh. Do you know what I mean? (Hannah, Avon)

Ofsted's (2012b) 'Getting to Good: How headteachers achieve success' encourages headteachers to 'train' their governors in asking questions:

> Effective governance
> 18. In seven schools visited governance had previously been
> weak because governing bodies did not hold school leaders to

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[25] For an example from a non-London borough, see http://great-governance.org.uk/governance-tools/ask-the-right-questions/.

account or effectively monitor the work of the school. They had been content to take the word of the headteacher at face value, or had not been sufficiently well trained to know the questions they should be asking. As one headteacher reported, "In the early stages I had to model the questions that the governors could ask. Following my headteacher's report I would say, 'Now you might want to question me about this'. I would then give them questions that they should ask".

19. In 11 of the 12 schools visited the headteacher reported that governors are now much better trained to ask challenging questions (p. 16)

The 2013 Select Committee Inquiry suggested governors could not be trusted to develop their own questions and needed even more specific guidance, saying:

> 77. Many witnesses, including Mark Taylor of Cambridge Education, Islington, believed there were "*dangers in letting governors make up the questions themselves*" and this guidance would be best developed nationally⋯. In oral evidence, Anne Jackson of the DfE explained that the Department was talking to partners about developing a set of questions that governors could use to interrogate data, including RAISEonline and the Data Dashboard. She also mentioned that the new Governors' Handbook (the replacement for The Governors' Guide to the Law) would contain a suggested headline set of questions that every governing body could use to interrogate data⋯. The Handbook, which has since been published, contains a small number of generic questions and links to NGA guides to help governors make the most of the data held in RAISEonline⋯.
>
> 78. The importance of good data in user-friendly formats for governing bodies cannot be overstated. We welcome Ofsted's Data Dashboard and support the DfE's work to develop questions that governing bodies can use to interrogate data effectively. The generic questions in the new Governors' Handbook are helpful, but will not in themselves provide sufficient assistance to governing bodies in interrogating complex data. We look forward to DfE publishing further questions
> (*my emphasis*, Education Committee, 2013a, p. 25)

The NGA subsequently published a further series of questions for its members (NGA, 2013a). This external provision of questions is not inconsistent with a technical-managerial understanding of accountability but is far removed from any form of democratic accountability (see 'Accountability as a slippery concept' in Chapter 7) and even further removed from Foucault's conception of 'critique'.

I want to suggest that being told how to be critical reduces the possibilities of governors being critical in a broader sense; in challenging the current constitution of the education system. This technology of the provision of supposedly critical questions acts as a kind of immunisation against governors developing meta-critical questions. It is another example of their busy-ness and passivity. Governors are encouraged to keep busy asking prescribed questions but are passive in considering what conception of 'good' education lies behind these questions. 'Prescribed criticality' displaces possibilities for the emergence of alternative conceptions of 'good' education.

Reflections

This chapter began with the conception of the 'political' underpinning this study. In sharp contrast, it then explored how education and the work of school governors are constituted as apolitical and beyond critique. Education and governing were constituted as apolitical and politics was understood in negative terms. Particularist interests were viewed with suspicion and excluded, based on a sense that it was possible to be neutral. The conceptions of politics expressed by research participants were associated with positions, rather than processes such as deliberation and contestation. There were limited discourses of education and very limited challenges to the school and to state discourses of 'good' education. Through the technology of *prescribed criticality*, governors are provided with the 'right' questions to ask. These questions are premised on a singular narrow conception of 'good' education and provide for the *performance* of criticality whilst mitigating against a wider *practice* of criticality. Hence, governors are very busy but at the same time are passive in the face of recognising and engaging in the political nature of governing or exploring abstract principles rather than merely practices.

The constitution of education and of governing as apolitical has significant implications: some voices are not heard; there is little creative dialogue which might lead to the emergence and collective exploration of alternative ideas that individuals did not come to the meeting with; and the productive power of national policy discourse and of actors such as headteachers is masked. All this

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precludes an understanding of politics as ongoing contestation, a ubiquitous play of power and a recognition that things could be otherwise.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Final Reflections

Introduction

I began this study by describing governing bodies as something which seemed 'cracked' (Foucault cited in Ball, 2001, p. 210). Using qualitative research methods, I have explored their practices drawing on understandings of deliberative democracy and citizenship as sensitising concepts. This has enabled me to adumbrate some ambivalences and ambiguities in their role.

This final chapter begins with reflections on the contribution of the study to theories of democracy and citizenship, particularly deliberative democracy. The next section considers democratic practices and governing bodies in relation to the research questions. 'Democratic engagement and schools' considers what can be learnt from the study for democratic engagement in schools more broadly. This is followed by a brief section on the wider implications of the study for academies and for global education policy. A section on methodology considers the use of sensitising concepts and the status of qualitative research. The chapter ends by concluding that ambivalences and ambiguities in the role and practices of governing bodies operate together with a dominant discourse of skills and effectiveness to construct a singular conception of 'good' education and obscure possibilities for thinking otherwise.

Reflections on theories of democracy and citizenship

The application of political theories as sensitising concepts in the empirical research has suggested some implications for theory. This section focuses on deliberative democracy, complemented by conceptions of citizenship.

Chapter 2 introduced my understanding of deliberative democracy, drawing largely on Dryzek (2002) and Young (2002 [2000]) who emphasise the recognition of difference and challenging of existing power relationships. It contrasted deliberative democracy with aggregative models and drew attention

to the potential of deliberation to be social, creative and educative. Throughout the study, however, I have also recognised that deliberative democracy is deeply problematic, largely because it can be exclusive and, in some versions, overemphasises consensus and rationality. Political theory is abstract. This study has explored the concrete practices of governors in a context with a long and ambiguous history of GBs; a particular discourse of education centred on a performative national system; and nationwide social divisions and inequalities. The exploration of political theory within a particular and concrete context can be fruitful for the political theory as well as for the empirical research itself.

The discussions in Chapter 5 have a number of implications for theories of deliberative democracy. The chapter explored a number of constraints on deliberation. Asserting the importance of the framing of decisions is not an original contribution but is a very important one. There are always aspects of any decision framed outside any particular deliberative forum and participants' awareness of this is variable. Another important constraint is the affective dimension to perceiving conflict negatively and this has important implications for the social awkwardness which can accompany the expression of difference. 'Ways of talking' built on the work of Young (2002 [2000]) and of theorists who emphasise the role of emotions in deliberation (Hoggett and Thompson, 2002; Hoggett and Thompson, 2012; Martin, 2011; Thompson and Hoggett, 2001; van Stokkom, 2005), discussed the importance of class and ethnicity and, with Young (1996, p. 122), asserted that 'social power' cannot be bracketed and that confidence tends to be context specific. Another constraint on actual decision-making is that the lines between technical/rubberstamping type decisions and actual decision-making are unclear. Processes can operate as performances giving an illusion of engagement in decision-making. For example, full GBs were told that committees had scrutinised decisions which they had merely rubberstamped and this potentially gave greater legitimacy to the final rubberstamp by the full GB. The chapter also drew attention to the ways in which decision-making spaces can be constrained by busy-ness. Where participants are kept very busy with receiving information, their passivity is obscured. In addition to these constraints on deliberation, Chapter 5 considered issues around consensus and singular conceptions of a common good, which

are prevalent, and often unproblematised, within some literature on deliberative democracy. A contribution of this study has been to emphasise the affective elements to consensus and the sense that to challenge the consensus can be seen as a challenge to a singular common good and hence against, in this case, the good of the children. Theorists of deliberative democracy tend to present it as a pure, discrete political theory whereas, in practice, it combines with aggregative models. The combination of aggregative with deliberative models can lead to the worst of both worlds with, in this case, a pressure to consensus and a lack of discussion.

Chapter 6 focused on conceptions of representation and inclusion/exclusion. It suggested that the ability to speak of those positioned as representing a constituency or attribute is complicated and constrained. Those constituted as independents are more able to present themselves as objective and to take on core positions within their GB. The chapter attempted to show how the constitution of *some* governors as only ever partial masks the partiality of *all* governors. This has important implications for deliberative democracy. Where deliberations are oriented towards a common good, it can be that the most privileged and least representative are most able to present themselves as impartial and concerned for the 'common good'. The issues raised by such a body, where some members are constituted as representative and partial and others are not, adds to the problematisation put forward by Young (2002 [2000]) of a conception of citizenship as concerned with a singular common good. Like her, I would suggest instead a conception of citizenship as concerned with collective problems, including public goods.

Chapter 7 explored the complex place of knowledge within deliberation. This study echoes another empirical study of deliberative democracy in suggesting lay knowledge is a fragile basis for action (Davies, Barnett and Wetherell, 2006, p. 165). This is largely because of the difficulties lay people have in challenging complex discourses. The chapter explored two main issues in relation to deliberation and knowledge. Firstly, conceptions of knowledge are being reconfigured by neoliberalism which could be said to reduce much knowledge to value-free information and/or technical skills which can, in turn, be understood

by drawing on the 'meta-knowledge' of managerialism. Secondly, the limited discussion in the literature on the role of experts in lay deliberation tends to conceive of expertise as merely another perspective (Dryzek, 2002; Young, 2002 [2000]). Walter's (2008) critique of Dryzek and Young is helpful. He draws on Foucault in recognising how expertise constitutes objects in the world and considers the implications of this for deliberative democracy. This study has drawn on Walter's work in an empirical context. A particular contribution of the chapter to theories of deliberative democracy is to explore the complex interplay between three (interrelated) forms of knowledge: lay, (educational) expert and managerial. The ways in which the positive connotations of lay knowledges can be co-opted by managerial knowledge mean the relationship between lay and (education) expert is a complex rather than binary relationship. Deliberative democracy needs a stronger account of expertise, both incorporating the way expertise has ontological effects in constituting objects in the world and recognising the specific power of managerial knowledge.

Chapter 8 presented further challenges for deliberative democracy. The idea that it is possible for education and governing to be apolitical constitutes education as a technical matter and deliberation as instrumental. Deliberations from which difference and principles are excluded does not benefit from the social, creative and educative possibilities of deliberation. The discursive power of the national performative system and the technology of *prescribed criticality,* in which governors are provided with 'critical' questions to ask, challenge the possibility of deliberations providing more than a performance of criticality. Deliberative democracy needs to be combined with a strong conception of the 'political'. The conception drawn on here is of ongoing contestation, a ubiquitous play of power and a recognition that things could be otherwise.

This section has outlined some implications of this empirical study for theories of deliberative democracy. These implications are also relevant for those attempting to develop deliberative democracy in other concrete settings.

Democratic practices and governing bodies

The theories referred to in the previous section have provided useful sensitising concepts and have been drawn on productively, together with the literature introduced in Chapter 2 and the research questions introduced in Chapter 1:

1. How do discourses of democracy and citizenship operate in school governing bodies?
2. Are particular perspectives and knowledges privileged in policy and in governing bodies? If so, how?
3. What subject positions are available to governors? How are governors produced as subjects?
4. What discourses of 'good' education are drawn on in the conduct of school governing bodies?

As stated in the introduction, the questions were intended as stimuli rather than inflexible drivers of the research. In this spirit, although all have been addressed, they are not presented here in a rigid question and 'answer' format. The first inspired all the findings. The second and third are closely related and provoked explorations of the complex subject positions of governors as both governing and governed. They led to consideration of: the different categories of governor; governors as simultaneously busy 'decision-makers' and passive recipients of information; the constitution of governors as representatives, stakeholders or skills-carriers with either broad or particular knowledge; the complex interplay of educational, lay and managerial knowledges; and of how particular ways of talking privilege certain governors and their knowledges over others. The fourth question stimulated explorations of the conception of a singular common good for each school; the constraints on challenging the national performative system; and the constitution of education and governing as apolitical.

Prevailing political rationalities and their discourses produce and constrain the possibilities for what school governing can and might mean in practice. In Chapter 2, I cited Foucault's description of the French legal system to describe governing bodies as:

> more Heath Robinson than Audi, full of parts that come from elsewhere, strange couplings, chance relations, cogs and levers

> that don't work – and yet which "work" in the sense that they
> produce effects that have meaning and consequences for us
> (cited in Gordon 1980) (Rose, 2005 [1996], p. 38)

The real effects partly stem from these 'strange couplings' rather than emerging despite them (Lemke, 2002, p. 57). Some of the 'strange couplings' explored in the study are considered here[26].

Representation and skills

The subject positions available to governors are ambiguous. Representation in the context of the stakeholder model is unclear to many. Parent and staff governors are elected by parents and staff. This can imply a system of representative democracy but, importantly, the elected governors are not meant to represent the views of their constituents. Chapter 6 discussed how the ambivalence about their role stemming from this status constrained many of the parent and staff governors. Parent governors were unclear what they could bring. They often wanted, but felt unable, to discuss other topics rather than provide a 'parent perspective' on the narrow agenda items. Staff governors tended to avoid anything that would not be seen as supportive by their headteacher. They were not greatly valued as stakeholders but it was hard for them to be citizens or skills-carriers either. Furthermore, Chapters 2 and 6 explored the move in policy towards 'skills' and how this is often set against representation. The study suggests that those constituted as independents with skills are more able to present themselves as objective and to take on core positions within their GB. In this way, governor categories operate as dividing practices and the ability to speak of those positioned as representing a constituency or attribute is complicated and constrained. Chapter 6 suggested that the constitution of some governors as only ever partial masks the partiality of all governors. Chapter 8 built on this constitution of skills-carriers as neutral and explored the wider constitution of education and of governing as apolitical.

The subject positions available to and taken up by governors have implications for the understandings of accountability on which they draw, as considered in

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[26] There were interesting variations between GBs and these have been highlighted throughout the study but there is not space to re-examine them here.

Chapter 7. The complexities of the relationship between different interrelated knowledges mean lay knowledges tend to be marginalised in a context of the ongoing displacement of educational knowledges by managerial knowledges. The two dominant understandings of accountability in play within governing bodies which emerged from the data are data-based accountability and compliance checking. These require managerial and/or educational knowledges rather than the knowledge of parent, staff or local representatives. Both understandings of accountability are about checking that the school meets aims set elsewhere. They are not about setting strategic aims for the school.

Busy-ness and passivity

Governors were simultaneously busy and passive. They were busy with their numerous statutory duties (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Dean *et al.*, 2007) and with receiving information but were passive with regards to proactive deliberation and decision-making.

Chapter 5 set out a variety of ways through which decision-making was constrained. Most of these position governors as decision-makers despite their lack of actual proactive decision-making. They include: the fixity of the written agenda; the constitution, including through the minutes, of technical decisions or 'rubberstamping' as actual decisions; the busy-ness of receiving information combined with a lack of active discussion; and time pressure. These constraints on actual decision-making constituted governors as simultaneously busy and passive.

The ways of talking in governing bodies also constrain governors' engagement. Much deliberative democracy literature and effectiveness literature about governing bodies presents deliberation as rational and without affect or emotion whereas I suggest emotions are always present. Emotions might include social embarrassment and awkwardness, such as wanting to avoid conflict or asking questions when people want to go home. Meetings tended to be very formal and this had variable impacts on different governors. The governing bodies, particularly the secondary ones tended to be divided into core and peripheral governors. The core governors tended to be middle-class and largely white.

They attended committee meetings and spoke more than the peripheral governors. Any decision that is made, therefore, tends to be made largely by this inner core. Personal relationships affected engagement. Governors did not know each other well. Furthermore, particularly in the secondary governing bodies, there were divides by class and ethnicity, which some governors felt were partially addressed by certain individuals acting as bridges. The lack of engagement of some governors was often attributed to confidence but this confidence seemed to be very context dependent. For example, Patty was overwhelmed by the formality of Severn's GB but felt very comfortable in a much smaller special school where she was also a governor and where she knew everybody well.

Conceptions of the 'common good' as set out in the next sub-section contribute to governors' busy-ness and passivity as they are busy pursuing a singular common good and passive in relation to expressing difference.

Conceptions of a 'common good'

As in Dean *et al*'s study, governors in this study tended to see themselves as 'operating on the basis of goodwill and consensus rather than of politics and conflict' (2007, p. 29). Governors are volunteers who tend to see themselves as being there for the good of the children. They talked about this and about the importance of consensus in interviews. Chapter 5, particularly, considered how the ways of talking in governing bodies encouraged such consensus. This valuing of consensus implies the valuing of a singular common good and operates against the expression of difference. Expressing difference is important as governors may well have differing educational values and perspectives which they need to articulate. Furthermore, deliberation has an educative role so if there are no opportunities for discussion, members are less likely to formulate considered views about issues and are more likely to assume that there is no alternative to the *status quo*. When a headteacher presented a decision for agreement, going against it could be perceived as going against the good of the children. As described in Chapters 6 and 7, the conception of a singular common good is associated with the valuing of technical skills-carriers with managerial knowledge as 'impartial' and well-suited to implementing this

apparently indisputable common good. The conception of a singular common good and the constitution of education and governing as apolitical operates against the discussion of alternative conceptions of 'good' education to that of the national performative system.

A conception of a singular 'common good' is problematic for the reasons above. However, there are also dangers for citizenship in *not* discussing education in terms of the 'common good'. The opposite can be seen as an individual 'consumer good'. Hence, 'the common good' is often used to distinguish a citizenship discourse from a consumer discourse (e.g. Fielding and Moss, 2012, p. 6). As set out in Chapter 2, a tentative response to this dilemma is provided by Young who suggests an understanding of citizens as concerned with 'collective problems' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 43), including public goods, rather than with a singular common good. Her response has been used throughout this study as a heuristic alternative both to the 'common good' and to a view of self-interested consumers or stakeholders. This understanding is consistent with ongoing deliberation about principles and a recognition of power as ubiquitous.

What is education for?

The literature introduced in Chapter 2 suggested governors were not involved much in strategy and that teaching and learning were not discussed much (e.g. Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1995, p. 85; Farrell, 2005, p. 103). The lack of discussion of the aims of education arose in all the chapters in different guises. Chapter 5 set out ways in which discussion was constrained by the ways of talking and the constitution of a singular common good. Chapter 6 described how, through dividing practices, certain types of governors were constrained in what they could discuss. Chapter 7 discussed the valuing of managerial knowledge. Chapter 8 focused on the constitution of education and governing as apolitical and the lack of discussion of principles in meetings. Chapter 2 described the national performative system within which

> Governing bodies have little scope for developing alternative
> models of quality or (even if they should want to do such a thing)
> for taking their schools in radical directions where standards of

attainment are regarded as of secondary importance (Dean *et al.*, 2007, p. 4)

The national performative system is closely linked to the singular 'common good' summarised in the previous sub-section. Going against it can be seen as going against the good of the children. It is a powerful discourse which constitutes 'good' education in such a way that it would be almost 'mad' (Ball, 2013b, p. 20) to challenge it.

Chapter 7 explored how those with managerial knowledge and those with educational knowledge, inflected with managerial knowledge, implement this national performative system with little space for lay involvement. As described in Chapter 8, there was very limited discussion of principles. Politics was seen negatively and narrow conceptions of 'good' education, as being focused on targets, were not challenged. The lack of discussion of values or principles is part of the busy-ness summarised earlier. There is however a performance of criticality. Chapter 8 described the technology of *prescribed criticality* in which 'critical questions' are supplied for governors. When Ofsted inspects governing bodies, they look at minutes for examples of governor challenge. There was an emphasis, in meetings, on ensuring anything that might impress Ofsted was recorded. Governor training sessions and literature provide lists of appropriate questions that governors can ask to ensure that their school is complying with national policy.

The national performative system and the role of governors in supporting it, possibly to an even greater degree than when Deem *et al* referred to them as 'state volunteers' (1995), is an example of the way in which, despite claims around the 'death of the state … the state persists, albeit in new formations, relationships and assemblages (Sharma and Gupta, 2006)' (Clarke, 2009, p. 4). The state plays such a significant role that there is little space for governors to think otherwise about what education might be for. Over and against this, considering what education is for could be the most important way for citizens to engage in education.

Democratic engagement and schools

The Education Select Committee concluded: 'Our inquiry into the role of school governing bodies does not suggest that any radical changes are required to the current system of governance in English schools' (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 43). However, with a very different starting point to the Select Committee, this study has suggested a number of ways in which the current functioning of governing bodies is problematic. This does not lead to straightforward prescriptions for change partly because many of the issues raised by the research reflect wider national discourses of education and of public engagement. This section draws on findings from the study to consider some aspects of democratic engagement within the school system more broadly. A contribution of this study is to indicate some considerations that should be borne in mind in relation to future developments.

A heuristic framework for considering democratisation is that of Who? What? How? as suggested by Dryzek's three interrelated dimensions of democratisation: 'franchise', 'scope' and 'authenticity' (2002, p. 29). With regard to the 'Who?' of involvement, considering education has important implications for society, I suggest everyone in society should be concerned about what happens in schools. The diversity of people involved in deliberations about schools is central. As described in Chapter 2, governing bodies nationally are not good at involving a broad range of people reflective of their school populations and local communities, particularly with regard to class and ethnicity. This has important implications for the perspectives and knowledges considered (see Chapters 6 and 7). As set out in Chapter 4, governors display a complex mix of altruistic and self-interested motives and their motives have implications for their engagement. Who participates, their motivation and their subject positions are largely shaped by the spaces available:

> public participation tends to produce, as much as it reflects, "publics". Publics are sought out, invited, seduced and constituted in the process of participation (Clarke, 2009, p. 10)

The dominant policy discourse on school governors suggests that they should be skills-carriers rather than people who play a representative role. This is

increasing even further the proportion of governors who are white, middle-class professionals, drawing on managerial knowledge. With regard to parental involvement, the minister responsible for school governance said,

> It is helpful to have a range of people with complementary perspectives involved in creating robust accountability. But governing bodies can't be the primary forum for stakeholder engagement. Parent councils, for example, are a much more appropriate and meaningful context in which to engage with a wide range of representative parents (Nash, 2013, p. 9)

Research such as that of Vincent and Martin (2000) suggests that the few existing parent councils are not always 'more appropriate and meaningful' as forums for collective citizen engagement. Parents are increasingly seen as consumers rather than as people who might engage collectively in debates about schools more broadly, marginalising spaces for deliberation between parents as citizens.

Another complex subject position emerges from being voted into a position. Voting is often seen as a key to democracy but it can be deeply problematic. As seen in Chapter 6, parents and staff found themselves in an ambiguous position in that they were voted for by constituents but not then accountable to those constituents. Furthermore, in a context in which they were elected and others were nominated, they were seen as partial, with a particular agenda, whereas the nominated governors tended not to be.

A very important issue in relation to the 'Who?' of democratic engagement in schools is the role of students. There was nominally one student associate governor at Mersey but I never met her. Student voice was part Mersey's ethos; it was mentioned in relation to the vision and uniform at Avon; and the student council was discussed at Severn. However, student governors and the relationship between student voice and the GB were not explored much within this study. Students' constant interaction with each other means they are well placed to act collectively rather than as individual consumers.

There are questions around the level at which debate about schools might occur. Governing bodies may not be the most appropriate place for people to engage in discussions about the aims of education; local authorities are being diminished and the quality of national debate about education is limited. In a national school system, national debate is very important. However, national debate might well be strengthened by richer debate at a local level, both in schools and in other local forums. For local debate, governing bodies focused on one school[27] are inadequate. As Ball suggests,

> we might want to seriously consider a return to directly elected local school boards. These would have local responsibility for educational planning and spending, for ensuring access and equity, and for supporting deliberation and decision-making by schools (2013c, p. 37)

Rather than the individual school communities of the 'Big Society' discourse (see Chapter 2), school boards might involve 'replacing the homogenizing, ideological category of "community" with the potentially more critical category of "public" in the sense of a discursive arena for staging conflicts' (Fraser, 1997, p. 118). In this sense, they might provide a space for a wide variety of people to engage in deliberation about what education might be for. Such spaces need to be intertwined with other deliberative spaces. In relation to parent groups, Vincent and Martin say, 'A revitalised public sphere will not be achieved through the development of atomised "little polities" alone' (2000, p. 477). Deliberative spaces need to be interconnected.

Alternative spaces for engagement might, firstly, inform the work of governors and, secondly, lead to them taking their learning from governing to other forums. With regard to the first, I did ask governors about their relationship with other governors outside the meetings and this seemed very limited (see Chapter 5). However, a limitation of this study was that I did not fully explore governors' wider connections or the possibilities, for example, for all parent governors to form a 'counterpublic' as a 'way in' (Vincent, 2000, p. 18). Furthermore, I did not interview other parents, students or members of the local

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[27] This study did not consider groups of schools such as federations but there is no suggestion that they could play the role of a local authority or local board.

community to explore how they were or might be involved in decision-making about the school. With regard to the second, another limitation of this study and one which warrants further study is the impact that being a governor has on people's wider political engagement especially in relation to education policy. It did appear that most of the research participants only had minimal other engagement with their local communities or with political debates. Tyne governors had the strongest local links although those most involved in the community locally were not the 'core' of the GB. This lack of connection between governors and other local and/or political groups would be consistent with other research. Ranson *et al*'s (2005a) UK-wide study suggested that being a governor *could* form a basis for greater engagement (p. 362) but they found, 'Only a small proportion of respondents indicated that they were active as citizens in other spheres of civic life' (p. 360). Dean *et al* say:

> It struck us forcibly in our study that school governance exists in a somewhat hermetically sealed world, divorced not so much from party politics as from other forms of community politics in which different views and interests struggle with each other. While we had expected that some governing bodies would work through consensus and mutual support, we thought that others - particularly, perhaps, in the turbulent communities of London - would be politicised in this sense and linked closely to forms of community activism. As we have seen, however, this is far from the case and most governing bodies, wherever they are, proceed through consensus in pursuit of some notion of the common interest of the school (2007, p. 53)

From her research in Wales, Smith (2010) reported governors having stronger local political links so the difference between England and Wales might be interesting to consider.

The observation above from Dean *et al* suggests that the conception of a singular common good, as discussed at length in this study, is related to governors' lack of engagement with wider political groups. I would suggest that although their experience of schools challenged the 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 2013a) (see Chapter 8), governors' experience of schools did not incline them to challenge the national performative system. Rather, it seemed to induct them

into it suggesting that they might not be strongly motivated to engage in wider deliberations about what education might be for.

Governors' 'atomisation' within individual schools makes it difficult for them to act collectively as citizens in relation to local or national government (Brehony, 1992, p. 214). This question of governors operating as a collective is very important. However, it does raise again the very significant issue with regards to who they are. Governors tend not to be representative of their local school communities so a collective of governors may be even more likely to be white and middle-class.

In summary, the 'Who?' of engagement needs to involve everyone and occur in a range of interconnected local and national forums.

With regard to the 'What?' of democratic engagement, the national performative system currently means there is very little which is available for discussion, despite increasing 'autonomy' for schools. This study has set out a number of ways in which education and school governing are constituted as apolitical and the national performative system is accepted as reflecting a singular and uncontroversial common good. I would suggest that fundamental questioning of educational aims is needed at all levels since

> The political process of rethinking education for the 21st century, related to our real social needs and in relation to our real economic problems, will only come about by unleashing the innovative potential of schools, teachers and communities, by building and exploiting a proper sense of "democratic fellowship" [Fielding and Moss, 2011], and by rebuilding trust in teachers and schools (Ball, 2013c, p. 39)

With regard to the 'How?' of democratic engagement, governors, like most people in the UK, are not used to ideas of deliberation. Deliberation at its best can be social, creative and educative. As seen in this study, it can also be none of these things so calls for 'deliberation' are not enough. Reducing the constraints outlined under 'Busy-ness and passivity' may allow for broader discussions involving principles and the expression of difference. Consideration

is also needed about the affective dimensions of moving away from a singular conception of the common good and expressing difference about 'collective problems' (Young, 2002 [2000], p. 43). Process needs as much consideration as product.

Two decades ago, when there was possibly a greater potential for 'empowered citizens' in governing bodies, Thody ended an edited volume, 'School governors: Leaders or followers?' with 'two scenarios' which she presented in 'the best tradition of late twentieth-century interactive literature [leaving readers] to make their personal choice between the two'. The first suggests governing bodies 'may be obscuring the reality of where power lies in the system as a whole and within schools themselves'. The second suggests they 'may be the future model for the management of the state by empowered citizens' (1994, pp. 224-5). The ambivalences and ambiguities in their role enable governing bodies to appear to be all things to all people by obscuring the work they do particularly under the current policy trajectory towards a narrow managerial approach. However, their multiple ambivalences and ambiguities may, on the other hand, mean this policy trajectory is not as fixed as it appears.

There are possibilities for greater democracy with regard to the 'who?', 'what?' and 'how?' of engagement. However, there are also dangers. Incremental change[28] in governing bodies is more likely to be associated with the managerial than the localising or democratising rationale suggested by Dean *et al* (2007, p. 51) as the discourse underpinning the managerial rationale is dominant. Furthermore, small changes towards greater democracy might be seen as providing democratic legitimacy which is not fully justified. However, as Foucault says, 'everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism' (Foucault and Rabinow, 1991, p. 343). In this spirit, 'radical incrementalism' (Ball, 2013c;

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[28] After this study, the dramatic and high profile 'Trojan Horse' related events in Birmingham and the subsequent reports have raised possibilities for both positive and negative changes to governing body policy.

Fielding and Moss, 2012) towards greater democratisation provides a potential way forward for schools, governors and wider society. As Ball says:

> Neither democracy, inclusion, nor equity, are end states, they are things that will always need to be struggled towards and struggled over (2013c, p. 40).

Wider implications

The topics below did not fall within the scope of the current study but the findings are likely to have implications for them. The findings also have wider implications for public engagement in non-educational public services which are not discussed explicitly here. However, the issues raised throughout, particularly under 'Reflections on theories of democracy and citizenship' above, may be useful.

Implications for academies[29]

As James *et al* say, 'The upshot of this diversification of institutional type is that governing is likely to become a more diversified activity in the future' (2013b, p. 86). The constitutions of academies vary greatly depending on their individual Articles of Association. However, most of the key findings from this study are likely be equally relevant to academies. Additional issues particular to academies may be considered in an important ESRC funded project on 'School Accountability and Stakeholder Education' (Wilkins, 2014). Here, I briefly mention issues of particular relevance to democracy and citizenship.

Governing bodies decide whether a school should convert to academy status. It could be suggested that they are used to confer democratic legitimacy on academisation as the existence of governing bodies operates as an alternative to requirements for wider public consultation. The maintained school governing bodies explored within this study are not perfect models of democracy. However, shifting decision-making to a market-based model precludes future democratic decision-making.

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[29] In this sub-section, academies are understood as including free schools.

The greater financial, personnel and legal responsibilities of those governing academies can lead to suggestions that they are more like company boards and hence should have a stronger focus on functional skills derived from business. This is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, decisions about finance and personnel are not just technical decisions, they have important values dimensions which are obscured by presenting them as merely technical. Secondly, academies also have greater control over areas where managerialism is not relevant, including the curriculum. Decisions on such areas are about the aims of education and could, therefore, be seen as a reason for greater democratic engagement, not less.

Both the Academies Commission and the Education Select Committee have expressed concern over the reduced democratic role of governing bodies in academies, largely associating this with the lack of stakeholder engagement. The Academies Commission identify a 'Risk: academy governing bodies do not remain democratically accountable' (Academies Commission, 2013, pp. 108-9) and quote evidence from the Charity Commission:

> The Charity Commission observes in written evidence (below) that the model charitable company membership provisions for academies are relatively narrow, generating concerns about representation and stakeholder influence:
> "The structure is designed around effective school governance rather than inclusion of stakeholder interests. Only members are invited to the Annual General Meeting... We advise charities to consider the need to consult stakeholders on matters of policy and key decisions. This might be an area where academies could do more"
> (Academies Commission, 2013, p. 109)

The Education Select Committee also expressed concern about engaging local groups:

> We recommend that the Government clarify the roles of governors in the different types of academy. The Government should also clarify how relevant local groups (including pupils, parents and staff) should be given a voice in the business of the governing body (Education Committee, 2013a, p. 38)

As suggested in this study, maintained schools do not provide a perfect model of stakeholder engagement. However, the issues raised in this study such as the dividing practices constituting some governors as partial and some as impartial, described in Chapter 6, are important considerations for stakeholder engagement in academies. The Academies Commission suggests 'The role of governors in an academised system is more important than ever and needs to receive greater attention' (2013, p. 6). Ongoing research into conceptions of citizenship and democracy in relation to the governance of all types of schools is needed.

International implications

English policy is frequently exported, often for the benefit of UK based Education plc:

> The UK provides a model and a laboratory for educational innovations, and policy is being exported. Increasingly the work of international policy transfer is done by the private sector… These are all indications of the re-scaling of education policy and the relative decline in significance of the nation state as the dominant scale of policy-making (as was ever the case for developing countries) (Ball, 2007, p. 68)

Policy related to academy chains is mobile through the presence of these academy chains in other countries. However, beyond these, UK based international companies and organisations provide "knowledge about" (such as evaluations) and "knowledge for" ('practices and discourses') (Ball, 2012a, p. 105) GBs, consistent with an effectiveness discourse. For example, Cambridge Education provides 'Support for governors' (2014) and CfBT has supported work referred to in this study, either solely (James *et al.*, 2013a; James *et al.*, 2010; Ranson and Crouch, 2009) or in partnership with others (Academies Commission, 2013). Internationally,

> CfBT works worldwide to develop good governance in schools through providing evidence-based support for school boards and school management committees (CfBT, 2014)

From the perspective of the mobility of policy, governing bodies provide an interesting area of research, not least because of the conjunction of the 'participation' discourse promoted by INGOs with the managerialism of edu-business:

> Decentralisation ….is one of the few policies that strike a chord on both the right and the left of the political spectrum. From a market-focused human capital perspective, it offers expressions of client and consumer power and choice. From a rights-based perspective, it offers a participatory model of citizen action and local control (Stenvoll-Wells and Sayed, 2012, p. 97)

In relation specifically to South Africa and Zimbabwe, Stenvoll-Wells and Sayed suggest the inadequacy of a simple policy borrowing analysis:

> the devolution of control to school governing structures, was as much a reaction to colonial rule as it was to policy borrowing. A strong emphasis on democratic school governance in both countries was seen as a reaction to the system of political rule in which decisions affecting the majority were made by a white ruling government (2012, p. 114)

The complex networks and mobilities involved in this area of education policy merit ongoing research.

Reflections on the methodology

I endeavoured to ensure the research was rigorous and thorough and hope, therefore, that it can be appraised by the reader against criteria of trustworthiness and plausibility. Chapter 3 provided reflexive discussions on specific issues arising from the approaches to data generation and analysis. This section looks briefly at two broader issues, the use of sensitising concepts and the place of qualitative research in a 'what works' culture.

I set out the epistemological and ontological starting points for my qualitative approach in Chapter 3 and these have provided the basis for the whole study. Sensitising concepts have been used productively, largely in the manner set out by Charmaz:

> sensitizing concepts and disciplinary perspectives provide a place
> to *start,* not to *end.* Grounded theorists use sensitising concepts
> as tentative tools for developing their ideas about processes that
> they define in their data. If particular sensitising concepts prove to
> be irrelevant, then we dispense with them (2006, p. 17)

The main sensitising concepts for this research were concepts of citizenship and deliberative democracy. They were introduced in Chapters 1 and 2 and continually developed and explored throughout the study. They brought multiple perspectives to the analysis which would probably have been missed if my starting points had been different.

Clearly this study, in many ways, goes against the current education discourse. I am trying to challenge a situation 'where the aims of education cannot be questioned, [and] the only "possible" role for research seems to be a technical role' (Biesta, 2010, p. 46). As Biesta suggests, when 'a consensus [on aims] does not exist, there is a possibility for research to play a cultural role by providing different interpretations of the situation (p. 46). At a national level, it is increasingly difficult to question the aims of education or of governing bodies. As in the governing bodies themselves, the notion of the common good is used, including by policy makers, to shut down debate and suggest we all know the aims, we just need to focus on effectiveness in getting there.

I have taken care to avoid the circular logic that informs many Ofsted thematic reports (e.g. Ofsted, 2011c). Such reporting begins with a conception of 'effective' schools, finds these schools then describes them as proof of what 'effective' schools look like. The research for the current study asked *how* type questions and it would be disingenuous to claim that I can derive normative prescriptions for policy and practice directly from these. The DfE have provided a list of 'Research priorities and questions' with regard to 'Accountability and governance' (DfE, 2014a). This study has not been conducted within such an effectiveness rationality. It is not 'policy science' (Fay, 1975 cited in Ball, 1995) which provides technical answers about how to achieve prescribed aims. It, therefore, questions rather than answers the DfE's 'priority questions' (DfE, 2014a, p. 12). As set out in the methodology, the aim of this study was rather to provide a 'critique ... pointing out on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar,

unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest' (Foucault (1988: 154) cited in Olssen, Codd and O'Neill, 2004, p. 40).

Ambiguous citizenship: Democratic practices and school governing bodies

School governing bodies in England have considerable formal powers and responsibilities. This qualitative research study has explored their concrete practices drawing on understandings of deliberative democracy and citizenship as sensitising concepts. The empirical research was broadly ethnographic and took place in two primary and two secondary maintained schools. Data was generated primarily from interviews and observations. As set out in this chapter, the findings have led to suggestions for future research, including research on governors' wider political engagement; academies; and global education policy.

Considering school governors from the perspectives of deliberative democracy and citizenship draws attention to ambivalences and ambiguities in their role. These ambivalences and ambiguities cover issues of agency, representation, exclusion, knowledge and a singular conception of a 'common good'. Firstly, despite their busy-ness, governors are largely passive, and in relation to decision-making and dissensus, they can be socially awkward. Consensus is underpinned by a singular and unchallenged conception of the 'common good'. Secondly, the voices of certain governors are marginalised. Some governors are positioned as representatives and their constitution as partial masks the partiality of all governors. Thirdly, there are ambiguities in relation to the valuing of different knowledges. Educational knowledge is valued but also inflected by managerial knowledge. The policy emphasis on the value of managerial knowledge and measurable data tends to displace other possible 'lay' knowledges. Fourthly, education and governing are constituted as apolitical and there is limited discussion of educational aims, principles and values. In all this, despite policy describing governors as 'strategic', their work is largely technical and operates within a constrained national performative system that renders alternative conceptions of 'good' education unsayable or unthinkable.

These ambivalences and ambiguities, together with a dominant discourse of skills and effectiveness, work to obscure possibilities for thinking otherwise about education.

Appendix A: May 2014 policy ensuring newly appointed governors have 'skills'

Throughout the study, there has been a discussion of the increasing policy focus on governors having skills. This has two important effects. Firstly, 'skills' is often used in opposition to 'representation' so the valuing of governors with skills operates to simultaneously devalue representative governors. Secondly, the language of skills reinforces a conception of governing as an apolitical technical process. After the research period, in May 2014, the Coalition Government amended the regulations to require consideration of skills when appointing governors. The skills are not clearly defined so are difficult for anyone to disagree with. Despite this, the emphasis on skills has the two important effects described above. Two relevant extracts are reproduced below:

The revised 'Governors' Handbook' states:

> **2.3.1 Changes to the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012**
> **New skills-based eligibility criteria for appointed governors**
> From 1 September 2014, changes to the 2012 Constitution Regulations will require that any newly appointed governor has in the opinion of the person making the appointment "the skills required to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school". This could include specific skills such as an ability to understand data or finances as well as general capabilities such as the capacity and willingness to learn. The introduction of these changes will emphasise to all governing bodies the importance of appointing persons with the necessary skills to improve the overall effectiveness of the governing body.
> The eligibility criteria for elected parent governors and staff governors remain the same, but governing bodies should make clear when a vacancy becomes available the skills they are looking for to inform the electorate. (DfE, 2014d, p. 27)

The statutory guidance on the new regulations has a section on 'The skills governing bodies need' but leaves them very open:

The skills governing bodies need

16. The Regulations, as amended, create an explicit requirement that all appointed governors have the skills required to contribute to effective governance and the success of the school. The specific skills that governing bodies need to meet their particular challenges will vary. It is therefore for governing bodies and other appointing persons to determine in their own opinion, having regard to this guidance, what these skills are and be satisfied that the governors they appoint have them.

They may interpret the word skills to include personal attributes, qualities and capabilities, such as the ability and willingness to learn and develop new skills.

17. Experience has shown that all governors need a strong commitment to the role and to improving outcomes for children, the inquisitiveness to question and analyse, and the willingness to learn. They need good inter-personal skills, appropriate levels of literacy in English (unless a governing body is prepared to make special arrangements), and sufficient numeracy skills to understand basic data. Foundation governors need the skills to understand the ethos of the school and its implications for the way it is governed.

18. Experience also shows that effective governing bodies seek to secure or develop within their membership as a whole expertise and experience in analysing performance data, in budgeting and driving financial efficiency, and in performance management and employment issues, including grievances. They seek to recruit and/or develop governors with the skills to work constructively in committees, chair meetings and to lead the governing body.

19. It is governing bodies' responsibility to identify and secure the induction and other ongoing training and development governors need. Governing bodies should set aside a budget for this purpose. The governing body's code of conduct should set an ethos of professionalism and high expectations of governors' role, including an expectation that they undertake whatever training or development activity is needed to fill any gaps in the skills they have to contribute to effective governance. If a governor fails persistently to do this, then they will be in breach of the code of conduct and may bring the governing body or the office of a governor into disrepute – and as such provide grounds for the governing body to consider suspension. (my emphasis, DfE, 2014b, p. 7)

Appendix B: Ethics approval letter

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Helen Young
16, Gawber Street
London
E2 0JH

3 March 2011

Dear Helen

Ethics approval

Project title: An exploration of forms of democratic practices and conceptions of citizenship demonstrated by a range of school governing bodies

I am pleased to formally confirm that ethics approval has been granted by the Institute of Education for the above research project. This approval is effective from 1/04/2011.

I wish you every success with your research project.

Yours sincerely

Carol Vincent
Professor of Education

cc: IOE research ethics committee

Appendix C: Consent forms

School Governing Body Research: Headteacher Consent Form

School governors are the largest group of volunteers in the country and play a key role in running schools. Many people become school governors to help support education in their local community. School governing bodies can play an important democratic role, by giving the wider community a way to be involved in local schools

'Democracy' and 'getting involved in the local community' are attractive terms but school governing bodies are places where people have to meet the challenge of living them out in a practical way. Lots of interesting questions arise such as:

- How does a group of people with a mixture of experiences and views work together?
- What opportunities are there for governors and others to discuss different ideas about education?
- What might make it easier for a wider range of people to get involved?
- What can be learnt from school governing bodies for other groups that are trying to work in a more democratic way?

I am studying for a research degree at the Institute of Education, University of London. In my research, I plan to explore ideas about citizenship and democracy through a study of four school governing bodies. I am interested in looking at how a group of people discuss, deliberate and come to decisions. I am also interested in the ideas about education that are discussed in governing body meetings.

To do this research, I would like to:

- Observe full governing body meetings and agreed sub-committee meetings at your school.
- Interview a number of school governors, including the headteacher and the chair of governors.
- Read the minutes of governing body meetings for the last year.

I will provide opportunities for you and the other participants to comment on draft findings and to read a summary of the final research which I hope that you will find interesting and useful.

The research will be written up for my Doctoral thesis. It might also be used in publications and presentations. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in all these.

> Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments:
>
> Helen Young
> hyoung03@ioe.ac.uk
> 07761135881

Consent form:
Headteacher of ………………………………………….. School

- I give my voluntary and informed consent for my school to be involved in the research as described above.
- I understand that in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the school will not be named in the research findings unless I explicitly request that the school is acknowledged.
- The full anonymity and confidentiality of individual participants will be respected.
- The school reserves the right to withdraw fully or partially from the research at any point.

Signed: Name: Date:
        ……………………   ……………………   ……………………

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH

School Governing Body Research: Chair Consent Form

School governors are the largest group of volunteers in the country and play a key role in running schools. Many people become school governors to help support education in their local community. School governing bodies can play an important democratic role, by giving the wider community a way to be involved in local schools

'Democracy' and 'getting involved in the local community' are attractive terms but school governing bodies are places where people have to meet the challenge of living them out in a practical way. Lots of interesting questions arise such as:

- How does a group of people with a mixture of experiences and views work together?
- What opportunities are there for governors and others to discuss different ideas about education?
- What might make it easier for a wider range of people to get involved?
- What can be learnt from school governing bodies for other groups that are trying to work in a more democratic way?

I am studying for a research degree at the Institute of Education, University of London. In my research, I plan to explore ideas about citizenship and democracy through a study of four school governing bodies. I am interested in looking at how a group of people discuss, deliberate and come to decisions. I am also interested in the ideas about education that are discussed in governing body meetings.

To do this research, I would like to:

- Observe full governing body meetings and agreed sub-committee meetings at your school.
- Interview a number of school governors, including the headteacher and the chair of governors.
- Read the minutes of governing body meetings for the last year.

I will provide opportunities for you and the other participants to comment on draft findings and to read a summary of the final research which I hope that you will find interesting and useful.

The research will be written up for my Doctoral thesis. It might also be used in publications and presentations. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in all these.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments: Helen Young   hyoung03@ioe.ac.uk   07761135881

Consent form: Chair of Governors of .... School

- I give my voluntary and informed consent for Helen Young to observe full governing body meetings and agreed sub-committee meetings at this school. By agreeing this, I confirm that all governors have been informed of the proposed research and have agreed to it taking place.
- I also agree that she may read the minutes (with any confidential items removed) of governing body meetings for the year preceding this research.
- In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the school will not be named in the research findings unless the headteacher explicitly requests that the school is acknowledged.
- The rights to anonymity and confidentiality of all governing body members will be fully respected.
- I reserve the right to ask Helen to leave meetings for short periods for the discussion of any confidential items.
- I reserve the right to withdraw the governing body fully or partially from the research at any point.

Signed: Name: Date:

....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH

School Governing Body Research: Interviewee Consent Form

School governors are the largest group of volunteers in the country and play a key role in running schools. Many people become school governors to help support education in their local community. School governing bodies can play an important democratic role, by giving the wider community a way to be involved in local schools

'Democracy' and 'getting involved in the local community' are attractive terms but school governing bodies are places where people have to meet the challenge of living them out in a practical way. Lots of interesting questions arise such as:
- How does a group of people with a mixture of experiences and views work together?
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- What can be learnt from school governing bodies for other groups that are trying to work in a more democratic way?

I am studying for a research degree at the Institute of Education, University of London. In my research, I plan to explore ideas about citizenship and democracy through a study of four school governing bodies. I am interested in looking at how a group of people discuss, deliberate and come to decisions. I am also interested in the ideas about education that are discussed in governing body meetings.

To do this research, I would like to:
- Observe full governing body meetings and agreed sub-committee meetings at your school.
- Interview a number of school governors, including the headteacher and the chair of governors.
- Read the minutes of governing body meetings for the last year.

I will provide opportunities for you and the other participants to comment on draft findings and to read a summary of the final research which I hope that you will find interesting and useful.

The research will be written up for my Doctoral thesis. It might also be used in publications and presentations. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in all these.

> Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments:
>
> Helen Young
> hyoung03@ioe.ac.uk
> 07761135881

Interview consent form

- I give my voluntary and informed consent for Helen Young to interview me for the research described above.
- My right to anonymity and confidentiality will be fully respected.
- I reserve the right to withdraw fully or partially from the research at any point.

Signed: Name: Date:
....

- I give permission for the interviewed to be taped to help with writing up but understand that the tape will only be used for this purpose and will be kept confidential.

Signed:
....

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR SUPPORTING THIS RESEARCH

Appendix D: Meetings Attended

For each school, I attended at least two full GB meetings and at least one meeting of each committee. The secondary schools had more committee meetings than the primary schools. I attended at least one of each committee's meetings in each school.

Mersey Secondary School

Full	May 2011
Curriculum and Personnel	June 2011
Inclusion and Extended Schools	June 2011
Premises	July 2011
Finance	July 2011
Full	July 2011

Avon Primary School

Full	October 2011
Resources	November 2011
Standards	November 2011
Full	November 2011
Training session	December 2011

Severn Primary School

Full	March 2012
Finance, Premises and Personnel	May 2012
Full	May 2012
Full	June 2012

Tyne Secondary School

Full	March 2012
Personnel	April 2012
Community (Only one governor came)	May 2012
Finance and Premises	May 2012
Curriculum	May 2012
Full	May 2012
Curriculum	July 2012
Full	July 2012

Appendix E: Interviewee Supplementary Information

Interviewee Supplementary Information

Date and time of interview ....

What is your highest level of educational qualification?
[] O'Level / GCSE
[] A'Level or equivalent
[] Vocational qualification
[] Undergraduate degree
[] Postgraduate degree

Employment
[] Employed full-time
[] Employed part-time
[] Not employed

What is your occupation?

....

....

What is your current housing situation?
[] Owner occupier
[] Private tenant
[] Social tenant

Are you resident in the same borough as the school?
[] Yes
[] No

Approximately how far from the school do you live?

....

How would you describe your ethnicity?

....

Appendix F: Interview schedule

Questions [ask for egs throughout]
Introduction Thank you for agreeing to this interview We'll be talking about what it is like to be a school governor 1 hr max, I will ask fairly open questions and it is great if you do most of the talking. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview isn't about judging you or the school, it is about trying to understand how the structure of governing bodies affects discussion. Explain confidentiality etc – Please sign consent form, including 'Is it OK to tape the interview?' Any questions?
1 (Could you tell me what you do for a living? (or have done if you're not working?) Do you have formal meetings like governing body meetings at work?)
2 Do you live locally? Are you involved in your local community in other ways? How long have you been a governor here? Why did you become a governor? Have you been a governor elsewhere?
3 What do you think the role of the <u>whole </u>governing body is? (Support, advice, accountability, critical friend). What, if any, do you think are the advantages of having governing bodies? What, if any, do you think the disadvantages are?
4 What do you think <u>your</u> role is as a governor? Does the fact that you are a [type] governor affect your role? Does it make you feel that you should restrict yourself to particular topics? What are the main knowledge/skills/experience you bring which you think are important to your role as a governor? *[See questions for specific individuals]*
5 Where do you get your ideas about education in general from? What are the main ways that you find out what education is like in this school? What is a 'good school'? Is that something you've discussed in governing body meetings? Vision? Social justice, eg, Who tends to raise questions about the impact of what is being discussed in the GB on looked after children?

What other issues around social justice tend to come up?
6 Is it easy to say what you want to say in the meetings? Do some people talk much more than others in the meetings? Why do you think that is? Which governors are most influential? Is this different in committee meetings? If so, how?
7 Do you think it is the governing body as a whole that makes decisions or is it more the chair and the head? What do you think are the most important decisions that the GB has made while you've been there? Do you think the people on your GB always agree with each other? What do people do if they disagree? Are there things about the way meetings are set up that makes it easy or difficult for people to disagree with each other? Do people often change their minds? Do you talk about how to talk at all? What is your understanding of the way GBs are meant to operate as a corporate body? GBs are meant to act as a 'critical friend'- what does that mean to you? Do challenges feel constructive?
8 Are there topics which you would like to discuss but which don't come up in meetings? (What aspects of school life are you particularly interested in?) How do you get to talk about those kind of things? If there was more time in GB meetings, what do you think might be discussed? In the last meeting, was there anything that surprised you about things that people did or didn't decide to talk about?
9 In general terms, in an ideal world, whose views are most important for deciding what happens in a school? What does or would it mean for a GB to be democratic? Should GBs be more democratic or is that not their role?
10 Is being a governor satisfying?
Close Thank you v much Anything you want to ask

If you have more thoughts, please contact me
Can I contact you if I need to?
Would you mind filling out this form [Interviewee supplementary information]?
It is fine if you don't want to or if you want to miss some questions.

IF TIME

Are the meeting minutes useful to you?

Formalities or actual record. If you say something do you expect it to be recorded? Do you ever restrain what you say as you're concerned about it being recorded?

Have you done any governor training?
Have you attended other LA events?

Have you been involved in any significant events like an exclusion or appointing a head?
Are you in any special working groups?

SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS - Some people fit more than one category

Parent
What is your relationship with the other parents?
Do you discuss your role as a governor with them much?
Relationship to parents' group? Expectations of representation

Staff
Do you discuss your governor role much with other staff?

Community governor
How does being a governor affect your role in the local community?

Chair
Do you know everyone's name? Are there some people who don't speak much?
Does that impact on the way the GB works?
What is the difference in the contribution to the GB by different types of governor?

Head
Does having a GB help or hinder the work you do?
What have you found most useful? (Least?)
Do people suggest items for the agenda?
What is the difference in the contribution to the GB by different types of governor?
What would happen if GBs didn't exist?
How did members get chosen?

Appendix G: Codes used in analysis

Code	Description
Accountability	Explicit references to accountability Audit
Agenda	Use of the agenda in meetings How topics are added to the agenda
Appropriate topics	What topics can/should be discussed
Appropriate talking	Appropriate ways of talking 'Good' questioning Talk about how to talk [also see Formality]
Benefits of being governor	Benefits as described by beneficiaries and others, e.g. learning or status Motives for becoming a governor
Business	Involvement of business in schools Use of business ideas Skills and expertise from business
Chair	What chair does and how they are seen
Challenge discourse	Challenge neoliberal discourse Challenge discourse of derision about schools Challenge prevailing discourse in school
Challenge head	This sometimes includes challenging the SLT or established school policies
Committee	Role, status, relationship to full GB
Confidential	Conceptions of what is confidential and what isn't and why
Construct consensus	Construction of consensus in meetings Valuing of consensus Corporate body
Conceptions of citizenship and democracy	In abstract sense and in relation to GB
Data	Including measuring
Decision complexity	Decisions presented as simple or complex [see Do governors need educational knowledge]
Decision process	How decisions are made or not made. Who, what, when, how…
Decision size	What are seen as big decisions which the GB has made
Defer to governors	Head or other staff defer to all or one governor
Defer to head	Governor/s defer to head
Deliberation	Back and forth discussion Discussion that generates new ideas
Disagree	Disagreement and reference to it Avoiding disagreement
Diversity	References to diversity in terms of individuals and different types of stakeholders on the GB

	Valuing of a diversity of governors Diverse perspectives Size of GB
Divides	Core vs periphery Divides between types of governors Divides between insiders and outsiders Class divides
Do governors need educational knowledge	What knowledge is valued [see Educational expertise and Appropriate topics]
Drawbacks of being a governor	Including boredom [See Overwhelming]
Educate governors	Governor training Governor visits Link governors Reminding governors of background, abbreviations etc. Giving governors summaries of national policy etc. Giving governors tasks to develop their skills
Educational issues	Discussion of educational issues (loosely defined) Questions around which issues are educational
Educational expertise	In GB and from elsewhere [See LA and Staff]
Elections	Elections to join the GB and committees and for particular roles within the GB Recruitment even if this is not through elections
Formality	My observations about in/formality and participants' comments on it
'Good' education	'Good school' Vision Ethos Whether this is discussed SDP [See 'Business']
Governors - associate	Including student governors Observers
Governors - community	
Governors - foundation	(Mersey only)
Governors - LA	
Governors - parents	
Governors - staff	
Head sets direction	The head sets the direction for the school and for GB meetings (or members of the SLT do)
Induction	Process Experience Clarity about what GB does before joining [See New/longevity]
LA	Including Schools Forum
Leaving	Leaving the GB Getting other governors to leave

	Leaving positions within the GB
Local	Understanding of the local area and community
	Engagement with local voices and issues
Marginalised voice	Class
	Including discussion about engaging people more
Materiality	Food; furniture etc
National policy	Including consultations
New/longevity	References to history of the school and history of education
	Being a governor for a short or long time
	Governor turnover
	[See Induction]
Ofsted	All mentions
Overwhelming	So much to know and do
	Paperwork
Parents	All mentions
Personality	References to personality
	What is attributed to personality
	[See Relationships and Divides]
Politics	What is seen as political
	Mentions of party politics
	Idea of 'apolitical'
Private good	Education as a private good
	Governors as there for their own ends
	Including discussions of marketing the school
Privileged voice	How particular voices are privileged
	How people speak to get their voice privileged
Public good	Education as a public good
	Governor as civic duty
Relationships	Place of interpersonal relationships
Representation	Expectation that parents represent other parents and staff represent other staff
	Consultations with parents and staff
Role	Role of GB and individual governors
	Clarity about role
	Analogies with company board
	Mentions of critical friend
	Voluntary role
	[See Support School]
Staff	Including references to unions
Statutory responsibilities	Policies
	Requirements on GB
Stories from other schools	People talking about GB in other schools
	Governors drawing on their knowledge of other schools
Student attainment	[See Data]
Student inclusion	SEND
	LAC
	Exclusions
	Social justice issues related to students

	Slippage between each of these dimensions of inclusion
Student voice	All mentions
Support school	Including virtuous circle of joining a school you agree with Allegiance to school
Time to talk	References to lack of time etc Closing of discussions due to time
Value of GB	References to the GB being valuable and not valuable
View breadth	Whether views are seen as narrow of broad Includes conceptions of governors having 'common sense'
View strength	Should/do governors hold strong views
Voting	Votes or discussion of votes

Possible keywords to search for:

SRE
Critical friend
Skill
Clerk/Clark/Clara
Performance management
State volunteer
White
Curriculum
Academy/academies/free school
Stakeholder
Conspiracy
PTA/Prabal
Woman/women
Union
Minutes
Link
Community

Appendix H: A coded interview[30]

Trina Interview 28 May 2012

a.	**Notes after interview**	
b.	Very conscious that she is member of staff.	Governors – staff
c.	Attributes lack of speaking to shyness + v conscious that she is there as part of job so wouldn't like to be shown up for not knowing something	Governors – staff Personality
d.	Said it would be wrong to **challenge head** in front of others.	Governors – staff
e.	Supports other staff who do presentations	Governors – staff
f.	She values the different perspectives from **business** and others.	Diversity
g.	She became the **chair** of committees almost by accident.	Elections
h.	She is governor to learn about school but didn't explicitly talk about this in terms of promotion	Benefits of being governor
i.	like Tara, she was concerned to be helpful to me and worried that she hadn't said much of interest	Governors – staff
j.	She would be happy to take things from other staff but people don't come to her.	Representation governors - staff
k.		
l.	**Later notes**	
m.	really talks a lot about feeling silly if she said the wrong thing therefore she sits quietly	Governors – staff personality
n.	like the heads, she talks about hearing horror **stories from other schools**	
o.	GB as way to find out how school is run	Benefits of being governor
p.	People – **local** and staff - can ask her to say things at GB and she can represent them. She is keen to do this but it never actually happens	Representation
q.	Governors welcoming and friendly	Formality
r.	Expected GB to be scary	Formality
s.	Doesn't say much and panics sometimes if doesn't understand. Feels watched. Feels she should know more. V worried about saying wrong thing in GB. Restricted as staff governor	Governors – staff Do governors need educational knowledge
t.	**Parents** seem comfortable to ask questions	Appropriate talking governors – parents
u.	GB as another eye that monitors	Value of GB
v.	'I think a good governing body is a real asset to the school because they are bringing in different things from different communities, different, you know, different areas, banks, that kind of thing in'. + other comments on value of community links	Value of GB diversity
w.	People listen if she speaks. She has experience etc to speak from but doesn't tend to speak much	Governors – staff
x.	GB mostly **confidential**	
y.	Children should have more say	Student voice
z.	Feels positive after meetings	Support school

[30] This example was chosen as it includes a question, rather than a discussion about the research, within two pages (transcriptions were originally in landscape).

aa.	Not **Ofsted** robots but **Ofsted** important	
bb.	Important decisions: budget and policies	Decision size
cc.	Governors 'aware' of SDP	'Good' education
dd.	People don't completely disagree	
ee.	Wouldn't **challenge head** in meeting	
ff.	Doesn't know what it might mean for GB to be democratic	Conceptions of citizenship and democracy

Transcription

1.	55 seconds		
2.	I: so can you tell me what you do here?		
3.	T: I'm a year one middle room teacher		
4.	I: OK		
5.	T: um yeah that is just me at the moment heh		
6.	I: OK		
7.	T: and obviously a teacher Governor as well		
8.	I: OK. And how come you became a governor?		
9.	T: it was something I thought would give me a much more in-depth insight into the school. And more about kind of how the school is run. Not being part of the management team, you don't necessarily find out all the ins and outs of how the school is run. I think as well as governor, you find out more rather than the teaching side of how school is run, it is the other side, the bare bones of what goes into the make up of the school and the structure of the school as well. And it is, a lot of things are broken down for governors in a way which I find really helps me to understand all that as well. So I find it really helpful. So it was something that when the opportunity was put to staff I jumped at because I was really interested in that side of it.	Find out how school is run	Benefits of being governor Governors – staff
10.	I: OK. Did anyone else? Did you have a staff election?		Elections
11.	T: yes. We didn't have an election, there was a couple of us that went for it and there was enough posts to put us all in so, it was, I was fortunate. But yeah. It was something I had asked about previous		Elections governors – staff
12.	I: would you have done it if there was an election?		Elections governors – staff
13.	T: yeah. I would have still gone		Elections

Appendix I: A coded observation[31]

Tyne Curriculum ▌July 2012
In library

Overall notes

a.	very low turnout	Committee
b.	Connor encourages school to become involved with his EBP projects	Business
c.	it seems surprising that they could be quorate with only two governors there to agree policies	Committee decision process
d.	Connor draws on his **business** background a lot. It seems that **business** is where you learn about clarity, punctuality etc	

1.	4.56 I arrived first. Deidre directed me to the library as she was going out. There were papers on the table so help myself to an **agenda** and minutes. I saw an e-mail that said that Fe had circulated the policies but I never saw these.	**Notes**	
2.	5.04 Deidre and Connor come in together. Connor apologised to me that they were late. Deidre didn't get any apologies. Connor had apologies from Lucinda		
3.	5.05 Parihan arrived		
4.	Connor repeats that Lucinda e-mailed that she can't come but he has not heard from Spencer or from the new governors who joined the **committee** but have not been attending		
5.	Connor says that Dennis had told him no one had turned up for the community **committee**. Very strange. Deidre said it is disappointing		
6.	Deidre said TT10 was coming down		
7.	Connor said so we don't normally go through the minutes as everyone has a chance to say what they want. Deidre gives copies of the minutes to Connor to take to the full meeting		Appropriate talking

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[31] This example was chosen as it has very few overall notes compared to most observations so a range of aspects can be seen in two pages.

8.			

Seating diagram (row 8):

		Deidre		Parihan	
					Connor
	Spencer (v late)		TT10	Me	

No.	Description		Notes
9.	TT10 arrived and said she had problems with the photocopier. She's introduced to everyone. Deidre goes to the photocopier. Connor says everybody knows Parihan.		
10.	Connor asks TT10 to speak for 20 minutes. 'We expect all the good news so please focus on what governors might help you with'. TT10 seemed surprised by this and asked what sort of things other teachers talk about. Connor says that the art teachers are normally after extra time but English has plenty of time. **Staff**ing is often an issue although Tyne is very lucky with being able to afford a lot of **staff**		Time to talk Value of GB Defer to governors
11.	5.10 Deidre brings the photocopied sheets [see handout of English faculty review]. Connor asks who the link governor is for English. No one seems to know. The faculty review template has a gap at the top where the link governor name should be		Educate governors
12.	TT10 starts the presentation saying that she only just started the job, she has observed most teachers, they are pushing oracy; she used the **Ofsted** framework for the faculty review and it is more rigorous than the previous one. She talked through areas of strength and areas needing development. Connor interrupts to say that we had a presentation from TT6 in the full governing body		Educate governors
13.	5.14 Connor 'this is all the good stuff' looks impatient.TT10 moves onto the areas the development. See the next page. Deidre chips in about changes in **staff**ing. TT10 Does most of the presenting and asks if there are any questions. Connor says they'll leave questions to the end. TT10 points to the actions including setting. Connor asks how many sets there will be. Deidre explains. And that there is more time for maths and English.		Appropriate talking Staff

Appendix J: A node result

Business

86.	H: um no. Working. We had X. Who was **chair** of governors for a long time. Was a a managing director or something at X bank. And he ended up being on the governing body because he came as the reading partner. But then he. When all the stuff happened with X bank. I think he is still here. I think at X bank but it all got too much. Impossible for him But then we had somebody, X. I can't remember if he was LA or community who retired but again he didn't *live* locally.	Had 2 bankers before

Bankers came as reading partners [this seems a common way in for corporates]

Not living locally | Governors – LA
Governors – community **business** |
| 99. | H: um well we have had. I mean, When we had X and X [from banks] as governors, you know they did bring real financial knowledge which was helpful. Um I think, particularly for me | Finance knowledge from banks helpful | **business** |
| 100. | I: and appropriate financial knowledge? | | **business** |
| 101. | H: well the great thing about X actually who was heh who lived in X in Chelsea was a really significant American banker, I can't remember where he worked. He had, he was completely big picture about everything. So he kind of looked down the budget thing and he would never say 'well what did you spend that £400 on?', He'd always go, you know, he'd look at the big headings and the big picture thing and say 'it all looks fine' and who do that at a glance heh heh. It was quite reassuring to have somebody with that knowledge who would. And he would sometimes say 'well what can we do about this?' Or maybe we should. And he was the same statistics. He used to make a big thing about 'well you know we're talking such a small number, it's not really statistically viable anyway, I don't know why are making such a fuss about 10%' sort of thing. And it was quite *interesting* having that perspective | Used to budgets => big picture thinking

Banker useful on recognising **Ofsted** etc approach to statistics doesn't make sense | **business** |
| 103. | H: when we're always kind of going over all the pennies and each one percentage you know up or down on levels or whatever, represent something for us. And he was always determined to not be thrown by those kind of variables. Um. And Now I mean Latif Latif didn't come this time. I think he's only been to. Because he's new. To the one. But he's in finance isn't he. So he may bring. May or may not bring something useful there. Heidi obviously brings a huge amount of | Latif may bring something useful in future, hasn't yet… | **Business** Educational expertise |
| 109. | H: it all about kind of where our children are going after they're here which I think is really good [Mersey is the secondary school which many Avon pupils go to]. Um. Yeah. I don't know. I mean it can be useful having that **business** perspective and you're right, sometimes it doesn't work. And there were occasions with that with X [banker governor]. Where he. It didn't really work and he just didn't understand. | Sometimes bankers can't understand | **business** |

Appendix K: ACORN household types

The marketing solutions company, CACI, describes their ACORN tool as 'a geodemographic segmentation of the UK's population which segments small neighbourhoods, postcodes, or consumer households into 5 categories, 17 groups and 56 types' (CACI, 2009). Their segmentation is copied below:

Category	Group	Type
Wealthy Achievers	Wealthy Executives	01 - Affluent mature professionals, large houses
		02 - Affluent working families with mortgages
		03 - Villages with wealthy commuters
		04 - Well-off managers, larger houses
	Affluent Greys	05 - Older affluent professionals
		06 - Farming communities
		07 - Old people, detached houses
		08 - Mature couples, smaller detached houses
	Flourishing Families	09 - Larger families, prosperous suburbs
		10 - Well-off working families with mortgages
		11 - Well-off managers, detached houses
		12 - Large families & houses in rural areas
Urban Prosperity	Prosperous Professionals	13 - Well-off professionals, larger houses and converted flats
		14 - Older Professionals in detached houses and apartments
	Educated Urbanites	15 - Affluent urban professionals, flats
		16 - Prosperous young professionals, flats
		17 - Young educated workers, flats
		18 - Multi-ethnic young, converted flats
		19 - Suburban privately renting professionals
	Aspiring Singles	20 - Student flats and cosmopolitan sharers
		21 - Singles & sharers, multi-ethnic areas
		22 - Low income singles, small rented flats
		23 - Student Terraces
Comfortably Off	Starting Out	24 - Young couples, flats and terraces
		25 - White collar singles/sharers, terraces

	Secure Families	26 - Younger white-collar couples with mortgages
		27 - Middle income, home owning areas
		28 - Working families with mortgages
		29 - Mature families in suburban semis
		30 - Established home owning workers
		31 - Home owning Asian family areas
	Settled Suburbia	32 - Retired home owners
		33 - Middle income, older couples
		34 - Lower income people, semis
	Prudent Pensioners	35 - Elderly singles, purpose built flats
		36 - Older people, flats
Moderate Means	Asian Communities	37 - Crowded Asian terraces
		38 - Low income Asian families
	Post Industrial Families	39 - Skilled older family terraces
		40 - Young family workers
	Blue Collar Roots	41 - Skilled workers, semis and terraces
		42 - Home owning, terraces
		43 - Older rented terraces
Hard Pressed	Struggling Families	44 - Low income larger families, semis
		45 - Older people, low income, small semis
		46 - Low income, routine jobs, unemployment
		47 - Low rise terraced estates of poorly-off workers
		48 - Low incomes, high unemployment, single parents
		49 - Large families, many children, poorly educated
	Burdened Singles	50 - Council flats, single elderly people
		51 - Council terraces, unemployment, many singles
		52 - Council flats, single parents, unemployment
	High Rise Hardship	53 - Old people in high rise flats
		54 - Singles & single parents, high rise estates
	Inner City Adversity	55 - Multi-ethnic purpose built estates
		56 - Multi-ethnic, crowded flats

Appendix L: Education Act 1996 (c.56)

In Chapter 56 of the 1996 Education Act, 'Political indoctrination' is associated with being 'partisan'. The following sections of Chapter 56 of the Act might be seen as an example of how legislation both reflects and constitutes public attitudes about the possibilities of education avoiding 'political indoctrination' and being 'balanced':

406 Political indoctrination.
(1) The local education authority, governing body and head teacher shall forbid—
    (a) the pursuit of partisan political activities by any of those registered pupils at a maintained school who are junior pupils, and
    (b) the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school.
(2) In the case of activities which take place otherwise than on the school premises, subsection (1) (a) applies only where arrangements for junior pupils to take part in the activities are made by—
    (a) any member of the school's staff (in his capacity as such), or
    (b) anyone acting on behalf of the school or of a member of the school's staff (in his capacity as such).
(3) In this section "maintained school" includes [F1a community or foundation special school] established in a hospital.
407 Duty to secure balanced treatment of political issues.
(1) The local education authority, governing body and head teacher shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils while they are—
    (a) in attendance at a maintained school, or
    (b) taking part in extra-curricular activities which are provided or organised for registered pupils at the school by or on behalf of the school, they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.
(2) In this section "maintained school" includes [F1a community or foundation special school] established in a hospital.
(Note: 'F1' refers to outstanding changes)

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