PRIMARY SCHOOL GOVERNANCE:
THE PERSPECTIVES OF HEAD TEACHERS
AND CHAIRS OF GOVERNANCE

MALCOLM ROBERT DIXON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

of Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ABSTRACT

In England over 300,000 school governors serve some 23,000 schools, influence the lives of over 7 million children and oversee a budget in excess of £20 billion per annum. School governors, as unpaid volunteers, are said to have responsibilities and duties that are unprecedented in the voluntary sector. These responsibilities and duties are likely to become even more demanding and complicated as changes in the education system are implemented. Despite this, there has been limited research on primary school governance. The research, presented here, sought to investigate the perspectives of key stakeholders in primary school governance by interviewing the head teachers and chairs of governance of 20 schools. Maximum variation sampling was used to select 20, contextually different, primary schools within ten Local Authorities. The research adopted a qualitative approach - the head teacher and chair of governance of each school were interviewed, during 2011, using a semi-structured schedule to elicit 'thick descriptions' about primary school governance. Additional information was obtained from the most recent Ofsted report for each school. Four themes, all related to the research questions, emerged from the literature review. These themes were used to structure the interview schedule, to present the data and in the subsequent discussion and analysis. Findings of this research confirmed that primary school governance is important and that primary school head teachers received invaluable support from their governing body, especially from their chair of governance. Chairs of governance were shown to be committed to their roles and school governance was found to be complex but governors were judged to be capable of doing the job. The concepts of governor capital, agency and amplification were found to be valid and need to be developed further by primary schools. The training of governors was found to be inadequate and there was inequality in information provision for governors. Recruitment of new governors was problematic for some schools in both disadvantaged and affluent areas. Recommendations included that what is required of school governors needs to be clarified by central government and that further training is necessary for this complex role.

Declaration

I declare that this work is original and has not been previously submitted in support of a degree or other qualification.

Malcolm R. Dixon

Acknowledgements

To my Director of Studies, Professor Mark Brundrett, for his invaluable and unwavering support, patience, time, encouragement, and friendship. I was very fortunate to have such an outstanding scholar to guide me through the doctoral journey.

To Professor Angela Thody and Dr Carol Kerry, of the University of Lincoln, for their generosity and help at an early stage, in the planning of the research, and for their welcome into the 'doctoral community'.

To the head teachers and chairs of governance interviewed as part of the research – they gave their time freely and offered their insights generously.

To Professor Philip Vickerman, Professor Marion Jones, Professor Patricia Shenton and the late Dr Harkitan Singh-Raud for their encouragement and advice at an early stage in the research process.

To all the pupils, students and colleagues who made my career, in education, such a joy.

To my daughters Joanne and Michelle, and their husbands James and Tom, for their constant encouragement and for inspiring me, through their own outstanding academic achievements. I look forward to spending more time with Emma and Henry.

Finally, to my mother, sister and late father for their love, support, encouragement, self-sacrifice and continual interest in my projects.

Abbreviations

ASCL	Association of School and College Leaders
BELMAS	British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Authority
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CE	Church of England
CTC	City Technical College
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EFA	Education Funding Agency
FFT	Fischer Family Trust, provides data to schools
Governor Mark	A National Governors' Association quality standard
Governornet	Website for School Governors
GM	Grant-Maintained
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEB	Interim Executive Board
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NCOGS	National Co-ordinators of Governor Services
NGA	National Governors' Association
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (replaced by QCDA)
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
RAISEonline	Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation
RC	Roman Catholic
SATs	Standard Assessment Tasks
SCAA	School Curriculum and Assessment Authority
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SSAT	Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
TDA	Training and Development Agency
TTA	Teacher Training Agency
White Paper	Sets out proposals for inclusion in a government Bill
YPLA	Young People's Learning Agency
VA	Voluntary- Aided
VAT	Value Added Tax
VC	Voluntary- Controlled

CONTENTS

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

School governance is considered to be significant in the management of education systems around the world – especially wherever local democracy is important (James, 2011; Bush and Gamage, 2001). In England, there are over 300,000 school governors representing parents, teachers, religious groups, local authorities, local communities, business and industry (DCSF, 2010a). This group of unpaid volunteers serve some 23,000 schools and influence the lives of over 7 million children. Governors are asked to undertake complex tasks – provide strategic leadership, be 'critical friends' and ensure accountability – for 'their' particular schools and have an increasing portfolio of legal responsibilities in relation to, for example, health and safety, employment of staff, finance and the curriculum. They are charged with providing strategic leadership for their school but have to balance this with ensuring that the day-to-day management of the school is left to the head teacher, who, in turn, is accountable to them as a corporate body (DfES, 2007). Governors are described as complementing and enhancing school leadership (Ofsted, 2011) – having previously been described as equal partners in leadership with the head teacher and senior management team (DfES, 2004).

School governance in England has undergone a number of changes since the 1944 Education Act established free primary and secondary schooling for all pupils supported by boards of managers for primary schools and governors for secondary schools. Possibly the most significant changes in composition and responsibilities of governing bodies were brought about by the 1986 Education (No.2) Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act giving the public more involvement in the educational system and devolving more responsibilities directly to schools and, therefore, governing bodies through the Local Management of Schools (LMS) initiative (The Open University, 1994). Over the last two decades the links between Local Authorities (formerly Local Education Authorities) and governing bodies have decreased but central government control of education has increased. This paradox, more autonomy and therefore more fragmentation in delivery but greater control, including the use of inspection agencies such as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), has been referred to as "decentralised-centralism", a model that, it is argued, is consistent with an international discourse on the role of the

state and civic society (Karlsen, 2000: 526). As a consequence of this self-governance of schools, governing bodies, largely modelled on the private sector board of directors, have become increasingly important (Balarin and Lauder, 2008).

James et al (2010) recognise that governors make an enormous contribution to schools and the English education system. They propose that the task of governing is likely to become even more complicated and demanding and postulate that increasing expectations of schools, changes in government policies, more diversity in governing body types, the extension of community services offered by schools and new forms of schools are amongst the reasons for this. They suggest that despite the enormity of the voluntary contribution made by school governors this goes on largely un-noticed by the public and that "The lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence for a school; it is a substantial disadvantage" (James et al, 2010: 3).

The Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government's Education White Paper – The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) – supported the views of James et al (2010) in relation to the likely increased demands on school governors. It proposed, for example, that:

- Governors, head teachers and teachers will have clear and prime responsibility for school improvement and will be accountable to parents and their community for their work.
- The government will make it easier for schools "…to adopt models of governance which work for them – including smaller, more focused governing bodies, which clearly hold the school to account for children's progress" (DfE, 2010: 13).
- Failing schools and those unable to improve their results will be converted to Academy status.
- A national network of Teaching Schools (modelled on teaching hospitals) is developed.
- Encouragement will be given to new providers to set up alternative Free Schools.
- The National Curriculum and Key Stage 2 testing is reviewed.
- Every school be given the freedom "…to shape its own character, frame its own ethos and develop its own specialisms, free of either central or local bureaucratic constraint" (DfE, 2010: 11). The paper is clear that the "…direction of travel…"

(DfE, 2010: 12) is towards every school being an autonomous institution, often as an Academy.

- Support will be given to schools to collaborate as academy chains and multi-school trusts and federations.

Governing bodies are said to have responsibilities and duties that are unprecedented in the voluntary sector. There are, it is argued, few, if any, parallels to be made whereby a mixed group of volunteers carry out the massive task, without payment, of leading an institution (The Open University, 1994). Furthermore, compared with their period of dominance before 1988, Local Authorities, providing local administration for a 'family' of schools, have been described as "…shadows of their former selves" (Alexander (Ed.), 2010: 31).

1.2 Defining the Field

School governance is, as has been argued above, important, complex and evolving. It is necessary, therefore, to further articulate the different categories of governors to be found on primary school governing bodies. They are as follows:

- Parent governors
- Local authority governors
- Teacher governors
- The head teacher
- Co-opted / community governors
- Foundation / partnership governors
- Trust governors

Further details of each of these types of governors can be found in Appendix 1.

There are, also, a number of categories of primary schools:

- Community / Maintained schools
- Foundation schools
- Voluntary-aided schools
- Voluntary-controlled schools
- Primary academies
- Primary free schools

- Federated schools
- Independent schools

Details of these different categories of schools are to be found in Appendix 2.

Finally, further consideration needs to be given to the families of schools associated with Local Authorities (LA), chains of academies, multi-school trusts and clusters of schools. Further details, therefore, are to be found in Appendix 3.

1.3 Origins and Motivation for this Study

The researcher's interest in primary school governance is derived from having served as a school governor on two occasions, both in large primary schools. In 1988 he stood for election as a parent governor at his children's primary school, in a leafy suburb of a large northern city, and was elected − subsequently being re-elected and serving until 1995 including a year as the deputy chair of that governing body. At this time he was a senior lecturer in education in the teacher training department of a polytechnic, having previously been a primary school teacher and local education authority science adviser. During his time as a teacher, from 1970 to 1977, there was very little engagement with the governors of his school apart from one governor being involved, with the head teacher, in his initial appointment interview. Whilst working as a science adviser to 270 primary schools and 30 special schools, from 1977 to 1985, he had no involvement with school governors but obviously had a unique experience of working with so many head teachers and teachers and observing so many different schools in action. The researcher considers that he had experience of other schools, of teachers and of committee work to bring to this governing body and this might be evidenced, particularly, in his involvement with staff appointments. From a personal standpoint he does not recall any governor training being offered and he was totally unaware of the legal background to the roles and responsibilities of primary school governing bodies at that time. He also gained some experience, during 1988, of the power of local politicians, particularly in making head teacher and deputy head teacher appointments. The researcher's over-arching memory of that period was the ability of the head teacher to control and lead the governing body. The head teacher was in control of the pace of change, there was very little challenge to his views by the governors and that body had no independent data to scrutinise the performance of the pupils since the national Standardised Assessment Tasks (SATs), for

year 6 pupils, only commenced in 1996. It was accepted that the school was an 'outstanding' school and it may well have been but the criteria for this judgement would probably be based on a wide range of factors and be very different from the narrower focus of subsequent Ofsted-led criteria. This period of school governance, 1988 to 1995, was marked by the introduction of a national curriculum and the local management of schools. It preceded the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies, the national testing of children aged 11 in Mathematics, English and Science and the subsequent changes and pressures on the primary school curriculum.

In 2003 the researcher was asked to serve as the chair of governance of an inner-city primary school. He accepted this role, at a time when he was a principal lecturer in a university faculty of education, leading and managing four teacher training courses, and he served until 2007. The researcher was a very experienced committee chair but found that the climate and pressures of accountability for those involved in higher and primary school education were very different from 2003 to 2007 to that in 1988 to 1995. The school was involved in a number of Ofsted inspections and the governors, particularly the chair, were part of this inspection process. Teacher training courses were also under intense scrutiny by Ofsted so the writer was, in his full-time job, leading his academic team through similar inspection processes. This four-year term as chair of governors led the researcher to reflect upon his experiences centred on issues such as the following:

- Being chair of governance was extremely time-consuming and, at times, required more time than the researcher could find for the role given the pressures of his full-time employment.
- The role required extensive reading and the collection of much paperwork so that the researcher, as chair, was suitably informed.
- The role was stressful given that difficult decisions were required, sometimes involving the employment and futures of many members of staff. This was particularly so when disciplinary and employment law-related issues arose. The school staff now included not only teachers but also numerous support staff, including teaching assistants and administrators.
- There was so much business to be dealt with that it was very difficult to deal with it all in the normal one governor meeting, per term, lasting two-hours. Even when this was extended to two meetings per term, that is six per year, it created

problems since it was more difficult to obtain a good attendance from all governors.

- There was an increasing need for other sub-committee meetings e.g. curriculum, finance, buildings, health and safety, disciplinary and appointments. Each of these required meetings of one or two hours per term, sometimes more, and their minutes and decisions needed to be fed into the main governor meetings.

- Although training was available through the local authority governors' unit it seemed that not many fellow governors were able or willing to attend. The researcher attended some courses but found the delivery was often unsatisfactory.

- The researcher found that the contribution from some governors was limited and that there was a 'small core' of governors that he relied upon. It was extremely difficult to find the time to socialise or team-build, as one would do in a work place, in order to get to know individual governors.

- The national guidance on the law for school governors, updated and issued annually (for example DfES, 2007) was consulted, by the researcher, and found helpful but as the most important document of its type it seemed unnecessarily 'reader unfriendly' especially given the wide range of the readership.

The role of chair of governance appeared, therefore, to the researcher, even though he had wide experience in education, to be challenging, time-consuming and complex. He wondered how other governing bodies operated and how other chairs of governing bodies found their roles and responsibilities. Do chairs of governing bodies think that school governance is worth the time and effort? What do head teachers think about their governing bodies and how they operate? Does the 'strategic' role of governing bodies conflict with the 'day to day management role' of head teachers? Are head teachers willing to let the governors 'govern'? What training is available to governing bodies? What training is given to head teachers and their senior management teams about the roles and responsibilities of governing bodies? What challenges and tensions are faced by governing bodies?

In order to satisfy his curiosity it was clear that the researcher needed to find out what research had been carried out on school governance and on primary school governance in particular. However, there appeared to be relatively few research studies of school governance and especially of primary school governance. It has, in fact, been argued that studies of educational management and administration "…too often neglect the

framework of governance within which school leaders operate" (Glatter, 2002: 226) and a review of school governance reported that "…there has been limited research conducted specifically on school governors" (DCSF, 2010a: 6). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report, by Dean et al (2007), following an investigation of school governing bodies in three contrasting areas characterised by social and economic disadvantage. They found that these governing bodies often lacked the capacity to be effective and faced confusion about the real purpose of their work, for example, being happier to offer support rather than challenge. It was argued that whilst the role of governors has increased in complexity, particularly over the last 20 years, the state of governance in schools serving disadvantaged areas was "…decidedly mixed" (Dean et al, 2007: ix). These investigators argued for a national debate on school governance and proposed three possibilities for change: gradual improvement, structural change or more radical alternatives. This researcher noted that the report was focussed on governing bodies in disadvantaged areas and only 14 schools, both secondary and primary, were sampled. The context of the schools investigated was limited - only one being a faith school. Nevertheless, Dean et al (2007: 55) argued, persuasively, that whilst the school system had "…changed radically in recent decades, questions about school governance have been something of an afterthought." They suggested that there was an urgent need for a reconsideration of school governance and that a debate about the fundamentals was long overdue. At this time, the then Labour government's Children's Plan - Building, Brighter Futures (DCSF, 2007: 99) in fact revealed ideas to "…consult on reducing the size of governing bodies…" arguing, with no indication of the evidence, that smaller governing bodies tend to be more effective.

It was appropriate, therefore, in an attempt to clarify some of the issues raised above, to investigate the perceptions of head teachers and chairs of governance, in relation to a sample of primary school governing bodies, at a time when there has been considerable changes in the demands on governing bodies and when there are other changes planned in the primary school system, for example the development of trust schools, academies and free schools.

1.4   Aims of this Research

The intention of this programme of research, undertaken on a part-time basis, was to explore current practices and experiences in the governance of a sample of contextually different primary schools in England. The prime aim of the research was to contribute to knowledge and understanding of this aspect of school leadership, through analysis and synthesis of the literature and new evidence obtained by empirical research, so that governing bodies can be more effective.

The research programme aimed to address the following questions:

1. How do head teachers and chairs of governance understand, experience and respond to their roles and responsibilities within primary school governing bodies?

2. What are the patterns of relationships and organisational modes of primary school governing bodies?

3. What are the challenges, hindrances and possibilities in the effective operation of governing bodies, as perceived by key stakeholders?

4. What are the implications for the further development and improvement of primary school governance?

1.5   Emerging Themes

In reviewing the literature relevant to this study, four themes were identified. These themes were:

1. The civic role of governing bodies.
2. The function and operation of governing bodies.
3. Training and information sharing for and within governing bodies.
4. Challenges and tensions for and within governing bodies.

These themes, discussed further in Chapters 2 and 3, were used to structure the literature review, formed the basis of the interview schedule, the presentation of the data and the subsequent analysis.

1.6   Recent Research on School Governance

At this point it is to be noted that during the course of this present investigation there have been a number of research studies into school governance. Ranson (2011) argued that school governance matters and he provided evidence that there is a link between good governance and pupil achievements, as well as good teaching and school leadership and management. Significantly, James et al (2011a: 397) suggested that "… school governing has not received the kind of attention from scholars that it warrants…" despite its importance and responsibilities in many educational systems around the world. Additionally, Connolly and James (2011: 508) argued that there is evidence that "…the attitude and competence of actors in school governance are as important as structures" and that further research is needed to add to our understanding of both school governance and improved performance. Balarin et al (2008) pointed out that the research-based literature on school governors was not as extensive as the literature on other aspects of school organisation. The findings of these recent studies are discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Further, it is to be noted that the influential British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) launched a new research interest group on 'Governing and Governance in Education' at their 2011 international conference (www.belmas.org.uk/ accessed on 20th November 2011).

1.7   Outline of Methodology used in this Study

In seeking to explore current practices and experiences in the governance of primary schools, this study draws upon the perceptions of head teachers and chairs of governance from contextually different primary schools. Maximum variation sampling (Maykutt and Morehouse, 1994) was employed so that 20 schools (see Appendix 4) were selected, from primary schools in England, to represent, as far as possible, the full diversity of primary provision in terms of school size and type including inner-city, suburban, rural and a multicultural mix (from schools with a low percentage of ethnic minority pupils to those with a high percentage of ethnic minority pupils) and a range of religious denominations. The sample included high, medium and low achieving schools - school league tables and Ofsted reports being used to help assess the extent to which the sample of schools are representative of English primary schools.

It was judged appropriate to use a qualitative approach to the research - Robson (2002: 163) having contended that it is now "…considered respectable and acceptable in virtually all areas of social research…" to use designs based largely or exclusively on methods generating qualitative data. Individual, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews, each of around 50 to 70 minutes, were undertaken, mainly during the period February 2011 to June 2011, with the head teacher and chair of governance in each of the sample schools. The 40 semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewees to convey their experiences of primary school governance in their own terms – head teachers and chairs of governance being key personnel in the operation of governing bodies. Pilot studies, in a further small sample of four schools, had been carried out, in May and June 2010, to refine the interview questions and procedures.

All forty interviews were transcribed in full, by the researcher, prior to analysis. The data was analysed by the researcher and revealed emerging themes, patterns and trends. Documentation - the most recent Ofsted inspection report - was obtained for each of the sample schools. This documentary evidence was used to complement the interview data, gave a detailed picture of each school setting and provided a source of triangulation. The documentary evidence and interview transcripts enabled the collection of some data that were susceptible to basic numeric analysis, but elicited mainly qualitative reponses. Validity and reliability were addressed through careful construction of questions and piloting using the approaches suggested by Bryman (2004) and Robson (2002). The researcher sought to be ethically responsible "…at every stage of the research process…" (Silverman, 2006: 334) – the Liverpool John Moores University research ethics guidelines being followed at all times.

1.8   Rationale for this Study

The reasons for this study can be summarised:

1. School governance is considered to be of international and national significance but has received, to date, relatively little attention from researchers.
2. Over 300,000 school governors are considered to make an enormous voluntary contribution to the English education system and to the work

of over 23,000 individual schools. However, there has been limited research conducted specifically on school governance in England.

3. Little research has been undertaken related to the key stakeholders in school governance – that is the Chair of Governance and the Head Teacher.

4. When research has been undertaken on school governance, within the English school system, the sampling has often involved only secondary schools or some primary and secondary schools. Research studies need to be undertaken specifically related to a sample of English primary schools.

5. Previous studies on English primary school governance have often been conducted on a relatively narrow range of schools. Studies need to be undertaken on a wider contextual range of primary schools.

6. There is emerging evidence of a link between good governance and pupil achievement as well as good teaching, leadership and management. Research needs to be conducted to contribute to this debate given the current pressures for improvement within the English educational system.

7. There is evidence of great challenge and complex demands on governing bodies. Research is needed to establish how individuals, especially the chairs of governing bodies and head teachers perceive and cope with these demands.

8. There are likely to be increased demands on governing bodies within the English education system. It is important that there is up to date research evidence to inform their practice.

9. Previous research has indicated the need for further studies of school governing bodies in order to add to our understanding of this field. How individual governing bodies function is not well understood, more research is needed to probe their operation.

10. Some research evidence on school governance has been obtained in other countries. Research needs to be undertaken to ascertain if these findings can be generalised to the governance of English primary schools.

1.9   Summary of Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 has introduced and justified this research on primary school governance.

School governing is described as being important in the management of education systems around the world. In England, over 300,000 unpaid volunteers act as governors serving 23,000 schools and influence the education of over 7 million children. Making an enormous contribution to schools, governor responsibilities and duties are seen to be unprecedented in the voluntary sector. The task of governing schools, already complex and challenging, is said to become even more complicated and demanding as changes in the education system are implemented. Despite the importance and magnitude of their roles, school governors have attracted relatively little interest from educational researchers. This researcher's personal interests in school governance have been described above. His motivation and the origins for undertaking this research have been explained and the aims of this research, with a focus on the perspectives of head teachers and chairs of governance, are stated. Four themes emerged as a result of a review of the literature – these are briefly stated, as is their relationship to the interview schedule, to the research findings and to the analysis of the data. During the course of this present research a number of other studies on school governance were reported – these are briefly outlined in Chapter 1, with further detail given in the review of literature. An outline of the methodology used – a qualitative approach involving interviews of key stakeholders and the use of maximum variation sampling to identify twenty contextually different primary schools – is given. The chapter concludes with a summary of Chapter 1 and an overview of the whole study.

1.10   Overview of this Study

In Chapter 2 the research and professional literature relevant to this topic is reviewed and presented using four themes which were identified as being significant. The 'conceptual framework' of this study, represented in diagrammatic form, is presented in Chapter 2. The methodology used in this study is described in Chapter 3. This chapter includes discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the methods used in the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the investigation, grouped around the four themes identified in Chapter 2. These findings are analysed and discussed, in Chapter 5, under each of the four themes. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter of the thesis, presents the main findings of

this study and discusses the professional implications and recommendations for practice that have arisen. The status of the study, considering originality and contribution to knowledge, is discussed. Chapter 6 includes reflection on the research process used in this study and presents some possible ideas for future investigations into primary school governance.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Writing the review of literature commenced at an early stage in the research process and new literature was added throughout the research period in order to take account of the latest developments within the field of school governance. Moreover, some modifications, mainly additional references, were made to the literature review as the data emerged and during the subsequent analysis (Silverman, 2005). In reviewing the literature on primary school governance, four themes - all related to the research questions defined in Chapter 1 - were identified (Thomas, 2013). These themes, collectively, provided a logical and clear way to structure Chapter 2 (Hart, 2003) and formed the basis of the conceptual framework for the study (Burton et al, 2008). The four themes used to structure the literature review were:

1. The civic role of governing bodies.
2. The function and operation of governing bodies.
3. Training and information sharing for and within governing bodies.
4. Challenges and tensions for and within governing bodies

The interrogation of recent literature demonstrated the rapidly changing context of primary school governance as a result of reforms by successive governments leading to, for example, new types of schools and pressures on the long-standing stakeholder model of governance - considered, by many, as a unique form of local democracy. It was important, therefore, to review, under theme one, the literature on this emerging trajectory of change from the English post-war democratic, civic society to the developing neo-liberal corporate, civic society. The second theme – the function and operation of governing bodies – was central to this researcher's questions, as outlined in Chapter 1, about primary school governance. Whilst studies on primary school governance were found to be limited, the literature review, for this second theme, incorporated recent research findings and the methodologies used. The training of primary school governors, and how they received and shared information, emerged as the third theme underpinned by the increasing demands on school governance coupled with possible changes to the function of local authorities. Inequalities in the training of governing bodies, and in sharing information, leading, it was argued, to a possible diminishing of democracy. Finally, the review of the literature revealed that governing

bodies faced a further range of challenges and tensions including the recruitment of new governors, increased workload, complex demands from government, concerns about clerking and the development of new types of schools. These challenges and tensions were reviewed as the fourth theme.

Chapter 2 concludes with a diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework of the study and a summary of the review of literature. The four themes, stated above, were used subsequently, as suggested by Blaxter et al (2002) and Burton et al (2009), to structure the interview schedule and in the coding of the data (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 8), in the presentation of the data (Chapter 4) and in the subsequent analysis and discussion (Chapter 5). This approach was supported by Brundrett and Rhodes (2014: 84) who commented: "This 'system' is certainly the simplest...and is one that often underpins many professional research projects." They noted, however, that this approach is not always possible when, for example, the research aims are general and priority is given to themes emerging from the data.

2.2 THEME 1: THE CIVIC ROLE OF GOVERNING BODIES

2.2.1 Introduction

In this, the first section of Chapter 2, the research and literature relating to the theme of 'the civic role of governing bodies' is analysed and discussed. To begin, the public role of school governors is examined from the time of the 1944 Education Act to the 1988 Education Reform Act. Evidence is provided that an important House of Commons Committee saw school governance as a unique form of local democracy and accountability with a high level of commitment from those involved. However, there is further evidence that some educationalists considered that the 1988 Education Act – which introduced a national curriculum, national testing and local management of schools – dramatically changed the context in which primary schools operated and that this was even more marked by further changes by the New Labour government of 1997. Others supported this, arguing that the governance, administration and control of primary education has been one of the policy areas that has undergone the deepest changes in recent decades – with a move towards decentralised decision making and administration accompanied by greater national control in the form of standards, targets and assessments described as the 'state theory of learning', and so reducing the influence of Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Recent national documents were reviewed illustrating the

ways in which schools are now being encouraged to be independent of local authorities by becoming, for example, free schools, academies, trusts, chains of schools and federations. One researcher argued the case for governance at the school level, maintaining that these 'new' schools cannot be 'micro-managed' by central government. Evidence is provided that the development of academies, based on the concept of creating schools as small businesses, has created a democratic deficit – with a lack of transparency, no local elected scrutiny, no parental control and affects on other schools in the same community. Recent case studies are reviewed and illustrate these concerns over the democratic process. It is argued that the radical changes associated with the development of academies poses fundamental questions as to how we want to live together and develop our population as citizens, workers, users and custodians of our cultural, political, economic, social and intellectual resources. Evidence from other leading researchers maintained that the 'direction of travel', particularly with the development of academies, is away from locally elected people on governing bodies – the stakeholder model – and towards small boards of nominated non-executive directors and a diminishing role for the networks of Local Authorities (LAs, formerly LEAs) that have existed for over a century.

2.2.2 School Governance from 1944 to 2012

The development of the school governors' public role, from 1944 to 1998, has been documented by Earley and Creese (1998). The 1944 Education Act required all primary schools to have a Board of Managers and all secondary schools to have a Board of Governors. Schools could be clustered together under one body of governors or managers – local education authorities (LEAs) being influential in the appointment of individuals to these bodies. Governors and managers, however, had little responsibility for their schools – their role being generally a formal position. Demands for change and more public accountability led, in 1975, to a Committee of Enquiry chaired by Lord Taylor. It was recommended that every school should have a governing body, responsible for all aspects of the school's work, with equality of representation – the LEA, parents, staff and the local community – in an effort to establish a true partnership between the educational professional and the lay governors. The 1986 Education (no 2) Act implemented the recommendations of the Taylor report and ended party political control of governing bodies. The 1988 Education Reform Act produced more far-reaching change such as a

national curriculum and national testing at the end of each key stage. New arrangements – local management of schools – gave schools delegated budgets and new financial freedoms. Schools were also given the freedom to opt-out of local authority control, becoming 'grant-maintained' (GM) schools.

Following a wide ranging inquiry into school governance, the House of Commons (1999) concluded that in the majority of cases the then system of school governance was working well and did not need wholesale reform.   Significantly, they saw school governors as:

> …a large, usually unsung, army of volunteers whose contribution to the life of our schools has been too little appreciated. There is much to celebrate about the contribution made by our school governors. They represent a unique form of local democracy and accountability in one of our most important public services, bringing together as they do representatives of the 'consumers' (in the form of parents), teachers, staff and local community representatives (through those governors appointed by the LEA or foundation) (House of Commons, 1999: para 1).

They further argued that effective governing bodies bring benefits to the schools they serve in terms of school improvement as well as community involvement and accountability. School governing bodies were described as giving very high levels of commitment to the national education service (House of Commons, 1999: para 2).

However, Alexander (Ed., 2010: 32) referred to the comments of the then opposition party education shadow Jack Straw who, echoing the views of many critics, argued that the Conservative's 1988 Education Act would centralise power and control over schools, colleges and universities in the hands of the Secretary of State in a manner without parallel in the western world. Furthermore, Alexander (Ed., 2010: 32) argued that the context in which primary education operated was "…dramatically changed by the 1988 Act…" and that the centralisation became even "…more marked still when Jack Straw's party, by then rebranded as New Labour, took over in 1997."

These views were supported by Balarin and Lauder (2008) who proposed that the governance, administration and control of primary education in England has been one of the policy areas that has undergone the deepest changes in recent decades. They argued that since the rise of the Conservative government to power in the early 1980s there had been a move towards the idea of governance and more decentralised forms of decision-making and administration. However, they pointed out that while the official rhetoric

emphasised autonomy and participation, the move towards a governance model had been accompanied by greater control such as a National Curriculum, standards, targets and assessments. Balarin and Lauder (2008) referred to this centralised system as the 'state theory of learning', whilst the co-existence of such differing tendencies is described as a new model of 'decentralised-centralism'. This Conservative policy initiative was driven by the wish to make the public sector more efficient through a reduction of the state. Prior to this, school administration had largely been in the hands of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with very little central government involvement in school matters. Balarin and Lauder (2008) relate that, in an effort to break the monopoly of the state over education, administrative capacities were given directly to schools, so reducing the authority of the LEAs. The self-management of schools, growing private sector involvement, the introduction of market mechanisms and the introduction of choice policies (for example further choice over which school to attend) was accompanied by changes to the constitution of school governing bodies – the inbuilt majority of local politicians was removed and replaced by further representation of parents and local business people. Further tightening of central government control was to continue – for example, more control over teacher training and the replacement of the traditional Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

Despite considerable criticism of the Conservative education policies and some expectations of change with the advent of a New Labour government, Balarin and Lauder (2008: 3) reported that "…rather than moving back in terms of decentralisation and control policies, the government moved towards an enhancement of the latter." A series of new agencies including Ofsted, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and private companies radically altered the role of traditional actors and the way policies developed.

Whilst the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act increased LEA representation on governing bodies it was clear that the government regarded "…schools as the main drivers of their own development" (Balarin and Lauder, 2008: 4) with the LEAs working in partnership with them to provide support and challenge. Balarin and Lauder (2008: 5) commented that, with LEA control reduced and the shift towards the self-governance of schools, the role of governing bodies has becoming increasingly important. This was seen

to be in line with an international trend underpinned by the idea that school autonomy will lead to better school management and achievement. It also fits the 'New Public Management' model, which moves away from bureaucratic organisation and towards more 'fragmented service delivery'. It was assumed that, by incorporating leaders from the community and private organisations, school management would become stronger and more efficient (Balarin and Lauder, 2008)

Two documents showed the intention of national government to make schools even more independent of local authorities. Firstly, HM Government (2005: 4) expressed their aim to create:

> …a system of independent non-fee paying state schools, where schools can decide whether they wish to acquire a self-governing Trust or become a self governing Foundation school.

Secondly, a more recent White Paper (DfE, 2010) declared the government's intention to increase freedom and autonomy for all schools, to dramatically extend the academies programme, to allow the establishment of Free Schools and to promote inter-school collaboration through academy chains, multi-school trusts and federations. Although local authorities at present retain a strategic role − for example, supporting schools with school improvement and admissions policies − it is clear that their role has diminished considerably. Dean et al (2007) suggested that this showed the importance of school governance since 'independent' schools cannot be micro-managed by central government or by local authorities and the public has, they argued, a legitimate interest in the education system. Dean et al (2007: 1) described the governance role as having been carried out by "…an army of unpaid volunteers…" and continued:

> This represents a massive investment of what we might call civic capital. In purely financial terms, if governors were to be paid the going rate for their work, the annual charge on the public purse would run into many millions of pounds. Perhaps more important, if, as governments insist, schooling is the key to the life chances of individuals and the economic development of the country as a whole, then the quality of governance is crucial (Dean et al, 2007: 1).

Further, Dean et al (2007) maintained that only at the school level can ordinary citizens have an effective voice in how the education service is run. It is, they argued, only at the school level that education reforms can be made to work and the work of head teachers and staff be scrutinised and supported. It is to be noted that the DfES (2004) described

governors as equal partners in leadership with the head teacher and senior management team whilst, more recently, Ofsted (2011) depict school governors as complementing and enhancing school leadership.

2.2.3 Criticism of the Academies Programme

In a critical examination of the academies programme, developed under the New Labour governments (1997 – 2010), Gunter (2011a: 1) argued that*:*

> The modernization of the education system in England … is based on creating schools as small businesses regulated by a performance management regime. Such restructuring is about how successive UK governments have handled neoliberal challenges to the post-World War II welfare state in England…

She suggested that the New Labour academies programme had origins in the City Technology College (CTC) initiative of the previous Conservative governments (1979 – 97), intended, officially, to improve educational outcomes through extension of the market and creating more diversity in provision. However, Gunter (2011a) argued that, in reality, it was about major root and branch changes to the purposes of public education, involving dismantlement of the post-war settlement and restoring the dominance of private interest.

Gunter (2011a) documented the support for academies from successive Secretaries of State for Education. Academies were seen as different from other non-fee paying community schools because of their independence from local authorities and their direct funding by the Government. Gunter (2011a: 3) described this new independence whereby:

- Sponsors have responsibilitry for the management of their academies.

- Sponsors appoint a majority of the governors.

- Sponsors control the school estate.

- Sponsors are responsible for staff appointments, school expectations and the curriculum.

- Sponsors receive the school budget direct from government, without a top slice at the local authority level.

It was argued, by Gunter (Ed., 2011), that what is happening within academies relates directly to issues about the status and role of private interests in publicly funded education. Moreover, she explained that a democratic deficit hasbeen created since:

- The control of academies is outside of public accountability and they are not subject to local elected representative scrutiny.
- There are concerns over parents losing control over schools.
- There are concerns over the creation of an academy in a community and the consequent affect on other schools in the area.
- There is a lack of transparency in relation to the consultation process, the discussions and setting-up of academies.

Furthermore, Gunter (2011a: 17) proposed that the New Labour Academies Programme is important when examining "…the growth of neoliberal ideas and practices in the framing and delivery of public services such as education." She referred to the four models of governance identified by Newman (2001: 38):

1. Hierarchy – 'towards control, standardisation, accountability, based on formal authority'.
2. Rational goal – 'towards maximisation of output, economic rationalism, based on managerial power'.
3. Open systems – 'towards flexibility, expansion, adaptation, based on flows of power within networks'.
4. Self-governance – 'towards devolution, participation, sustainability, based on citizen or community power'.

Gunter (2011a: 14) concluded, following the conceptualization of the four models stated above, that the New Labour Academies Programme was:

> …based on a rejection of hierarchy and the marginalization of self-governance: the independence of the academy means that it seeks to be separate from the state and through control by sponsors the local community lacks the power to remove decision-makers at elections. The form of governance that seems to be emerging is a combination of localized within-school managerial power interrelated with sponsor-approved networks.

Gunter conceded that there are challenges to this since hierarchy has imposed curriculum changes, the local authorities are still involved in planning admissions, there are political

demands to prove academies are working and there are "…ongoing demands for academies to be subjected to the same local 'self-governance' control as mainstream schools are…" (Gunter, 2011a: 15). The development of the academies programme under New Labour can therefore be seen as complex and changing and as discussed above this continues under the new coalition conservative and liberal democrat government. Moreover, Gunter (2011a: 16) referred to the academies programme as "…clearly troubled territory…" requiring "…a thorough and scholarly mapping of activity and conceptual critical analysis of the provision of publicly funded education."

When considering the developing academies programme it is to be noted that a specialist in public law, Wolfe (2011: 21), has pointed out that the

> "…governance arrangements for, and the rights of parents and pupils at maintained schools are set down in acts of parliament, regulations (also known as statutory instruments), codes of practice, statutory guidance and non-statutory guidance" but that "…none of that applies to independent schools."

He argued that the legal control, and therefore the rights of pupils and parents, is very different and more limited in independent schools compared to maintained schools. Academies are, Wolfe (2011) states, in law, independent schools not maintained schools. Whilst maintained schools are operated by governing bodies, which are statutory corporations, an academy is operated by a private company (called the 'Academy Trust') created by a 'sponsor' (Wolfe, 2011). Waterman and Shaw (2010: 31) stated that an Academy Trust, under the provisions of the new coalition government's Academies Act 2010, will be constituted as a company limited by guarantee and be a confirmed charity – therefore required to comply with company, charity, education law and other legislation. From January 2011 an Academy Trust was deemed to be an 'exempt charity' and therefore not regulated by the Charity Commission but by the Financial Services Authority (an organisation that was abolished in 2012; the principal regulator for an Academy Trust is now the Department for Education). An Academy Trust is owned by its members ('Members') and is governed by its governors ('Governors') who are also directors of the company and trustees of the charity. Waterman and Shaw (2010: 31-32) pointed out specific provision within the Department for Education's Articles of Association ('Articles'; essentially forming the 'rule book' for the Academy Trust):

- The Articles do not specify how many governors from a school's governing body shall become Members and/or Governors. This is for each school to decide.

- The Academy Trust is required to be formed with at least three Members.

- The Secretary of State may appoint a Member (although doesn't normally do so).

- The Chair of the Governing Body is also a Member.

- The Members may appoint a number of Governors (to be specified in the Articles).

- The Governors may appoint academy employees as Governors but academy employees may not exceed more than one third of the total number of Governors.

- There must be at least two parent Governors.

- The local authority may appoint a Governor.

- The Principal/Head Teacher of the academy will be an ex-officio Governor.

- The Secretary of State may step-in and appoint any number of additional Governors where there are problems at the academy on a similar basis to its rights of step-in, in relation to a maintained school.

Given the above, it is perhaps not surprising that Waterman and Shaw (2010: 29) stated:

> The one thing that both the government and the opposition agreed on about the Academies Act is the radical impact it is likely to have on the education system in England. Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education was confident that the Act will herald a schools revolution, while Ed Balls, Shadow Secretary of State and former Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families fears that it is the most profoundly unfair piece of social engineering in this generation.

Following the establishment of a new Conservative-led coalition government the Secretary of State offered, in May 2010, all Ofsted-rated 'outstanding' schools the opportunity for automatic conversion to academy status and all other schools, including primary schools, were offered the opportunity to register their interest in gaining Academy status. The backing of a sponsor was no longer to be a requirement for academy status. The outcome, at the time of writing, was that 13% of primary schools have converted to academy status and 56% of secondary schools now have academy status (www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn06233.pdf downloaded on 1st January 2015). However, as Waterman and Shaw (2010) have commented, the growth in the number of academies – with the financial incentive of receiving the monies currently spent on their behalf by local authorities – has implications for the sustainability of local

authorities themselves. It may well be that a point will be reached when a local authority is unable to offer central services to any school. Croke (2011) has pointed out that the granting of academy status to a school means signing a seven-year contract (with no get-out clause should the school want to revert to maintained status), requires the buying-in of services previously provided by the local authority and will mean "… the work of the governing body is likely to be greater…" (Croke, 2011: 17) since they are the employer of the staff, have responsibility for the premises and have greater latitude over term dates, the length of the school day, staff pay and conditions of service.

2.2.4 Neoliberal and Civic Positions

Gunter (2011b) argued that there is a need to consider the emerging evidence related to the Academies Programme in order to clarify the relationship between the state, civil society and educational reform. She pointed out that initially we need to consider the purposes of schooling and particularly "…why should the population as a whole fund the education of children?" (Gunter, 2011b: 214). She suggested that whilst citizens do not routinely think of this everyday, the answers are located in how as a society we want to live together and develop our population as citizens, workers, users and custodians of our cultural, political, economic, social and intellectual resources. The Academies Programme, she argued, prompts such debate in particular related to the civic and the neoliberal positions. She continued:

> By civic I mean that learning has a purpose that is about both individual and social development, and is about the enculturation of the learner with core values regarding how their agency is in ongoing negotiation with wider structural responsibilities regarding their role as citizen. (Gunter, 2011b: 215).

In contrast, advocates of neoliberalism embrace privatisation and deregulation. They seek to increase the role of the private sector and self-reliance in modern society. So, Gunter (2011b) suggested, secondary education for all, comprehensive education and the expansion of higher education are all examples of projects resulting from the civic position. However, whilst Gunter recognised that the Academies Programme has connections with the civic position – for example the state is involved as an investor and a regulator – she argues that, on balance, the Academies Programme is "…a project that is deeply located in the value system of the neoliberal position where there is a clear

rejection of public institutions…" (Gunter, 2011b: 216). She described the Academies Programme as being based on "…private interests marginalizing the public domain…" (Gunter, 2011b: 217) and further argued that the Academies Programme illustrates a failure to engage in democratic renewal since Local Authorities are being excluded, with control being handed to a hierarchy of public institutions – for example the Department for Education, 10 Downing Street, the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (NCSL) and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). New power elites are seen to be emerging in the form of academy chains as well as looser networks and alliances with the SSAT and NCSL and through business and community networks. In Gunter's (2011b: 227) view the Academies Programme is "…an elite political project masquerading as benevolence integral to improving people's lives…" and, to her "…it seems that publicly funded education is being dismantled…" not "…through rapid revolution but incrementally through legislation."

Gunter (2011b: 228-229) referred to the policies of the new Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government and their clear commitment to extend the role of private interests in educational provision (see comments related to the recent White Paper (DfE, 2010) above) and to open up academy status to all primary and special schools, so that they can have:

- freedom from local authority control;
- the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff;
- freedom from following the national curriculum;
- greater control of their budget; and
- greater opportunities for formal collaboration with other public and private organizations.

Furthermore, they will have the freedom to spend the money the local authority currently spends on their behalf and be able, if they wish, to change the length of school terms and school days. These proposals coupled with the Free Schools policy (see above) - where it is contended that parents, charities, teachers, businesses and universities wish to establish schools outside of local authority control - caused Gunter to comment that what is being proposed is "…a mass exodus from local authority control without public consultation" (Gunter, 2011b: 229). School governors are at the heart of the decision to adopt academy status, however, it is not clear, especially given the speed of change and the lack of research, whether they are aware of the implications for schools and Local Authorities.

2.2.5   Concerns about a Democratic Deficit

A number of studies reveal concerns over democratic participation when academies have been established. Hatcher (2011) provided a case study of developments related to the establishment of an academy, sponsored by a charitable trust, in Tamworth during the period 2007-2009. Hatcher (2011: 50) detailed a disturbing series of events, within the county council, which enabled:

> …the handover of schools which are public assets, accountable, at least to some extent, to local communities both through elected local government and through representation on governing bodies, to private owners and managers without local accountability.

An 'insider research' case study by Elliott (2011) revealed a similar democratic deficit in the establishment of a school academy in January 2008. Elliott (2011: 63) concluded that his case study:

> …tells a story about how a local school community was rendered over a period of twelve months (2007) to influence a decision that will now shape its future and that of its children…the New Labour government enabled 'structures of domination' to come into play to effectively stifle local voices.

In a study of academy consultation meetings – involving school governors, members of staff, parents, students and community representatives – across three contrasting sites, Purcell (2011) reported that, in the absence of strong anti-academy campaigns, consultation meetings were found to focus on practical and individual concerns – what would the academy be like when it is open – rather than encouraging deeper democratic participation, for example whether it should be opened. The Local Authority representatives, delivering a policy that may have conflicted with their own ideological perspectives, found themselves mediating between central government and local people with the financial ramifications of not converting to academy status providing a strong steer.

However, Rowley and Dyson (2011) suggested that it is not inevitable that sponsors will act in ways that do not reflect the public interest. They present, as an example, the case of an academy sponsored by social housing landlords with the aim of improving pupils' attainment, providing a range of services for the children and their families and, therefore, building a sustainable community. They argued that:

> …academies have happened, are happening…it may be important to identify and critique their problematic aspects, it may also be advisable to learn from the unique experiments they offer (Rowley and Dyson, 2011: 91).

The "…entrepreneurial attitude…" to a "…range of organizational, curricular and human resource issues and to the almost total absence of restrictions…" and the need "…not to accept 'ordained' norms…" are said by Daniels (2011: 99 and 103), an academy head teacher, to be a great advantage for academies over maintained schools.

In an overview of the findings from a five-year evaluation of the first 27 academies in England– mainly secondary but two all-age (primary through to secondary) – Larsen et al (2011) found, of relevance to this study of primary school governance and to the views of Gunter (Ed., 2011) expressed above, that sponsors of multiple academies:

> …typically had a central trust which oversaw the management, strategic planning and accountability for all of the academies within their group. This model provided the benefits of belonging to a 'family' of schools, while allowing for local variation and representation. In the early stages of the evaluation there was a lack of clarity around individual local school and community input into governance in some of the academies that belonged to a group. However, over the course of the evaluation there was greater clarity and inclusion of staff, parents and community representatives on the governing body became more usual…(Larsen et al, 2011: 107).

Some of these early academies were challenged to involve and engage parents (in particular) in the life of the academy, as well as engaging with the local community of schools and the wider community. It is to be noted, however, that Larsen et al (2011: 107) state that these early academies "…were opening in a dynamic policy context with a high level of political and public scrutiny…" and that further investigations are necessary, over a longer term, to examine and report upon a broad range of issues.

In a quantitative study of 24 schools converted to academies between 2002 and 2006 Gorard (2011) found that only around five appeared to be gaining appreciably higher results for their students than in previous years (including those when not an academy), suggesting to Gorard (2011: 132) "…that the programme is a waste of time, effort and energy…". He argued that the money involved could have been spent differently – spent on refurbishing the most deprived schools or used to follow the most deprived students to whichever school they attend.

Wrigley (2011), also, reviewed the data on academic achievement in academies and demonstrated the paucity of evidence to underpin governmental optimism, arguing that poverty remains the prime cause of school failure requiring "… new thinking well beyond the limited imaginations of the school improvement and school effectiveness paradigm…" (Wrigley, 2011: 145). It was argued, by Ball (2011), that academies are indicative of a significant shift in the organizing principles of state services and of public sector governance. Ball (2011: 146-147) described academies as:

> … an experiment in and a symbol of education policy beyond the welfare state and an example and indicator of more general turbulence taking place in public sector governance and regulatory structures…a self-conscious attempt to promote new policy narratives, entrepreneurism and competiveness…new values and modes of action are installed and legitimated and new forms of moral authority established, and others are diminished or derided.

Moreover, Ball (2011: 147) pointed to what he called a process of "destatization" whereby there is a de-construction of the welfare state education system leading to a reculturing and re-invention of public sector institutions – so that tasks and services previously undertaken by the state are now being done by "others", typically involving competition, choice and performance-related funding – with the increasing marginalization of local government, professional organisations and trade unions. The Academies Programme, he suggested, is not a careful and pre-planned process of reform but involves "…a great deal of muddling through and trial and error and, as a result, different and changing interpretations of policy by key policy actors" (Ball, 2011: 149). Whilst recognising that the state still retains the capacity to steer policy, Ball (2011: 157-158) proposed that there is "…in some ways a new form of state…" with "… great liquidity, intertwining, blurring and instability in the processes of governance".

However, Goldring and Mavrogordato (2011) argued that, throughout the world, the boundaries between the public and private have now become blurred, especially in relation to social services including education. They stated:

> It is no longer the case that public organizations are exclusively managed, financed and governed by public entities, nor is it true that private entities have no forms of public engagement or oversight. Some refer to this as the 'mixed economy' while others refer to these hybrid models as the 'new public management'. In the public sector, the new public management includes a new focus on standards and measures of performance, private sector style of management and hiring, efficient and effective allocation of resources,

competition, autonomy and decentralization, and rewards linked to outcomes (Goldring and Mavrogordato, 2011: 195).

As an example, Goldring and Mavrogordato (2011) referred to the 'charter schools' of the United States as part of this new public management in education. They argued that these schools – publicly funded with an independent board of overseers or directors and receiving a contract or 'charter' from an authorizer (such as a state, local school district, university, municipal body or special-purpose board) to operate a school – provided a source of learning for academies in England. They pointed to research claiming increased parental engagement with charter schools but concluded that despite "…a multitude of examples of new public management in education across the globe...not one case has proven to be an education panacea…" (Goldring and Mavrogordato, 2011: 197).

In examining government policy on academies through the lens of governance, Glatter (2011) documented that recent research has shown, in relation to public services, that the UK is rated low in terms of democratic quality compared to other countries. It is suggested that power has been taken much further away from citizens and that this is relevant to the development of academies which, it is argued, are political in intent as a consequence of central government's long campaign to marginalise local authorities. Glatter (2011: 160) indicated that public sector organizational reform is "…exceptionally easy…" for politicians in the UK – as a result of the lack of constitutional restraints such as federal structures or proportional voting and the multiplicity of consultants and special units dedicated to the promotion of reform. He pointed out that a "… particularly puzzling feature of the school diversity policy, of which academies have become an important part, is the lack of evidence of public or parental demand for it" (Glatter, 2011: 167). Glatter argued that whilst there is evidence of upward accountability to central government there is "…much less evidence of downward accountability to the local community and stakeholders" (Glatter, 2011: 169).

At this point, it is interesting to note the views of Caldwell (2011: 182-183) who referred to England as a "low trust" country - that is, there has been a loss of trust in traditional organisational forms - with a moderate to strong demand for alternatives (although he provides no evidence for this rating) to traditional schooling. Finland, with high educational standards, is seen as a "high trust" country to the extent that there are no national tests, teachers are free to use their own professional judgement and there are few

private schools and no schools similar to academies. Caldwell argued that the Academies Programme is a pragmatic response, to concerns expressed about schooling, rather than a neoliberal project.

Glatter (2011), however, suggested that the elite private (independent) school sector in England has been pivotal in the doctrine of the importance of "self-government" but proposed that it is "…doubtful whether school self-government is the elixir that policy appears to imply…" (p.161). Further, he maintained, the differential in resources across schools, including class size, intensive exam preparation and differences in background of the intake are more important than 'branding' using 'academy', 'foundation' or 'trusts'. Moreover, Glatter (2011: 166-167) queried the attraction of the "academy chain" concept, in which one organisation is responsible for a number of academies, saying that "…the school chain concept raises acute questions of governance…perhaps the most significant issue would concern local accountability…". He postulated that the head offices of chains would be likely to be distant from the social, economic and geographical communities in which the schools were located and that this implied that substantial control being exercised remotely, well beyond the level both of the school and of the locality. Glatter (2011) continued:

> The consequence of the development of chains seems likely to be the further dilution of the local empowerment (LE) model of governance, in which the school is viewed explicitly as a one of a 'family' of schools, as part of a local educational system and as a member of a broader community in which there are reciprocal rights and obligations. (p.167).

School chains, especially their impact on the governance of the wider system both locally and nationally, need to be, Glatter (2011) maintained, an urgent priority for research. In his view schools funded from the public purse should not attempt to mimic the governance set-up of private schools since, he argued, their context and their accountabilities are entirely different.

In commenting upon the present government's encouragement of academies Brundrett (2012: 223) stated:

> Such localised management would seem to run counter to all of the international evidence from the ever-growing body of school effectiveness and improvement research which suggests that schools do best when they cooperate. Equally, one might counter the argument about the benefits of enhanced local management by asking how schools can possibly get better

by, in effect, removing the traditional network of support provided by Local Authorities that has existed for over a century.

He continued, referring to the concept of private chains of schools and to the present Secretary of State being "…actually relaxed about organisations taking charge of large elements of the education system on a profit-making basis" (Brundrett, 2012: 224) but pointed out that:

> …many would argue that there is something cherished about the state education system and say that the idea of making money out of the education of children is morally or socially inappropriate.

Brundrett contended that the social collectivism of schooling in the form of Local Authorities – which were locally, politically accountable – is being replaced by a system of commercial collectivism.

2.2.6 Plural, Corporate and Self-Governing Ownership and Regulation

In their analysis of school governance Ranson and Crouch (2009) contended that there is a distinctive trajectory of change in the growth of partnership governance, the expansion of professional power at the expense of elected volunteers, and the corporatising of school ownership. The direction of travel in recent years, they showed, has been to expand the sector of self-governing schools, independent of local government, though continuing to receive funds direct from the State. This reference to the State implying that the schools will remain in the public sector though not provided by the administrative apparatus of the public sector (i.e. central or local government). Ranson and Crouch (2009: 48) argued:

> Yet if schools acquire foundation status and create an independent trust often supported by private or voluntary interests, then it is reasonable to ask whether the schools remain in the public service or have transmuted into the corporate sector. Trust and academy schools have become the vehicles for new forms of ownership of schools.

They continued (Ranson and Crouch, 2009: 48):

> The nature of governing schools is, we propose, being re-configured in its practices, structures and cultural codes. At the level of the institutional ownership a system of plural, corporate and self-governing ownership and regulation will replace a unitary state system of governance.

So Ranson and Crouch (2009) described a system which, since the 1944 Education Act, has placed the governance of schools in the hands of a council of locally elected people, supported by an experienced professional bureaucracy, the local education authority, with a committee of elected councillors, being replaced by self-governing trusts led by corporate sponsors. Further, their research findings revealed that at the level of the school there is pressure, from some school leaders and from some in Whitehall, for an executive board of governors or trustees to replace the democratic stakeholder model that elects parents and teachers to a governing body of representative interests. The emphasis being on a smaller board of nominated and appointed non-executive directors with the intention of bringing dimensions of social capital to the school, particularly in the area of the experience of running businesses. The research of Ranson and Crouch (2009) further found that, where clusters of schools had been established, governing committees were being formed and led by professional partnerships – parents and school governors may be included but not as a controlling public interest. They were appointed, rather than elected, by the professional leaders of their schools. Ranson and Crouch (2009: 49) commented:

> These changes in the governance of schools exemplify a wider transformation in the governance of civil society from a local, public to a corporate civil society.

Accordingly, Ranson and Crouch (2009) maintained that the English post-war world sought to constitute a political order of democratic civil society based upon the public values of justice and equality of opportunity in order to change class disadvantage and class division. Public goods were conceived as requiring collective choice and action. Therefore, a unitary framework – central and local governance – provided cohesive systems of administrative planning (the LEA) and institutional organisation (the school). A key organising principle of governing civil society was the importance of specialist professional knowledge in delivering public services at the level of the LEA and the school. Even when in 1986 the Conservative Government reformed school governing bodies, by including elected parent representatives, they strengthened the democratic base of school governance which was, in turn, accountable to democratic, public authority at the level of the LEA. Moreover, Ranson and Crouch (2009: 50) argued that:

> The mode of authority informing local, civic governance is judgement about the public good, the good of all, formed by the people of a locality. Public goods and public decisions acquire legitimacy when they are based on

collective, public agreement and are accountable to the public. Because public goods require consent, it is rational to develop institutional arrangements and establish practices of participation and deliberation that enable learning about the expressed needs and wishes of families and communities. The judgement of the people is regarded as an essential and valued contribution to the process of deliberation and public choices to be made.

Consequently, when governance is responsive to the voice of people from a locality, taking into account their expressed needs, they are, Ranson and Crouch (2009) suggested, likely to feel engaged and to participate in the life of the school or the community. Governance, therefore, is more likely to succeed in its purposes when it includes and deliberates with, rather than subordinates, its public. The cultural code of public governance is thus accountable participation and practice.

In the view of Ranson and Crouch (2009) the corporate, civil society model celebrates *diversity* of particular interests and ethos, in contrast to the authority of *universal* purposes expressed by the local, public civil society model. Self-governing trusts, driven by a charitable sponsor or belief systems of a faith or other private interests, will build up chains of schools not based on place or locality but on affiliation to the informing ethos. The argument being that if this 'ethos' is passionate about learning then this will communicate itself to children and generate motivation to learn. This commitment, it would be argued, will bring greater benefits than the traditions of professional vocation described above. Practices of charismatic leadership will be employed - the directors of Trusts and head teachers embodying inspiring, charismatic, transformational leadership - in seeking to overcome the purported failures of the traditional national and local state partnership. The unifying authority of public purpose is replaced by the disparate authority of charitable or corporate purpose – these voluntary amalgamations being contingent upon affiliation or acquisition rather than association with place. Ranson and Crouch (2009: 51) reasoned:

> By implication, therefore, it can also leave to chance the kind of education that children and young people will receive, depending on the contingent distribution of institutional trusts and chains available in a locality. A key distinction between local and corporate civil society is thus the status of arbitrariness. Does randomness matter, or does the purpose and organisation of education require forms of necessity?

Although education policy appears, from the above, to be divided over two very different strategies Ranson and Crouch (2009) contended that they could, from another perspective, be constructed as perfectly consistent. They argued that the State could be seeking to regulate different class interests and concerns. One strategy is trying to satisfy advantaged middle class parents whilst the other strategy is seeking to enhance the life chances of the disadvantaged.

2.3 THEME 2: THE FUNCTION AND OPERATION OF GOVERNING BODIES

2.3.1 Introduction

In this the second section of the review of literature, research relating to the theme of 'the function and operation of governing bodies' is discussed. The section begins by discussing the role of a primary school governing body as a 'corporate body' and gives an insight into some of the specific legal responsibilities of the chair of governors. Evidence is provided stating the importance of the chair of governors and how this role is likely to be even more important and significant as a result of recent governmental legislation. The key areas of governing body functions are listed and evidence provided as to how concern has been expressed over the increasingly demanding, and perhaps daunting, workload required of governing bodies with some governors and head teachers not clear as to the role of the governing body. There is some discussion, in this section and later in this chapter, relating to the stakeholder model of school governance as the custodian of community interests. Insight into how governing bodies operate is provided by reviewing recent major research projects into school governing bodies. In these studies the benefits, offered to schools by having governing bodies, are described and the importance of the relationship between the head teacher and the chair of governors is stated. There is evidence that governing bodies operate in different ways and that this has implications for school performance. This section argues that school governance is seen by recent research studies to be important – perhaps the largest collective voluntary endeavour in the country – and that the lack of a capable governing body is a substantial disadvantage for a school. Evidence is further provided to show that research into the

function and operation of governing bodies is limited. This section concludes by reviewing some of the recent literature relating to the strategic role of governors.

2.3.2 A Corporate Body

School governors are members of a school governing body. This is known as a 'corporate body' since it has a legal identity that is separate from the members. Consequently, individual governors are generally protected from personal liability – provided they act honestly, reasonably and in good faith – as a result of the governing body's decisions and actions. Individual governors, including the elected chair and the head teacher, have no power or right to act on behalf of the governing body except where the whole governing body has delegated a specific function to that individual or where regulations specify a function is to be exercised in a particular way (see below). The school head teacher can choose to be a governor or not – most choose to be part of the governing body and take a central part in meetings (James et al, 2010). At present, for most primary schools the school governors are drawn from different parts of the community – the 'stakeholder model' - the intention being to ensure that the governing body has sufficient diversity of views and experiences. However, governors from a particular category – for example parents or staff governors – do not represent that group and are not required to report back to them. The governing body must appoint a chair and vice-chair at its first meeting of the school year or if the post becomes vacant at its next meeting (Department for Education, 2012). The chair of the governing body carries some specific legal responsibilities relating to the performance of the school, the exclusion of pupils and staff discipline. This role-holder also has emergency powers to act without the authority of the governing body "…if a delay in exercising a function is likely to be seriously detrimental to the interests of the school" (James et al 2012: 4). James et al (2012: 4) further commented

> Clearly, the role of the ChGB (Chair of Governing Body) of schools in England is important, and recent and forthcoming legislation, which will change the educational landscape in England, is likely to augment its importance.

Further, James et al (2012) described the conversion of schools to academy status, the development of chains of academies and federations of a variety of kinds and the scaling back of the role of the local authority in supporting schools as all having very significant implications for school governing and, therefore, the role of the ChGB. They welcomed

the intention of the government, as set out in the 2010 White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching', to offer high-quality training for chairs of governance and reflected that this may be due, in a new era, to the growing importance and enhanced significance of the role.

2.3.3 Governing Body Responsibilities and Functions

When considering the responsibilities of school governing bodies, James et al (2010) testified, that over the last 20 years, attempts in statute and guidance to clarify the tasks and responsibilities of school governing bodies have led to a large number of definitions and specifications. A recent report from a Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (DCSF, 2010a) affirmed that the Government was appreciative of governors who continued to give their time and energy to the voluntary work of serving on school governing bodies. It was reported that many governors have expressed concern over the increasing workload on governing bodies. It was agreed that the duties of school governors are demanding and that in the last two decades there has been increasing delegation of funding and responsibilities from local education authorities to individual schools. Many of those responsibilities rested with governing bodies as the accountable body for their schools. This report, 'The 21st Century School: Implications and Challenges for Governing Bodies' (DCSF, 2010a), provided the most recent attempt to "…indicate the key areas of governing body functions" (DCSF, 2010a: 10). These functions (statutory duties) are listed, in an abbreviated form, below:

- The constitution, functions and membership of governing bodies.
- The conduct of the school and to promote high standards of educational achievement.
- The control of school premises.
- The determination of school session times.
- The right to a delegated school budget and expenditure for community use.
- The provision of religious education.
- The employment and dismissal of staff (there are additional provisions for staffing at foundation or voluntary schools with religious character).
- Requirements related to reporting to parents and having a complaints process in place.
- The provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

- The behaviour, discipline and welfare of pupils including home-school agreements.
- Admissions.
- Consultation with pupils.
- The preparation of a post-OFSTED plan.
- Religious worship.
- Charging.
- The setting of targets for pupil attainment.

Additionally, foundation governors of a Voluntary-Aided school with a religious character must preserve and develop this character and ensure compliance with the trust deed. Governors also have powers relating to:

- Innovation.
- The formation of companies.
- Governing body collaboration or federation.
- The provision of community facilities.
- Publishing proposals to make alterations to the school. Voluntary and foundation school governing bodies can publish proposals to close the school.

Amongst the functions which cannot be delegated are:

- Head teacher and deputy head teacher appointments.
- Consideration about forming, leaving or joining a federation.
- Drawing up an instrument of governance.
- Appointing (and removing) the chair and vice-chair.
- Appointing (and dismissing) the clerk to the governors.
- Holding a full governing body meeting at least three times in the school year.
- Appointing (and removing) community or sponsor governors.
- Consideration of the delegation of functions to individuals or committees
- To regulate governing body procedures, where they are not set out in law.
- To suspend a governor.
- Decisions to change the name of the school.
- Decisions to confirm serving notice of discontinuance of the school.

All governors are further required to complete, annually, the Register of Business Interests in order to comply with the School Finance (England) Regulations 2008. It is to be noted that the Ministerial Working Group (DCSF, 2010a: 10) recognised that the above lists of duties and powers "…are not exhaustive but indicate the key areas of governing body functions" and noted that whilst "…this may seem like a daunting set of responsibilities…" governing bodies should not be involved in the day to day management of their schools – that being the domain of head teachers and senior leadership teams.

2.3.4 Role Clarification

Ofsted figures for the year 2008 to 2009, as reported by DCSF (2010a) in a review of school governance arrangements, indicated that school governance was judged to be good or better in 70% of schools but only satisfactory in 28% and said to be unacceptably weak in 2% of schools (the percentages referring to secondary, primary and special schools). This review (DCSF, 2010a) was established following the then government's document 'The Children's Plan' (DCSF, 2007) which set out proposals for the development of children's services up to 2020 including the suggestion that there was a need for smaller governing bodies and for clarification of their strategic role (both discussed later in this chapter). The DCSF (2010a: 6) review acknowledged the importance of school governors by stating:

> There are in excess of 300,000 school governors in England. Along with charity trustees, school governors are one of the largest groups of volunteers and one of the best examples of civic engagement in the country. School governors perform a uniquely valuable job in helping to ensure our children learn in a safe, stimulating and highly professional environment. Over the course of the last 25 years, governors have taken on more and more responsibility, their role increasing in importance as schools have gained more and more independence from local authorities. Governing bodies are an integral part of school leadership…

However, the House of Commons (1999: para 8) reporting on school governance, found, from their evidence, that many governors and head teachers were not always confident that they knew exactly what the governing body's role should be and there were frequent calls for greater clarity in this area – governors and others wanted more 'user-friendly' guidance on what their job entailed and how they would know when they were doing the job well. This Select Committee, whilst accepting that the role of governing bodies is

well-defined in law recommended that high quality guidance needed to be developed and made available, so providing an interpretation of their statutory role in a form suitable for all governors. One governor was said to have described the role of governing bodies as a 'mish-mash' of responsibilities. Others recommended that governors should be issued with a clear job description, a code of good practice and a code of conduct. The more recent research of Balarin et al (2008: 49) (further details are given below) reported, also, that there was concern about the lack of clarity in relation to the role of governance – especially in the way it was set out in the regulations and legislative guidance. Concern was expressed over whether the government had a clear expectation of what governance should be and what governors should do. This research further reported that many of their interviewees felt that the lack of clarity had resulted in school governing being undertaken in a range of ways and to the whole process of governing being more complicated than it needed to be. There was concern over the overloading of responsibilities and how this might be to the detriment of the strategic, monitoring and scrutinising role – governors being drawn into a more operational role.

2.3.5 Custodians of Community Interest

Ranson and Crouch (2009) reported that the 1986 Education Act structured school governing bodies on the principle of partnership between all groups with a 'stakeholder' interest in the school – parents, teachers and support staff would be elected, other governors would be appointed by the local authority and sought from the local community including businesses. Everyone was to be regarded as equal but they were not to regard themselves as representatives or delegates of their stakeholder constituencies but rather to bring "…an understanding of a perspective to a corporate body within which they would form common membership" (Ranson and Crouch, 2009: 53). They continued:

> The principle underlying the constitution of such stakeholder governing bodies has been that schools will only work well when the different constituencies which have an interest in the success of the school are provided with a space to express their voice and reach agreement about the purpose and practices that will shape the education of children in the school. The function of the governing body was to have regard for the overall strategic direction of the school acting as the trustee of the community while taking into account national and local policies. (Ranson and Crouch, 2009: 53)

So the governing body was seen to be the custodian of community interests – ensuring that developments and changes proposed by the school are in line with community aspirations and needs. However, as discussed later in this chapter, the 'stakeholder model' of governance has been challenged in recent years and some alternative models have been proposed.

2.3.6 Improving Governing Body Effectiveness

An 11 month research project to investigate the composition of school governing bodies, their effectiveness and ways in which they might be improved was reported by Scanlon et al (1999). This project employed 3 main data collection methods: a large scale national questionnaire survey of head teachers, chairs of governance and governors; a small exploratory study in 44 schools and nine case studies of effective governing bodies. Approximately 2,750 governors – including chairs of governing bodies, heads and teachers - from a total of 672 schools were involved in the research. This research found that there was a clear association between effective schools and effective governing bodies. There were considerable benefits to be derived by a school – in particular to its head teacher – from having an effective governing body. Scanlon et al (1999) established that a positive attitude towards the governing body on the part of the head teacher was a crucial factor in its effective operation and its chances of ever becoming effective. Without the cooperation and encouragement of the head teacher they found that it was difficult for a governing body to fulfil its responsibilities. For example, the case study heads were seen as: 'open', 'willing to listen' and 'share information'. The relationship between the head and the governors in effective governing bodies was described as: 'professional' and 'not too cosy' and one where trust and support were key features and where governors were able to challenge and question where necessary.

It was reported, by Scanlon et al (1999), that the chairs of governing bodies were usually the most experienced and more senior governors. Generally, they were highly qualified with experience outside of the education sector and the research found that there was a high level of satisfaction between heads and chairs of governors with regard to their working relationship. Scanlon et al (1999: 2) claimed that:

> Having a skilled and committed chair was found to be an important factor in governing body effectiveness. It is difficult for a governing body to improve or become effective if the role of the chair is poorly enacted. The chair needs

to be able to build a good relationship with the head, while at the same time enabling other governors to play key roles in the work of the governing body.

The vice-chair was also considered important and the chair, vice-chair and the head were seen as key motivators for the rest of the governing body. The chairs, however, stressed the importance of involving all governors in order to avoid creating a 'two-tier' governing body. The case study respondents emphasised the need for efficient working arrangements and committee structures to facilitate the efficient use of governors' limited time and for the governing body to operate successfully. The use of committees was found to be widespread amongst governing bodies. Effective team work was found to be crucial for the efficient operation of governing bodies. Within all of the case study schools there was a high level of governor commitment – many of the governors having long-standing relationships with their schools. This was seen as a positive factor in creating a supportive atmosphere for the work of the professionals. Commitment was shown, for example, by the amount of time governors put into their role. Chairs and head teachers were in frequent contact with each other outside of the formal meetings of the governing bodies. Many governing bodies linked governors to curriculum areas which enhanced understanding and relationships with school staff. However, even in some case study schools, Scanlon et al (1999: 2) found that "…there was still a gap in understanding and contact between teachers and school governors…" and that "…this needs to be addressed if the governing body is to be seen as contributing to school effectiveness in a more direct way."

 The case study schools did, Scanlon et al (1999: 3) reported, operate a sensitive and professional approach to school visits and monitoring. One case study school had a code of conduct for governors. Governors were carefully selected, so ensuring continued effectiveness. It was further reported that governors tend to have relatively high levels of education and professional qualifications, exhibit high levels of commitment and bring valuable experience to the role. Lack of time, the volume and complexity of the work and lack of funding for the governing body were amongst the factors mentioned as preventing governing body effectiveness. Suggestions for improving governing body effectiveness included additional training (see below), payment for governors or paid time off work, more school visits and clarification of the governor's role. Scanlon et al (1999: 4) reported:

> The research findings show that governing bodies offer a number of benefits to schools and that there is an association between effective schools and effective governing bodies. Where governing bodies are working well they are characterised by commitment, cooperation and 'professionalism'. Although governors are lay volunteers, their work is of such importance in the life of schools, that it is essential that they bring rigour and a professional attitude to their tasks…

Scanlon et al (1999: 4) found that effective governing bodies included head teachers who wanted them to work well; the chairs and governors were skilled and committed and good working relationships existed. Furthermore, the governors operated as teams and developed positive relations with their school.

2.3.7 How Governing Bodies Operate

Further insight into how governing bodies operate was provided by Ranson et al (2005a) in a national study of school governance in Wales. Ten Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were studied and to be representative these included three LEAs in rural areas, three in industrial valley areas, two in urban areas and two in border areas. Eight schools – four primary and four secondary – were studied in each LEA. Interviews were held with each head teacher and chair of governance. Questionnaires were administered to all members of the eighty governing bodies. Additionally, three schools within each LEA were selected for more focused case study research of good governance. Structured interviews were held with each governing body member as well as key school senior management team members. Ranson et al (2005a) found that the governing bodies exhibited very different kinds of structure and practice. They were able to distinguish four distinctive types of governing body (see Figure 1, below):

1. Governance as a *deliberative forum* where members, often parents, are gathered and led by the head teacher as the professional leader. The head teacher determines and leads the discussions but the members do not feel they can question the authority of the head. They may inquire about aspects of the school's progress.
2. Governance as a *consultative sounding board* with the head teacher, the principal professional, providing strategies and policies for the governors to discuss. The head brings policies to the board for their consent and authorisation and occasional adaptation but Ranson et al (2005a: 311) comment "…it is clear that the head teacher rules."

3. Governance as an *executive board* with a partnership between the school and the governors and particularly between the head and the chair with the former leading 'primus inter pares'. The board may take overall responsibility for the business aspects of the school – budget, staffing and buildings. The head takes responsibility of curricular and pedagogic aspects of the school. The board does, however, take a strong role of scrutiny over school performance as well as policies and financial issues; with a strong structure of subcommittees and considerable delegation of powers which will typically be ratified by the full board. Such boards comprise a number of professionals and business people who bring social capital (see discussion below about governance capital) to the governing body.

4. Governance as a *governing body* occurs in those schools where the governing body takes, according to Ranson et al (2005a: 311), overarching responsibility for the conduct and direction of the school. The head will be a strong professional leader, but a member rather than leader of the governing body that acts as a corporate entity. The agenda and the meeting will be led by the chair. The language of the head will communicate a different relationship; "Would the governors like to consider such and such" rather than "I strongly propose the policy should be." There will be systematic processes of scrutiny, but what distinguishes the governing body is the strategic leadership of the school.
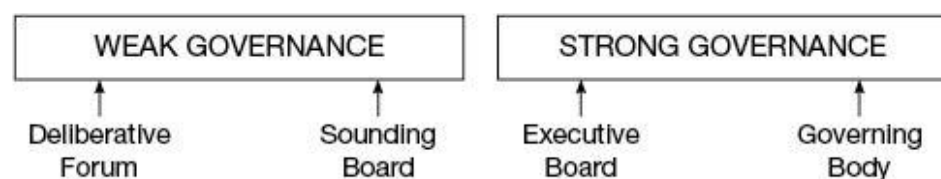
Figure 1: Types of Governance - Schools in Wales (Ranson et al (2005))

Ranson et al (2005a) related that 57% of the schools in their study had weaker forms of governance – less than 10% of schools had 'governing bodies' – with higher proportions of weaker governance in rural areas. Primary schools were found to be more likely than secondary schools to have weaker forms of school governance. They further argued that their findings suggested an association between the type of governance and school performance, with stronger performing primary schools appearing to be associated with 'executive boards' or 'governing bodies' and having more robust practices of scrutiny, accountability and strategy. Lower performing primary schools, Ranson et al (2005a) noted, seemed to be associated with weaker governance – 'consultative sounding boards' or 'discussion forums'. However, they pointed out that there are exceptions to this – for example where there is a weaker form of governance but where a strong and knowledgeable chair of governors provides support but also engages in challenge, scrutiny and the 'critical friend' role perhaps in the head's office if not in the formal meetings. It is to be noted that there is no comparable study relating to a sample of primary schools in England.

In discussing, and seeking to explain, the findings of their research on primary and secondary school governance, analysing 5000 responses from a national questionnaire-based survey and from across-case analysis of 30 school case studies, James et al (2011b) referred to the notions of 'governance capital' and 'governance agency' (see also below). Governance capital was seen as the "network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governance of any particular school" (James et al, 2011b: 429). So a school's governance capital is the members of the local community – parents, school staff, churches, businesses, hospitals, universities, emergency services, etc – who are eligible, motivated and capable of engaging in school governing. It was asserted, by James et al (2011b), that a school's governance capital can be built up, needs to be fostered and will need to be continually renewed because of the turnover of governors due to their limited period of tenure. James et al (2011b) suggested that governance capital is likely to be relatively high when the school is successful in terms of performance of its pupils or where a school is held in high esteem or viewed with affection or where it is in an area of high socio-economic status. Low governance capital is associated with low socio-economic status especially where there is wide ethnic diversity and/or a high level of family mobility. Governance agency is said to be the capacity to act – so in practical terms it is the "…exertions, efforts and endeavours of

those involved in governing" (James et al, 2011b: 430) and this can "…ameliorate the effects of low governance capital" (James et al, 2011a: 395). It is said to influence the building of governor capital – nurturing parents who are seen to have the potential to become governors, seeking out members of the local community to become governors – but also influences the organisation of the governing body and participation in training and development. The head teacher, chair of governors and the clerk to the governing body are said to have a significant role in building governance capital. James et al (2011b) suggested that the interaction of governance capital with governance agency may create an 'amplifier effect'. This researcher has summarised their arguments in Table I below:

TABLE I
Positive and Negative Amplification

Positive Amplification	*Negative* Amplification
Governance agency is high	Governance agency is low
Substantial governance capacity	Very little governance capacity
Plus the following factors all contribute to positive governance capacity:	*Plus the following factors act against governance capacity:*
School is successful	School not seen as successful
School is held in high esteem	School not held in high regard
School is viewed with affection	School not viewed with affection
School is in a high socio-economic setting	School is in a low socio-economic setting

James et al (2011b: 431) noted that the "…pressures of negative amplification may seriously impact on the governing of some schools." These aspects of school governance are under-researched (see James et al, 2010).

In their study of governance in 14 primary and secondary schools, located in three disadvantaged areas of England, Dean et al (2007) (see below) reported that whilst some governing bodies felt more comfortable being "supporters" rather than "critical friends" of head teachers there was a sense that they brought a "moral force" (Dean et al, 2007: 32) in working for the common interests of the school. Dean et al (2007: 32) described the critical friendship role of governors as being "inward-facing" but argued that the

"outward-facing" role of school governors can be concerned with mobilising resources to support the school – using political connections, levering additional financial and/or business connections – but also, at times, mobilising to fight for the interests of the school – for example, against local authority policy changes on special needs education, school meals contracts or finance. However, Dean et al (2007) also reported evidence that some head teachers attempt to manipulate their governors by withholding information and preventing close scrutiny of the head teacher's actions. Some governors felt that they were 'rubber stamping' what the head wanted. Dean et al (2007: 31) made an important point in stating:

> One of the implicit rules, therefore, seems to be that challenge has to be based on mutual respect, on an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of each other's roles, and on a preservation of the boundary between the respective roles of governors and heads.

In a research report, sponsored by the organisation 'Business in the Community', seeking to find out about school governance during April to September 2008, Balarin et al (2008) analysed the policy and research literature relevant to school governing, carried out 43 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, undertook a large scale random on-line survey of over 5000 school governors and elicited the views of 42 head teachers. In the introduction to this report (Balarin et al, 2008: 7) the authors pointed out that school governing "…is perhaps the largest collective voluntary endeavour in the country". They further argued that school governance has had a lack of policy attention and that published research into the work of school governors has not been extensive. The main findings (Balarin et al, 2008: 4) of this study were reported as:

1. School governing is important and it is generally working well thanks to the efforts of those involved. However, it could be improved and it will need to change if it is to respond to the ways schools are changing.
2. At present, school governing is :
   - Overloaded – governing bodies are responsible for too much.
   - Overcomplicated – their work is unnecessarily complex, difficult and demanding.
   - Overlooked – 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.

Furthermore, this research group (Balarin et al, 2008: 4-6) summarised their findings and made a number of recommendations:

- They saw school governing as important. Governing bodies can add value to the organisation and can help legitimise schools as institutions.

- School governing was judged, generally, to be working well but there was room for improvement in a minority of schools. Ineffective governing bodies tend not to challenge the head teacher or monitor plans and targets.

- Schools are changing – more diverse, providing an extended range of community services, head teachers and staff are better trained – and school governing will need to change.

- School governing is overloaded. Governing bodies were found to have a high workload and this research group thought that many of their responsibilities could be assigned directly to the head teacher. It was recommended that the range of governing body responsibilities be reduced.

- School governing was judged to be over-complicated, for example, the role of governing bodies was said to be described ambiguously in policies and regulations. Greater clarity and simplicity in the role of the governing body was recommended. Balarin et al (2008: 24) referred to the fact that many of the responsibilities of governors are "…couched in metaphorical terms, such as 'critical friend', providing 'support' and 'challenge', which are then open to wide interpretation."

- The overloaded and overcomplicated nature of school governing is likely to make recruitment challenging, training complicated and retaining governors difficult.

- School governing does not have a sufficiently high profile - it is not widely publicised, understandings of it are not widespread and its contribution is hidden. It was recommended that the status of governing bodies should be enhanced with greater public recognition. Companies and all non-school work organisations should be encouraged to play a part in recruitment. High quality relationships should be established with local communities to aid governor recruitment.

- The status of the clerk to the governing body should be raised and the clerk should not work in the school in a different capacity to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest.

- New models of school governing are being implemented by some schools and groups and these were said to have the potential to transform school governance and needed to be evaluated.

Reporting on a more recent project, utilising an analysis of a previously conducted national survey (Balarin et al, 2008, as above) with over 5000 responses from 1000 schools and further case-studies of 16 primary and 14 secondary schools, that analysed the relationship between school governing, school performance and the way this relationship was influenced by the socio-economic setting, James et al (2010: 93, 94) stated their main findings as:

- School governors give an enormous amount to the education system in England, yet their contribution is largely hidden from public view.
- The lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence; it is a substantial disadvantage for a school.
- The Chair of the Governing Body and his/her relationship with the head teacher are very significant in enabling high quality governance. Being the chair of a school governing body is a significant educational and community leadership responsibility.
- The role of the local authority governor is unclear and in some ways can be unsatisfactory. There was very little evidence of the responsibility or the link with the authority being used in a productive way.
- Notions of 'challenging the head teacher' and 'calling the head teacher to account' did not match the practices of the governing bodies studied. The focus tended to be on scrutiny – of information, decisions, plans and policies. Support for the school was accepted as axiomatic.
- School governing is important and can be difficult and demanding. It takes place in a range of ways and at various times, through informal contacts and meetings, formal meetings, in schools and during particular ad hoc events such as 'away days'.
- Primary school governing and secondary school governing are different. The level of effectiveness of primary school governing is linked clearly and positively to the level of pupil attainment. The link between secondary school governing body effectiveness and pupil attainment is very weak.

- The governing of a school and the context for governing are typically in a continual state of flux.

- Well managed governing as a collective activity based on the stakeholder model is well placed to cope with the changeable nature of both governance and the context for governance.

- Governing bodies exert a similar effect on pupil attainment in both advantaged and disadvantaged settings.

- The extent to which the governing body focused on the performance of the school, and how performance was considered, varied under a range of influences.

- Governance capital is the network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governing of any particular school. The governance capital available is likely to be greater for schools that: are well regarded compared with those that are not; are in higher socio-economic status settings and have higher levels of pupil attainment. These effects may add and mutually reinforce the creation of an 'amplifier effect' which may seriously impact on the governing of some schools.

- Governance agency is the energy, level of proactivity, drive and commitment to the governing, and for the governing, of any particular school. It is highly significant for all aspects of governing and can ameliorate the effects of low governance capital. The effect of governance agency complicates the relationship between governing, performance and socio-economic context.

Furthermore, James et al (2010: 94) commented on their "…sense of the relatively fragile nature of schools as institutions" in that although they may seem stable and secure they are potentially subject to a range of influences and it is an effective governing body that helps, in the views of these researchers, to mitigate against these threats so ensuring stability. James et al (2010: 95) summarised that these findings:

> …confirmed that school governing is complicated, demanding, and goes on largely unnoticed. The commitment of many of those we interviewed was quite remarkable especially in terms of the time they gave to their governing responsibilities. Much of the work of lay governors is hidden from view and is all undertaken for no tangible reward. The 300,000 or so school governors in England make a significant contribution to their schools and to the education system as a whole.

These researchers emphasised that whilst school governing "…has never been a substantive focus for researchers in educational leadership and management…" (James at al, 2010: 94) it is time that it was subject to in-depth study: including studies of the chair of governors, the notions of governor capital and agency as well as longitudinal studies of school governing.

2.3.8 Key Characteristics of Very Effective Governance

In an attempt to help all governing bodies become excellent, Ofsted (2011) reported on the principles and practices that enabled 14 schools (5 being in the primary phase) to show outstanding governance, as judged by Ofsted inspections during the academic year 2009/2010. The report gives a brief indication of the methodology used in gathering data – discussions with head teachers, governors and other personnel; consideration of relevant documentation including minutes of governor meetings and governor handbooks – and provides brief case studies on the context and operation of each school in the study. In the introduction to their report of this small-scale study Ofsted (2011: 4) recognised that:

> More than 300,000 school governors in England form one of the largest volunteer groups in the country. Since 1988, school governing bodies have taken on more responsibilities and their role has become more important as schools have gained increasing autonomy. The governing body complements and enhances school leadership by providing support and challenge, ensuring that all statutory duties are met, appointing the head teacher and holding them to account for the impact of the school's work on improving outcomes for all pupils.

Whilst Ofsted (2011) judged that no single model of success was seen, they were able to identify a number of key characteristics that enabled these 14 schools to exhibit very effective governance:

- There were positive relationships between the governors and school leaders – based on trust, transparency and openness. They were mutually supportive and the school leaders recognised the different perspective offered by the governors and that this strengthened the school leadership.
- Governors were given high quality information and gathered information themselves by regularly attending lessons and talking to staff, pupils and parents. Positive and negative aspects of school developments were shared with

governors. Governors, as a result of this sharing, gathering and transparency were judged to be well informed and knowledgeable.

- The clerk to the governing body was judged to be pivotal in organising meetings, sending out documentation and ensuring that statutory duties were met.

- A core team of key governors were prominent in driving forward the school governing body and chairing sub-committees. Time was used efficiently and governors used their external networks to support the school governing body.

- Governors asked challenging questions, held the school leadership to account, monitored progress, made difficult decisions when necessary and had shaping school improvement as a clear focus.

- New governors were provided with an induction programme and the governing bodies reflected upon their own effectiveness and training needs.

Ofsted (2011: 10) recognised, in this report, the "…wide range of skills and expertise…" that governors "…used effectively to support school leaders…" and, specifically, mentioned help with personnel, finance, resourcing, appointments and professional development. Teachers were described as valuing the governing body particularly in maintaining high levels of staff morale. Effective governors were said to be active in seeking out information from external experts and from SIPs (School Improvement Partners).

It is to be noted that Ofsted (2011:4) argued that their inspection framework reflected the importance of the role of governors and suggested that, on the basis of their inspection evidence, there is a "…relationship between effective governance, the quality of leadership and management, and the quality of provision and pupil achievement." They pointed out, however, that in the academic year 2009 to 2010 governance was judged by them to be outstanding in 56% of schools but in just over a fifth of schools inspected the governance was judged to be less effective than leadership.

2.3.9 The Chair of the Governing Body

In an investigation of the role of the chair of school governing bodies in England, James et al (2012) investigated 30 case study schools, 16 primary and 14 secondary, and drew upon a national web-based questionnaire survey of governors. They noted that, despite the significance of a chair of a governing body, relatively little research had been

reported on the role. 1007 chairs of governing bodies were amongst the 5000 governors who completed the questionnaire (see Balarin et al, 2008). Observations of governor meetings, interviews and the questionnaires enabled these researchers to gain insights into the role of the chair and, in particular, how it was experienced. The whole data-set was analysed for emergent themes – these are reported below:

a. The central finding of this research was that the role of chair of a governing body was very significant, complex and demanding. The demanding nature of the role was evident in the time respondents, all unpaid volunteers, gave to their responsibilities.

b. The way chairs talked about their responsibilities and action during meetings "…conveyed a strong sense that they were the leading custodians, supervisors and guardians of the school" (James et al, 2012: 9). They were conscious of their responsibilities in the designated role of chair but also very aware that they carried a share of the collective responsibility, as a governor, for the conduct of the school. Responses, particularly in the survey data, specifically referred to supporting the head teacher, challenging the head teacher by acting as a critical friend, being strategic and making a difference for the children. In terms of scrutiny the respondents saw asking difficult questions, challenging, ensuring the school is running properly, maintaining standards, increasing the academic performance and taking the school forward as important dimensions of their role. Supporting the head teacher in a very difficult job was seen as a worthwhile aspect of the role – also supporting the staff and school as a whole. In terms of challenging aspects of the role, the school finances, maintaining buildings, making a real difference in the lives of children were all mentioned.

c. Although emerging relatively infrequently in the data, the appointing of a new head teacher was seen as significant and worthwhile. In some case studies it marked a moment of change for the school. Some chairs conveyed the amount of time involved in the procedures.

d. The benefits of close and productive working relationships between the head teacher and the chair were said to be very evident. James et al (2012: 9) commented: "Indeed, this relationship appeared to be pivotal in the governance of the school." Working with the head teacher was seen as one of the most worthwhile aspects of the chair's role. The chairs mentioned the following as being important: acting as a listening ear, as a mentor, a sounding board, talking things through, being supportive and being there for the head. Whilst high quality head teacher/chair of governing body

relationships were observed – business-like, serious, good humoured, warm, valuing, genuine and positive - there were other examples that were more stressful – with conflict and lack of respect. The notion of openness, especially on the part of the head teacher, was seen as of significant benefit to the relationship. Trust and similar views on educational matters were also considered important in strengthening relationships.

e. There was evidence that an effective and expert chair can promote radical change in a school and so move the school forward. The methods may be questioning, challenging or using the opportunity presented by a new head teacher appointment. The commitment and leadership of the chair was found to be "…particularly significant when a school faced a particular crisis of some kind, for example, financial problems or pupil under-performance" (James et al, 2012: 10). Evidence demonstrated that a chair can substantially change the ways of working of a governing body. However, evidence also demonstrated that the lack of an effective chair can impede pupil achievement, and act as a drain on the head teacher's resources.

f. Active participation in the work of the school was a significant part of the chair of governance role. So they were active in visiting their schools – spending time in classes, meeting with teachers, participating in school activities, monitoring teaching, celebrating pupil achievements and awarding prizes. James et al (2012: 10) relate that "… the in-school presence/involvement…" was "…significant and could be quite substantial."

g. Organising the work of the governing body – recruitment, induction, training, managing the governing body generally – was found to be a key aspect of the chair's role.

h. The chair of governance was found to have a significant role in developing and improving the functioning of the governing body.

i. An important and positive aspect of the role of the chair of governance was found to be ensuring that the team of governors all worked together for the good of the school's children.

j. A dominant theme in the case study data was the considerable expertise of the chairs of governing bodies – this was often due to many years of experience. Maintaining this expertise and keeping up to date was a significant aspect of the role but also a source of dissatisfaction due to the numerous government policy changes and other 'red tape' such as auditing and reporting forms.

k. Working with parents was a significant theme in the whole data-set. So chairs found themselves supporting and promoting relationships between school/staff and parents. Another issue noted was related to the difficulties presented by parent governors, e.g. when they paid little attention to confidentiality related to governor body business.

l. Dealing with complaints – particularly from parents – was a significant theme.

m. This study, through observation of governor body meetings, showed that chairing the meetings of full governing bodies was a formidable task especially if there was substantial business to be covered, with adequate scrutiny, within a reasonable time-scale.

James et al (2012: 92) considered that the role of the Chair of the Governing Body in the English education system is substantially under played and given insufficient status. They argued that being the chair of a school governing body is a significant educational and community leadership responsibility (James et al, 2012: 3).

2.3.10 The Strategic Role of a Governing Body

An important, perhaps the most important, strategic role of governors is the appointment of a new head teacher. At this time the governors are in a powerful position, having more experience of the school possibly than the incoming head teacher. Dean et al (2007) found that many governors recognised this was a key task and saw their role as acting as guardians of the common interest in appointing a candidate who would best serve the school and its community. They have great strategic responsibility during the process of amalgamating schools or changing the status of schools - creating federations of schools, creating clusters of schools, deciding to move forward as a trust, deciding to become an academy or establishing a free school. When probing how governors in a sample of disadvantaged schools defined and enhanced the 'quality of service' provided by their schools Dean et al (2007: 36) found "…little sense that they were pursuing a fully thought-out strategy aimed at realising some clear vision of what schooling should be like for local children." There was little inclination to articulate explicit performance standards and generally the governors relied upon the head teachers for strategic leadership. However, Dean et al (2007: 37) documented:

> This is not to say, however, that governors did not act in a principled way. On the contrary, they held values in high esteem and were…prepared to battle for

their principles against both external and internal threats. It is simply that their principles were articulated in terms of the 'interests of the school' or the 'interests of the children', which, for the most part, were taken to be self-evident.

It was argued by Pounce (2008a: 10-11) that most governors know that they need to be strategic, however, he contended that:

> …the ever lengthening list of responsibilities piled on them by successive ministers since 1988 makes it difficult for governing bodies to keep out of operational detail…many of the responsibilities can be delegated to their head teacher… but the fear of missing something important makes most governing bodies hang on to too many tasks.

Pound (2008a) further claimed that as a result this leaves insufficient time for the things that matter and makes governing appear too complicated. He suggested that better ways need to be found for removing complex and operational tasks from governing body agendas.

2.4   THEME 3: TRAINING AND INFORMATION SHARING FOR AND WITHIN GOVERNING BODIES

2.4.1 Introduction

In this, the third section of Chapter 2, the research and literature relating to the theme of 'training and information sharing for and within governing bodies' is discussed. To begin, two research projects on the training of school governors are reviewed. The first of these projects investigated the induction training of newly appointed governors and the second reported on the training of governors within nine case study schools contrasted with the training status of governors within a further six hundred schools. Some important indicators of training needs are reported from a 1999 House of Commons report – these include joint training of head teachers and chairs of governors as well as whole governing body training. The recommendations, which include mandatory training for chairs of governing bodies, of an important recent Ministerial Working Group are reported. A summary is provided of where governors can, at present, find the information to carry out their roles. The findings of research into possible inequality in information

provision in the context of school governance is discussed – the researchers arguing that all governors have the same legal responsibilities but if information and/or training is not equally accessible then decisions will be affected and it could be that there is a diminishing of democracy. A further research project on the information technology needs of school governors is reviewed. Finally, note is made of the views of leading researchers on school governance who question whether governors can acquire the skills to fulfil their roles within the typical four-year tenure period.

2.4.2 Research Evidence

A research project into the induction training of newly appointed governors - using a questionnaire survey and telephone interviews – was undertaken by Jones (1998). He argued that government legislation, over two decades, had brought about major changes in the management and governance of schools so that governors were required to make important decisions affecting the quality of education provision for the nation's children. Further, he contended, the significance of training for governors had increased as the extent of governing body responsibilities had expanded. However, Jones (1998: 330) commented:

> "Despite a growing body of research into school governance, it is still the case that certain areas such as the training needs of governors remain problematic."

He found that only 5.2 per cent of governors, in his sample of 314 governors had received any formal training to prepare them for their role. Many governors felt insecure about their role so that the precise nature of what governors are meant to do and how this relates to the duties of head teachers and their staff was unclear. Jones (1998: 349) recommended that:

- The range of governors' responsibilities should be reduced in order to produce a clearer focus for school governance.
- Training should be made compulsory for governors before they begin their work.
- All school staff are made more aware of the role of governors in supporting school improvement.
- Each governing body be required to establish an annual training plan detailing specific training and development needs.

- A national induction programme is introduced and that this is delivered locally but centrally funded.

Jones (1998: 349) concluded that if governors are to function effectively, they must be provided with training and support which is relevant to their needs and of the very highest quality. He suggested that there was an urgent need for the DFEE, schools, LEAs and other national training organisations to adopt a far more proactive stance on training in general, and on induction training for new governors in particular.

Following an eleven month research project into effective school governance Scanlon et al (1999) reported that the governing bodies studied – from nine case study schools - had benefited from training, both at the individual and the governing body level. Induction was considered a key issue, and some of the governing bodies had well-worked out schemes for their new members, such as induction packs and training but also a 'buddy' or mentor system, where a new governor was teamed up with a more experienced one. Governors and staff trained together and this helped to build relationships. However, whilst the above was their conclusions for nine case study schools with effective governing bodies, Scanlon et al (1999) found that amongst a further 600 schools, surveyed using a national questionnaire, almost fifty per cent of governors reported having received no further training since induction. These researchers concluded that training was an area that required improvement.

2.4.3 Spreading Best Practice

The House of Commons (1999) commended those LEAs who, at that time, provided high quality support and training for their governing bodies but recognised that more needed to be done to spread this good practice. They recommended that the Government initiate schemes to spread the best practice in providing support for governors – which they saw as an important part of an LEA's contribution to school improvement. This committee noted the importance of high quality training for governors – particularly the value of whole governing body training and joint training of the governing body and the head teacher. However, they did not believe that training for governors and chairs of governors should be mandatory. They did recognise that induction training for new governors and newly appointed chairs was important and stated (House of Commons, 1999: para. 41):

Evidence has shown that high quality induction is critical to enabling governors to make an effective contribution to the work of their governing body. We therefore recommend that induction training be made a requirement of all governors when first appointed, and for newly appointed chairs of governors.

This committee considered that joint training for new chairs of governing bodies and their head teacher would be particularly valuable. They recognised that a requirement to undergo training may act as a barrier to the recruitment of some governors. However, they were of the opinion that, given the significant role of governors in improving schools, it is important that they are given at least a basic introduction to their responsibilities and how best to discharge them. This committee firmly expressed the view that money targeted at improving the effectiveness of the governing body will do much to improve the effectiveness of the school as a whole. They also recognised that a large proportion of newly appointed head teachers will have little direct experience of working with a governing body and therefore affirmed (House of Commons, 1999: para 43) that:

…training for new head teachers on working effectively with governing bodies and chairs of governors should be available for newly appointed head teachers. Although we do not recommend that this is a requirement, it would be in the best interests of individual governing bodies to require such training as part of the appraisal process for their newly appointed head teacher.

A further recommendation, from this group, was for each LEA to establish a pool of experienced governors able to give support, advice and/or mentoring to other governing bodies or individual chairs of governors. They also stressed that governors must have access to all the information they need to carry out their role and that this information should always be in a format that governors, as volunteers, can easily digest; such information, they state, should not be couched in educational jargon or 'teacher-speak'.

2.4.4 Mandatory Training and Accreditation

Evans (2007) argued the case for mandatory training and accreditation for all governors. He suggested that all governors should receive basic training in school governance, serve a minimum probationary period of four to six months (this would be as an associate governor with an experienced governor acting as a mentor) and meet with the chair, reviewing the probationary period, before being appointed as a full governor. Evans

contended that all governors need to take a professional approach to their role and commit to personal and corporate training at least on an annual basis. Such measures would, in his view, bring a step-change in the quality of governance. He further maintained that paid 'semi-professional' governors and chairs of governors should be used to coach and support governing bodies.

In a recent report on school governance the DCSF (2010a) claimed that the majority of governing bodies have done a good job but stated that some have not delivered as much as they might. They continued (DCSF, 2010a: 2):

> Governors will need to acquire skills to carry out their responsibilities. To further equip and enable them the Working Group agreed that there should be mandatory training for chairs of governing bodies. Many local authorities, diocesan boards and others provide excellent training for governors and there was scope to share that good practice to improve induction training for all governors.

Further, they recommended (DCSF, 2010a) that governing bodies and individual governors should also review their effectiveness and carry out self evaluation of their own skills. They should evaluate the skill set possessed by the governing body as a whole so that any skills gaps can be met.

This report had discussed the issue of paying the chairs of governing bodies stating, however, that many members of the Ministerial Working Group supported the voluntary principle and no firm conclusion was reached. Some members of the Group felt that paying chairs of governance would increase their workload as other unpaid governors might take on less responsibilities. This report argued that good quality induction training ought to be taken up by all new governors. The majority of the Working Group considered that uptake of such induction training ought to be compulsory in order to assure the competence of new governors, but also with a side benefit of emphasising the importance of the work of governing bodies. However, some members of the Group were opposed to this, arguing that mandatory training would deter some potential governors.

2.4.5 Role of the Local Authority and National Organisations

In their manual for governors and their clerks, Information for School and College Governors (Taylor (Ed.), 2007), a not for profit company offering services to all those

interested in school governance, stated that Local Education Authorities are required to ensure that every governor is provided with sufficient information and training, free of charge, to carry out their role. The then DfES, under the umbrella of a National Strategy for Governor Support and Training, had sponsored a number of training packages – induction training for new governors, performance management training, training for clerks and a development programme for heads and chairs. Details were said to be available through the DfES sponsored website for school governors at www.governornet.co.uk.

The DfES also sponsored a free telephone advice line offering information and support to governors. Further information for governors could be found in the DfES publications 'Governors' (a free newsletter) and in 'Spectrum' (a monthly publication about schools). Advice for governors is available through local authority governor support officers who are linked through a national body – NCOGS (National Co-ordinators of Governor Services) – bringing together the activities of nine regional groups in England. These co-ordinators are responsible for supporting school governors within their local authority including the running of appropriate governor training courses. Their website, www.nfer.ac.uk/emie, provides information about the activities of this group. Church school governors also receive information through their diocesan authorities. The National Governors' Association (NGA) – a charity with no political affiliations – lobbies and campaigns on behalf of governors with the aim of making governing bodies more effective. A Guide to the Law for School Governors (DfES, 2007) is a manual produced annually intended to guide individual governors, and governing bodies, on their legal responsibilities. The head teacher is said to be the principal professional adviser to the governing body (Information for School and College Governors, 2007: 14).

2.4.6 Inequality in Information Provision

The proposition that inequality in information provision exists within the context of English state school governance, and that it is potentially damaging in the decision making of an individual governor, was explored by Banwell and Woodhouse (1996). They recognised that governing bodies had substantial responsibilities – including school management, staffing, pay, the curriculum and premises – and as a consequence school governors, all 300,000 volunteers, needed a wide range of information in order to fulfil an extensive range of tasks and roles. Whilst these researchers recognised that 'inequality' is a value judgement and a loaded term, they contended that inequality does

and should matter to all information providers in the field and to school governors themselves – this would involve identifying inequalities between individuals and developing appropriate information strategies to try to cope with any imbalances between them. Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) pointed out that the principal originator for information needed by school governors was national government – particularly the Department for Education. This information was then mediated through a variety of channels before reaching the individual governor. Examples of such mediators, at the time of the research, were head teachers, other governors, TV and press, governor associations, teacher unions and diocesan boards. Banwell and Woodhouse's (1996) research provided, firstly, a top-down view of governor information aiming to identify providers of information to school governors and the type of information that each provided. This study involved a questionnaire for all local authority governor training co-ordinators; a questionnaire to all library authorities and interviews with key individuals in the field. It was found that the most commonly provided form of information service (81%) offered to governors was a local authority governors' newsletter usually produced on a termly basis. These were found to vary across local authorities from a single news-sheet to a journal-like publication with detailed information and articles. Most newsletters examined by these researchers were said to vary between these two extremes. Other information services provided were training and information packs, help lines, travelling exhibitions, video and audio cassette materials. Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) also referred to the use of 'filters' in transforming, in some way, the information being mediated. So the local authority may superimpose a 'political filter' and/or a 'funding filter' on the information being received by an individual governor. A 'geographical filter' may operate in comparing a compact urban authority with a remote rural area – access to meetings and training sessions being more difficult in remote areas. The background, status and personality of the information provider (the head teacher or training co-ordinator) also acts as a filter on the services provided. So the experience and effectiveness as a communicator of the information provider will impact on the individual user governor. Similarly, the medium by which information reaches the governor may suit or not suit them be it via newsletters, in audio or video format or via the national press. In this top-down study Banwell and Woodhouse (1996: 29) concluded that:

> …the variation in services provided result in a fragmented information provision situation which is also undergoing constant change as decreasing funding and changing legislation demand changing responses from the

information providers themselves. Geographic barriers such as remoteness, both rural and in a large urban area, will have a significant impact on information available to an individual.

In a further, four month study of governors in a northern local education authority Banwell and Woodhouse (1996: 29) took what they described as a "bottom-up" approach interviewing 50 individual, randomly selected, school governors and sending a questionnaire to all school governors in the authority. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use made, by individual governors, of LEA training and information provision and reasons for its non-use. Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) described the training courses which were attended, finding that the most popular were induction for new governors, pay policy courses, OFSTED inspection courses and Health and Safety courses. Lectures and practical workshops were much preferred to distance learning and role play styles of learning. There was a widely held and strong preference for school-based courses with some governors (especially parent governors) feeling intimidated by centre held courses where they felt themselves to be amongst strangers. Whole governing body training was seen as especially beneficial. However, Banwell and Woodhouse (1996: 30) commented that "…the picture which emerged (from this study) was again one of variations in training and information use at the level of the individual school governor." These researchers specifically found that:

- LEA governors, who were also councillors, were poor attendees at training sessions and many seemed to think they 'know it all already'.
- Head teacher governors and teacher governors felt they received enough training in their teaching capacity.
- Some long-serving governors, from any category, feel they 'know it all already'.
- Some new governors, particularly parent governors, fear being 'put on the spot' and therefore feel far too intimidated to attend training sessions.
- Co-opted governors often feel they have been recruited for their expertise in an area such as accountancy or human resource management and they are reluctant to participate in wider governor matters.

This study concluded that there was a strong demand for whole governing body training based in schools; some categories of governor, including head teachers, would benefit

from being specifically targeted for centralised training and there should be some 'house-keeping improvements' such as writing styles in information giving. Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) contended that information provision at the level of the individual school governor, whilst being a complex situation, needed to be unpicked through more research. Banwell and Woodhouse (1996: 32) further argued:

> All school governors have the same legal responsibilities placed upon them by national legislation. If information and/or training is not equally accessible to them, for whatever reason, then that individual governor's capacity to make good decisions will be affected. The governing body must make decisions and govern its school as a body: the persistence or even increase in equality in information provision will possibly lead to a diminishing of democracy.

They recognised that the development of computer networking and its increasing availability in schools, workplaces and homes will increasingly be used for information giving and training but suggest that this area of computerised information, and the skills and training required by school governors, should be an area for future research. It is to be noted that Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) whilst referring to many types of governor, including the head teacher governor, made no reference to the training or information gathering and sharing by the chair of governors – a key person, as argued above, in a school governing body. A recent Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (DCSF, 2010b: 2) did, however, state that governors should "…receive defined information to enable them to challenge and hold the school leadership team to account" but with a lack of clarity on quite what would constitute 'defined information'.

2.4.7 Information Technology and School Governors

In an assessment of the offline and ICT based support for governors, Fuller et al (2002) initially pointed out that governors play a major role in overseeing a large element of delegated public expenditure (currently over £20 billion per year). They further argued that governance responsibilities, particularly since the implementation of the local management of schools through the 1988 Education Reform Act, are such that public interest requires that they operate effectively. They state that there are high expectations of volunteer school governors where legislation mostly places responsibilities on governing bodies as a whole but where the chair is a special case – able to take action independently in an emergency and is likely to shape the governors' agenda and perhaps decisions. In the view of Fuller et al (2002: 4) the "…chair of governors needs different

knowledge and access to different networks…" and they questioned to what extent can governors perform their tasks "…better with appropriate support, including the use of information and communication technologies." Fuller et al (2002: 5) continued:

> Knowledge Management is used to describe a range of activities designed to improve the workings of organisations. These activities are concerned to make relevant information, skills and knowledge available in a timely fashion. Knowledge management within commerce and industry has attracted considerable attention during the last decade…Practically no facet of business life has escaped attention …

Fuller et al (2002) conceded that running a school was not the same as running a business but suggested that governing a school does involve the need for relevant and timely information, skills and knowledge for communication and access to information, and for collective memory and cooperative activity. These needs can, they suggested, at least in part, be addressed by the provision of help with knowledge management. Before discussing on-line provision for school governors Fuller et al (2002: 6) detailed existing off-line support:

- Through LEA courses, briefings and newsletters.

- Through independent private providers.

- DfES support literature distributed to head teachers and chairs of governors – so relying on these key individuals to circulate documents to other governors.

- Distribution of literature by voluntary organisations and national bodies such as the National Association of Governors and Managers and the National Governors' Council.

- Telephone support such as the DfES financially supported GovernorLine, providing a professional service staffed by governors.

In terms of on-line support Fuller et al (2002: 7) referred to the then extensive website provided by the DfES to support governors, stating:

> Many of the sections are well-structured, web-based versions of printed literature, for example *Becoming a Governor* or *Information for Governors.* There are also documents in PDF format for downloading, press releases and links to information issued by other providers. A very considerable proportion of the site is devoted to transmitting explicit knowledge to individual governors but there are also some attempts to support the transmission of know-how and collective knowledge.

They also referred to other websites provided by Local Education Authorities, the National Governors Council, the National Association of Governors and Managers and a few independent websites sometimes run by individuals.

Fuller et al (2002) concluded that the DfES and LEAs have made substantial efforts to transmit explicit knowledge to governors and given the wide-ranging information needs of governors this is important. However, there is, in the opinion of Fuller et al (2002), much more limited availability of online resources to support the creation and maintenance of collective knowledge. Furthermore, Fuller et al (2002: 8) argued that "Very little is known about the extent to which governing bodies make use of ICT to carry out their roles…" and refer to the research of Earley et al (2002) which found that only 29% of head teachers and 21% of chairs of governors used ICT to support their governing work. The issue of access to ICT was seen as important particularly in areas where governors were difficult to recruit and retain – schools themselves being seen as important in meeting the needs of their governors.

However, whether the capabilities required for effective governing can be acquired easily or within the four-year tenure period was questioned by James et al (2010). They further claimed that whatever skills are developed they are likely to be shaped, perhaps unhelpfully, by governing body custom and practice.

2.5 THEME 4: CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS FOR AND WITHIN GOVERNING BODIES

2.5.1 Introduction

During the review of school governance literature it was apparent that governing bodies faced a number of challenges and tensions. Some of these challenges and tensions – the stability of governing bodies, the challenges of governing schools in disadvantaged areas, the tensions summarised as a result of recent research, the re-organisation of governing bodies, the clerk to the governing body, the increasing workload of governing bodies and the challenges posed by a recent White Paper proposing a more autonomous school system – are discussed in this final section of the literature review.

2.5.2 Turnover of Governors

The stability of governing bodies was raised by Scanlon et al (1999) as an important issue in judging their effectiveness. They found that where there was a rapid turnover of governors, expertise was lost and it took time for the governing body to rebuild and become effective again. Their survey found that 45 per cent of schools experienced some difficulty in recruiting suitable people. Problems in recruiting and retaining governors were more likely to occur in the inner cities and in areas of social disadvantage. James et al (2010) pointed out that governors have a four-year term of office so there is a constant turnover of governors - new and perhaps inexperienced governors may join a governing body, some may leave and some may continue after their four years have lapsed. They commented "…for any governing body, filling vacancies is likely to be a continual concern and the pattern of vacancies will vary over time." (James et al, 2010: 15).

2.5.3 Governing in Disadvantaged Areas

The challenges of governing schools in disadvantaged areas were highlighted by Dean et al (2007) in a study involving linked case studies of school governing bodies in three contrasting areas characterised by social and economic disadvantage, that is average income levels, employment rates, educational and health outcomes were below national norms and there were concentrations of other social problems. Over 100 respondents – 73 governors, head teachers, local authority officers and other stakeholders – were interviewed, sometimes more than once. These respondents were connected with 14 schools in England – ten of these schools were primary and four secondary schools; almost all were classified as 'community' schools. Detailed exploration of 'critical incidents', identified in the interviewing, involved further discussion with relevant parents, children, community leaders and others. Feedback events in each of the three areas and further discussions with national decision makers served, it was argued, to enhance validation of the research findings. It was found that the majority of governors in these schools were female – commonly making up 60 to 90 per cent of the governing body. The membership of governing bodies was said to be skewed towards women, older people and people from majority ethnic and professional backgrounds. Many governing bodies found it difficult to recruit parent governors and it was suggested, where they were recruited, they were easily manipulated by head teachers and tended not to engage too closely with the work of the governing body. In some areas many of the local people lacked fluency in English and consequently were effectively excluded from participation.

Those that were politically active, members of churches or business people were often highly valued. Often the governing body relied on the activity of a small cadre of very involved governors – the rest being regarded effectively as 'passengers'. However, Dean et al (2007) pointed out that they found few governors with 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.

There were exceptions to this, for example, in the recruitment of governors from under-represented minority groups – a few of these recruits were active in representative community organisations. It was reported that there were tensions and ambiguities related to the involvement of local councillors as governors especially where they put their political allegiances before the interests of the school pupils – however they were also seen as useful in terms of getting things done via the local authority and for their knowledge of the local area. However, Dean et al (2007: 27) found that:

> In one way or another…governing bodies try to 'oust' sectional interests in favour of a set of common interests, shared by the school as a whole. In our feedback meetings, we pressed governors to explain how these common interests might be defined. The response was that they are best defined in terms of the interests of the children attending the school. These are close to, but not quite synonymous with, the interests of the head and staff, or of parents, or of the wider communities served by the school.

These researchers indicated that the implication from these governing bodies is that while disputes on matters of detail might arise from time to time, the common interests that guide governing bodies are likely to make consensus rather than conflict the norm (Dean et al, 2007: 27). Furthermore, they quoted the views of one chair of governors from their study who suggested that this 'rallying around the school' was dominant, contending:

> I think we're either more cohesive or slightly less demanding of the teaching staff than you would get in a more middle-class area…We don't have philosophical disputes, so I think that is different, and that comes from, I think, partly to do with the nature of the people on the governing body but also to do with the community it's serving, which if we weren't together it would be a disaster, there's too much stress on the system. (Dean at al, 2007: 28)

These researchers noted from their study – located in disadvantaged areas – that it is unclear as to whether this attitude is common to governors in other areas and from different types of schools. However, given this attitude of wanting consensus, co-

operation and support it is not surprising that Dean et al (2007) found that some governing bodies of schools in disadvantaged areas, whist being strong and principled in acting in the interests of the school, found it more comfortable supporting head teachers than challenging them. Where governors did critically challenge their views some head teachers found it valuable in improving their own performance. It is to be noted that the research of Dean et al (2007) studied ten primary school governing bodies in disadvantaged areas – further research needs to be undertaken of governance in contextually different primary schools.

2.5.4 Governing Body Responsibilities and Effectiveness

The analysis of the responsibilities of school governing bodies and the way they function, by Balarin et al (2008: 34-35), revealed four main tensions (see Figure 2) in the work of governing bodies:

- *Support - challenge*. Balarin et al (2008: 34) pointed out that support-challenge is specified as a function of governing bodies in legal statute. They argue that 'support' means listening, providing structure, expressing positive expectations, serving as an advocate, sharing ourselves in the relationship with the other, making the relationship with the other special. However, they argued, the concept of support in the support-challenge model is extremely sophisticated, going beyond being supportive, helpful and encouraging and requiring vision. If governors do not properly understand the support and challenge roles, and Balarin et al (2008) found that the vision dimension was often not articulated by school governors, then the support-challenge role would not be performed appropriately.

- *Representation - skill.* Balarin et al (2008: 34) contended that the way governing bodies are required to constitute themselves caused a tension between ensuring representation of different stakeholder groups and the skills and expertise required. Representation was seen as important – ensuring that the various groups with an interest in the school have a voice. Governors are, however, representatives not delegates. That is, they are not obliged nor expected to obtain mandates from the constituency they represent on decisions relating to the conduct of the school. Balarin et al (2008) argued that there is a case for extending this representation as a way of enhancing community participation and

development through the work of schools. Further, they argue, given the inclination for governing bodies to engage in operational school matters it may not be appropriate to appoint governors with a particular functional expertise.

- *Operational – strategic.* It was argued by Balarin et al (2008: 35) that the responsibilities of governing bodies as set out does not necessarily help them retain a strategic role. They contended that in a scrutiny role governing bodies would have a responsibility for ensuring that the head teacher and the senior staff both "…did things right" and that they (and by implication the school) were "…doing the right things". This would need to be informed by a discussion relating to "what we want our school to be". (See, also, discussion above).

- *Managing – scrutiny.* Balarin et al (2008: 35) suggested that a separation of these two roles – perhaps by regulation might be helpful to governing bodies.
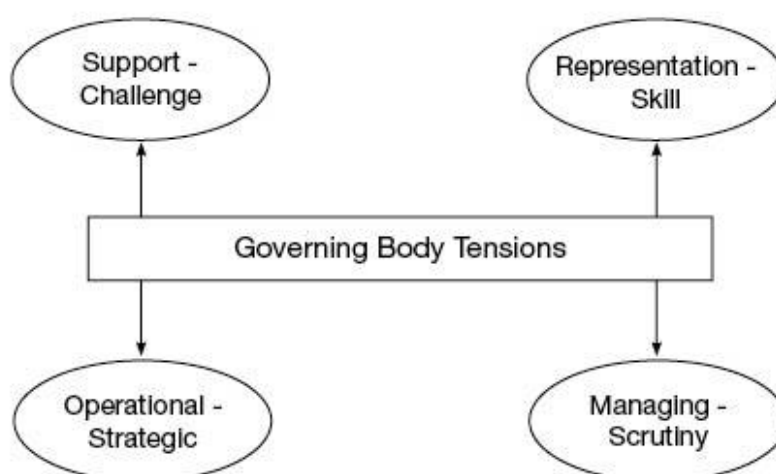
Figure 2: Governing Body Tensions

It was, therefore, the view of Balarin et al (2008: 35) that managing these different roles – support, challenge, representation, skill, operational, strategic, managing, scrutiny – and the interaction and balance between them, added substantially to the complexity of governing. A clearer definition of school governors' responsibilities could, Balarin et al (2008) argued, help governing bodies to manage the different roles and the tensions between these roles and this would assist them in undertaking their work more effectively.

Whilst recognising that the role of school governors has become more complex, with increased levels of legal and statutory responsibilities, Evans (2007), an experienced chair of governors and a consultant governor trainer to Local Authorities, was critical of school governance arguing that 40% of governing bodies can be described as coasting, 30% as unsatisfactory or failing and only 30% as meeting their obligations well. Typical features of a weak or failing governing body that Evans (2007: 7) claimed to have observed include:

- Ineffective leadership within the governing body.
- Shortage of necessary skills and/or experience.
- Reluctance to undertake training.
- High proportion of vacancies.
- Poor attendance at meetings.
- Poor knowledge of the school (i.e. its strengths and areas for improvement).
- Failure to challenge a dominant head teacher and other staff.
- Over-reliance on feedback from the head teacher.

Moreover, he argued, these weak governing bodies paid little attention to strategic issues whilst spending much time on minutiae. Evans (2007: 8-9) further contended that:

> Excellent governance in itself cannot directly improve the quality of teaching or overcome all of the problems within schools; this is the province of the head teacher and professional staff. However, by appropriate challenge and support to the head teacher and a clear focus on the key issues that restrict improvement, an effective governing body can identify potential difficulties and ensure that corrective action is put in place.

Moreover, Evans (2007: 11-12) claimed that there is an urgent need to address the problem of weak and failing governance. He maintained that:

1. More use should be made of semi-professional governors to effect rapid improvement in weak or failing governing bodies. A semi-professional governor would be an experienced governor who is paid for their services in supporting a governing body over a one year period perhaps by acting as the chair, joint chair or other mentoring role. A second semi-professional might support governors in their monitoring, supporting and challenging roles.

2. There is a need for alternative approaches to school governance but considered that one size does not fit all and he would not change those 30% of governing bodies that he argues are functioning well. He suggested that more use be made of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) model (originally used on a temporary basis in failing schools with the approval of the Local Authority and the Secretary of State). He claimed experience has shown that an IEB with four to six experienced governors plus the head teacher and chair can bring rapid improvement to governance with a few months. A shadow stakeholder governing body is then established to replace the IEB over a 6 to 12 month period. Another model Evans (2007) suggested is the use of a small group of experienced governors to run a Strategic Planning Group concerned with school improvement, finance, staffing, leadership and management. Less experienced governors would deal with issues such as the curriculum, the community, special educational needs, parents, etc. A further model Evans (2007) contended is worthy of consideration is to have a small executive board (three or four governors) and a larger non-executive board (representative of staff, parents, community and other stakeholders. The executive board would have responsibility for key strategic and statutory functions but would be required to report to the non-executive board who would have a scrutiny role.

3. For soft federations of three or four schools Evans (2007) proposed a smaller governing body for each school, each body to meet twice per term, but be linked to an executive committee for the whole federation. The executive committee would be formed from a nominated lead governor from each school, include each head teacher in the federation and be led, ideally, by an independent and experienced chair. A bursar/business manager would support the executive committee and have a role across all of the schools. Such a model would require a relaxation of the present governance regulations but, in the opinion of Evans, be particularly applicable to small rural schools.

A cautionary note on the re-organisation of governing bodies was expressed by Millar (2008). She was critical of the possible replacement of the 'stakeholder' model of governance by smaller 'interim executive boards' (IEBs) drawing in business people to run schools. As an experienced primary school chair of governors she referred to the smaller governing body in writing:

> …even if six people (barely enough to run a disciplinary hearing and an appeal panel) did constitute a large enough permanent group to perform the 85 tasks on the government's decision planner list, does anybody really think there is an army of 100,000 plus "experts" and entrepreneurs out there ready to step into our shoes? (Millar, 2008: 4)

Good governors, Millar (2008) argued, need to be strategic and well-trained, but additionally they need to have the time and inclination to sit in committee meetings, take minutes, recruit staff, deal with disciplinary and behaviour issues, as well as fulfilling "softer" roles such as attending school fairs, going to concerts and generally acting as the glue between the school and community.
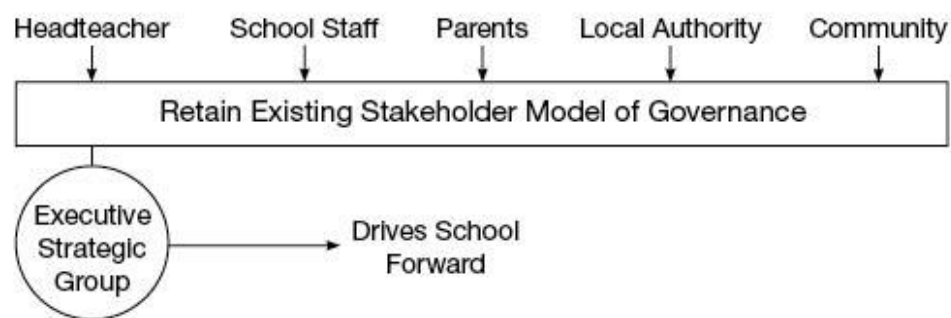
Figure 3: Inner-Executive Strategic Group

Defending the role of parents, within her own experience, in serving as school governors Millar expressed a preference for the existing larger stakeholder model including the use of an "…inner-executive strategic group to drive the school forward within a wider, democratic body" (Millar, 2008: 4). It is this model (Figure 3) that she would prefer to be developed rather than a smaller governing body or one populated by business people external to the school community. Clearly her argument against smaller governing bodies is related to her doubts as to their capabilities in fulfilling all of the tasks of governing as shown in Tables I and II below.

2.5.5   External and Internal Pressures on the 'Stakeholder' Model

Ranson and Crouch (2009) supported the findings of Balarin et al (2008) and described a number of external and internal pressures faced by the current stakeholder model of school governance. Ranson and Crouch (2009) identified three possible models of change (Figure 4) for the governing of schools:

1. The business model

It is argued by advocates of this model, claimed Ranson and Crouch (2009: 54), that the existing stakeholder model is crumbling – too much rubber stamping of head teacher decisions; recruitment is difficult; the "same old fogies year after year"; too daunting a task for parents and the prospect of trusts implies that faith in the community has crumbled. The argument here is that a new era requires a new form of governance – school governance is now too serious a business to have people just helping out. It was advocated that school governance would be better with a 'business model' of a board of non-executive directors. The head teacher would be left to manage the school whilst the board's prime responsibility would be to manage the head teacher. The governing body would be smaller and the role of the governor would be more clearly defined. Advocates of this business model see the role of governor being attractive to people from the world of business and commerce.

2. An executive and stakeholder model

In discussing this possible model of school governance Ranson and Crouch (2009: 55) presented further evidence of tensions and confusions – for example, additional responsibilities, further complexity, the centrality of relationships with parents, further accountability, the decline of local authorities – relating to school governing bodies. They argued that advocates of the 'executive and stakeholder model' are reluctant to move to business-like executive governing bodies because they are reluctant to place in jeopardy the representative dimension of the stakeholder model. Therefore, it is proposed that the full governing body maintains representation as with the stakeholder model and that this provides a "forum" for all views to be expressed. However, formed from the full governing body would be a 'small executive board' with full delegated powers to direct and manage the school. This executive board – including the head teacher and senior management team – would meet monthly and be responsible for the finance, resources, staffing, etc. The non-executive governing body would be responsible for scrutiny of the executive board's plans *before* implementation. They would also be responsible for links

with pupils, parents and other community links. It is believed that this model could be adapted to schools forming federations or working in clusters.
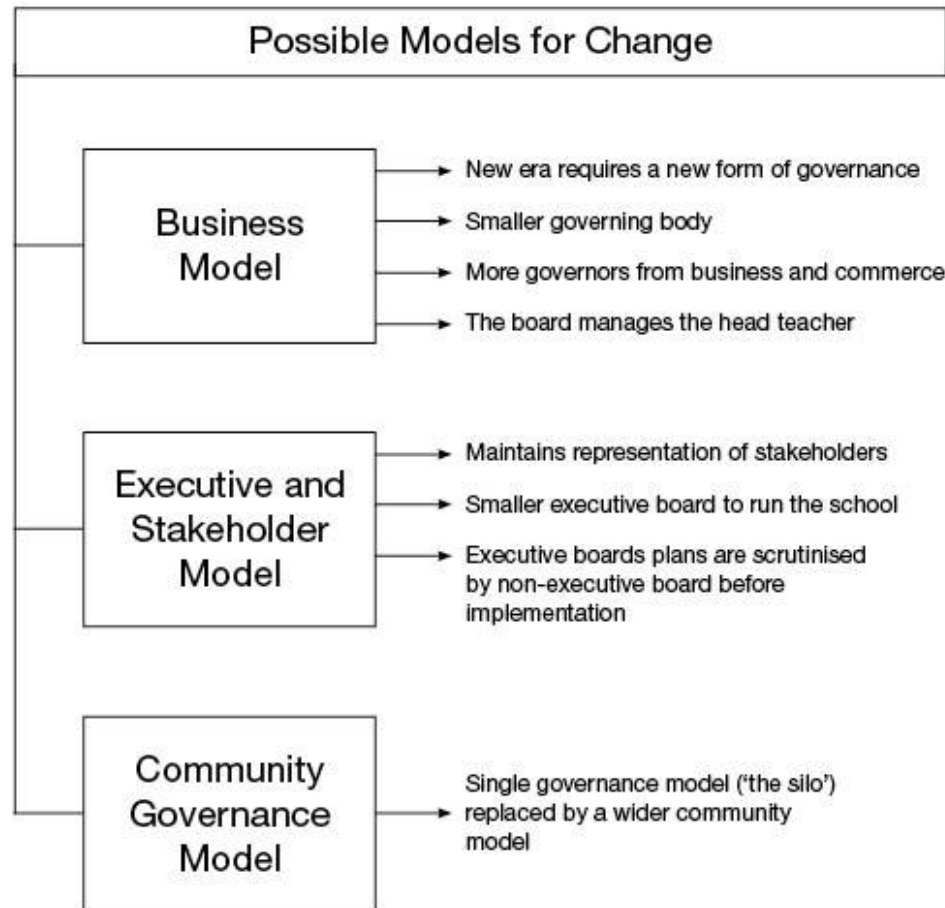
Figure 4: Models of Change

3. A community governance model

Ranson and Crouch (2009: 56) maintained that a national group of experienced governors recognised that the stakeholder model of governance needed reviewing in light of the then emphasis on building and engaging communities to develop education services. It was envisaged that the local authority would take the lead in creating 'a layer of community governance'. Ranson and Crouch (2009: 57) quoted one of this national group:

> We need governing bodies to broaden their remit, to engage more broadly with the community, to engage with the underachieving; examine what are the obstacles, and identify those in the community who can help remove the

obstacles to learning. This develops the role of governing bodies as leaders and enablers of community development.

It was intended that this model of governance would turn governing bodies into leaders of the community with parent councils, for example, engaging further with the governing body. As Ranson and Crouch (2009: 59) commented, advocates of this model were arguing:

> …for expanding the object of governance from the single school ('the silo') to the wider community. This would prevent schools competing with each other to admit 'the able' and exclude 'the difficult' child, and make all schools responsible for all the children in a community…

It was claimed by Ranson and Crouch (2009) that the debate over new models of governance raised fundamental questions about the values, purposes, organisation and practice of school governance and that these needed to be addressed if further reform was to rest on firm foundations. They argued that governing bodies, when they worked well, strengthened the practices of institutional leadership, by clarifying and enabling strategic direction, and by providing the qualities of scrutiny and evaluation. Good professionals are said to be ready to invite questioning of their policies, because it leads to reflection and improvement of practice and achievement. Governance that provides strategic direction, critical friendship and accountability establishes expectations that run right through a school, tightening the practices of learning and teaching and leading to improved standards of achievement.

2.5.6 Future Challenges

As mentioned above, a recent Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (DCSF, 2010a) reported on the implications and challenges for school governing bodies in the future. This group had been set up following the governmental document The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) which included making changes to school governance including a proposal to make governing bodies smaller whilst retaining consistency with the stakeholder model. It was argued (DCSF, 2007: 99), with little supporting evidence forthcoming, that:

> Smaller governing bodies tend to be more effective and highly skilled. We believe smaller governing bodies can be consistent with the stakeholder model and so we will make governing bodies more effective, beginning by consulting on reducing the size of governing bodies.

What was intended by "more effective" was not clarified and the evidence for this claim was widely queried, particularly by the National Governors Association (NGA) (see Adamson, Ed., 2009). Mansfield (2009: 10) commented: "If the government thought that some consensus on smaller governing bodies could be quickly reached it was due for a surprise". On publication, the report (DCSF, 2010a) revealed that the policy had been amended, stating that there "... needed to be greater flexibility around the membership of governing bodies for them to be more effective…" (DCSF, 2010a: 3). This report stated that whilst there "…has been limited research conducted … on school governors…" (DCSF, 2010a: 6) a number of common themes emerged from the studies they had examined (unfortunately these studies are not documented anywhere in the report). It was claimed (DCSF, 2010a: 7), however, that:

- The majority of school governance is good or better; a third of school governance is satisfactory.
- Governors can find it difficult to challenge the head teacher and prefer to work collaboratively with them.
- Head teacher surveys suggested that 20% of governing bodies were ineffective and 20% rated as very effective.

It was maintained, further, that a core of governors, within each governing body, did most of the work and that 11% of governor posts are vacant; governor vacancies being particularly evident in inner city areas.

2.5.7 The Governing Body Clerk

The above report (DCSF, 2010a: 8) expressed other concerns, for example, relating to the clerk of the governing body, stating that:

> …the role of the clerk to the governing body was akin to that of a clerk to a court and they were much more than mere note takers. Effective clerks to governing bodies were essential to give governors guidance on their duties, however, too many governing bodies used the school secretary or head's PA as clerk. This could create difficulties and compromise the individual's position if they had to challenge the head over a course of action that was being proposed.

It was recommended that the "…status, skills and independence of clerks to governing bodies should be raised, so that they can provide a more professional service to governing bodies" (DCSF, 2010a: 20) and proposed that "All governing bodies… have a trained clerk" (DCSF, 2010a: 22). Pounce (2008b: 10) argued that ineffective clerking can leave a "…governing body wallowing aimlessly…" and considered that training for clerks was essential.

James et al (2010) maintained that there is a particular burden on the governing body clerk as a result of the way in which the tasks and responsibilities of governing bodies are specified and the scope for variation. The clerk is required to work closely with the governing body in supporting them and advising on constitutional and procedural matters, duties and powers. However, their research revealed that there are varied arrangements for the administration of governing bodies by the clerk. In some schools the clerk was a member of the school administrative staff. In other cases the clerks were part of a professional team undertaking the work as part of a local authority service level agreement. James et al (2010: 75) commented that there "…was no evidence that the in-house clerk model was consistently worse than the 'professional' clerk model." However, they did find that weak clerking led to inefficiencies and argue that effective clerking can considerably help the governing process. The House of Commons (1999: 37) reporting on school governance, over ten years earlier, had noted that:

> We agree with witnesses who argued that effective clerking services made a significant contribution to the work of effective governing bodies. We believe the cost of such services is a worthwhile investment for governing bodies, and we hope that all governing bodies will use such services.

This UK Parliament report further recommended that LEAs should offer clerking services to schools but that schools might also use other providers. Ofsted (2011) in a study of 14 schools judged to have very effective governance stated that, in these schools, the clerk to the governing body was essential in organising meetings, sending out documentation and ensuring that statutory duties were met.

2.5.8 Increasing Workload

Many governors, the DCSF (2010a) noted, have expressed apprehension over the increasing workload on governing bodies. The authors of the report concurred that:

> …the duties of school governors are demanding and the last twenty years has seen the progressive delegation of funding and responsibilities from local education authorities to individual schools and many of those responsibilities rest with governing bodies as they are the accountable body for their schools. (DCSF, 2010b: 8).

Table II, below, has been compiled and adapted by this researcher, using material from Adamson (2012) and DCSF (2010a) to briefly illustrate the statutory duties and key issues that relate to primary school governors. In foundation and voluntary aided schools the governing body has additional responsibilities due to their role as the employer.

<div align="center">

TABLE II
Compliance with Statutory Regulations

</div>

The curriculum	Every learner to receive the full statutory curriculum.
	Provides teaching of RE / told of right to withdraw.
	Provides daily act of worship / told of right to withdraw.
	Written policy on sex and relationships education.
	Decision on sex and relationships education (in Primary).
	Meets early years foundation stage requirements.
Equality and diversity	Implemented policies and practices to avoid discrimination against learners, job applicants or staff – gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, marital/civil partnership status or age.
	Complies with Sex Discrimination Act – monitoring and assessing impact.
	Complies with Race Relations Act – monitoring and assessing impact.
	Complies with Disability Discrimination Act – monitoring and assessing
Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Meets national requirements with regard to Special Educational Needs Code of Practice – publishes policy and reports annually.
	Meets requirements of Part 4 of Disability Discrimination Act – informs parents of accessibility plan and reports annually.
	Appointed special educational needs coordinator – ensures postholder is trained.
Learners care and well-being	School to meet all relevant health and safety legislation.
	Child protection and procedures in place.
	School catering meets current DfE standards.
	Complies with welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Informing parents/carers	Head teacher and/or governing body ensures all statutory assessments are conducted and results forwarded to parents/carers.
	Annual reports forwarded to parents/ carers.
	School prospectus published.
Leadership and management	Constitution, function and membership of the governing body.
	To hold full governing body meetings at least 3 times in a school year
	Admissions
	Meets requirements relating to school finances. Limits of financial delegation are delineated.
	Control of school premises; charging; determination of session times; safeguarding children

	and safer recruitment procedures.
	Ensures implementation of good practice in relation to School Teachers' Pay and Conditions.
	Has all complaints and appeals procedures in place.
	Employment and dismissal of staff.
	Behaviour, discipline and welfare of pupils including home-school agreements.
	Post-Ofsted action plan.
	Has performance management policy in place – ensures appraisal of all staff including head teacher.
	Promoting community cohesion and associated delegated budget.
	Governing body collaborations e.g. federations, trusts.
	Appoint / dismiss clerk to the governors.
	Change the school, e.g. to academy status.
	Complete register of business interests.

As a further illustration of the demanding workload of school governors, particularly the Chair and Head teacher, Table III, below, has been developed by the researcher using his own experience of school governance, as detailed in chapter 1, and governing body annual work plans from Adamson (2012) and Adamson (2011). Table III shows, therefore, some of the issues that may engage a primary school governing body across a school year. In this hypothetical example the school governing body meets three times a year and the four sub-committees meet once per term. In reality, the governing body – the full body and the sub-committees - may meet more than three times per year and the Chair of Governors may spend much additional time meeting one to one with the Head teacher.

TABLE III
Exemplar Primary Governor Meetings

Autumn Term	Spring Term	Summer Term
Full governing body	**Full governing body**	**Sub-committees meet:**
Elect chair and vice-chair.	Very full agenda including head teachers report and reports from sub-committees.	**Finance**
Review sub-committees and elect chairs.		Review minutes.
	Monitor school development plan.	Receive and discuss report from Head teacher.
Agree specific responsibilities for individual governors.	Discuss imminent visit from Ofsted	Discuss budget priorities.
Agree dates of meetings for the coming year.	**Sub-committees meet:**	Audit school fund.
	Finance	Fund raising issues discussed.
Confirm clerk for the year ahead.	Review minutes.	Premises chair reports on new classroom developments.
Agree any other procedural and structural issues for the year ahead.	Receive and discuss report from head teacher.	**Staffing**
Introduce new governors and organise induction for them.	Monitor budget.	Review minutes.
	Consider charges for lease of premises.	Head teacher's report.
Consider and organise training for individual governors.	Discuss fund-raising for new classroom extension.	Staff leaving – discuss.
		Discuss advertising and set-up appointments panel for new post.
Receive head teachers report and discuss.	**Staffing**	Support staff, discuss issues.
	Review minutes.	**Curriculum**
Receive reports from sub-committees.	Receive and discuss report from head teacher.	Review minutes.
		Receive reports from English and Music co-ordinators.
Receive other reports.	Review staffing numbers for forthcoming year.	Discuss funding issues.
Receive and discuss national issue reports, e.g. development of academy proposals, SATs related issues.	Discuss possible redundancy amongst support staff .	Review phonics proposals.
		Discuss individual reading.
	Curriculum	Discuss plans for mathematics practical areas.
Discuss issues for possible Ofsted inspection.	Review minutes.	**Premises**
Four different sub-committees meet at varying times during the term:	Receive reports from Science and Mathematics Co-ordinators.	Review minutes.
	Discuss new National Curriculum and changes required in the school timetable.	**Full Governing Body**
Finance		Review minutes.
Staffing	Review plans for extra individual reading sessions supported by parents.	Receive Head teacher's report.t
Curriculum		Discuss issues arising including outcome of Ofsted inspection visit.
Premises	**Premises**	Receive reports from chairs of sub-committees: Finance, Staffing, Curriculum, Premises.
Governors team building event (one day)	Review minutes.	Receive report from architect re new classroom.
	Walk around school corridors and classrooms, discuss and plan improvements to the facilities.	Governor training – discuss needs and plans.

As indicated, the duties and issues illustrated in Tables II and III, above, are not exhaustive but it is, perhaps, surprising that the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in their report 'The 21st Century School: Implications and Challenges for Governing Bodies' (DCSF, 2010a: 10) should write in relation to the duties and powers of voluntary governing bodies: "This *may* (present researcher's italics) seem like a daunting set of responsibilities…" whilst arguing that many of these duties can be delegated. The pressure and difficulty of the governing body workload can also be evidenced by the national education agenda, where the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander (Ed), 2010: 458) have argued that their work had taken place against a backdrop of constantly changing national education policy. Since 2006, when the review was launched, policy had changed with such speed and frequency that even full-time policy experts, let alone teachers, had been hard pressed to keep track of what has been going on.

2.5.9   New Challenges

Following their study of school governance James et al (2010: 4) argued that school governing is likely to become even more complicated as a result of:

- Increasing expectations of schools.
- Changes to government policies.
- Schools becoming more diverse in type, increasingly working together, and being governed together.
- Schools providing an extended range of services for their communities and undertaking a broader range of responsibilities and tasks.
- New forms of schools and the extension of existing categories.

These new challenges could be clearly seen in the new coalition government's White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) seeking to create a more autonomous school system with dismantling of central government control and the so-called compliance regime. It is intended that more information will be available for parents from central government so that parents can hold schools to account. Furthermore, schools will be required to publish comprehensive information online. Performance tables are to be reformed and emphasis put on the progress made by the lowest-attaining

20 per cent of pupils. The Ofsted inspection system is to be re-focused on teaching and learning with more inspections of weaker schools, but will retain inspection of school governance within the 'leadership and management' aspect. Higher standards are to be required from each school. This White Paper (DfE, 2010: 71) referred specifically to the role of school governors and stated:

> School governors are the unsung heroes of our education system. They are one of the biggest volunteer forces in the country, working in their spare time to promote school improvement and to support head teachers and teachers in their work. To date, governors have not received the recognition, support or attention that they deserve. We will put that right.

Additionally, the White Paper (DfE, 2010: 71) argued that many of the most successful schools have smaller governing bodies with individuals drawn from a wide range of people rooted in the community, such as parents, businesses, local government and the voluntary sector. The White Paper stated that from early 2012 all schools will be allowed to adopt this more flexible model of school governance whilst maintaining a minimum of two parent governors. This continuation of the argument for smaller governing bodies is difficult to reconcile with the workload concerns expressed above. However, the White Paper does express the intention to work with the National Governors Association (NGA) and others to clarify governing body responsibilities. Other radical reforms − reviewing the national curriculum and key stage 2 testing; the extension of the academies programme; the setting up of free schools; further collaborations such as academy chains, multi-school trusts and federations; the changing role of local authorities; changes to school funding − are, it is argued, some of the demanding issues which will challenge primary school governing bodies in the years ahead.

2.6 Developing a Conceptual Framework

Having formulated a number of research questions, representing "…facets of an empirical domain that the researcher most wants to explore" (Miles and Hubermann, 1994: 23) and having reviewed the literature on primary school governance (the existing theoretical framework) the researcher was able to develop a 'conceptual framework' for this study. Miles and Hubermann (1994: 22) have advised that conceptual frameworks "…are best done graphically rather than in text…" and further describe them as "…simply the current version of the researcher's map of the territory being investigated."

Figure 5 represents, therefore, a diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework for this study:

Primary School Governance

Civic Role
School Governance - History
1944 Act
1988 Reform Act
Neoliberal v Civic
Democratic Deficit
Local Management of Schools
New Labour Government
Academies, Trusts, Chair
Local Authorities
Decentralised - Centralism

Function & Operation
Corporate Body
Legal Responsibilities
Function
Role Clarification
Community Interests
Effectiveness
Operation
Types of Governance
Capital and Agency
Public Profile

In England
300,000 Volunteers
23,000 Schools
£20 Billion Budget

Changing
Educational System -
Increased
Responsibilities

**Perspectives
of Head Teachers
and Chairs of
Governance**

Methodology
Data
Collection
Data
Presentation
Data
Analysis

Conclusions
Contribution
to
Knowledge
Reflections

Training and Information Sharing
Induction Training
Mandatory Training
Accreditation
Local Authority Training
Information Provision
Use of Information Technology
National Provision

Challenges and Tensions
Turnover of Governors
Disadvantaged Areas
Tensions in Governing Bodies
Weak Governance
Stakeholder Model
Community Governance
Governing Body Clerk
Workload
Statutory Regulations
New Challenges

Figure 5: Conceptual Framework for this Study

This conceptual framework has a "…focusing and bounding function…" (Miles and Hubermann, 1994: 19) in that it specifies that primary school head teachers and chairs of

governance are the subjects of the study, that their perspectives of primary school governance are the focus of the study and that four specific themes have emerged from the review of the literature. It was the head teachers and chairs of governance 'perspectives on these four themes', not other possible themes, that were studied.

This researcher developed a 'methodological framework' for this present research and this is presented in Chapter 3. This can be considered as part of the 'conceptual framework' for this study since it has focusing, bounding, defining and mapping functions.

2.7 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The foregoing literature review has shown that school governors have been considered a unique form of local democracy – part of an important public service - in the form of the 'stakeholder' model of governance. They have been described as one of the largest groups of volunteers and one of the best examples of civic engagement in the country. It has been argued, however, that the 1988 Education Act centralised power in the hands of the government and therefore dramatically changed the context in which primary schools have operated over the last twenty-five years. It has been shown that there has been more state control of primary education accompanied by increasing school autonomy – a co-existence which has been described as 'decentralised– centralism'. A key concept in this has been to make the public sector more efficient particularly at the Local Authority level. It has been proposed that the governance, administration and control of primary education in England is one of the policy areas that has undergone the deepest changes, in recent decades, and that the importance of school governance – especially the role of the chair of governors and head teacher – is likely to increase following the 2010 White Paper whereby the freedom and autonomy of schools will be enhanced allowing the development of academies, free schools, chains of schools, multi-school trusts and federations. Evidence has been provided showing that many are critical of these developments, arguing, for example, that they create a democratic deficit and that they are a dismantling of the present public education system. The governance task of these new schools is seen to be greater, than at present, yet there is evidence that smaller governing bodies are proposed. So the above review showed that English primary education is likely to undergo significant structural change with some leading researchers

contrasting the English post-war democratic civil society – the judgement about the public good, the good of all, formed by the people of a locality – with the developing corporate, civil society where diversity of interests is celebrated.

Leading researchers in this field have argued that school governance is overloaded, overcomplicated and does not have a sufficiently high public profile. Recent research has shown the importance of school governance and that some researchers maintain that the lack of a capable governing body is a substantial disadvantage for a school. Other research has shown that chairs of governors convey a strong sense that they are the leading custodians, supervisors and guardians of their schools. The role of the head teacher, it would appear from research, is crucial in the operation and effectiveness of a governing body. A recent national survey showed that governance is only satisfactory or less in around a third of schools whilst other research, based in Wales, has distinguished between four types of school governance with only ten per cent of schools having the strongest form of governance labelled 'the governing body'. No comparable study is available for English primary schools. Recent research relating to the views of head teachers and chairs of governance on school governance is limited.

In relation to training and information sharing for, and within, governing bodies the foregoing review of the literature has shown that these are significant issues, especially at a time when the responsibilities of governors are increasing. It was apparent, from the review of literature, that the training of school governors has been of concern over the last two decades – one research project indicating that only a small percentage of governors received formal training to prepare them for their role and another research study showed that one-half of governors had received no further training since induction. This latter study, in 1999, argued that governor training needed improvement. Arguments have been made, above, that governors need to participate in a national induction programme, that each governing body should have an annual training plan, that governing body responsibilities be reduced, that whole governing body training be given and that joint training of the governing body and head teacher is necessary. It has been recognised that many newly appointed head teachers have little direct experience of working with a governing body and, it was suggested, that training be given in this area of their work. Further, it has been suggested that experienced governors should be mentoring and supporting governing bodies and individual chairs. A recent governmental working group has argued that there should be mandatory training for chairs of governing

bodies. Literature has been reviewed suggesting there should be accreditation for all governors, basic training followed by a probationary period and that 'semi-professional' governors be used to give support. At present, local authority governor support services are responsible for training but there appears to be limited recent research on the training of chairs of governors and head teachers for their role in relation to school governance. It has been argued, in the foregoing review of the literature, that inequalities in the training of governing bodies, and of individual governors, as well as inequalities in information provision, could lead to a diminishing of democracy. Little appears to be known about how chairs of governors and head teachers use information technology in their roles as governors. Recent research would seem to indicate that custom and practice may well be an important factor in shaping the skills of governors.

Further, the foregoing review of the literature has shown that governing bodies face a range of challenges and tensions. They are, it appears, dynamic in nature since there is a consistent turnover of governors because of their four-year period of office and the subsequent need to fill vacancies and rebuild as expertise and experience is lost. In areas of social and economic disadvantage, recent research has shown that it is difficult to recruit parent governors – once recruited such governors tend to be easily manipulated by head teachers and are often peripheral to the working of the governing body where a small group of governors often do most of the work. Other research has identified four areas of tension within governing bodies: support - challenge; representation – skill; operational – strategic and managing – scrutiny. These tensions, it has been argued, add to the complexity of school governance and, as above, this research argues that a clearer definition of school governor responsibilities might aid their effectiveness. Literature has been reviewed relating to the re-organisation of governing body structures with the idea that 'one size does not fit all' whilst other researchers suggest three possible governance models: the business model; an executive and stakeholder model and, finally, a community model. A recent governmental working group has proposed that school governance would be more effective with smaller governing bodies; yet other evidence has been presented showing the multifaceted and increasing workload of governing bodies so casting doubt on how a smaller governing body could manage. Moreover, it is argued that school governance is likely to become even more complex with increasing expectations and more diversity in the school system. Finally, literature has been

reviewed comparing the governing body clerk to the clerk of a court and expressing doubt as to whether this important role can be fulfilled by in-house school personnel.

It is evident from the foregoing literature review that school governance is of national significance but has received relatively little attention from researchers. Few research studies have been undertaken on key stakeholders, such as the head teacher and chair of governance, within governing bodies and previous studies on English primary school governance have been conducted on a relatively narrow range of schools. Research needs to be conducted to establish how head teachers and chairs of governors, in English primary schools, perceive their role and cope with the complex and increasing demands on governing bodies. Previous research has indicated the need for more studies of school governance in order to further develop understanding of this field. How individual governing bodies function is not well understood and further research is needed to probe their operation. The training of individual governors and of governing bodies is under-researched as is the way information is shared. Little research has been conducted on the challenges and tensions currently facing school governors across a range of English primary schools.

Following the review of the literature the researcher has presented and discussed the 'conceptual framework' of the study. The next chapter explains, discusses and justifies the methods used in the investigation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to explain, document and justify the methods adopted and used in this research study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the models of inquiry associated with educational research and this is followed by a description and justification of the research approach used in this study. How the researcher used maximum variation sampling to select twenty primary schools, across ten Local Authorities, in England is described and details given of how access to the participants was obtained. Further explanation is provided relating to how the data was collected and of the interviews undertaken in the research. The chapter concludes with discussion and clarification of how the data was analysed, of how ethical considerations were maintained and, finally, what provisions for trustworthiness were made. The operational framework for the study is summarised in Figure 6, below:
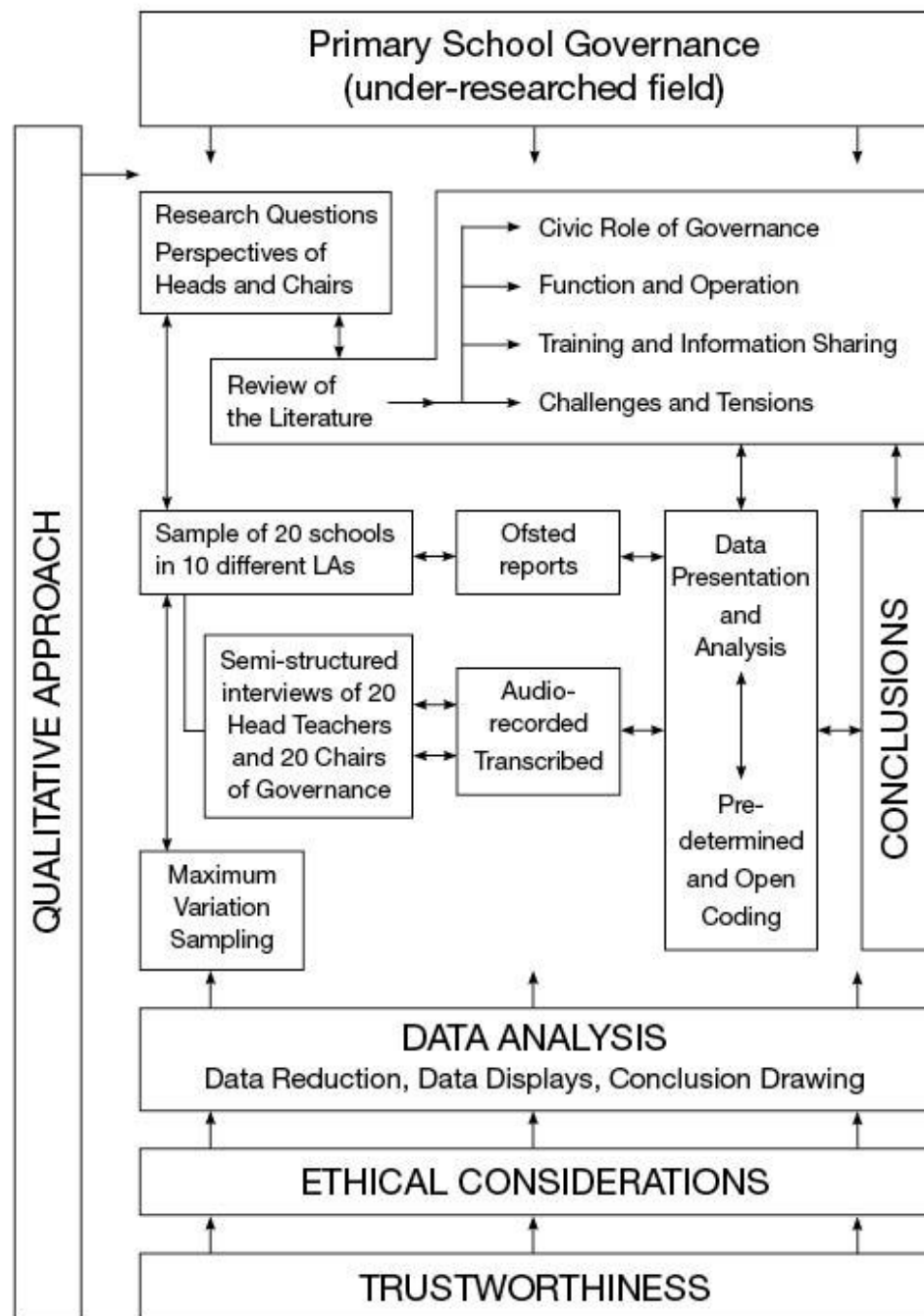
Figure 6: Operational Framework

3.2 Research Approaches

An early task in the 'research journey' was to review the models of inquiry (paradigms) associated with educational research in order to assess their suitability for this study. Hammersley et al (1994: 6) argued that:

> Much of the work of educational researchers, like that of social scientists generally, has been modelled on what were taken to be the methods of the natural sciences. In many ways this has been the most important influence of all, shaping the ways in which educational researchers have thought about and carried out their research.

The roots of educational research are, according to Hammersley et al (1994), associated with the work of late nineteenth century psychologists when the experimental method was seen as the essence of a scientific approach to research. When the sociology of education was established in Britain in the 1950s it also employed measurement techniques and statistical analysis similar to those used in psychological research. As a consequence much educational research in Britain, and the USA, has been quantitative in character using a scientific approach to derive 'hard' measurable data. However, there has been criticism of such research. For example, there have been fundamental doubts raised about the validity of the numerical evidence produced by such research and questions raised as to whether it represents accurately what it claims to represent. Questions have been raised about the assumption that human social life consists of mechanical cause-and-effect relationships whereas it is, arguably, more variable and complex. Such criticisms, Hammersley et al (1994) noted, have been the stimulus for the adoption, since the 1960s, of more qualitative approaches to educational research.

In contrasting the positivistic/scientific paradigm with the alternate interpretive paradigm, Burton et al (2008: 60) pointed out that these paradigms are the two most frequently associated with educational research and that they "…represent opposing world views with regard to how reality is understood (ontology) and the production of knowledge (epistemology) is perceived." The positivistic researcher seeks to collect hard quantitative, measurable data and discover true facts about the world (scientific truths); uses an experimental, scientific approach in controlled conditions such as a laboratory and/or using controlled groups; tries to test and observe relationships between variables and believe that their findings can be generalised as 'true facts' from the research setting to the world in general (Walsh, 2001). The interpretive researcher is characterized, Burton et al (2008: 60) suggested, by the intention:

> …to explore perspectives and shared meanings and to develop insights and a deeper understanding of phenomena occurring in the social world by means of collecting predominantly qualitative data.

Three types of possible approaches to research (research designs) - quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods – were proposed by Cresswell (2009). These can be seen as covering the broad assumptions that need to be understood in deciding upon detailed methods for the collection of data and subsequent analysis. Cresswell reasoned that qualitative and quantitative approaches should not be viewed as polar opposites but rather as representing different ends on a continuum. He perceived mixed methods research in the middle of this continuum since it incorporates elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Whilst conceding that the quantitative/qualitative ways of labelling research are well established, Robson (2002: 164) argued for his preferences - the labels of "fixed" and "flexible" designs – since quantitative approaches require "…a tight pre-specification of the design prior to data collection…" whereas, in practice, qualitative approaches can incorporate quantitative methods of data collection. Quantitative and qualitative research, Bryman (2004: 19) has explained, can be taken to "…form two distinctive clusters of *research strategy"*. He defined a research strategy as being simply "…a general orientation to the conduct of social research" and contrasted the quantification of data in the quantitative strategy with the emphasis on words in the collection of data for the qualitative approach.

In concluding this section the researcher documents Robson's (2002: 163) view that:

> It is now considered respectable and acceptable in virtually all areas of social research (including applied fields such as education, health, social work, and business and management) to use designs based largely or exclusively on methods generating qualitative data.

However, it is to be noted that Silverman (2005: 6) cautioned: "No method of research, quantitative or qualitative, is intrinsically better than any other." In choosing a method or approach everything depends on what the researcher sets out to investigate.

3.3 Research Approach Used in this Study

The aim of this research, as described in Chapter 1, was to explore current practices and experiences in the governance of a sample of contextually different primary schools as perceived by their head teachers and chairs of governance. The researcher was interested

in finding out and understanding, in-depth, their views on a range of issues concerned with primary school governance. He was concerned with their perceptions, interactions, insights, descriptions, choices, challenges, tensions and experiences as they observed them as key individuals within the 'natural' setting of their particular governing body. The views of Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) were persuasive when they claimed that a feature of qualitative data:

> …is their richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide "thick descriptions" that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader.

Additionally, Brundrett and Rhodes (2014: 154), whilst pointing out that qualitative research can rarely claim to provide generalizable universal truths, have argued that it can offer rich interpretations and insights that can have important implications for development and change.

Therefore, given the nature of the research questions it was judged appropriate to employ a qualitative research strategy – the researcher considered that this approach would produce the most useful knowledge taking into account the time scale for the study and the availability of the sample schools (see Blaxter et al, 2002 and Silverman, 2005). However, whilst the researcher considered a traditional, exclusively quantitative approach to be inappropriate, the investigation generated some useful and relevant numerical data. It is to be noted that in planning this investigation the researcher had examined and was aware that some experienced researchers in the field of school governance (eg Ranson et al, 2005; Dean et al, 2007; Balarin et al, 2008) had used essentially qualitative approaches.

When examining the nature of research in education Bassey (1990: 35) explained that:

> In carrying out research the purpose is to try to make some claim to knowledge; to try to show something that was not known before. However small, however modest the hoped for claim to knowledge is, provided it is carried out systematically, critically and self-critically, the search for knowledge is research.

Faulkner et al (1993: 8-9) built upon Bassey's definition, and other conventions that he outlined, in providing a set of 'ground rules' that they believed to be fundamental to research in education:

- There should be a clear purpose to the research with a planned attempt to answer specific questions, problems or hypotheses.
- Data should be collected and recorded systematically, so that it can, if necessary, be checked by others.
- There should be a clear rationale informing the data analysis.
- There should be a critical examination of the evidence to ensure it is accurate, representative and reliable.
- Researchers must be self-critical and scrutinize their assumptions, methods and findings.
- Researchers should communicate their findings to a wider audience and attempt to relate these to previously published theories.
- Researchers should observe sound ethical practices.

(adapted from Faulkner et al, 1993: 8-9).

The present researcher has tried to incorporate this set of ground rules into the various phases of his research and to be mindful of Blaxter et al's (2001: 5) view that all research should aim to be "…planned, cautious, systematic and reliable" in "… finding out or deepening understanding."

The review of literature (Chapter 2) and the researcher's own first-hand experiences of primary school governance (see Chapter 1) had revealed the importance of the head teacher and the chair of governance in the operation of school governing bodies. However, it was clear that there was little previous research probing the views of these key stake-holders and, furthermore, what research had been conducted on school governance indicated the need for more studies to add to knowledge and understanding of this field. At the outset of the study, and particularly in reference to the methodology of Dean et al (2007), where conclusions were drawn from a limited number of governing bodies, all in disadvantaged areas, this researcher was interested in investigating the governance of a wide range of primary schools in England. This interest was supported further by the review of other studies (see Chapter 2). Accordingly, this researcher built a sample of 20 contextually different primary schools and gathered data using interviews and background documentary evidence. This approach is explained and justified below.

Finally, in implementing a flexible, but essentially qualitative, approach the researcher adopted a naturalistic (sometimes labelled interpretive or constructivist) stance – the aim

was to investigate school governance in the natural setting. Reality was, therefore, represented through the views of those participating in school governance and there was minimal manipulation of the setting (see Robson, 2002). It has been argued by Cohen et al (2003:157) that the widespread use of naturalistic research, whilst recognising some inherent difficulties, signals "…increasing acceptance…" as a "…legitimate and important…" research style. Miles and Hubermann (1994: 10), similarly, pointed to the importance of well-collected qualitative data focussing on naturally occurring, ordinary events and with an emphasis on the "lived experiences" of people.

3.4 Building a Sample of Schools

As explained above, this study aimed to explore current practices and experiences in the governance of primary schools drawing upon the perceptions and insights of chairs of governance and head teachers from contextually different schools. Maximum variation sampling (after Chapman et al, 2010) was used to select 20 primary schools within 10 Local Authorities in England. Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 57) helpfully explained that maximum variation sampling does not aim to build a random sample:

> …but rather to select persons or settings that we think represent the range of experience on the phenomenon in which we are interested. Thus, it is our working knowledge of the contexts of the individuals and settings that lead us to select them for initial inclusion in our study.

For this present study the researcher aimed, as far as possible, to select a sample of schools based upon the full diversity of primary provision in terms of the following dimensions:

- Size - small, medium, and large primary schools.
- Position - including inner-city, disadvantaged, suburban and rural primary schools.
- A multi-cultural mix of pupils – representing those schools with a very low percentage (often all of White British Heritage), a low percentage, a medium percentage to those with a high percentage of ethnic minority pupils.
- Free school meals taken (as a measure of deprivation).
- Different types of schools from a range of religious denominations, community schools and those representing other categories including trusts, federations and academies.

- Representing schools as inspected by Ofsted and graded as '1 for outstanding', '2 for good' and '3 for satisfactory'. These grades representing, in Ofsted's terminology, 'Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?'

The above characteristics were selected as a result of previous studies (see Chapters 1 and 2) and the researcher's own first-hand experiences (see Chapter 1) which suggested that they all were possibly contextually relevant to the operation of primary school governing bodies. The researcher aimed, also, to select a sample of schools across a range of Local Authorities (until recently known as Local Education Authorities). This was because he was aware that every Local Authority (LA) had an independent governor training unit and, consequently, considered that this may be significant in the operation and/or training of governing bodies and therefore worthy of probing in this study. The 20 schools that agreed to participate in this study were drawn from ten different Local Authorities (approximately 10% of all the LAs) in various regions of of England. Table IV, below, summarises the characteristics, as noted above, of the 20 schools selected for the sample for this study. Once these 20 schools had agreed to participate in the study, the conscription of schools concluded, since the researcher considered that a maximum variation sample had been obtained (see Tables IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X and X1) although, because of the constraints of time and travelling distance, Muslim and recently established 'Free' schools were not included in the sample.

TABLE IV

Characteristics of the Primary Schools in the Sample

	Size: Number of pupils	Position	Percentage of Minority Ethnic Pupils	Free school meals	Type of School	Ofsted
S1	270	DisAd	High	High	CommP	Satisfactory
S2	68	Ru	Very Low	Low	CEVC	Satisfactory
S3	226	Sub	Very Low	Average	CommJ	Outstanding
S4	388	IC	Medium	High	HFRCVA	Outstanding
S5	210	Sub	Very Low	Low	CEVA	Good
S6	364	Sub	Very Low	Low	CommJ	Good
S7	164	IC	High	High	RCVA	Satisfactory

S8	232	IC	High	High	CommP	Good
S9	280	DisAd	Very Low	High	CommP	Satisfactory
S10	200	Sub	Low	Low	RCVA	Outstanding
S11	421	Sub	Very Low	Low	CEVA	Good
S12	260	IC	Very Low	High	CommI	Good
S13	346	Sub	Very Low	Low	CommP	Satisfactory
S14	154	DisAd	Very Low	Average	HFRCVA	Satisfactory
S15	27	Ru	Very Low	High	RCVA	Satisfactory
S16	170	DisAd	Low	High	TrustCEVA	Outstanding
S17	230	Sub	Very Low	Low	M	Good
S18	410	Sub	Low	Low	JVA	Satisfactory
S19	390	Sub	Very Low	Low	Academy Federation	Good
S20	60	Ru	Very Low	Low	Academy	Satisfactory

KEY for TABLE IV:

Schools: S1, S2, S3 etc refer to School 1, School 2, School 3 etc (See Appendix 4).

Size of school: number of pupils is stated.

Position of school: IC = inner-city; Sub = suburban; Ru = rural; DisAd = disadvantaged area of a town.

Percentage of ethnic minority pupils: Very Low percentage (often all British Heritage) ; Low percentage; Medium percentage; High percentage.

Free school meals (as a measure of deprivation); High proportion; Average proportion; Low proportion.

Type of school: CommI = community infant school; CommP = community primary school; CommJ = community junior school; CEVC = Church of England voluntary controlled primary school; CEVA = Church of England voluntary aided primary school; TrustCEVA = Church of England voluntary aided primary school part of a Trust; CEVAJ = Church of England voluntary aided junior school; RCVA = Roman Catholic voluntary aided primary school; HFCVA = Hard Federation (Catholic voluntary aided schools); M = Methodist voluntary controlled primary school; JVA = Jewish voluntary aided school. Academy = newly formed Academy; Academy Federation = Federation of two community schools newly formed as an Academy.

Ofsted grading at last inspection: Outstanding; Good; Satisfactory.

NOTE: The grading of these 'characteristics' is based on the system used by Ofsted (see Appendix 4).

Further details about each participating school are given in Appendix 4 - this information is limited to that which is relevant to the focus of this study (see Maykut and Morehouse, 1994). Changes have been made, in Appendix 4, in order to ensure the confidentiality of the schools and research participants. The location of each school is shown in Appendix

5, however, these locations are approximate in order to maintain confidentiality (see Appendices 6 and 7).

As mentioned above, the 20 schools were located in ten different Local Authorities. Table V, below, gives some information about the distribution of these schools, however, the need for confidentiality limits the extent of the data given. S19 and S20 at the time of the research were newly established independent academies − they are located, below, under their previous Local Authorities (LAs) since it was through these LAs that recent training had been undertaken.

TABLE V

Distribution of the Schools

Local Authority:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Schools:	S1 S14	S2 S15 **S20**	S3 S4 S7 S8 S13 S18	S5 S10	S6	S9 **S19**	S11	S12	S16	S17

In order to build a sample of 20 schools the researcher initially defined the 'types' of primary schools within the English school system (see Appendix 2 and Table VI, below). The next stage was to select, contact and gain access (see 5.6 Access Considerations, below) to 12 schools that matched the types of schools listed in Table VI. A further 8 schools schools were then selected, contacted and accessed − as detailed in the third column of Table VI:

TABLE VI

Selecting a Sample of Schools

Types of Schools	First Schools in Sample	Other Schools Selected
Community Primary	S1	S8, S9, S13
Community Junior	S3	S6
Community Infant	S12	
Church of England Voluntary Controlled	S2	S11
Church of England Voluntary Aided	S5	
Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided	S7	S10, S15
Hard Federation Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided	S4	S14
Methodist Voluntary Controlled	S17	
Jewish Voluntary Aided	S18	
Academy	S20	
Academy Federation	S19	
Trust	S16	

The smallest school in the sample had 27 pupils on roll and the largest 421 pupils. The distribution of school size, under each of three groupings, is shown in Table VII below:

TABLE VII

School Size

Number of Pupils in the School:	Small: less than 100	Medium: 100 to 275	Large: over 275
Schools in Sample:	S2, S15, S20	S1, S3, S5, S7, S8, S10, S12, S14, S16, S17	S4, S6, S9, S11, S13, S18, S19

The 20 schools were positioned in a variety of locations including cities, towns and villages. Table VIII, below, shows the distribution of schools matched to each of four locations:

TABLE VIII

School Position

Position:	Inner City	Disadvantaged in a Town	Rural	Suburb
Schools in Sample:	S4, S7, S8, S12	S1, S9, S14, S16	S2, S15, S20	S3, S5, S6, S10, S11, S13, S17, S18, S19

The most recent Ofsted inspection report, for each school, was accessed to complete Table IX, below, showing the percentage of minority ethnic pupils in the sample schools:

TABLE IX

Minority Ethnic Pupils

Percentage of Minority Ethnic Pupils:	Very low % (Often all White British Heritage)	Low %	Medium %	High %
Schools in Sample:	S2, S3, S5, S6, S9, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S17, S19, S20	S10, S16, S18	S4	S1, S7, S8

The number of pupils having 'free school meals', as a measure of deprivation, was obtained from the most recent Ofsted report for each school. Table X, below demonstrates the level of deprivation, in each sample school, under three categories:

TABLE X

Free School Meals

Numbers:	Low	Average	High
Schools in Sample:	S2, S5, S6, S10, S11, S13, S17, S18, S19, S20	S3, S14	S1, S4, S7, S8, S9, S12, S15, S16

Table XI shows that the sample included schools in each of three categories used by Ofsted in their summative assessment gradings.

TABLE XI

Ofsted Gradings

Ofsted Grading:	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory
Schools:	S3, S4, S10, S16	S5, S6, S8, S11, S12, S17, S19	S1, S2, S7, S9, S13, S14, S15, S18, S20

How the researcher gained access to each participating school is described in the next section.

3.5 Access Considerations

This study necessitated the researcher gaining access to the head teachers and chairs of governance of 20 contextually different primary schools. The progress of the research was critically dependent on the cooperation of these 40 key individuals if data was to be collected, and the research develop as originally planned (Blaxter et al, 2002). It was necessary for the head teacher of each school to agree, in the first instance, to participate in the study. The agreement of the chair of governance, to participate and be interviewed, was then sought – either by the researcher or by the head teacher. It was, therefore, the head teacher of each sample school that acted as a 'gatekeeper' so ensuring access to the research setting (Burton et al, 2008). In each case the relevant Ofsted inspection reports were available and were downloaded from www.ofsted.gov.uk.

In order to gain access to the necessary sample of primary schools the researcher telephoned schools directly asking to speak to the head teachers in order to explain the research and seek their participation. It was very difficult, even though the researcher had vast experience of such activity, to obtain access to individual head teachers since they were often out of school, in meetings, "not interested", required the researcher to "ring back later" or the researcher could not get, in many cases, further than the school administrators who appeared to see their role as 'protecting' the head teachers from such demands on their time. It was only after much perseverance that access to an appropriate sample of 20 schools was established. Having spoken to each head teacher, the researcher sent him/her an invitation letter (see Appendix 6), further information about the research

(see Appendix 7), and a consent form (see Appendix 8). An invitation letter, participant informant sheet and consent form was, also, enclosed for the chair of governance. The researcher was aware the participants were doing him a favour (Bell, 1999) in agreeing to help and noted the comments of Blaxter et al (2002: 156) relating to the unpredictability of access negotiations and how this can be a major influence on investigations so that "…few researchers end up studying precisely what they set out to study originally". Once individual head teachers had agreed to participate in the study it was relatively easy to obtain the cooperation of their chair of governors – although in some cases, particularly those who were business people, they also led very busy lives and required some flexibility in interviewing arrangements.

3.6 Data Collection

Robson (2002: 223-376) reported a number of ways of collecting data - surveys, questionnaires, interviews, tests and scales, observational methods, using documents and data archives. Given the constraints of time this researcher collected data by individual, face-to-face, interviewing of the head teacher and chair of governance of each school. Documentation in the form of the most recent Ofsted inspection report, for each school, provided further evidence of each "site" (see Miles and Hubermann, 1994: 27) and so complemented the interview data. The choice of these methods appeared, to the researcher, to be the most feasible in terms of access and of the research questions. It was considered that interviewing two key stakeholders in each school would generate "thick descriptions" (as above, Miles and Hubermann, 1994: 27) and together with scrutiny of the most recent Ofsted inspection report provide a source of triangulation.

Three types of face-to-face interviewing are commonly distinguished: the unstructured interview, the structured interview and the semi-structured interview (Wragg, 2002). The unstructured interview allows conversation to develop and can be very informal. Often the interviewer has only a list of topics or issues to use as a guide. In a structured interview the researcher has a carefully worded interview schedule. Short answers are needed or the ticking of a category by the interviewer. The structured interview is useful when a lot of questions are to be asked and these questions are not contentious or thought provoking. This research used a semi-structured interview schedule so allowing the head teachers and chairs of governance to express themselves at length. Semi-structured

interviews have been widely used in flexible, qualitative designs (Bryman (2004), Robson (2002) and Wragg (2002)).

The interview schedule (see Appendix 8) was devised around the four emerging themes identified in the literature review (see Chapter 2) and was related to the research questions (see Chapter 1). A number of open-ended questions, again derived from the review of literature, were listed under each of the four themes.

These open-ended questions were devised to give the individual respondents, the 20 chairs of governance and the 20 headteachers, a frame of reference for their replies whilst providing "…a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression" (Cohen et al, 2003), and allowing for unexpected answers which could inform hitherto unthought of relationships. Further, a number of possible probes or follow-up questions were listed for most questions. Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 95) have pointed out that:

> Since the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to gain a deep understanding of the interviewee's experience and perspective, using probes effectively is an important qualitative research skill. By probing an interviewee's response, we are likely to add to the richness of the data, and end up with a better understanding of the phenomenon we are studying.

The interview schedule was piloted with head teachers and chairs of governance of four primary schools, during May and June 2010, to refine and adjust the schedule and procedures of interviewing. Further data was obtained, as explained above, by accessing the most recent inspection report, of each school, from the Ofsted website.

3.7   The Interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 123-124) described the research interview as:

> …an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. In the interview, knowledge is created 'inter' the points of view of the interviewer and the interviewee. The conversations with the subjects are usually the most engaging stage of an interview inquiry. The personal contact and the continually new insights into the subjects' lived world make interviewing an exciting and enriching experience…

Further, they maintained that the semi-structured life world interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena.

Three main routes to guide the learning of interviewing were suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) – as a craft, as a knowledge producing activity and as a social practice. Commenting on interviewing as a craft, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 17) maintained that interviewing rests on the practical skills and the personal judgements of the interviewer. It does not follow explicit steps or methods. The skills of interviewing are learned by practising interviewing and the quality of interviewing is judged by the strength and value of the knowledge produced. Interviewing, they argue, is an active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge. Moreover, they suggest interviewing "…has become a pervasive social practice in what has been called the interview society" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 18).

However, Wragg (2002) suggested that research interviews are, in practice, riddled with numerous pitfalls for the unwary. Some of the possible pitfalls are listed below:

- Interviewer bias – in the form of leading questions.
- Sample bias – an unrepresentative sample.
- Hired interviewers – may fake answers.
- Ethnic issues – interviewees may respond differently to interviewers of a different ethnic background.
- Straitjacket interview – tightly structured interview schedules permit little latitude.
- Interviewer's or respondent's image – the interviewers' own status, purpose and function may distort responses, leading to answers which are more a public relations exercise than an accurate response.

Nevertheless, Wragg (2002) saw interviews as a fruitful source of information whilst pointing out the importance of the setting and timing of the interview. Cohen et al (2011) and Robson (2002) provided advice on the setting up and conducting of the interview. Their advice is summarised below:

1. Introduction – interviewer introduces himself, explains the purpose of the interview, seeks to put the interviewee at ease, assures confidentiality, asks permission to audio-tape and make notes. Crucial to remember that the interview is a social, interpersonal encounter not merely a data collection exercise.

2   'Warm up' – easy, non-threatening question at the beginning of the interview.

3.   Main body of the interview – covering the main purpose of the interview.
     In semi-structured interviews the order of questions can be varied.   Important that during the interview the biases and values of the interviewer are not revealed. The interviewer should be non-judgemental. The interviewer should, politely, steer respondents if they are rambling off the point. Avoid giving your own view or opinion; be neutral.

4.   'Cool-off' – a few questions at the end.

5.   Closure – thank you, turn recorder off, collect materials together goodbye.

Accordingly, this researcher interviewed the head teacher and chair of governance in each of the twenty sample schools. Each interview was individual, audio-recorded, semi-structured and undertaken, mainly, during the period February 2011 to June 2011. These interviews allowed the interviewees – key personnel in the operation of governing bodies – to convey their experiences of primary school governance in their own terms. In addition to the audio recording of the interviews, the researcher took field notes on each interview schedule. All the interviews took place in the schools – usually in the head teacher's study or another quiet room - during the morning and/or afternoon school sessions. In many cases the researcher interviewed the head teacher and chair of governance in the same day. The researcher sought to avoid bias in the questioning and by employing a maximum variation strategy attempted to ensure there was no bias in the sample of schools. The researcher, of White British heritage, undertook all of the interviews himself – all of the interviewees also being of White British heritage. The researcher was able to establish good rapport with all of the interviewees, who were aware of the researcher's experience of primary school governance, his background in primary school education and his reasons for undertaking this research.

The interviews started by the researcher introducing himself, switching on the audio recorder and completing the details on the first page of the interview schedule – checking that the participant information sheet had been read and the consent form completed. The researcher then read, to each interviewee, the paragraph about the research on the first page of the interview schedule and asked if the interviewee had any questions, at the start of the interview. The first question was read out – this was the 'warm up' question. The

researcher then explained that the main body of the questions were in four groups (these were the emerging themes, as above). Each interview concluded with some 'cool-off' questions and then researcher thanked the interviewee and switched off the recorder. Each interview lasted 50 to 70 minutes. The researcher transcribed, in full, all forty interviews usually on the evening or during the week of the interview (see Appendix 10). All of the transcriptions and voice recordings were copied to reduce the possibilities of mislaying the data. How this data was analysed is the subject of the next section.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data 'analysis' has been defined, by Miles and Huberman (1994), as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. Further details are given below:

- *Data reduction* (sometimes referred to as transformation or condensation) is considered to occur throughout the life of a qualitative research project. In the case of this present research, reduction has occurred when, for example, the researcher composed the research questions and conceptual framework; identified the sample of schools and decided to use interviews as the data collection approach. Consistent with the views of Miles and Hubermann (1994), reduction of the data proceeded with the presentation and analysis of the data (Chapters 4 and 5) and up to the completion of the thesis (Chapter 6). Data reduction is, therefore, seen to be a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organizes data so that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified.

- The creation of *data displays*, the second major flow of analysis activity, permits conclusion drawing by organising and compressing information. Miles and Hubermann (1994) related that the most frequent form of display for qualitative data has been 'extended text'. This is enhanced, they argued, by the use of matrices, graphs, charts and networks which organise and assemble information into compact forms which enables the researcher to make inferences and draw conclusions. The creation and use of displays is, therefore, part of analysis and, clearly, is a form of data reduction.

- *Conclusion drawing and verification* starts, Miles and Hubermann (1994) claimed, when the researcher begins data collection and notes themes, trends,

regularities and discerns patterns and explanations. Miles and Huberman (1994: 11) maintained that the competent researcher "…holds these conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and scepticism" – the final conclusions not appearing until the data collection and analysis are completed. Furthermore, the conclusions need to be verified, that is tested for their 'confirmability' as the analysis proceeds.

Strong support for the Miles and Hubermann (1994) approach was given by Robson (2002: 473) in describing it as "…an invaluable general framework for conceptualizing qualitative data analysis." However, Bryman (2004) recognised that qualitative data derived from interviews typically generates a large, cumbersome database but argued that, unlike the analysis of quantitative data, it has few well established and widely accepted rules for the process of analysis. Similarly, Cohen et al (2011: 537) maintained that there is no single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data but suggested that the researcher should abide by the issue of "fitness for purpose". Moreover, they indicated that qualitative analysis involves much interpretation and argued that there are, often, multiple interpretations that can be made.

Bryman (2004) pointed to the growing use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NUD*IST and NVivo. The speed of handling data and the increased rigour offered by the use of such software was acknowledged by Silverman (2005). Denscombe (2003: 276-277), however, contended that there are limitations to the use of CAQDAS since it:

> …leaves little scope for interpretive leaps and inspirational flashes of enlightment. It reduces analysis to a mechanical chore…It is likely to exacerbate the tendency to focus on the literal or superficial content…and… to distance the researcher from the data.

It was, similarly, argued by Cohen et al (2011: 545) that:

> …qualitative software is no substitute for the requirements and capabilities of the researcher to assign meaning, identify similarities and differences, establish relations between data.

Significantly, Cohen et al (2011) maintained that the 'added value', of software packages used in qualitative data analysis is less than the return from quantitative data analysis software which yields statistical results. Furthermore, Thomas (2011: 172) recognised

that some would find CAQDAS useful but stated "…though I personally find that a set of highlighters do the job just as well, if not better."

Whilst supportive of the use of CAQDAS, Robson (2002) argued that the downside to using this specialist tool was the time and effort needed to become proficient. Blaxter et al (2002) adopted a similar position in suggesting that a researcher new to CAQDAS may find a wordprocessor the safest choice.

Having considered the views of experienced researchers, above, the present researcher, with no previous knowledge of CAQDAS, used word processing software (Microsoft Word) in the analysis of the data rather than specialist analysis software. Given the constraints of time, lack of expertise and as a part-time student, with limited access to information technology support, word processing software was judged to be the safest option. How this software was used is detailed below.

A major feature of qualitative data analysis is the use of 'coding'. Miles and Hubermann (1994: 56) maintained that "Coding is analysis. To review a set of field notes…and to dissect them meaningfully…is the stuff of analysis". Similarly, Cohen et al (2011: 559) suggested that:

> Coding enables the researcher to identify similar information. More than this, it enables the researcher to search and retrieve the data in terms of those items that bear the same code. Codes can be regarded as an indexing or categorizing system, akin to the index in a book…

Codes, sometimes referred to as *categories*, are described by Miles and Hubermann (1994: 56) as tags or labels attached to "…chunks…" of varying sizes – words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs. Robson (2002: 477), pointing to the possibility of collecting an overwhelming amount of unstructured data in a qualitative study, described "coding categories" as retrieval and organising devices.

A preferred method for creating codes, suggested by Miles and Hubermann (1994) and Brundrett and Rhodes (2014), is to generate a 'start list' of *pre-determined* codes, prior to fieldwork. Such codes are considered to enhance validity being derived, for example, from the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study as well as the researcher's professional and personal experiences. Similarly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 202) referred to the use of "concept-driven coding" whereby the researcher develops codes in advance by, for example, using existing literature.

Pre-determined codes - derived from the research questions, the present researcher's experiences, the review of literature and the interview schedule – were used in the analysis of the data collected in this study. Since these codes (categories) were used in structuring the interview schedule, the data, collected from each respondent, was transcribed and organised under these codes. Table XII (after Miles and Hubermann, 1994: 59) shows the pre-determined codes and abbreviations that were used in the "first level coding" (Robson, 2002: 477):

TABLE XII

Pre-determined Codes

CODES/CATEGORIES	CODE ABBREVIATION
Warm Up Question	WU
Theme 1: Civic Role	TH 1 / Civic
Importance?	CI
Local Community?	CLC
Challenging, Complex, Time?	CCh
Capable?	CC
Make Better?	CMB
Theme 2: Function and Operation	TH 2 / Function
How many meetings?	Fmany
Effective?	FE
Relationships?	FR
Challenges and Supports?	FCS
Integral?	FI
Strategic/Operational?	FSO
SIPs?	FSIP
Raise Standards?	FRS
Theme 3: Training and Information	TH 3 / T and Info
Training for You?	TYou
Annual Training?	TA
Information From?	TInfofrom
Theme 4: Challenges and Tensions	TH 4 / Ch and T
Turnover?	CTT

Recruit?	CTR
Future challenges?	CFut
Clerk?	CTCl
Different Types?	CTnew

Having undertaken the first interviews – the head teacher and chair of governance in S1 – the researcher used a word processor to transcribe each interview using the codes (categories) detailed above (exemplar transcripts are included in Appendix 10). The researcher then used the 'cut' and 'paste' facilities of the word processor to create a 'master' document of the raw interview data. The first stage was to cut and paste, from their interview transcripts, the responses from Head S1 and Chair S1 to the 'warm up question'. Next, the researcher cut and pasted the data, from respondents Head S1 and Chair S1, for each of the codes/categories under 'Theme 1: Civic' (See Table XII, above). The 'cut and paste' process continued for the codes under Themes 2, 3 and 4 – until all the data from the interviews of Head S1 and Chair S1 was categorised in the master data document. This process was then applied to the interview data from Head 2 and Chair 2 and, subsequently, in turn to all the responses from the head teachers and chairs of governance in the sample.

Having conducted all of the interviews, listened to the audio recordings and personally transcribing and categorising all of the responses, this researcher was very familiar with the obtained raw data and this was enhanced by the first level coding, described above, and the constant comparison that was undertaken in these processes supported by the review of the literature and this researcher's personal experiences of primary school governance.

The next stage of the analysis began by printing out the 'master' document of categorised raw data. The researcher then proceeded to the second level coding by identifying themes, trends, patterns, explanations, similarities, differences within each category, as detailed in Table XII, above. Following Blaxter et al (2002) and Thomas (2011) this researcher used coloured pens and highlighters to categorise, annotate and label (*'open'* coding, after Brundrett and Rhodes, 2014) *within* the pre-determined categories. This re-worked master document was then used to produce a first draft of Chapter 4, Presentation of Data. The final copy of Chapter 4 was produced after further amendments involving

more data reduction, selection, re-organisation and consideration of data display and the tentative drawing of conclusions. The analysis and synthesis of data continued in the production of Chapter 5, Discussion and Analysis, particularly in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This researcher was informed by the views of Yin (2003) that analysis, in social science research, needs to consider all of the relevant evidence, should address all major rival interpretations, should concentrate on the most significant aspects of the data and, lastly, that the researcher should use their own expert knowledge.

3.9   Ethical Considerations

Cohen et al (2003: 58) argued that the question of ethics in research is a "…highly complex subject…" due, in part, to the tension between the pursuit of knowledge and truth and a belief in the dignity of individuals. They refer to the "…growing awareness of the attendant moral issues implicit in the work of social researchers…" (Cohen et al, 2003: 49) and quote Cavan's succinct and helpful definition of ethics:

> …a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical of limits and the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature. (Cavan, 1977, p.810 cited in Cohen et al, 2003, p.56)

Burton et al (2008: 50) pointed out the "…duty of care…" owed by researchers to all those participating in the research process whilst Bryman (2004: xiii), similarly, argued that researchers owe responsibility to the recipients (people and organisations) of their activities and pointed to the need for all researchers to be "…ethically sensitive".

On this theme Blaxter et al (2002: 158) noted:

> …all social research (whether using surveys, documents, interviews or computer-mediated communication) gives rise to a range of ethical issues around privacy, informed consent, anonymity, secrecy, being truthful and the desirability of the research. It is important, therefore, that you (the researcher) are aware of these issues and how you might respond to them. You owe a duty to yourself as a researcher, as well as to other researchers and to the subjects of and audiences for your research, to exercise responsibility in the process of data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 79) described the researcher's learning of ethical behaviour as being "…a matter of being initiated into the mores of the local professional culture". For this investigator, the local professional culture was the research community of the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure at Liverpool John Moores University. Following the submission and acceptance of his initial proposal, the researcher was required to submit further documentation, following specific guidance, to a separate and cross-faculty scrutiny group, the Liverpool John Moores University Research Ethics Committee. This group considered and advised the researcher on the ethical implications of his study. It was only after full, unconditional ethical approval had been obtained, from this Committee, that the research could be started. In relation to this research project the following summarises the ethical issues considered at the planning stage and implemented during the interviews and presentation of the research:

- All research participants were fully briefed, in writing (see Appendix 7) and orally prior to their interview (see Appendix 9), on the purpose of the research and their involvement.

- All participants consented prior to their interview, in writing using a 'consent form' (see Appendix 8) which they signed and the researcher also signed; so that they confirmed that they understood the purpose of the research, that they understood that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at anytime; that all information collected would be anonymous and remain confidential; confirmed that they agreed to be interviewed and agreed that this would be digitally recorded; confirmed that they understood 'direct quotations' may be used in research reports but that these would be anonymous and not traceable to them as individuals or to their school.

- The research had potential benefits to the participants in that they had the opportunity to contribute their views and perspectives to research on school governance but it was recognised that there was a slight risk of them feeling uncomfortable when divulging sensitive information.

- All information on computers, digital recorders and in written form was stored in locked cabinets to ensure confidentiality of personal data. Only the researcher had access to this information and it was destroyed after completion of the study.

Checklists provided by Bryman (2004: 516) and Burton et al (2008: 52) were used in formulating ethical practice for this study.

This research also involved the scrutiny of background documentation in the form of Ofsted inspection reports. It is important to note, as Busher (2002) indicated, that the use of such documentation poses ethical dilemmas since these documents are written for one purpose, or for a particular audience, but may be used in another way by the researcher. Furthermore, Busher (2002: 83) argued, "…it is not at all clear to what extent, if at all, a document writer has given informed consent" for the documents to be used beyond their initial purpose. He explained that the use of documents, whilst allowing the researcher to gain insights, does invade the lives of participants and further argues that the researcher has a "…moral responsibility to protect the privacy and anonymity of the research participants" (Busher, 2002: 83). This was the approach adopted in this study.

3.10   Provisions for Trustworthiness

Bush (2002) explained that the notion of scrutiny – by peers, professionals and examiners – is important in educational research. The researcher must be able to defend and explain the decisions made in conducting their enquiry. Similarly, Robson (2002: 93) asked:

> How do you persuade your audiences, including most importantly yourself, that the findings of your enquiry are worth taking account of ? What is it that makes the study believable and trustworthy? What are the kinds of argument that you can use? What questions should you ask? What criteria are involved?

Validity, reliability, triangulation, reflexivity, generalizability and trustworthiness are central concepts in this process of evaluation. They are discussed below in relation to this present study.

In clarifying the concepts of validity and reliability, Cohen et al (2003) outlined several different types of validity and various forms of reliability. They suggested that both terms can be applied to quantitative and qualitative research – although how they are addressed, within the two approaches, varies. Validity is a requirement for both approaches and whilst Cohen et al (2003: 105) pointed out that if research "… is invalid then it is worthless" they argue that it is impossible for research to be one hundred per cent valid and therefore validity should be "…seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state" – so at best researchers need "…to strive to minimize invalidity and maximize validity". Reliability is seen as a necessary precondition of validity.

Validity was originally associated with the positivist paradigm and seen as the extent to which a research instrument measured what the researcher claimed it to measure. The quantitative researcher employs appropriate sampling and statistical methods in order to increase validity. Other forms of validity have been recently favoured, leading Cohen et al (2003: 105) to point out that in relation to qualitative data:

> … validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher.

Whereas quantitative research has an inbuilt standard error factor, the qualitative researcher must acknowledge the bias inherent in the opinions, attitudes and perspectives of the subjects of the research.

Reliability has been described by Cohen et al (2011) as essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability. They argued that for research to be reliable it has to be demonstrated that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents, in a similar context, then similar results would be found and that, moreover, this applies to qualitative research as well as to positivist research. Robson (2002) has emphasised the need for qualitative researchers to be seriously concerned with the reliability of their research methods and practices. He suggested that the researcher must be thorough, careful, honest and needs to demonstrate these approaches to others. Moreover, the researcher needs to keep an audit trail, a full record of research activities such as raw data (transcripts, field notes, audio tape recordings), details of coding and data analysis. For this present investigation the researcher has recorded the research activities in this thesis and has full records of all the data and analysis.

Triangulation has been depicted, by Cohen et al (2003: 112), "…as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour." They argue that this approach to social science research seeks to explain more fully the complexity and richness of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint. Denscombe (2003: 133) confirmed this view and suggested that "…seeing things from a different perspective and the opportunity to corroborate findings can enhance the validity of the data." As described above, data for this study has been collected by interviewing both the head teacher and chair of governors of 20 primary schools and by sampling documentary evidence in the form of recent Ofsted inspection

reports. Using these multi-methods, multi-sources and the aggregation of data will not enable the researcher to arrive at an overall 'truth' (Silvermann, 2007) about school governance but does allow for the development of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2003; Cohen et al, 2007). The researcher noted, and experienced, some of the difficulties of using multiple sources of data collection - the increased time and processing demands - and was aware of the potential for discrepancies, disagreements and contradictions.

The importance of reflexivity in qualitative research was stressed by Robson (2002: 172) who explained that it is "…an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process". Robson (2002) referred to the typically close relationship between the researcher and the respondents and the potential for bias in the research. Following the guidance of Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 155) the researcher, as the 'data collection instrument' has included his own personal and professional details in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The researcher sought to be 'neutral' at all stages of the research and employed the guidance of Robson (2002: 173) to identify areas of potential research bias. Walsh (2001: 17) pointed out that researchers must be "…open and 'public' in the way that they conduct and explain their research." This researcher has sought to adopt this objective approach in conducting and explaining his research.

Even if a research study, based on interviewing, is judged to be reasonably reliable and valid then, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argued, the question remains whether the findings are generalizable to other situations and subjects. They report that a common objection to interview research is that there are too few subjects for the findings to be generalized. However, Kvale and Brinkmann argued that social knowledge can be perceived as "…socially and historically contextualised modes of understanding and acting in the social world" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 261) – with, therefore, an important shift from generalization to contextualization. This is supported by Flyvbjerg's (2006) argument:

> …that there simply cannot be found universals in the study of human affairs, since human activity is situated in local contexts of practice, so, because of the nature of the human world, context-dependent knowledge is more valuable than a vain search for universal, predictive theory." (in Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 264)

In discussing research Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) referred to Stake (2005) and the distinctions he made between three forms of generalization – naturalistic, statistical and analytic. Naturalistic generalization is seen as resting on personal experience and derives from knowledge of how things are, leading to expectations rather than predictions. Statistical generalization is seen as feasible for interview studies provided the subjects are randomly selected and the findings quantified. However, when statistical tests are applied, a large sample of subjects is needed and this may be problematic for an approach based on interviewing. Analytic generalization involves a reasoned judgment about the extent to which the findings of one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation. It is based on an analysis of the similarities and differences of the two situations (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 262). A useful example is drawn from legal practice when:

> In case law it is the most analogous preceding case, the one with the most attributes similar to the actual case, that is selected as the most relevant precedent. The validity of the generalization hinges on an analysis of the similarities and differences between the original and the present case, on the extent to which the attributes compared are relevant, which again presupposes rich, dense, and detailed descriptions of the cases, or what are referred to as "thick description" … (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009: 263).

So, just as it is the legal court that decides if a previous case offers a precedent, that can be generalized to the present case, it is the receiver (the reader) of the research that judges the applicability of the findings to a new situation. It is the researcher's responsibility to provide rich contextual descriptions and to argue the case for transferability. In interview studies, therefore, both researcher and reader are involved in analytical generalization.

Trustworthiness is the term used to refer to the believability of a researcher's findings (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 64). Following the guidance of Yin (2003) this researcher sought to establish credibility by, for example, investigating an area of national and international significance; showing extensive effort in collecting the evidence for this investigation; demonstrating that he has acquired thorough knowledge of the field of school governance both theoretically and in the field; presenting both supportive and challenging evidence and data. Furthermore, this researcher has sought to present a structured and detailed report which shows the purpose of the investigation and gives appropriate information about the schools and individuals involved. The procedures of

data collection and analysis are described so that there is a clear audit trail of the research effort (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

3.11 Summary of Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter has explained, described and discussed the methods used in undertaking this research study. The use of a qualitative approach, with some numerical elements, has been justified with the aim of producing data that provided 'thick descriptions' in the pursuit of useful knowledge about primary school governance. Twenty, contextually different, primary schools, across ten local authorities in England, were selected using maximum variation sampling. The head teacher and chair of governance, of each school, were individually interviewed, face-to-face, by the researcher, using a semi-structured interview approach. An interview schedule based on the four emerging themes, as discussed in Chapter 2, was used to probe the experiences and views of each of the participants. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. This interview data was supplemented by information, about school governance, obtained from the most recent Ofsted inspection report of each school. The interview schedule had been piloted, and refined, using four pilot schools. The processes of analysing and synthesising the data from the forty interviews, including the use of pre-determined codes (categories) and the identification of open codes, has been described and justified. Ethical considerations have been discussed, as have validity, reliability, triangulation, reflexivity, generalizability and trustworthiness.

The next chapter presents key parts of the data collected, by interviewing and from Ofsted reports, under the four themes identified above.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

Having described and discussed, in the previous chapter, the methods used in this study, Chapter 4 presents key aspects of the data collected, based on the four emerging, over-arching themes identified, reviewed and discussed in Chapter 2. Within each theme, a number of sub-themes were identified related to the questions used in the interview schedule (Appendix 2). Details of each of the twenty schools involved in the study can be found in Appendix 4. These schools are identified as S1, S2, S3 and so on, for purposes of anonymity. Similarly, the head teacher and chair of governance of each school are anonymised in the form Head S1, Head S2, Head S3, Chair S1, Chair S2, Chair S3 and so on. Transcripts of the interviews with Head S16 and Chair S16 are to be found in Appendix 10. The process of analysing the raw data has been explained, described and discussed in Chapter 3. In this present chapter some words are presented in *italics,* these are indicative of the 'open' codes used in the data analysis. A summary of the chapter follows the presentation of the data.

4.2 Brief Profile of the Head Teachers

The head teacher of each of the twenty schools involved in the study was interviewed by the researcher. Nine head teachers had no experience of school governance prior to becoming a head teacher. Three head teachers had gained a little experience of governance whilst holding the post of deputy head teacher but emphasised that they were unable to contribute to the meetings. Two head teachers had gained their first experience of governance whilst in the post of 'acting' head teacher. For one head teacher their experience of governance had commenced when they had acted as a teacher-governor. One had experienced governance for the first-time when acting as a parent governor. Only one head teacher had opted not to become a governor believing that this made it easier for the governors to challenge her. She did, however, sit in on the meetings and had governing experience in previous posts. Only one head teacher had completed a M.Ed. degree, studying school governance on one module of the degree. Another head teacher stated that she had completed the NPQH but that the course had no input on school governance. Whilst in the post of deputy head teacher,

one had acted as an 'associate governor'. Whilst serving in a Local Education Authority one head teacher (Head S18) had acted as the 'Director's Representative' on twenty governing bodies. Having had this unique experience the head teacher commented that there was "…enormous variation…just amazing …every single one was different." One head teacher had been on the governing body of three schools. There was very wide experience of governance amongst the twenty head teachers – from three years to thirty-five years. Seventeen of the twenty head teachers had more than ten years experience of governance. Twelve of the head teachers had more experience of governance than their chair of governance (see Table XIII, below). Eleven of the head teachers were female and nine were male.

4.1 Brief Profile of the Chairs of Governance

The researcher interviewed all of the chairs of governance of the twenty schools involved in the study. Seventeen of the chairs had at least five years experience of governance; six of the chairs had twenty-five years or more of governance experience. Two of the chairs had three years experience and one chair was in her first year as a governor and a chair. Six of the chairs had more experience of governance than 'their' head teacher (see Table XIII, below).

TABLE XIII
Experience of Governance

School	Head teacher – years of experience as a governor	Chair of governors – years of experience as a governor
S1	35	10
S2	3	1
S3	20	18
S4	26	19
S5	3	12
S6	30	27
S7	11	31
S8	16	32
S9	20	3
S10	14	10

S11	14	29
S12	22	9
S13	23	25
S14	20	16
S15	16	8
S16	26	33
S17	17	8
S18	21	5
S19	19	9
S20	4	3

The chairs were of various ages: all over forty years and three aged seventy or more and came from a variety of backgrounds – a project manager for local authorities and the national health service; ministers of religions; a production manager for a global company; an accountant; an engineer; a management accountant; a former teacher; an economist; a nurse; a local authority councillor and 'business people'. Nine chairs were 'retired' from their work. Fourteen of the chairs had children or grandchildren in 'their' school. Three of the chairs were linked to 'their' school by reasons of religion. With regard to visits to the schools the chairs varied widely in the number of these occasions over the year: two chairs stated that they were in the school on most days; ten were in weekly; five visited only for meetings or at the request of the head teacher and the three business people found it difficult to give the time to the role. All maintained regular telephone or email contact with 'their' head teacher. Thirteen of the chairs of governors were male and seven were female.

4.4   THEME 1: THE CIVIC ROLE OF GOVERNING BODIES

4.4.1   Importance of Primary School Governance

The twenty head teachers from the sample of schools were asked how important they thought it was to have a governing body. Their responses were varied but mainly very positive towards the role of the governing body. Head S1 was very clear about the *support* he received from his governors:

> I think it is absolutely vital, certainly in the primary context. Without the support of quite a large governing body, mostly volunteers – community and local political representatives – I think my job as a school leader would be substantially *more difficult*. I really do appreciate them. It is voluntary and unpaid. I think people putting themselves forward as governors do a fabulous job. (Head S1)

Head S20 described her chair of governance as being very *supportive* and stated that in her view the support of school governors was important to a head teacher. Without that support she considered that "a head teacher's job would be a nightmare" and continued "...it is a *lonely job* being a head teacher." Head S16 referred to the fact that as a primary head teacher she felt very responsible, but "very much *alone*", in taking "big decisions" and considered that the governing body *shared* the decisions and responsibilities, often involving public finances. Head S16 referred to the need for the governors to give support and *challenge,* furthermore, she pointed out that "You need to empower your governors to challenge you, they don't do it easily." Head S5 thought that governance was very valuable and worth the *time and effort*. She was clear about *support and challenge:*

> Very supportive, and challenging the head teacher is exactly what they should be doing. They bring a lot of expertise and experience to the table. They throw into the pot thoughts and experiences that the head teacher might not have thought of, because of their work and life experiences. For example, one of our governors, a university lecturer in business studies is helping us with developing a new school website. The cost to us is negligible. A lot of professional people amongst our parents – doctors, teachers, etc. (Head S5)

Head S4 valued very highly the *support*, *challenge*, *expertise* and *critical friendship* given by his governors – maintaining that he could not do without them in their federation of schools. Head S10 referred to her "*support network* of experienced, knowledgeable governors." Without governors she saw headship as a *lonely job* and "…quite a dangerous job because you are making decisions without consulting". She saw her governors as "critical friends" in a *shared leadership* role.

The Head of S8, a large inner-city school, was very enthusiastic about the value of her governing body, affirming that they brought many different *skills and strengths* to the

school. She commented positively on their *analysis*, supportive challenge and *expertise*. She revealed the value of an innovative committee they had established with the assistance of the *local authority*:

> A few years ago we set up a monitoring committee which has been really good, it meets twice per term during the school day – a smaller group of governors focussing in on the school development plan, standards, etc. They have no delegated powers but they get the chance to interrogate and unpick everything. The minutes are very broad-based. It has been very valuable in supporting us. I prefer the governors to challenge me. The local authority was instrumental in getting this monitoring committee set up. We have a very skilled group of governors who give a lot of themselves.

Some head teachers referred to the governing body as *critical friends* and mentioned the *constraints* on them so that they could not do as they wished. Head S13, for example, thought that it was imperative for the good running of the school to have a good governing body. One reason, he argued, is for the governing body to be a 'critical friend'. He recounted how in a recent Ofsted visit an inspector had looked at the governing body minutes and said your governors are "…very challenging." Head S13 had then replied pointing out that they were also very supportive. He considered that there are so many things coming into a school that someone was needed "…to take the edge of it first." His governors did that and, consequently, it meant that there was *balance* in the school and the head teacher could not just do as they might wish. Further, he considered that, because of the governing body, as a head, he did not feel as exposed since the governors are there to support and challenge. He continued "In a recent Ofsted inspection we were failed, but for 18 months the governors were totally supportive. Without their support I wouldn't have been able to continue." The very experienced Head S6 referred to a difficult time in his school when there "…was a deep issue - could have been a dangerous time for the school - where the governors *held things together*."

The advantages of having a governing body when making difficult *decisions*, such as staff redundancies, was raised by Head S5. She pointed out that having a governing body meant that the final decision is not seen as the head teacher's but rather the collective and considered decision of the governors. Head S5 thought that this reduced the pressure on her.

Other head teachers gave credit to the governors for the challenge and *accountability* they presented. Head S18 considered it to be important for the school to have people who will challenge and cast "… a *fresh pair of eyes* on things." Head S11 considered that the governors held the school "…to account" and kept them "…on track". She referred to the value of the wide skill base available on her governing body and conveyed that she liked "…to have someone to be *answerable to*; to have someone to *recognise* what we are doing."

There was, also, acknowledgement of the governing body acting as a *sounding board* and their helpful role in *reflection* and in making *decisions*. Head S7 articulated that the main useful function of governance for her was as a sounding board and a buffer for her decision making. She thought governing bodies were probably very different in different situations. She stressed:

> "Day to day I exist without the governing body, absolutely. But I suppose it is a compliment that they are supportive and let me get on with my job. It does make you think about things, a time of *reflection*, have to be accountable."

Further, she described how, with her governing body, making harsh decisions was easier and removed from her personally, because they become "the governors' decisions." She recalled when the school had huge financial problems because of falling roles, and, consequently, had to make a teacher redundant. She had found that the small group of governors involved were "marvellous and did a really good job."

Head S6 thought that governors were important in bringing their *expertise* to staff appointments, school finances and buildings. Their role as a "receptive audience" in curriculum matters was not as important but he recognised that, involving volunteers, governance was a very *cost effective* way of bringing in expertise and interested people. He continued:

> If we didn't have them it would be *too insular*, schools could be too happy with their satisfactory performance. The governance model as it stands is cost effective, little cost involved. Bringing in consultants would be far more expensive.

The increased responsibilities now given to primary school governors was acknowledged by Head S12 who further commented "…it is interesting how they

have grown into their roles." She considered that governance was important since it provided an *overall vision* for the school, supported the head teacher and "…provided a level of accountability for both the head teacher and staff." In her view a good governing body will act as a "critical friend" to the head teacher and will also ensure that the school meets the vision and aims and objectives that are agreed. She considered that her school had a *knowledgeable* group of governors.

The head teacher of a newly formed academy stated that his governors were more accountable now and mentioned their role in *celebrating* the work of the school:

> It is important, it just gives you some challenge. You need something to provide checks and balance...challenge and support. It would be easy in the academy situation for the governors to have more say...they are more accountable now. We are not often directed. We are more accountable, in the academy arena...mainly in the financial matters. We have had to make a lot of changes in the administrative procedures. We could run the school without the governors...but the 'critical friend' aspect is valuable, although you don't necessarily need 18 governors to do that. They help us to 'celebrate' the work of the school. (Head S19)

A very experienced head teacher, Head S17, referred to his governors, with a wide range of experience and knowledge, being a *sounding board* and a *challenge* for him. He also pointed out the governance *capital* of his school compared to a previous school where he was the head teacher. His present school, S17, had lawyers, accountants, bankers, ex-teachers and a scientist on the governing body. This was very different from a previous school where "…the head teacher led the governors, really just waiting for the nod." He described how in S17 the governors came into the school regularly so the knew the school "from the inside." The governors were supportive of Head S17 but he stated "…they take the decisions, often as a result of their special *expertise*." Further, he conveyed how as a head teacher "…you give out a lot of praise to the children and teachers, it is good to have the support and *appreciation* of the governors."

Four head teachers expressed doubts about primary school governance. Head S14 was concerned that the governors were unpaid volunteers and *not needed* to run schools.

He communicated that being a governor involves much work for unpaid volunteers and continued:

> I think it is unreasonable. *Not important* to have governors. In my opinion it is a clumsy mechanism. I don't think head teachers should be answerable to unpaid volunteers. I think the work involved for governors is unfair and too demanding. The requirements on them don't 'square' with the people involved, enthusiastic as they are.

Head S14 articulated that in his opinion the vast majority of heads would say they *don't need* the governors to run schools. He felt that there was a need for accountability but, he argued, Ofsted could fulfil that role.

Head S3, also, recognised the limitations of voluntary governance and thought it needed further consideration. He did think that governance "matters" and that it is "important" and believed there needs to be "… a *system of checks and balances* on any school, on head teachers particularly". However, given the "huge" responsibilities, Head S3 considered that people do not have the time to give to it and, in his opinion, it was not conducted effectively.

The head teacher of a very small village school expressed some doubts. She was the only head teacher, in the sample, to opt-out of being on the governing body and explained how her school was managed:

> I do wonder. They want to see and know about everything. I do sometimes wonder about the role of the head teacher. I suppose they make me stop and think. Sometimes they give a *parental perspective* that I haven't seen. We have a very good chair. In this school there is no management team. The management team is the head and the governors. (Head S15)

Head S9 was doubtful of the ability of the governors to run meetings, however, he did recognise the support they provided. His view was that voluntary governance is a good way of involving people in how the school is actually run and what is happening, but in his experience whilst governors are meant to run the meetings *they expect the head teacher to do it*. He did consider that it was important that the *community* was involved but questioned how much the governors *understood* how the school actually works in order to ask questions. He recognised that his governors had been very good at supporting during a recent Ofsted inspection, but was unsure if the present system of governance was worth the time and effort involved.

GOVERNING BODY

HEAD TEACHERS

CHAIRS OF GOVERNANCE

NEGATIVE ASPECTS
Need to be educated to challenge
Not needed to run schools
A clumsy mechanism
Not effective
Too much responsibility
Too demanding for unpaid volunteers
Don't understand schools

POSITIVE ASPECTS
Gives vital support
Provides vision
Lonely job without
Celebrate achievements
Share decisions & responsibilities
Provides challenge
Provides experience
Expertise and knowledge
Critical friends
Have many skills
Constrain heads
Can hold the school together
Decision is the Governors
Provide accountability
Fresh pair of eyes
Answerable to...
Sounding Board
Reflection
Cost Effective, Volunteers
System of Checks and Balances
Too Insular Without

POSITIVE ASPECTS
Worth the time and effort
Links schools to outside community
Main focus is on doing the best for the children
Of major importance
Roots school in its community
Support and challenge
Critical friend
Scrutiny
A new slant
Make appointments
A sounding board
Reminder - religion
Reminder - broad curriculum
Value for money

NEGATIVE ASPECTS
Needs time
Heads not always open and transparent

Figure 7: Importance of Primary School Governance

In Figure 7 the views of the head teachers, as shown above, and the chairs of governance, see below, are summarised in diagrammatic form.

The majority of the chairs of governance responded positively when considering the importance of school governance. For example Chair S17 commented:

> Completely worth the *time and effort*. Really important that we have a framework which gives input, management, guidance and support to the teachers and wider school community, as we try to do our very best for the children. The *children* are our main focus. As a governing body we provide that 'outside' look if you like...a school is a heck of a place with all those responsibilities. The governors connect the school to the outside community.

Chair S4 considered governance to be of major importance. He acknowledged the importance of primary education but thought that parents and governors had "*insight* into the outside world". He saw governors as "watching over the school", keeping "the professional side of things on track."

Chair S19 thought governance to be "vitally important" and commented:

> It is a very tangible example of community involvement in the school, it *roots it in its community* and makes it responsive and not a faceless

example of the machine of government or of the state. Here there is a great wish for the community to be involved.

Chair S14 was clear over the importance of governance saying "It certainly matters" but argued that his governing body was *"not a rubber stamping body"* since they challenged and asked. Chair S8 saw the primary role of a governor to be supporting the school in a critical way and stated: "…the buzz words are *'critical friend'* and I think that is a good way to describe it."

There was an emphasis from some respondents on their role of helping the *children* in the school. For example, Chair S16 explained that the role of the governing body is to put the children first. Chair S6 considered governance to be very important, seeing primary schools as the basis of children's education. She stated, also, that schools need *support* and *scrutiny* from people outside the sphere of education and claimed that governors *provide a new slant, provide some drive and* prevent the school from being *insular*.

The degree of *transparency* afforded by the head teacher was seen as crucial to the contribution made by governors:

> I think a lot depends on the head. If the head doesn't wish to confide in the governors, as I have found in other schools, it becomes extremely difficult to make a contribution. (Chair S3)

Chair S16 thought that his school could probably operate without the governors but pointed out that they had *appointed* the head teacher and had gone to three rounds of interviews before they appointed the present excellent head teacher. He recognised the role of governors as critical friends and the importance of challenging.

Having *time* to do the job of chair was an issue for some. Chair S3, for example, stated that before he retired from work he did not have time to get into the school so he did not know what was going on. Chair S13 stated that he would not be able to do the job if he was not retired. He was clear that governance was important particularly in *supporting* the head teacher, giving professional *advice* and as a sounding board for the head teacher.

The role of governors in reminding schools of their *religious ethos* and, also, the need for a broa*d curriculum* were seen, by some, to be part of their role. For example, Chair S11 commented:

> It is worth the time and effort, but you have to take the long view and realise you can have an influence on the head teacher, the senior management team and therefore the school. Here it is reminding people that *we do have a distinctive Anglican ethos and sometimes there are other things to consider apart from what the government might say*. The other key thing is to make sure that we are getting *value for money* – but education isn't just about passing exams or SATS, it's making sure that children have the ability to look critically, but with great excitement, at the world they live in. Sometimes governors have to remind schools about this *broader aspect* to education. For example, we run an 'arts week'- poets, writers, artists come into school - so the children get a broader insight into the world.

The governing body was seen to be of increasing importance to a primary school academy with Chair S20 making a number of observations:

- "I would think *very important*, yes...especially in terms of medium and long term planning...*financial plans*."

- "Now, as an academy, we haven't the *safety net* of the local authority. So, *governors are more important than ever before*. Now we are running the school as a business...governors have a lot more responsibility. It is a lot more *onerous but a lot more worthwhile*...we have the responsibility, not the local authority. There has been limited support from some departments in the Young People's Learning Agency."

- "We have more *freedom* around the curriculum and the finances. We were paying huge amounts into local authority funds but not getting enough benefit from them. Now we have the finances to, for example, improve our buildings. Although the financial benefits are not great...we are a very small primary school. We benefit more from using *private people*...lawyers, accountants...than we did from the local authority."

- "As an academy we are not governors anymore, technically we are now a *company* with charitable status which means we don't have to pay VAT...so that is another saving. If everything went pear-shaped then we would only have liabilities of £10 each."

Chair S5 considered that governance was of *vital importance* to a voluntary aided school where the governors are the *employers*. She thought that it was vital for schools to have an independent body able to help and *support*. She found that it was time consuming but worth the effort. Chair S5 further described how governance was important when her children attended the school and how that was still the case. She explained how the governors shared out roles in relation to their particular *skills* – the previous chair having expertise in finance and consequently chaired the finance committee.

4.4.2 The Local Community

The respondents were generally *positive* to the governors coming from the local community of each school:

> Yes, because they know what the community is like, they know what the children have to deal with on a day to day basis. They *understand the children* here, the challenges the children are facing, what their home lives are like. (Head S

Head S6 thought it was useful that the governors knew the school and the community it serves. He expressed a preference for *localism* and thought that governance was "…a perfect example of the *'big society'*. Chair S11 thought that it was helpful if the governors understood the *culture* of the area and so were not unrealistic in their expectations. He gave as an example marital breakdowns in the leafy suburbs of the school and the consequent stability that the school provides during the day.

Head S10 considered that governance works better because of the local community link. She considered that governors from the local community were aware of *local and current issues*. They are more interested, more caring, more invested and they are *passionate* about it because it is their children and their neighbour's children. He thought that it was important to have that connection with the community. Chair S17 described primary schools as "…*hubs of the community…at a time when communities*

are being fractured…". He appreciated his governor colleagues, with their wide range of skills, and the invaluable contribution they made to the school. Chair S14 pointed out that in a Catholic school it is a requirement since the parish has to support the school. He described his school as "…a *centre of the community*". He considered it was important to have governors from the local community in order to know the social and economic backgrounds of the children.

Head S8 was positive about having governors from the local community but articulated some *difficulties* for her inner-city school:

> I think it makes a difference although we struggle with that. We have the local vicar, who is an asset and tells us about what is going on. The parents find it very difficult not to bring their issues to governance rather than the issues of all pupils. We have a parent who is well respected in the Muslim community, who unfortunately can't attend as much as we hoped… but when we have talked about issues such as attendance, religious festivals… it is useful. They have information which we don't know about.

Recruiting governors from *outside* the local community had been difficult for some schools:

> We have tried to get people from the outside...but it is a lot of responsibility, it is unpaid and it is difficult to get the same *commitment* from them. (Head S20)

> Local people are more committed. Could have a couple of governors from the outside. It is a big commitment, people can't always do it. Outside people, say a solicitor, often don't last…they haven't got the time or *commitment*. Much more reading to be done than ever before. Feel that people are just throwing paper at us. It is getting more onerous. (Chair S6)

> Important to think of the *commitment* to the school. Can have expertise from outside but may not be totally committed to the school because they have other priorities, for example their own business. (Head S4)

Chair S8 did not think it was essential for all governors to come from the local community, but he argued that it would be a very *strange* school to have none from the local community. He considered that governance was a much harder job than might be imagined. They had thought it would be good to have one of the local bank managers on the governors but found "…they don't give their time easily." He described difficulties getting representatives from all of the different *ethnic groups*.

He saw the school as an *integral part* of the local community and, therefore, they continued to aspire to having representation from all groups.

Some respondents were open to having governors from outside their local community but thought that the majority of governors should come from the locality of the school. For example, Head S12, stated that it was very helpful when looking at standards and issues to have governors with an *understanding of the context* of the school. She, recognised, however, that it was possible to become *too insular* and pointed to her school being situated in a former mining village within a large city. She thought there was "still a village mentality" and that governors from outside the locality might bring *different aspirations*, different views and different ways of working. She thought these different viewpoints would be useful.

Other respondents were satisfied with the composition of their governing body but stressed the importance of them being *aspirational* and *outward looking*:

> I think you need to have someone who knows the patch, the area of the school. It might be over-powering to have them all from outside. I think we have the right balance here where the governors know the community but they have an *awareness of where the school should be going*. (Head S17)

> Yes, I think it is because we are the local community, but they are outward looking. One governor handles contracts across the country, another governor works worldwide and the chair had a powerful role as an accountant with a large bus company. All of our governors have had children in the school. (Head S13)

> I think it is. The closer association between the community and the school is better. Need to have an understanding of the local area. We would take outside governors if they had something to offer. However, the governors always have to be *aspirational* for the pupils. (Chair S4)

Some respondents were very clear that their governors should come from the local community of the school. Head S19 thought that the governors needed to understand the area of the school. He continued: "Our school catchment area is very different from the school down the road. We have a lot of *professional* people who are parents here." Head S1 thought that it was important for *democracy* that members of the local community were involved as governors.
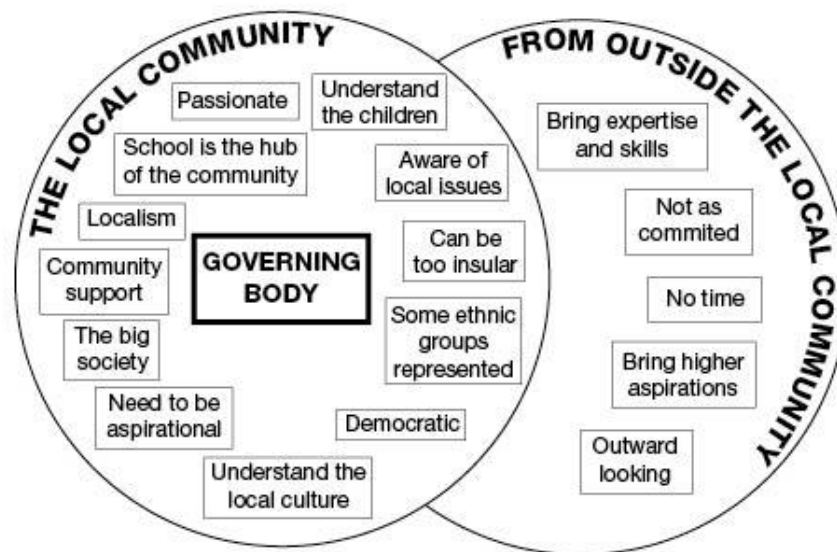
Figure 8: The Local Community

Head S1 described the great benefits of being a *community* school:

> Our school is a community primary school and a very important part of the local community…and we have community governance. As a multicultural school we have representatives from the local mosque and church … so in a community, housing and family sense that is really helpful. It maintains the links between the community and the school… and what they are looking for from the school.

Head S1 referred to his 22 years as a head teacher in his present school during which here there had been lots of occasions when children "…arrived in a transient sense at the school…supported by community governors, by religious leaders and cultural leaders…and that has been of enormous value in helping the children settle in…" and making families feel welcome. He described that dynamic as a strength of the community cohesion, valued by Ofsted, and important to the school. Additionally, this school was able to draw on the language skills of the governors. Head S1 articulated that children arrived at his school from many parts of the world and the community governors helped them to settle in. With up to 38 languages in the school, Head S1 was able to pick up the phone and ask one of his governors to help him with translation skills and he explained "…if they can't do it they'll find someone locally, regionally or even nationally."

Chair S20, from a newly formed academy in a small village, did not think it was necessary to have governors from the local community believing that "…expertise is better than people from the local community without interest or expertise." Head S16 considered that it was important for the chair to come from the local community, especially in a church school. However, she did not think it was important for the rest of the governors to come from the local community and suggested that it "…could be quite blinkered" if all came from the local community. She pointed out that being in a four school trust provided a good number of governors from outside the immediate school community. The views presented in this section are summarised in Figure 8.

4.4.3   Challenging, Complex, Time Consuming, Capability

The researcher asked the head teachers and chairs of governance whether their governors found their roles *challenging*, *complex* and *time consuming*. They were further asked whether their governors were *capable* of doing the job required of them. Some of their views are presented here and summarised in Figure 9, below.

There was agreement over the *complexity* of the role. For example:

> Yes, some governors might leave very quickly if it is too complex for them. I go to secondary governor meetings and find it complex and difficult with a different set of jargon, and I'm a primary head. I'm not sure what to do about the complexity of the role. (Head S3)

> Their work is complex. (Head S5*)*

> Complex? Yes, a thankless task at times. (Head S10)

There was some discussion over understanding *the role* of governors. Head S7, for example, stated that she was not "…quite sure what the job required of them is." She explained that her only experience of governance was with her own governing body – she had not seen any other governing bodies operating so she felt that her comments were from a very limited perspective. Head S19 revealed that he was not sure if all of his governors understood their role.

Time Consuming ◄──── Some Retired

Some in Employment

Complex, Yes   Stressful

More and More Responsibility

Not All Understand Their Role

GOVERNING BODY

Majority of Governors Capable of Doing the Job

Too Much Required of the Governors

Motivated by Notion of Helping the Children

Some do not have the Expertise or Time
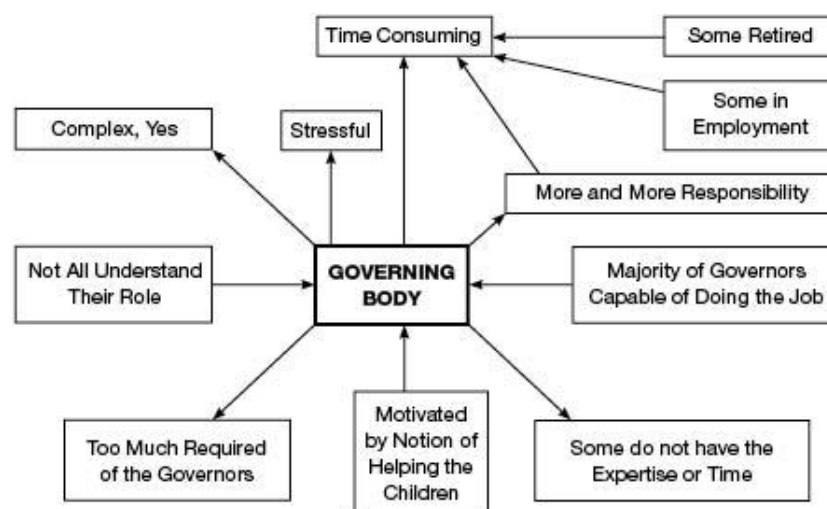
Figure 9: Challenging, Complex, Time Consuming, Capability

Some degree of confidence was expressed over their ability to do *the job*:

> Yes, they are capable of doing the job. They look at things and do challenge me. They recognise the positives but they do ask questions. They praise but are 'critical' friends. They are giving praise to me that I wouldn't necessarily get from anyone else. That is good for me personally. Some of the governors work and others are retired. They do find it *time*-consuming. (Head S11)

> Too much is asked of them as volunteers. They are confident and capable of doing the job. (Head S17)

Chair S20 articulated a different viewpoint stating that sixty per cent of governors are capable of doing the job but forty per cent are not capable.

Time and *lack of expertise* to do the job was an issue for some. Head S14 revealed:

> Governors know that I sympathise with their role as unpaid volunteers. I think they realise they haven't got the expertise or time. I think the main thing they lack is having the time to do the job. They aren't doing the job that Ofsted requires of them.

A number of comments were made about the complexity, stress and time spent as a school governor being due to other reasons. For example, Head S13 explained that

some of his governors considered that they were being *de-skilled* by Ofsted telling them what they need to do. Chair S4 considered that *too much* was being asked of lay people. He stated that most governors complain of more and more *responsibility*. Chair S17 suggested that governors gave their time because they saw it as *helping the children* in the school.

4.4.4 Improving School Governance

Head teachers and chairs of governance were asked how they might *make governance better*. Their suggestions are presented diagrammatically in Figure 10, below.

Some head teachers thought that more *finance* should be considered:

> I'd like to see paid governors; professional governors with a modest allowance for some funding…we are disenfranchising some potential parent governors because they can't afford childcare, transport, babysitters. We need their perspective on, for example, school meals. Everything is done on the cheap. (Head S1)

> Government must put more money into it, to make it viable, to make it workable for people. It is such a demanding job. Some of the changes are just another layer of people volunteering to do something for nothing. Maybe pay some governors and make it attractive to be full-time governors. Where you are asking people to do the job you need training. Maybe chairs should have compulsory training, once a year. When it is voluntary then some can't attend. (Head S4)

Head S17 considered that there could be a small remuneration for the chair and vice-chair while Head S3 suggested that some governors could be paid and their expertise shared with other schools. Chair S17 considered that the *profile* of governors could be raised. Similarly, Head S1 suggested that there should be some *recognition* for governors arguing that they have all of the responsibilities but very little recognition. There was some discussion about the *size* of governing bodies with Head S1 saying that he did not believe that "one-size fits all" and Head S17 indicating that he thought having 14 governors was "about right" and allowed a range of views and expertise.
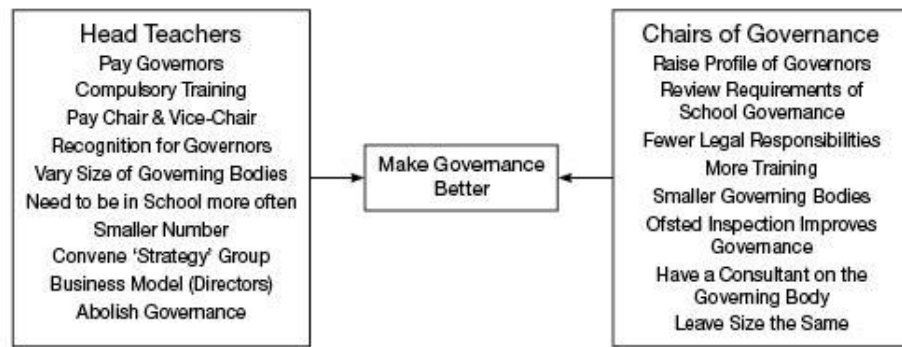
Figure 10: Improving School Governance

Heads S13, S5 and Chair S19 had *contrasting views*:

> I don't know. You don't want full-time, paid governors. Best to have governors from the local community because they are committed. (Head S13)

> It is a massive commitment. Should they be paid? They would then be more accountable and therefore would they be even more intense on the head teacher? This wouldn't be good. Payment by results? If you become an academy then it would be an executive board with no support from the local authority. You would have to employ human resource staff, legal staff, a bursar, etc. Grouping schools, as academies, together would mean it wouldn't be 'our school'. (Head S5)

> I would like a more democratic company structure in which to work as an academy. I wouldn't want paid governors. I feel that at present we are in a vortex, don't know where we are going or what is going to happen to local authorities. I would be deeply unhappy with a network of private academies. I'm uncomfortable with the large salaries being paid to executive heads of academies. (Chair S19)

The need for governors to *come into school* more often was recognised by Head S18. Head S14 considered that "…unpaid volunteers aren't doing the job". He suggested simplifying their role, paying them and having a smaller governing body. Further, he suggested that governance could be *abolished*, leaving head teachers to run schools.

Other respondents considered having a *smaller* number of people on a governing body:

> I would have a smaller core group of five or six with other associate governors for legal, finance, premises, safety of children etc… they could be called in to advise the core group. There could be an annual meeting with everyone involved. I do think there needs to be a smaller group. (Head S6)

> One size fits all isn't necessarily the best. Could be smaller in numbers. (Head S10)

> Could be smaller, say seven. Need a sounding board but at present fifteen governors is too big. Better to have a more skilful but smaller governing body. But this is a volunteer system – not everyone is going to give their time like the chair. Until you start paying them then you won't get the calibre you need. (Head S15)

However, the difficulties in having a smaller governing body were pointed out by Chair S6 in stating that every governor would then have to serve on every committee. Chair S12 considered that having more governors provided greater expertise to help a school. Chair S11 articulated:

> I'd make governance much more professional, smaller. Someone with a finance background, someone with a legal background. The optimum group size is about eight. But from a church perspective would that be sufficient in number to have the church representation needed? There are other practical issues, having sufficient numbers for all committees. Maybe 'professional' is the wrong word…maybe they need to have more understanding about education…with more directed, guided reading.

Head S11 believed that things can always be made better and gave a specific example of the way in which her school had tried to improve governance by convening a 'strategy group' solely concerned with school improvement not the other things that come up at the normal governor meetings.

It was thought that the government needs to *review* what was required of school governors. Chair S7, for example, considered that there was a need for a separate group to oversee a school but felt that the government needs to look carefully at what they expect from governors. He suggested that many legal responsibilities should be taken away so there would be less demanded of governors. Chair S14 stated that being a governor was "…a very big responsibility and a great workload." He thought that school governance should be reviewed.

Head S16 suggested a *business model*, with governors called directors and given some form of accreditation. She believed that the school needed to be like a successful business, taking risks (within the law) and being creative.

Others suggested *more training* and other changes to the governor meetings themselves. For example, Head S9 thought that there needs to be more training of

governors and the meetings themselves needed to be "streamlined" with less time spent listening to the head teacher talking. Chair S16 suggested more training and a "smaller governing body, less dead wood". Chair S5, also, suggested that more training was possibly the key to improving governance.

Other respondents suggested that governors must be interested in the school, preferably have some professional knowledge and thought that involving *another professional*, e.g. a consultant, would be helpful. Chair S13 considered that an *Ofsted inspection* had made them a better governing body. This chair referred to American school boards covering more than one school, similar to local authorities. He was of the opinion that in any typical governing body there was a core of active governors.

4.5 THEME 2: THE FUNCTION AND OPERATION OF GOVERNING BODIES

4.5.1 Effectiveness

During the research the investigator gathered information regarding the number of meetings held by the governing bodies. This data is shown Table XIV, below, and gives an indication of how each governing body operates over a year. It can be seen, for example, that each governing body holds at least three full governing body meetings per year. Usually one meeting is held each school term. A quarter of the schools studied held six full governing body meetings per year – in the main, these schools were larger than average. S16 held three main governing body meetings plus three meetings of their Trust per year. The number of sub-committees operated by each governing body varied widely from three to thirty-six per year. The reason for having sub-committees was related to finance, premises and the curriculum but a range of other purposes were required as detailed below. S4, a federation, held forty-two governor meetings per year. S5, a CE-Aided school, held twenty-eight meetings per year. S7, an inner-city RC school, held only six meetings over the year. Furthermore, the head teacher of this school described the sub-committees as "ineffective".

TABLE XIV
Governing Body Meetings

School	Meetings of full governing body per year	Sub-committee meetings per year**
S1	3	9
S2	6	18
S3	3	9
S4	6	36
S5	6	22
S6	4	20
S7	3	3
S8	6	16
S9	3	9
S10	3	24
S11	4	9
S12	3	15
S13	6	16
S14	3	9
S15	3	9
S16	3 plus 1 Trust meeting per term	6
S17	3	15
S18	4	26
S19	3	12
S20	3	6

** Typically these meetings would be sub-committees for finance, premises, personnel, curriculum and - varying with the school – worship committee, racial equality committee, admissions committee, strategic planning committee, disciplinary committee, appeals committee, music committee, security committee, religious committee, self-review committee and children's centre committee. Head S18 reported a regular 'surgery' being held by one governor so that the teachers could

bring their concerns to her. Chair S16 reported that each main meeting of the governing body lasted two hours and would have 20 to 30 items on the agenda.

When questioned about the *effectiveness* of their governing bodies some head teachers and chairs of governance responded *positively*:

> In this school the governors are heavily involved in making decisions because they have the skills to do that. It isn't rubber stamping my decisions. Sub-committees make decisions and these feed into the main governors meeting. With email it is easy to keep in contact with everyone. We are intending to establish a strategy group. Next year we are going for Governor Mark. I think they are very good. An integral part of the school leadership. (Head S11)

Head S12 judged her governing body to be *very effective*. She described them as involved in classrooms and with subjects. Therefore, they were judged to know the school well and able to make informed judgements. They were described as proactive and valued.

Vignette 1, below, is an example of an effective governing body as judged by the chair of governance and Ofsted:

Vignette 1: Chair S5 believed that her governing body was extremely effective. Each curriculum subject had a link governor who reported each year to the main governing body. They had two main governors meetings per term because it gave more time for full and quality discussions about the issues. They were seeking to get the Governor Mark Award. She pointed out that in their last Ofsted inspection the governors had been classified as 'outstanding'. Strong links with the diocese had been developed, there was a huge community involvement and because of the Christian ethos of the school they considered themselves to bemuch more of a family. They had instigated a strategic planning group which worked together with the senior management team and supported them. Chair S5 met weekly with the head teacher for about 45 minutes. In these weekly meetings they reviewed the meetings the head teacher had attended, discussed any issues the head brought up and any issues the chair might have. The chair, a former teacher, communicated that she was, usually, in the school every day. Governors assisted in classrooms and helped children learning to read. Ofsted spoke highly of the governing body of S5 – describing them as knowledgeable and very experienced; a strength of the school; providing stability during periods of change and knowing the right questions to ask in ensuring every pupil does well.

A number of head teachers and chairs of governance used *Ofsted* as a measure of governing body effectiveness:

> Outstanding as judged by Ofsted and by our School Improvement Partner. (Head S17)

> Outstanding as judged by Ofsted. We have systems in place so that they challenge me. (Head S16)

> Depends how you measure effectiveness. Ofsted said we are 'good'. (Head S6)

Others used the concepts of 'challenging' and 'supporting' as a measure of effectiveness. For example Chair S17 described his governors as "…good in *challenging* and *supporting*. We can't do the head's job, we can't do the teachers' jobs but we can bring common-sense and a range of gifts and skills…". They had governors with a range of skills, a self-review process and invited teachers into their meetings to give them first-hand experience.

Some head teachers were *cautious* in their responses:

> I think it is very effective. We say 'good' and this was ratified by Ofsted. Some of their practice is outstanding. They are easy to talk to if I have got concerns. Four of the governors in particular are very supportive. They are a good team. (Head S8)

Other head teachers, whilst considering the effectiveness of their governing body, gave credit to their *chairs* of governance. Head S6, for example, rated his governing body as 'very effective' and explained that Chair S6 provided very strong leadership and the governing body had a lot of credibility in the school because of their expertise. Head S13 reported that they were very fortunate to have their present chair of governance since he was highly intelligent, had 25 years experience of governance and as a retired accountant he was able to give time to his role. He described the chair as the key person in their governance since he was able to "look things up and can call on other governors with specific knowledge." Head S13 referred to other governors with expertise in contract law, interview techniques and groundworks. In rating S13 as 'satisfactory' Ofsted noted that governance had improved since the last inspection and had in place a clear timetable of action to hold the school to account. S15, also rated as 'satisfactory' by Ofsted was reported as offering effective support and challenge to the head teacher.

Effectiveness was sometimes judged differently by head teachers and chairs of governance, as in Vignette 2:

Vignette 2: <u>Head S19</u> considered his governing body to be "very effective". He reported that they had regular meetings and that the governors had a good understanding of how companies work and as time progresses he thought they will grow more accustomed to how academies work. <u>Chair S19</u> reported that for Ofsted purposes the governors would describe themselves as "outstanding" but in reality they were "…probably good". He considered that they did "support and challenge" but he thought that "…the head teacher could open up more and have more discussion". As an academy they no longer had the safety net of the local authority and they were now dealing directly with the government. This resulted in more responsibilities for him as the chair of governors.

<u>Head S20</u> described her chair and vice chair as "…very supportive". She thought that her governors were an intelligent group and asked relevant and challenging questions. She judged the meetings to be "good" but stated that beyond the meetings most governors were not involved with the school. She considered that the governors gave "validity" to the work of the school. <u>Chair S20</u> was frank in her assessment of effectiveness: "I would say 'satisfactory'…bog standard…half of the governors, four, are involved but the rest don't get involved enough". As chair she had been very involved in conversion to academy status, her previous work in business having helped.

Some governing bodies had seen improvement *over time*. Head S16, for example, explained that when she started in the school the governance was not very good – she referred to "…one governor who brought her knitting, it was a social occasion." However, the headteacher considered that she had been careful in "…bringing good people onto the governing body and now it is a very professional outfit." Chair S6 revealed how the governors had "…failed in the past by having the wool pulled over our eyes." However, she considered that they were now "outstanding", knew what was going on in the school but were always looking for ways to improve. She described Head S6 as "…very open and proud of his school."

A chair of governors was more critical with regard to the *time* spent governing:

> I think it could be more effective if some governors put more time into their roles. The link governors need to come into school more often. We

could do with more expertise and more governors in school more often. I suppose we are 'good'. (Chair S16)

Ofsted, in fact, reported that the governors of S16 were led by an experienced chair who was well aware of the strengths and areas for development. The governors were regularly updated on the performance of the school. The governors were judged to be supportive but not afraid to ask challenging questions.

Training was seen as important in establishing effectiveness:

> They are becoming more effective because we have done some bespoke training – what standards are all about, Fisher Family Trust, RAISEonline. We have been fortunate over the last few years because we have appointed two deputies and my replacement, so the governing body have been more informed over key issues. In that respect they have become better informed and more confident. To keep the momentum going some of our parent governors have become community governors. We have a bursar who comes in from the local authority twice a term. (Head S9)

One chair of governors stressed the need for *joint training* including the senior management team as well as the head teacher:

> If you had asked me that six years ago I would have said very ineffective. Now we have a change of head and deputy who are more willing to engage with us as governors and therefore they see that we have a role as governors. I would think that there should be more training for head teachers so that they understand the role of governors. Also need more training for chairs, vice-chairs, heads and deputies – joint training. We need more focus on the senior management team not just the head teacher. (Chair S11)

There was concern over the way Ofsted judged governance as described in Vignette 3:

Vignette 3: Head S14 was *critical* of governors. He described governors as "...very willing, enthusiastic volunteers but not necessarily with any expertise to give. I think governing bodies, in general, aren't effective in an Ofsted sense." He described how Ofsted expected governors to hold schools to account, to be challenging and supportive, and how Ofsted are, in his view, keener on challenging than support. However, he recounted how he had to tell his governors to hold him to account. He spoke frankly: "I have to tell them the questions to ask so that I can answer and the minutes of the meeting will show that I am being challenged. Very artificial process." He considered it unfair of Ofsted to ask about the leadership given by the governors. The Chair of Governors of S14 had a

different perspective. He stated that there was very good participation from all of the governors and they included a good cross-section of backgrounds – an engineer, health and safety, recruitment agency, a local pharmacist assistant, finance, planning, ship building and educational welfare. He rated the governing body as "…very good but not yet outstanding." In their recent report on S14, Ofsted were quite positive about the governing body – noting that they were showing great determination to get full benefit from the new federation; that they were very supportive of the head teacher; were increasingly active in holding the head teacher to account; that they knew the school well and were active in finding training in order to be even more effective.

The *limitations* of some governing bodies were pointed out, for example, in Vignette 4, below:

Vignette 4: Head S7 saw her governing body as "very supportive" but also recognised their *limitations* judging them to be a mixed group of people with mixed skills. She stated that they were not proactive and had no impact in terms of making changes. She related that they had a shortage of governors, the full governors met once per term but the sub-committees did not meet regularly. Ofsted had judged the governance of S7 to be 'good' mentioning their support in guiding the school through a large budget deficit, including making staff redundant.

Other respondents recognised the role of the *clerk* and *professional* people in making their governance more effective:

> The effectiveness, part of this is having a good clerk. We buy in from the LA for our clerk. The clerk keeps us right with regard to the legalities. (Head S4)

> Very effective because we have a good ratio of different governors, we have great support from the local authority clerking service. We work well as a team. I think we are outstanding, I think Ofsted agree. (Chair S12)

Head S3 described the "key to an effective governing body" as being the weight of experience they have and this enabled them to take "a different view". He related how his governing body had benefited from having an accountant and a bank manager as governors. The governance of S3 was judged by Ofsted to be 'good' mentioning how the governors kept a watchful eye on school performance, were prudent in its

financial management and supported the school very well. They did, however, find that in this 'outstanding' school individual governors rarely visited classrooms and this limited their understanding of provision and their knowledge of pupil's views.

A number of chairs of governance gave praise to their *local authority* in helping to develop their governance *after Ofsted* inspections:

> A few years ago, after the merger of the two schools, we struggled a bit, the standards weren't as they should be. We went into 'notice to improve'…that was the best thing that ever happened to us. One thing that came out of that was that the Local Authority asked us to set up a 'monitoring group', which is a small number of governors basically, with the head and some of the management team. It has a wide remit to monitor and challenge the school in various areas. That worked very well, Ofsted have praised it, and we still have that group meeting about once per term. (Chair S8)

> I think the governors are working very well now. I think they are 'very good' although there is always room for improvement. We have had a lot of feedback from the local authority to help us. As the chair, even though I was experienced, I learned a great deal. (Chair S13)

S8 was the only school to have established a 'monitoring group' with the function described above
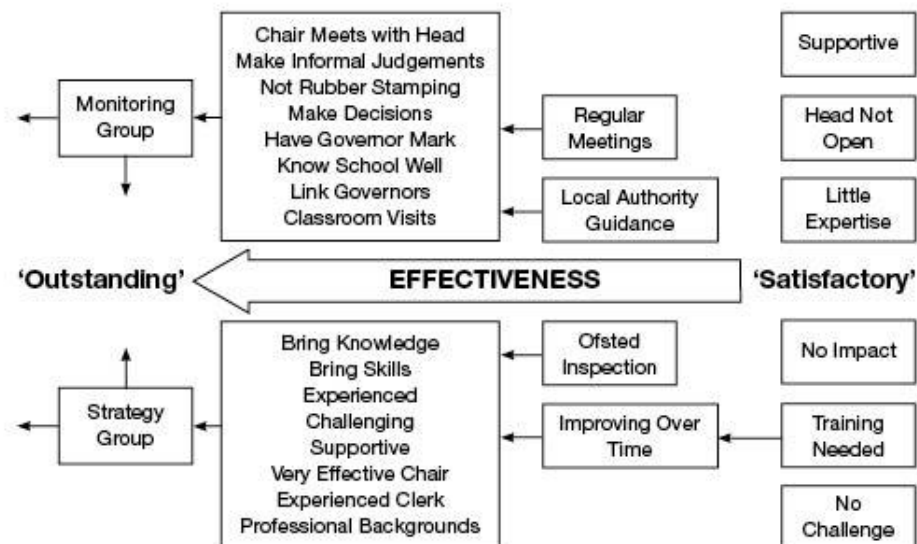

Figure 11: Effectiveness

Figure 11 summarises issues raised by head teachers, chairs of governance and Ofsted in considering the effectiveness of governance.

4.5.2   Relationships

Head teachers and chairs of governors stressed the importance of *good relationships* between the head teacher and the governing body. Head S9 considered that a good relationship was "Vital!" and Head S7 stated it was "Very important" and these views were supported by others. For example:

> Treat the governors with *respect*. Treat them as part of the school. It is something you have to work on. (Head S3)

> I do have a good relationship with the chair. The governors *respect* her. She is trained as a teacher and they respect her because of that. (Head S5)

> Very important especially in a small school like ours. The key relationship is between the head and the chair and to a lesser extent with the vice-chair. (Chair S2)

> We do guide them but our chair is the leader. He is a very good chair, articulate. There is mutual *respect*...we rate him highly. (Head S19)

> Relationships between myself and the head are very good – I couldn't imagine anything else, it is essential. (Chair S16)

Reference was made, by some respondents, to how their governors worked as *teams*. For example, Chair S5, considered that her governing body now worked as a team and that this was an improvement on past practice. All governors received the papers for meetings in advance, they were required to read them and there was more discussion at the meetings. Head S11 described how, in her school, there were six year group teams and six curriculum teams – every member of the governing body was on a year group team and a curriculum team. This innovative system enabled staff and governors to know more about the school. The staff were more aware of the role of the governors as a result of this system.

Some head teachers expressed their views that having a chair of governors was very valuable when *disputes* occurred and, also, in being able to hear a different viewpoint when required:

> If you have a good relationship with the chair… for example, with disputes, when times are hard, then that is who you talk to. With disputes with parents it is nice to have someone else to put their viewpoint, it can be seen as an objective viewpoint. (Head S3)

Head S6 and Chair S6 described, see Vignette 5, a time when there was a *breakdown in relationships* on their governing body:

Vignette 5: Head S6 communicated that there had been a "…bad experience when relationships broke down and it is then when you realise how important relationships are". He described how "Relationships went 'pear-shaped'." He remarked how important the "friend" is in relation to "critical friend" and considered that there must be mutual respect between the head teacher and the chair of governance. Head S6 thought that it was very important for the head teacher and chair to take quality time, maybe an hour, before the meeting so that "…there is a consensual agreement, an openness between the head and chair, a united situation, at the governors meeting. The meeting is not the place to have disagreements." Chair S6 conveyed that the school had some difficulties with governors in the past and they had taken advice from the local authority. She described it as an "…awful and extraordinary…" time. It had caused further reflection on how new governors could be made welcome. Since that time the governors had been involved in a number of social occasions.

Other respondents referred to the role of a governor as a '*critica*l friend:

> If the school is struggling then Ofsted is expecting the governors to act as a 'critical' friend. If the relationship between the head and chair is working then celebrate…it is a joy. As a union representative I have seen elsewhere the trauma that is produced when the relationship breaks down. (Head S1)

Chair S11 considered that the relationship between the head and chair to be vital and that it was important for the chair to be seen to support the head teacher. He continued: "Have to be loyal… a critical friend, but the friend is important." If relationships between the chair and head broke down then the chair would, Chair S11 considered, have to go and a new chair be appointed. The governors of S11 were described, by Ofsted, as working well with the head teacher. They were said to be well informed and supportive and well-placed to act as a critical friend.

However, Chair S14 described how *effort* was needed in order to establish good relationships. He described how he was working with a new head teacher and how the governors have to adapt to the change. Relationships were strained and that needed, in his opinion, to be worked upon.

4.5.3   Challenging and Supporting

When invited to comment on *supporting* and *challenging* the head teacher, some chairs were very clear:

> Yes, I think supporting and challenging are the main areas for governance. It is a very difficult job being a head teacher. We have to look after our head teacher especially as this is her first headship and her first experience of a voluntary aided school. (Chair S5)

> No, I can depend on everyone to raise issues. We benefit from having a lot of professionals in the locality. I've never found it difficult to challenge...asking questions, asking for more information. (Chair S19)

The way in which one governing body accessed information and scrutinised the school was described by Chair S17 and Ofsted in Vignette 6:

Vignette 6: Chair S17 articulated that the governors looked at the paperwork, asked key questions of the leadership and he continued "...we are in, we are in...there is no hiding place...we are attached to classes...it is an open school...if there are any issues then you hear about it." He considered that the real *scrutiny* of the curriculum was from the RAISEonline figures where the governors probed and said "...in terms of tracking we are forever asking questions." He thought they had a good relationship with the head teacher, considered that he was "open" with the governors and they did not "...feel he is hiding things from us." Ofsted commented that the governing body of S17 were extremely knowledgeable about the school's work. They were judged to support the school well but also challenged the school to do even better.

Scrutiny, challenge and monitoring in the large inner-city S8 are described in Vignette 7:

Vignette 7: Head S8 described an area of *scrutiny* from her governors and her reaction to such challenging: "For example, in the 'standards committee' we look at the SATs analysis, we look at each class, attendance, make up etc, we aim for two sub-levels per year and look at each child in turn." She described how, on one occasion the governors were unhappy with her targets and advised her to seek advice from a local authority consultant. She did this and went back to the

governors who then accepted the targets. She continued: "So there was clear scrutiny from the governors. My philosophy is if the governors are good enough to give up their time, to read the paperwork to prepare for the meetings, then if they say something then I do it. If I am instructed then I don't see this as an insult. If they say 'jump' then I say 'how high'." Chair S8 stated: "Challenging is always difficult, but I think we have got to the stage where the management team readily accept challenge. The management team aren't on the defensive, they readily accept challenge. We have even had the School Council (pupils) in to give their views." Ofsted had noted that the governing body of S8 *monitored* the school's work rigorously and held it to account by reviewing the impact of actions taken. They were said to play a crucial part in supporting the school and in helping to bring improvements.

S4 was judged, by Ofsted, to have very good governance – the head teacher and governors sharing high ambitions for the school. S18, as reported by Ofsted, had strong governance which supported and challenged the school well. However, the governors of S6 were said to be very supportive and offered an appropriate amount of challenge but sometimes *lacked rigour* in checking the school's progress.

Chair S7 perceived his governing body as having a *'sounding board' and supportive* function. He described the professional background – a doctor, an accountant, a solicitor – of the governing body but mentioned that the "…school always invites the governors to functions and so on but generally the governors can't attend because of other commitments."

The difficulties of challenging were recognised by some respondents, for example:

> They do support...we have been challenged a lot in the past. I think it is *hard* for any governing body to be truly challenging...they are not in education, they are volunteers, so they respect the head teacher's role...so it is difficult for them...I think a lot of governors don't understand their role. There are statutory requirements on them...this forms the core of what they are supposed to do, but they don't always do it. The governors do lead but the head needs to be there to guide. We have a good chair, he runs the meetings well. (Heads S19)

> Yes, *challenging is difficult* sometimes. But the head teacher knows me and we have a good relationship. (Chair S16)

> The chair is supportive – phone conversations, text messages etc – but the rest of the governing body don't have the expertise. Challenge not good, as I've said. (Head S14)

Head S11 reported *the value* of the governing body to her. She believed that her reports to her governing body were "…open and transparent." She met regularly with the chair and there were full and frank discussions at the meetings. She judged herself to be "…a hard worker" but she maintained that she liked "…to have someone to be *answerable* to…" and continued "…it is helpful to have people to overlook my work." She reported that it was helpful to have the "…extra layer of *expertise*", for example in finance and building work, that the governing body provided. She considered that they were "…very good at recognising positives" but they also asked questions. She related that "…being a head teacher can be a *lonely* job" and, therefore, it was "…nice to have genuine recognition and praise from the governors…"

An *Ofsted* inspection had helped the governing body of S3 to improve their level of scrutiny. Chair S13 reported that, since their last Ofsted inspection, they were aware of the targets set for the children and were able to monitor the progress of individuals.

It was apparent that some governors spent a lot of *time* in their schools and therefore were well placed to support and challenge:

> Everything that I bring to the governors meeting they scrutinise. Also governors are attached to all of the curriculum areas, they come into school and know what is happening in the school. They do governor monitoring visits, the more able and talented governor met recently with the coordinator, completed a proforma that we have for these visits, met with me and then we sent a copy to our clerk at the local authority. To be a governor in this school you have to give a lot of time and be committed. When there are parents' evenings then there are always governors in attendance. They are supportive, yes. For example, they take on board my suggestions, my new ideas. Really, this school should be outstanding given the pupil intake, but it is only good at present. The teaching is rather dull at present, lots of the teachers have had a comfortable existence here. (Head S5)

Head S1 reported that his chair of governance was in the school at least three times per week. He talked to all members of staff and had "…a good grasp of the issues." Staff had direct access to the chair. The head teacher described this as "…the senior leader's privilege.The chair often *challenged the head teacher privately*. Head S1 appreciated this challenge and described the chair as being particularly skilful.

However, one chair expressed his doubts with reference to supporting:

> Yes certainly challenges...questions and scrutiny. But support ... I'm not
> sure at present, new head. (Chair S14)

Ofsted reported that the governors of S9 supported their head teacher very well but also monitored the work of the school and contributed to strategic planning. Excellent financial management had helped to improve the school buildings and provide extra information and communication technology.
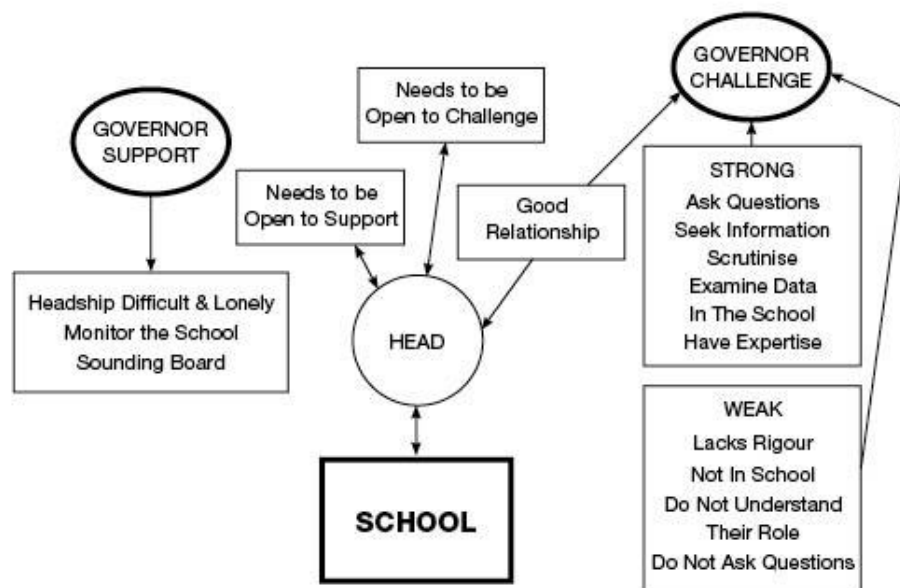

Figure 12: Challenging and Supporting

The comments of the head teachers and chairs of governance in relation to 'challenging' and 'supporting' are summarised, diagrammatically, in Figure 12, above.

4.5.4   Integral Part of School Leadership

When asked if they considered the school governors to be an *integral part* of their school leadership, some chairs and head teachers spoke positively with regard to this. For example, as shown in Vignette 8, both Chair S17 and Head S17 were confident of their leadership:

Vignette 8: Chair S17 was very positive that their school governance was an integral part of the school leadership. He considered that the governing body was "…a real platform for us to challenge and support." He described how there was a good flow of information, good 'keeping in the loop' and how the governors "…bounce ideas off each other". Head S17 was very positive, stating " Very much so. Very much so…". He likened his governors to a board of directors with him, as the head teacher managing the team. He conveyed that he did not regard it as the governors "checking" on him but spoke of how they went "…over everything together". If his governors raised concerns then he had to think further.

Head S5, recently appointed to the school, conveyed that her governors were "…definitely" an integral part of leadership. She met with the chair of governors every week and a lot of detail was discussed. She felt that this could "…become irritating over time…" but understood that for the moment the governors were trying to provide stability for the school.

Head S16 was clear that her governors were an integral part of the school leadership. Being part of a four school trust had helped bring new people with a wide range of skills - financial, marketing, entrepreneurial - onto the governors. She stated "…this has lifted our game."

However, some respondents were clear that they were *not part of the school leadership* and others felt that they were only partially involved:

> I don't think we are in on everything that is decided. If it involves change then we are involved. It is quite difficult to know at what stage we should be involved. (Chair S6)

> I think the governors are there to set the framework, not to manage the school. Governors are welcome here. I'm in contact with the Head two or three times a week. (Chair S8)

There was doubt and *lack of understanding* among some of the respondents. For example Chair S11 and Head S14 commented:

If I'm honest, no, but it could be. I think it isn't, because I think there isn't enough understanding, in the whole school, of what governance is about. (Chair S11)

No. I think they are supposed to be. It is very difficult to get governors to come into school. Typically they are very modest...have time commitments, lack of expertise. (Head S14)

Head S7 was very clear that her governors were not sufficiently involved and this was supported by Chair S7 who commented: "Ideally yes, but given the amount of involvement because of time, family, etc that is inevitably limited." Similarly Head S3 did not consider that his governors were part of the school leadership. He considered that they left that to him and stated "…they very much go along with what I recommend. I can't think of any time when they have taken a different route to me."

Some head teachers described how the governors helped them and so were *part* of the school leadership. Head S11 described how the governors had helped with progressing the new school buildings. Head S10 stated that "…any crucial decision I've made, so far, I have run by the chair" and Chair S20 considered that becoming an academy, and therefore a company, made the case for joint leadership stronger. Chair S12 considered that the governors strengthened the leadership of Head S12.
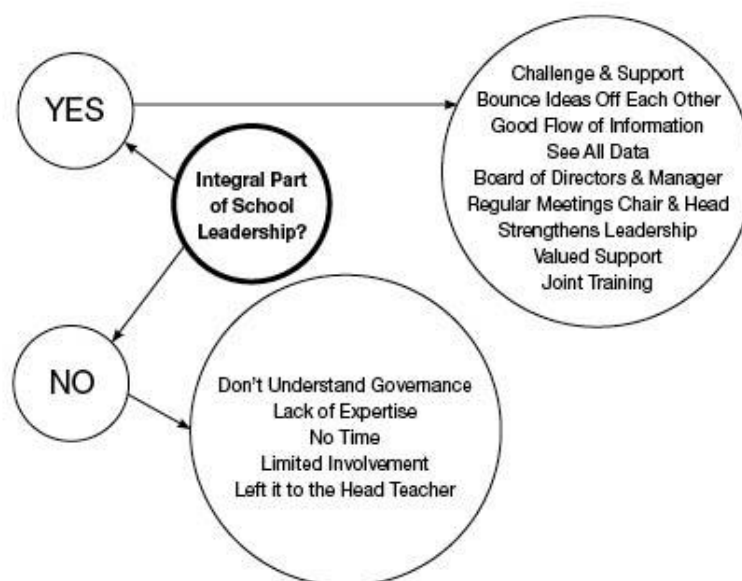
Figure 13: Integral Part of School Leadership

Head S13 explained that every member of his senior leadership team had undertaken joint training with the governors. In his view having a good set of governors meant that he did not feel as exposed – he considered that this was something that head teachers across the country would support. He considered that he had an outstanding contribution from his governing body. Figure 13, above, provides a diagrammatic summary of the views expressed in this section.

4.5.5 Strategic and Operational Roles

Most of the head teachers reported that they had few problems with their governors interfering with their day to day operational role:

> I've never had a governing body that wanted to interfere with the day to day running of my school. (Head S3)

> No problems, perhaps early on in my headship but not now after 26 years. (Head S4)

> The governors don't stray into the day to day running of the school. (Head 11)

Head S13 reported that Chair S13 was insistent that the day to day running of the school was left to the head teacher. Head S8 said she had never had interference in the day to day running although she had heard of difficulties in other schools. Head S9

stated "…Justify what you are doing, yes, interference, no…" and Head S6 articulated:

> At the micro level, running the school from day to day, they are not involved but at the macro level, the big picture, they are fully involved. They are very involved and valued in making appointments of staff to the school. I would put staffing at the top of the list of what governors are involved in. It is a real benefit having the governors involved.

Head S5, a newly appointed head teacher, reported that her governors were very much involved with the school:

> Have very strong governance here, I want to know their ideas, but it is very intense, it could become irritating over time, but I hope that as they get to know me better they will trust me more. For example, a petty example, there was criticism over my changing the entrance display. I also moved a display where there was an award. So there appeared to be some resistance to change.

This view might have been explained by Chair S5 stating:

> With the previous head the governors had to get involved with the running of the school because the day to day management wasn't appropriate. It was a very difficult situation. The diocese were very good in supporting us.

Other chairs were very clear with regard to operational matters:

> We are a body that approves policy so executive decisions are nothing to do with us. I suppose parental complaints bring us nearer to the operational role. The parents should take their issues to the school not to the governors. Sometimes parents have to be reminded of this. (Chair S13)

> Well, yes, parents want you to get involved with the operational, but I have to say that's not our role, we are there for the strategic role. (Chair S11)

> Never had governors trying to interfere in how the head runs the school. (Chair S4)

Chair S6 explained the difficulties of avoiding the operational role, for example, she considered that "…with the curriculum it is not just about the strategic role but what is happening day to day. It is a difficult balance…". Chair S7 explained that there was "..no way" in which the governors had strayed into day to day management although he had heard of it in other schools. He gave brief details on how, in another school,

members of staff were asking to see him individually. He had found this a difficult situation to deal with.

4.5.6   School Improvement Partners

There was *strong support* from head teachers for the value of School Improvement Partners (SIPs). Head S5 reported that it was beneficial for a school to have a visit from an external adviser with professional expertise. He welcomed the perspective of a SIP because of their experience "…of the bigger picture", that is knowledge of other schools. Head S17 communicated that the SIP gave information which allowed the governors to compare their school with schools elsewhere – locally and nationally. This gave the governors an objective and realistic view of the school. He mentioned that their SIP was a serving head and was known to run "…a great school" and was respected because of this. The SIPs were no longer funded by their local authority – Head S17 suggested that "It might be something that the governors want to buy into."

Head S7 reported

> The SIP provides a report for the governors every term. Based on Local Authority agenda...very useful, challenging. I think that provides a very strong 'educational' and 'independent' viewpoint for the governors. They are aware of the issues. There was a time when the local authority 'general adviser' sat on the governing body. In our authority we think the SIP will stay (be funded), not on the governing body but providing a termly report.

Chairs of governance also found their SIPs a *valuable resource*:

> Yes, useful, very valuable. Our present SIP helped us a lot with our Ofsted inspection. Good to have someone who says this is good but you need to concentrate more on x, y and z. The SIP is helpful to the chair and governors in confirming where the school is at. We don't have any experience of other schools...the SIP has this experience. (Chair S13)

Chair S19 was very positive, communicating:

> Really, really, very good and important and helpful. Such that we wish to maintain that relationship although we have lost that from the authority in becoming an academy. At the end of the day we rely on the input from the head teacher but to have an experienced professional adviser really allows us to take our lay view and structure it. Yes, that experienced and professional viewpoint is important.

In some other schools there was concern at the possible lack of external independent advice due to conversion to academy status or lack of funding from the local authority. Chair S1 regarded the SIPs as effective as Ofsted inspectors coming into the school. He stated "They are usually head teachers, full of smart ideas." Chair S20 liked the principle of having a SIP since it helped the governors to judge the school. She considered that, as an academy, they might "…buy in our own SIP or equivalent." Chair S5 preferred more involvement from the SIP such as talking to the governors. She welcomed the expertise and knowledge of the SIP and appreciated that "Someone from the outside often sees things that we haven't seen."

Some head teachers and chairs were, however, *critical* of their SIPs. For example, Head S15 stated that she needed the support of SIPs and did respect one SIP, that had visited her school, as a 'critical friend' but another SIP was too inspectorial during her visits. Head S13 also referred to the personality of the individual SIP and pointed out that the "…P refers to 'partner' and that is how it should be." He was happy with his present SIP who he rated as supportive and knowledgeable but that was not the case with a previous SIP. Head S13 believed that the SIP should report directly to the governing body. Head S16 stated "The advice is only as good as the SIP. My SIP is very good but there a lot who aren't." Head S9 was very clear that SIPs were not useful, describing them as just an extra layer of accountability requiring "…just more preparation…".

One school S12 had appointed their ex-SIP to their governing body and valued her expertise. Head S12 appreciated the knowledge that a SIP has "…of the bigger picture" She believed that her local authority intended to continue to fund their SIPs. In some other schools there was concern at the possible lack of external independent advice due to conversion to academy status or lack of funding from the local authority.

4.5.7 Do Governors Help to Raise Standards

Some chairs of governors and head teachers expressed doubts relating to the role of governing bodies in raising school standards:

I think they hold us to account but I think the skill base of the teaching staff raises standards. However, I know that I am accountable to the governors...if I went in and said we are 60% across the board they would be challenging me, asking why. It is an interesting question. An outstanding teacher would do it anyway. (Head S11)

Difficult to say how we do this. Certainly not in a hands on way. We are aware of what the head teacher is doing to raise standards. I am one of those involved in the head's performance management. Don't directly raise standards. (Chair S7)

It's difficult...I suppose we challenge and support and this helps, but really it is the professionals. (Chair S13)

Only in so much as we support the staff. I am confident in our staff. I introduced some ideas on cooking and getting grants for this. Now, we have a cooking club, it is a school that is open to new ideas. (Chair S6)

Head S7 thought that their help with staffing appointments helped to raise standards. Chair S14 was doubtful and Head S14 was very clear: "No, they don't have the time or experience."
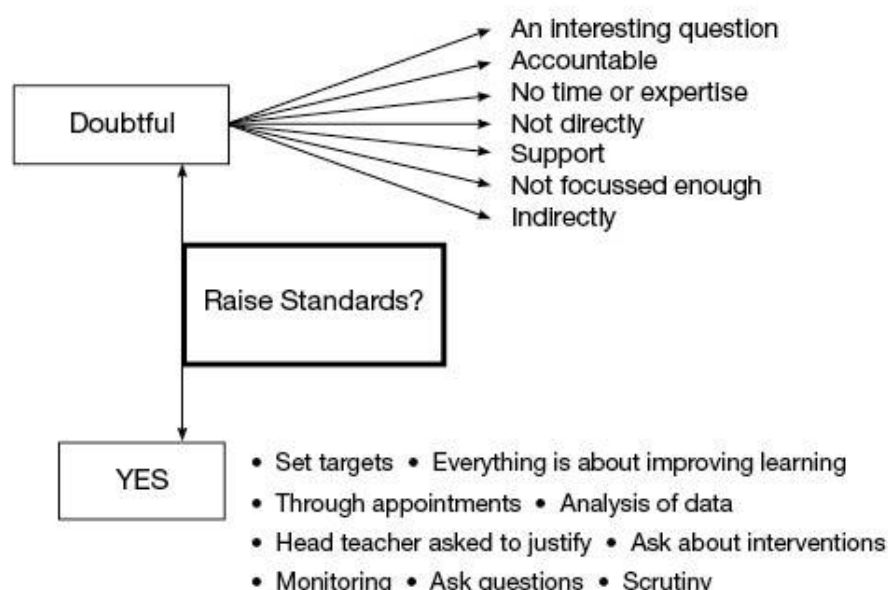

Figure 14: Do Governors Help to Raise Standards?

However, others were more positive. For example, Head S3 described how the governors supported the school in raising achievements and of their interest in "standards". He spoke of how the governors "…keep us on our toes." Heads S6 and

S19 agreed that they helped to raise standards. Head S17 described how he "…was certain they help to raise achievements." He spoke of their analysis of data, the RAISEonline, the SIP's report and how "…because of their good-will and support it makes the staff and myself want to give our best." Head S8 replied "Yes they do. We have to convince them that we are doing the very best for each child, what kind of support we are putting in, what interventions we are putting in, what is happening to the more able, what about our new arrivals." Furthermore she considered that this challenging made her pause for thought, reflect and it helped to "…move things along." Head S4 referred to the benefits of his two school cross-federation so standards were compared, by the governors, across the schools. Chair S18 spoke of having a "…very skilled governing body" and how they asked pertinent questions of standards and interventions. Chair S16 conveyed his perceptions:

> Directly... no...that is the teachers' job. But we do ask questions and probe into the achievement of the children. We want the best for our children. We have made great efforts to recruit male teachers and we have 7 men on the staff. Consequently we have a broad curriculum including a wide range of sporting activities.

Chair S19 responded positively arguing that the governors looked at the data and scrutinised it. Cohorts were followed right up to the SATs. They looked at the tracking results for each class and would ask if there were issues about individual children. The views expressed by head teachers and chairs of governance, relating to the role of the governors in raising standards, are shown diagrammatically in Figure 14, above.

4.6 THEME 3: TRAINING AND INFORMATION SHARING FOR AND WITHIN GOVERNING BODIES

4.6.1 Training to be a School Governor

When the 20 head teachers in the sample were asked about the training they had undertaken for their role as a governor, Heads S20, S7 and S9 mentioned that they had received *no training*. Head S20 reported that even when undertaking the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), that is specific training for headship. there had been no input on governance. Head S9 considered that training for

school governance should be part of pre-headship training but contended that, for her, it had been "…a case of suck it and see…" and that she would have been helped by some induction to governance.

Two head teachers mentioned the challenges they had encountered:

> …a baptism of fire…as acting head. As soon as I was appointed as full-time head we brought in Governor Services and I went on training, took advice from other heads and used a template to compose my head teacher's report and still use it today. I did a course for head teachers on professional relationships and how to put my viewpoint forward at governors' meetings. I went on a leadership course early on in my headship…it included management of change, moving things forward, blue-sky vision etc. (Head S8)

> To a certain extent I have been thrown in at the deep end. My deputy comes into the governors' meetings so that she has some experience through observation. (Head S11)

Other head teachers reported that they had *attended training* and one had been a governor trainer for her local authority. Head S15 was critical of the National Professional Qualification for Head Teachers (NPQH) course that she had attended when there was only one afternoon of training on school governance.)

Heads S3, S14 and S20 pointed out that their training had been through year on year *experience* as well as attending courses and bringing prior work experience to the role. Further, the data suggested that few of the head teachers interviewed in this study had any specific training for school governance prior to appointment.

Amongst the 20 chairs of governance, 18 *had attended* governor training courses and there were some enthusiastic responses to the training they had received, moreover they were more specific than the head teachers in their responses:

> Our local authority is very good at running training courses for governors. In our cluster we host governor training courses and it is a good way of meeting other governors. (Chair S5)

> I've attended the ones I've needed. RAISEonline for example. (Chair S17)

> The local authority run a lot of governor training courses and I attend quite a few each year. (Chair S11)

> I've been on every course. I go at least three times a year. Over the years I must have been on over thirty courses. (Chair S16)

> My most recent was 'safeguarding' training. The best training I've had was 'how to be an outstanding governing body'. (Chair S13)

However, some chairs were more *critical* of the training provision. For example, Chair S20 stated that she had attended many courses but found that some were unsatisfactory. Chair S7, once enthusiastic about attending courses, now avoided them, because of the multitude of new initiatives, and, instead, relied on the diocesan advisers. Only Chair S19 referred to using the internet for training – an online course on 'Taking the Chair' that he had worked his way through.

4.6.2 Annual Governor Training

Most head teachers were vague when asked about the training taking place, on an annual basis, for their governors. They did, however, often praise the training offered by their local authorities:

> Governors are encouraged to go on courses and we pay as needed. No annual budget is set for this. The local authority courses are very good. (Head S3)

> The on-going training offered by the local authority is excellent. I am quite happy with what is on offer. Courses are available all of the time. (Head S1)

Some head teachers reported that they had run courses within their own schools. Head S13 stated that an induction pack was available for new governors and that they had employed an independent consultant to run governor training courses. Heads S13 and S11 pointed out, however, that governors, as volunteers, are free to decide on whether to attend courses or not. Other head teachers expressed a *negative*, and possibly a laissez-faire, approach to training:

> It isn't a priority, but we have had training on 'academies'. (Head S19)

> We have a service level agreement but not many governors have time to attend courses. Probably best to run courses in-school. (Head S18)

> I don't think the training is good enough...it is too blinkered, it should be much more business related so that the governors are more creative, risk taking, so that they are always searching to make the school better. I regard our governor meetings as business meetings ...they are our board. We hold them in the afternoon, not the evenings. The meetings need to be run well, business like. (Head S16)

The local authority offers a wide range of courses, some governors attend some don't. Sometimes the quality of the courses isn't adequate. (Head S17)

Heads S14 and S15 pointed out that it was difficult to get their governors to *attend* training courses. Whilst a lot of courses were available, their governors were often too busy working to attend. Head S15 responded: "I've never really asked the governors about training."

A few head teachers expressed views indicating that they were *organised* in their approach to governor training. For example Head S12 reported that new governors were encouraged to go on local authority training events. The school had run a whole school training event for staff and governors. Head S5 said that the school had a budget for governor training and that their governors did go on courses.

Only one head teacher mentioned the use of the internet in providing training for governors:

There are always the local authority training packages that we subscribe to. My governors traditionally haven't taken up much of that. They have done the induction modules but much of the training hasn't been convenient for them, after school or in the evenings. Some have done some on-line training, this has been useful. We have also done some bespoke training, on this site. (Head S9)

Some chairs of governors indicated the importance of training, some mentioning the role of their local authorities and church organisations. However, little detail of the courses or their timing was mentioned.

One chair of governors responded that training wasn't necessarily that important but that individuals develop, and find out about governing, by actually being on the governing body:

The governors have been honed here into quite a good unit. Nobody really teaches anyone how to be a governor. You get on the governing body and develop in some way. The local authority are very supportive of governors. They have a training scheme that we buy into and the governors can go on any of the courses that are running. The package entails us to one or two on-site training courses every year. (Chair S8)

Another chair described an innovative approach to training on the school site:

> We had a 'governors' day' last September – it was brilliant – they invited all of the governors, we went into classes, we talked with the children. I thought we need another day like that - meeting more staff, for us to explain how we work as governors and to break down barriers and any misunderstandings. The feedback was very positive. (Chair S11)

Chairs S17, S20 and S16 recognised the need for training and pointed out that training was offered and money allocated but also mentioned that not all governors attend the courses available.

There was some importance attached to the training of *'new'* governors with Chairs S13, S12, S11, S7 and S19 referring to their attendance on local authority training courses. Only Chair S5 mentioned how the rest of the governing body benefited when one of their members attended a course. If a governor had been on a training course then they were asked, in S5, to inform the rest of the governing body. So their learning was cascaded to the rest of the governors.

4.6.3 Accessing information to be a governor

When the head teachers were asked how their governors accessed the information they needed to do their work there was a variety of responses:

> From me, as the head teacher. From the Local Authority, via me. Ofsted. The National Association for Governors, Parent Alliance…a whole range of bodies, unions…pamphlets…some use Governors' TV. (Head S1)

The clerk to the governing body, the head teacher, the local authority and websites were frequently mentioned:

> From the clerk, she always brings the information that they need. I use the internal authority internet and pass on information to the governors. They do visit websites themselves and look up whatever is needed. (Head S5)
>
> A detailed local authority magazine. (Head S7)
>
> Mostly from me. The clerk does give advice at the meetings. (Head S15)
>
> The local authority publishes a termly booklet on governing issues. (Head S17)
>
> From the clerk...and everyone has a copy of The Guide to the Law for school governors. Some of the governors look at websites. They do keep up to date, so we have informed discussions. (Head S18)
>
> At governors' meetings. They use various websites including the Ofsted website. (Head S13)

Only two schools, S20 and S6, were subscribing to national governor associations - Head S20 reported that they had joined the National Governors' Association (NGA) to provide more information for her governors in addition to accessing their website and newsletters; Head S6 spoke highly of Governet's advice in the handling of a difficult situation with some parent governors. The Head of S11 mentioned having one governor as an 'inductor' for new governors.

Only two head teachers made reference to the information file 'Governors Guide to the Law' (also available as a DVD):

> The Department of Education send out information in the form of a DVD every few years. Not many look at it. I don't want to be blunt but the information is there. There is information from the Local Authority, a newsletter, and the chair attends Local Authority meetings. The information is there, they are as well informed as they want to be. (Head S3)

> I would say coming into school, seeing how we work...that is the biggest grounding...just to know what the teachers do. Training courses; from me and the clerk...not sure that they use websites...some might use the government's DVD 'Your Guide to the Law' but if you think about people's lives these days… I imagine it is there if needed... (Head S10)

Head S9 admitted he was unsure as to where his governors get information from but suggested the clerk, the local authority newsletter, newspapers and himself as possible sources.

The chairs of the 20 governing bodies had varied views on how their governors accessed the information needed to do the job. A minority referred to the government's 'Guide to the Law for School Governors' (available in print and DVD formats):

> I have the 'Governors Guide to the Law', but you need to be a solicitor to read it...too much jargon. (Chair S12)

> I used to use the government 'Guide to the Law' and look at websites. I think we could do with something specific for academies. I think the governors get their information from various places – probably two-thirds get their information from the head teacher and clerk. Others read the educational press – Guardian Education and so on. (Chair S19)

> Some use websites. Most people 'dip into' the government's legal DVD. (Chair S11)

> At every meeting we review what training is available. All get copies of the government DVD. Also know of websites. (Chair S4)

There was variation between some schools over the use of websites – Chair S17 reported that the governors looked up information on websites but Chairs S14 and S12 reported that their governors did not use websites.
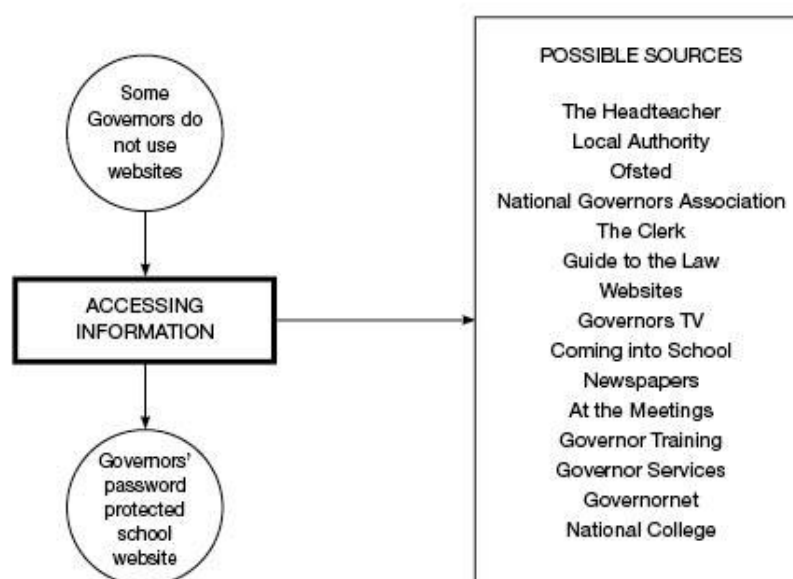
Figure 15: Accessing Information to be a School Governor

The head teacher, local authority, clerk to the governing body, the governor meetings themselves and websites were often the sources of relevant information:

> Mostly at the meeting. No knowledge of Governors' TV. (Chair S1)

> Mainly through the head teacher and the clerk. (Chair S14)

> Some look at websites. We know what the law is. The new governors will hopefully go on new governors' training. (Chair S13)

> From the head, but some do look at websites. The county has on-line training now so I wouldn't be surprised if some have done that. (Chair S16)

> The local authority newsletter. (Chair S7)

One chair of governors commented that governors possibly learn through experience:

> Local authority, the clerk, governor services newsletter, sometimes websites although it is difficult to know which one to use. Learn as we go along, like a lot of us did…I think that is still the way most people learn. Amazing really, given the complexity of some of the things. (Chair S8)

A minority of chairs referred to the value of national organisations although one chair spoke about her personal use rather than include the rest of the governing body:

> I use the National College website sometimes and the Governornet website. (Chair S5)

> I use the National Governors' Association. Very good. Ring them up sometimes. All of our governors are members of the National Governors Association. I think they use that website on a need to know basis. (Chair S20)

Chair S7 expressed his frustration over the amount of information that needed to be digested, revealing that he found it difficult to keep up to date because of the "…constant change, change for change's sake."

Only one school (S6) appeared to use ICT for the benefit of their governing body. This school had a password protected website with details about all curriculum areas, all school policies, matters related to the school finances, a governing body welcoming pack and a governing body induction pack. Governors of this school, therefore, had easy access to some of the information needed to carry out their role. Figure 15, above, shows the range of possible sources of information for school governors, as identified by the chairs of governance and headteachers interviewed in this study.

4.7 THEME 4: CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS FOR AND WITHIN GOVERNING BODIES

4.7.1 Turnover of Governors

When asked about the turnover of governors the heads and chairs of governance revealed a number of differences in turnover and in strategies to recruit governors:

> When we have parental elections we can have a lot of people standing, sometimes nobody, so I'm always on the lookout – same with co-opted governors. I'm always on the lookout for potential governors. Sometimes the problem is that co-opted governors are too busy to carry out their role. (Head S3)

> Hasn't been hard but getting the right person is crucial...someone who is committed. You have to approach them, to canvas...that is needed. (Head S10)

> Easy to recruit here. Have to have elections. If a vacancy occurs then we look at the skill-set needed and recruit accordingly. (Head S19)

Heads S5, S6 and Chairs S16 and S20 reported problems recruiting governors as a result of parents working and the time commitment involved. Chair S4 described the difficulty recruiting 'foundation' governors – parents who are also members of the church. Chair S11, also, referred to the difficulties recruiting foundation governors citing an ageing congregation as the reason. Head S6 claimed that the role of governor has been made too difficult:

> Tricky, made to be too onerous. They've made it too onerous fogovernors. We have people with expertise, that is valuable to us, but are running businesses and have families, how can they serve as governors and give the time that is needed?

Chair S20 was concerned about the lack of contribution made by some governors and thought it may be possible to "…get rid of them" now that the school had converted to an academy.

4.7.2   Governing in Disadvantaged Areas

Heads and chairs of governors in disadvantaged areas reported the *difficulties* they had recruiting governors:

> Not easy to recruit new governors. Unpaid, not much in it for parent governors with families. They are the most difficult to recruit. We are generally quorate at every meeting but it hasn't always been the case for example when there is illness. (Head S1)

> Very difficult. The parents here haven't got a clue about governors and how the school runs. I always attend the new parents meeting and talk about the governing body and how any of them can become a school governor. (Chair S7)

Head S7 confirmed that her governing body found it very difficult to recruit new governors. One of her governors was a consultant at a local hospital and another was a local solicitor. They were described as "…busy people, full time jobs, on committees in their jobs, so their time is limited for governing activities." They were not able to

go into the school outside of governing body meetings. Similarly the chair was the parish priest and since he had five other parishes now he was not able to go into the school on a weekly basis as in the past.

The challenges of recruiting new governors, especially parent governors, were stated by Heads S14, S4 and S9. Head S14 revealed that it was very difficult to recruit new governors and his governing body had two vacancies at the time of the research intereview. Head S9 considered that some parents find the role of governor to be very complex and often do not contribute much in the meetings.

However, head teachers and chairs of governance of some schools in relatively *affluent* areas also reported their difficulties recruiting new governors. For example Head S13 replied:

> On the edge. At the last set of elections for parent governors we had four vacancies and four nominations, so no need for an election. We have one community vacancy at present with two nominations including a crown court judge. Usually get sufficient people. (Head S13)

Further, some schools in disadvantaged areas had *little difficulty* recruiting parent governors:

> Not easy to recruit from the church for governors but that might be because we are seeking the right people. Plenty of parents want to be governors. (Head S16)

> No problem getting new parent governors. We always have to have a ballot. The links with the community are so strong. Our "hearts and souls" are into the school and the governors. We've got the minister from the church, a business man, grandparents and so on. (Chair S12)

Head S12 reported no problems recruiting from the local community. They had three nominations for their last parent governor election. This head teacher considered that this may be as a result of having very good relationships with the local community.

Forming a federation had helped one school with the recruitment of parent governors:

> It wasn't easy when we needed 30 odd governors for two schools, now with the federation it is easier to recruit 21 governors. The last time we had a shortage I made an appeal at the church and we got a good response. I've been here 15 years and I do think sometimes is it best for me to move on. More than half of the governors have been here for 5 to 10 years. (Chair S14)

Head S17 reflected on his experiences in three different schools, suggesting that the area a school is in, determines the type of governing body. In his first headship the skill base was far less than that in the affluent areas he had worked in.

4.7.3 Governing Body Responsibilities and Effectiveness

The questions in this section were intended to probe the responsibilities and effectiveness of governing bodies as perceived by the head teachers and chairs of governing bodies. In particular, it was intended to examine support and challenge; representation and skills; operational and strategic; managing and scrutiny.

Some head teachers and chairs of governors said that the governors were stronger in relation to *support* than to challenging:

> In my view the governors want to support and they know the children in the school. They are not very good at challenging… (Head S14)

> They are supportive in attending meetings and taking an interest in the school; they are quick to say "well done" and are appreciative. Being a head teacher is sometimes a *lonely* job, it is good to have appreciative support from the governors. They challenge me but I've never felt 'got at'. (Head S9)

However, some governing bodies were seen to be *effective at challenging* and supporting the school as well as scrutinising. For example, Head S10 described how his governors might say "…just hang back a minute". He considered it valuable for him to present his proposals and for them to be scrutinised and commented upon by the governing body. Head S10 continued:

> They see things from a difficult angle sometimes. This is valuable. I might run something by the chair first and he will take it to the full governing body for their views and decision. Any appointments or budget matters they challenge and support. I think it is important for any head teacher to be challenged.

Sometimes there was tension between the head teacher and the governing body as in Vignette 9, below:

Vignette 9: School S14 was a newly formed junior and infant hard federation in a small northern town. The school was judged by Ofsted to be "satisfactory". The head teacher was in his third headship and had over twenty years experience of school governance. He revealed his disappointment with the federation's governing body: "…I am aware of what Ofsted wants from the governing body

but I know that they (the governing body) aren't able to do this". The experienced chair of governors, with over sixteen years experience of school governance, related that "…We (the governing body) have some tension at present relating to the head wanting to change the staffing structure of the school, although he is only one year into his post here."

Chair S8 claimed that an innovative 'monitoring group', that had been set up in S8, was judged to be very effective in scrutinising what was happening in the school even at the level of the books. The group was considered excellent at holding the school to account. Chair S8 emphasised this was not "…about the 'big stick', but you have to acknowledge achievements, you have to give praise." Chair S12 saw himself as a 'critical friend' and considered that his governors did not just "rubber stamp" things but asked challenging questions. He saw his governing body as supporting and challenging the headteacher within a framework of mutual respect. However, not all governors were seen to challenge the head teacher with Chair S20 claiming that she alone did most of the governance challenging.

4.7.4 Future Challenges

In terms of future challenges for these governing bodies, only four areas were mentioned – Head S1 was *retiring* so the governors had the challenge of finding his successor; Head S11 saw the next Ofsted *inspection* as a challenge; Head S20 expressed concern about the *time* needed to be a governor especially where the governors are business and professional people. Chair S10 was worried about the *future* when volunteer governors would have a greater burden without the support of the Local Authority.

4.7.5 The Governing Body Clerk

Many schools used, and very much valued, the services of a local authority trained governing body clerk. Their experience, dealing with governance on a full-time basis, was considered to be invaluable. For example, Head S12 commented:

> Yes, we use an authority clerk. It would be a real loss without them because these people are very knowledgeable and experienced. We pay approximately £3000 per year for the clerk. She clerks all meetings – full

governors and the sub-committees. All minutes go to the full governing body meetings.

School S16 used a clerk who used to work for a local authority but was now independent and running his own 'governor services' business. School S19, recently converted to academy status, had used a local authority clerk but intended to change because of the conflict of interest. Chair S19 saw this change as having "an in-house clerk cum business manager cum company secretary." Other chairs of governance expressed their appreciation of the clerks employed by their local authority. Chair S1, for example, regarded the local authority clerk as the expert on protocol and said "…we are totally reliant on the clerk". Chair S5 considered it vital to have a trained clerk from County Hall and revealed that "…they have the answers to our questions". Chair S5, further, described how their clerk was helping to organise a training course for the governors.

However, four schools used one of their own staff as the clerk to the governing body:

Vignette 10: The Head of S11, a larger than average primary school, rated 'good' by Ofsted, in the North West of England, reported that the school secretary is the clerk. She stated that in her previous school a local authority clerk had been used and she found this was very valuable, particularly in terms of procedures. Chair S11 expressed his concern about the present clerk reporting that she "…isn't good enough". He considered that the school needed a business manager rather than the present school secretary who was acting as the clerk to the governing body.

Vignette 11: The Head of S13, a large primary school in Merseyside, rated 'satisfactory' by Ofsted, explained that one of the school administrative staff acted as the clerk to the governing body and that she had undertaken this role for a number of years. Chair S13 responded that the school secretary was their clerk. He considered that the governing body knew enough about the "legalities". He continued to relate that the head teacher probably "does most of the minutes".

Head S3 reported that the school receptionist acted as the clerk. She had been trained and led on procedures. The school bursar was the clerk to the governing body of S4.

4.7.6 New Challenges - Academies, Clusters, Trusts, Federations, Chains of Schools, Free Schools

When asked about new challenges in relation to different types of schools the head teachers and chairs of governance revealed a variety of viewpoints. Many were *unsure* about converting to academy status. For example, Head S12 related that he had "mixed views" on academies and considered that the responsibilities on governors, without the safety net of the local authority, would be extensive. Chair S6 reported that she had been to a meeting about academies but felt there was no financial advantage and that there was the prospect of a great burden of responsibilities on the governors. She felt that the governors had to consider the support that the school got from the local authority but she also recognised that it was possible that "the local authority is weakened so much that you have to look elsewhere". Chair S16 was concerned about the extra work required of his head teacher and whilst the school "…would gain about £90,000 but it would have to be managed – a business manager - and we would have to buy in more services". Similar views were expressed by Chair S15:

> On academies I have mixed views...it would involve more work for the head teacher. We would lose the services of the local authority so we would have to buy from them or elsewhere. The extra money would be useful. The way the government is going, all schools will become academies. Legal services are a worry...would cost a lot more than the local authority to use private solicitors. The budget is being cut so we have to look out for that. There will be challenges...always are.

The interviews with headteachers and chairs of governance revealed, also, *opposition* to converting to academy status. Head S1, for example, was clear:

> Academy status schools: I'm not a fan, if I was I would run into trouble with the chair and local authority. We have been clustered for some years with regard to some issues. I am interested in wider cluster governance but it could be difficult. No federations, at this time in this authority. If governing bodies were often inquorate then federation would be one solution. Personally, I think some heads would find it difficult with governors from another school. (Head S1)

Head S14 considered that most people in education want to work together – not in an isolated academy – for the public good of children. At the time of interviewing he felt that there were "…too many unknowns about academies". Head S18, located in a large city in the north west of England, related her opposition:

> We have had a meeting...primary head teachers' association and the local authority...and decided we want to stay with the local authority, not be fragmented. Department of Education don't know what they are doing with academies...things change all of the time. I think federations can be quite positive but there needs to be a balance so that your own school doesn't suffer. We are moving towards a 'soft' federation. We get a lot of value from the networks of schools to which we belong...these are long established....in this authority, in the primaries, there is no wish to go down the academy route. I don't think the government knows what they are doing with academies, things change daily. (Head S18)

Head S5, in the north east of England, reported that her local authority and the church diocese were discouraging the transition to academy status:

> With regard to academies we are having a meeting about this next week but the local authority are telling us not to proceed. The diocese aren't keen either. My view is that for primary schools there is too much that is unknown. I don't know anything about trust schools at present.

Chair S12 was clear in her opposition:

> "The academies...at the beginning they were there for the right reason but I don't think that now...privatisation, no. We need the support of the local authority. I think it is quite frightening really...they seem to want more professional people as governors but how will they get them...doctors, lawyers?"

The time required to run an academy was an issue for Chair S17 who responded:

> I think clusters and federations are good...but how do you find the time and finances? Academies...not keen on disconnecting from the local community. There is a huge push...but we don't want to be pushed, we want the best for our children. The church are willing to be the sponsoring body...they want to protect the church ethos of the school. We have enough to do already, how could we spend more time running an academy?

Some head teachers were positive with regard to academy transition. Head S6, for example, said that he had been to a presentation about academies given by a law firm. As a result he felt well informed and was no longer worried about S6 becoming an academy. Furthermore, he was no longer worried about not being linked to the local authority which he consideredto be in decline.

Two schools had been converted to academy status. The head teacher of one of these schools, S20, considered that becoming an academy had not made much difference as to how the governors operated. The views and reasons for conversion to academy status of the head teacher and chair of governors of the second school, S19, are presented below:

Vignette 12: Chair S19 reported that they had converted to academy status knowing that many other schools within their local authority intended to convert to academies. Further given the direction implied by government they did not wish to be pushed into a chain of academies. They wished to be independent and considered that this was a natural extension from being a hard federation of a junior and infant school. He considered that there was support within local schools for networking as academies and this would be needed for human resources, accountancy, legal services, etc. On a personal level he was not happy to be directly responsible to the Secretary of State and remarked "…which is …open to fudge down the line." He wished to see "…something on the law relating to academies". Head S19 stated that the "…main driver…" for becoming an academy was "…the impact it was going to be on the children's education and the professional development of the teachers. Furthermore, the local authority, because of national cuts, has become smaller and smaller." He described the new academy governance as much the same as previously having the same committees and, whilst they could have had a smaller governing body, they had retained the 18 governors of the previous federation. He considered that the governors would have more involvement particularly in the financial arena.

The chair and head teacher of S16 were enthusiastic about their involvement in a four-school trust. Their views are presented below:

Vignette 13: Chair S16 communicated that the school was part of a four-school trust with a number of external partners including a football club, two large companies and a television channel. Head S16 spoke of having a chief executive for the trust and how three representatives, from the trust, were on the governing body. Involvement with the trust had been very positive and had given the school benefits such as advice from business people and other specialists such as an entrepreneur. It had helped with procurement and there had been other financial benefits. She considered that becoming a trust had "…strengthened everything and made the governors raise their game". She spoke of having "…a

very good chair – he lives and breathes the school." She believed that it was necessary to have governors or directors for each school, even though there is an over-arching group meeting as the trust. This gave the schools a strategic way of working together.

Amongst many schools there appeared to be some *resistance* about working with other schools in clusters, federations or chains. Head S20, for example, stated in the small village schools, of her county, the governors were "…against any amalgamations…they want to retain 'their' village school." This was supported by Head S17 who stated "…I think governors are 'parochial' – they want to be involved with 'their' school." Head S13 spoke of being "rivals with other schools" and Head S9 was opposed to clusters and federations

The *time* and *finance* involved in working with other schools was an issue with some respondents. Chair S13, for example, expressed the opinion that more finance was needed if one of the senior management team was involved in attending cluster meetings. Chair S11 stated "I would be interested, as a church school, working in a cluster with other church schools, but the downside is time. Who would have the time for that?"

Chair S2 was positive about clusters and trusts but had difficulty finding other interested schools. Head S15 thought that clustering would be helpful for small village schools. She reported that they had considered federation, in her present school, but it would need to be with another RC school. She considered that clusters would develop in rural areas, with executive head teachers, as a way of helping small village schools to stay open.
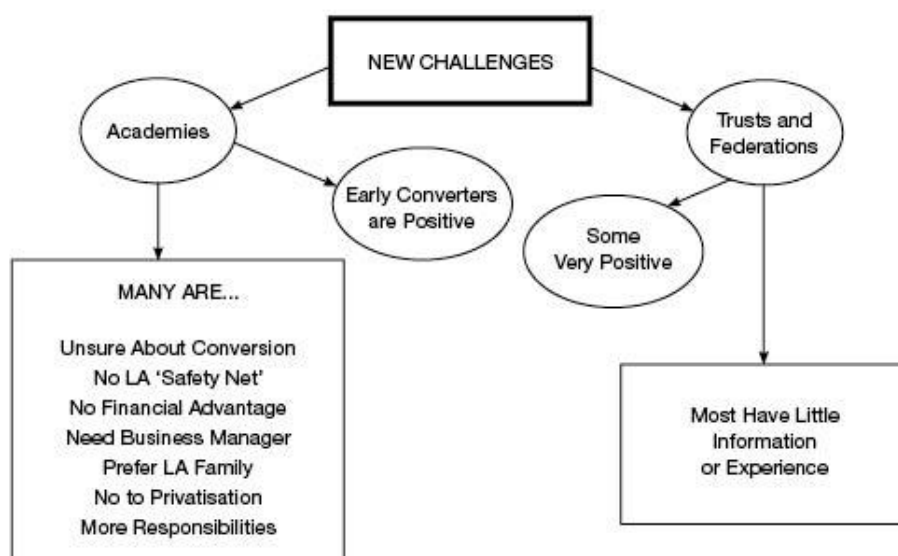
Figure 16: New Challenges – Academies, Clusters, Trusts, Federations, Chains of Schools, Free Schools

Head S3 commented that he found it difficult to understand that in free schools the regulations, for example in building and health and safety, might be more lax than in current local schools. He further proposed that he could see a role for 'expert governors', serving a number of schools, like a paid consultant.

Figure 16, above, summarises the perspectives of chairs and head teachers in relation to the creation of new forms of schools and school structures.

4.8   Summary of Chapter 4: The Presentation of Data

In this chapter the data gathered by interviewing 40 key stakeholders in school governance and relevant data from Ofsted inspection reports has been presented using the four over-arching themes identified earlier. A number of sub-themes were identified related to the questions used in the interview schedule. Details of each of the 20 schools studied have been included and overviews of the 20 head teachers and 20 chairs of governors, involved in the research, presented.

The foregoing presentation of data demonstrated, very clearly, that the head teachers very much appreciated the support they received from their governing body. For many head teachers, the governors provided a cost-effective way of bringing expertise into the school. The 'critical friendship' of the governors was seen, by many head teachers, as crucial to helping them to fulfil their professional responsibilities. It was argued that the governing body 'rooted' the school in its community. Local community involvement was seen to be important since it was these local people who understand local issues and are more committed to the school. The chairs of governance were aware of the complexity of the role of the head teachers. The complexity of governance was raised and, for some, the amount of work involved was seen to be too much for unpaid volunteers. The view was expressed that not all understood the actual role of governors. To improve governance, remuneration was suggested as was raising the profile of governors and accreditation. Concerns were expressed about the demise of local authorities and the increased workload as a result of operating as an academy. The commitment, and many skills, of the chairs of governance was apparent.

Having investigated the function and operation of the twenty governing bodies, the foregoing presentation of data shows that there was considerable difference in the number of meetings held by each governing body. The respondents thought that, generally, their governing bodies functioned effectively. The experience and credibility of the chair of governors was seen as central to the effective operation of the governing body. Some governing bodies were found to benefit from the clerk, the local authority support and having professional people as governors. In some cases, Ofsted had mentioned governing bodies within their reports – these comments were brief. Good relationships within the governing body were considered important – the crucial relationship being that between the chair of governance and the head teacher. The chairs of governance appreciated an 'open' approach from their head teacher. Challenge and support were seen as important by both head teachers and chairs of governance. In considering 'governors as an integral part of school leadership' there were disparate views – it was to be noted that in academies the governors, as 'directors' were seen as part of the school leadership. External advice for governing bodies was seen as useful, however, there was doubt as to whether the governors helped to raise school achievements.

In relation to training and information sharing for, and within, governing bodies the foregoing presentation of data has shown that training for the head teachers, in primary school governance, was relatively limited. A number of head teachers had learned through experience and some described the stress that this had caused. The chairs of governors had attended more courses than the head teachers but only one had completed an on-line course, while others expressed dissatisfaction with the standard of courses. Concern was articulated over the number of new initiatives in state education. On probing the training being undertaken on an annual basis, the head teachers and chairs of governors were vague as to the number of courses being attended by their governors. Praise was given to courses run by local authorities. The view that governors learn the role by being on a governing body was expressed – training being relatively unimportant. When asked about the sources of information available to governors, a wide variety of responses were given. The governing body of every school studied was different in the ways in which they accessed information. One head teacher responded that he didn't know where his governors got the information they needed.

The preceding presentation of data demonstrated that the governing bodies involved in this research faced a number of challenges and tensions. Strategies to recruit new governors were varied – some head teachers reporting that they were always seeking potential parent governors. Some schools found it difficult to recruit foundation governors. Schools in affluent and disadvantaged areas found it difficult to recruit new governors. Some schools in disadvantaged areas had little difficulty with recruitment, needing elections. It had been found that business and professional people often lacked the time and commitment for school governance. In a minority of instances it was found that the governing body was better at support than challenge. One head teacher considered that his governing body was incapable of doing the job needed. A local authority clerk was used by the majority of governing bodies and found to be very useful. Other schools had various ways of taking minutes and advising their governing bodies. Many head teachers and chairs of governance lacked knowledge of new forms of schools and organisations, others were reluctant to leave their local authority family of schools. Some schools had transferred to academy status and one was involved in a trust – the head teachers and chairs of governors of these schools were, generally, enthusiastic of these transformations. Amongst other

head teachers and chairs of governance there was a strong attachment to 'their' school with a reluctance, in some cases, to being involved with other primary schools. The onerous nature of school governance was reported.

In the next chapter the data presented in Chapter 4 is further analysed and discussed with reference to previous research on primary school governance.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the research data, presented in Chapter 4, with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. The analysis and discussion is categorised under the four themes stated earlier. The chapter concludes with a summary of the analysis and discussion relating to these over-arching themes.

5.2   THEME 1: THE CIVIC ROLE OF GOVERNING BODIES

5.2.1   Importance of Primary School Governance

This research revealed a number of new and substantive insights into the importance of school governance to primary head teachers. The majority of head teachers interviewed during this study considered that primary school governance was very important (see Figure 7). These head teachers recognised that without school governors they alone would be making very big decisions, including those about public finances. They found the support and the challenge provided by their governors to be extremely important. Even head teachers with vast experience considered that primary school governance was vital and that the job of school leader would be substantially more difficult without a governing body. Generally, it was considered that despite being volunteers, and unpaid, they did a very good job and this was appreciated by head teachers. Some head teachers recognised that as unpaid volunteers the governors were a very cost effective way of bringing in expertise and interested people – without them they thought schools could become too insular.   One recently appointed head teacher considered that without the support of governors the head teacher's job would be a nightmare, also, stating that being a head teacher was a lonely job. This isolation was articulated by other head teachers. One head teacher valued the expertise and experience that the governors, in her case many professional people, brought to bear on school issues. A very experienced head teacher, the executive head of a hard federation, valued very highly the support, challenge, expertise and critical friendship given by his governors, also, stating that he could not do without them. Other head teachers spoke highly of the support of governors during

stressful Ofsted inspections and during the process of making difficult decisions, for example staff redundancies, when the decision becomes that of the governing body, not the personal decision of the head teacher. Some head teachers spoke of appreciating the wide skill base, the experience, the knowledge, the critical friendship, the shared leadership, the scrutiny, the supportive challenge and the accountability of their governors. Primary school governance was judged by head teachers: to help in providing 'vision' for a school; to help in celebrating achievements; to provide a 'fresh pair of eyes' on issues; to act as a sounding board for head teachers; to sometimes 'constrain' head teachers; to provide 'someone' to be answerable to and to provide time for reflection. It was articulated that governors sometimes 'hold a school together' and two such examples were provided – during a traumatic failed Ofsted inspection and during a time when a school experienced a very difficult period as a result of actions by a minority of governors. Governance was described as a system of 'checks and balances' and it was considered that schools would be too insular without the system of governance.

It is to be noted that, as shown by Table XIII, that there was wide experience of school governance amongst the head teachers from the sample of schools, ranging from three years to thirty-five years. For many their first experience of school governance was when they were appointed as a head teacher. One head teacher had the unique experience of serving on twenty governing bodies, as the LEA's representative, and reported that each one was very different.

The chairs of governance responded very positively, describing primary school governance as vitally important and completely worth the time and effort. Governors were viewed as connecting the school to the community, with one chair of governance describing governance as a tangible example of community involvement, "rooting" a school in its community and making it responsive and not a faceless example of the machine of government or of the state. Chairs of governance referred to governance giving support, challenge, critical friendship, scrutiny, a 'new slant' and acting as a sounding board. The main focus for many chairs of governors was "doing the best for the children." Some chairs of governance articulated how they were able to influence head teachers with regard to, for example, the religious curriculum (especially in church schools) and to support ideas for a 'broader' curriculum. References were made to the important role of governors in making appointments with a chair of governance referring to how they had finally appointed an "excellent head teacher"

after three rounds of interviews in order to find the "right person." Many chairs considered voluntary school governance to be very good value for money. Chairs of governance spoke of the time that was needed for the role, especially when Ofsted were inspecting, and some mentioned that head teachers were not always "open and transparent" with their governors.

The responses of the head teachers and chairs of governance, given above, therefore generally support the then judgement of the House of Commons (1999) inquiry that the system of school governance works well. This inquiry had appreciated the large numbers of volunteers who contribute to the nation's schools and as such represent a unique form of local democracy in one of the most important of public services. There is support here for the more recent views of the DCSF (2010a) who recognised the uniquely valuable role, and commitment to civic engagement, undertaken by in excess of 300,000 voluntary governors.

However, not all of the head teachers, from the sample schools involved in this present research, were positive about the system of governance. One head teacher saw governance as a clumsy mechanism, a lot of work for unpaid volunteers. He considered that many head teachers would say they do not need the governors to run schools – he thought accountability could be through Ofsted. He considered that there was a need for a system of checks and balances, but thought that the system of voluntary governance needed examination because, in his view, governors do not have the time to give considering the responsibilities involved. As shown above, most head teachers involved in this present study, in fact, appreciated a range of benefits from the present governance system. One head teacher reported that it was interesting how governors, having been given more responsibilities, have grown into their roles. While another head teacher considered that his governors were very good at supporting but not as good with challenging him.

The importance of the chair of governors was, clearly, evident, and there was support for the views of Scanlon et al (1999) that having an 'open' dialogue between the head teacher and chair of governors was conducive to good governance. The arguments, presented by Balarin et al (2008), that school governing is important were supported, with few exceptions, by the head teachers and chairs of governance involved in this study. Additionally, there was some evidence that the task of governance was judged to be onerous. The view that governance was generally working well thanks to those

involved (Balarin et al, 2008) was evident in the responses of the participants in this study. Moreover, the view expressed by James et al (2010) that the commitment given by volunteer governors was remarkable was evident in the responses from the chairs of governors and recognised by the majority of the head teachers. Table XIII showed the experience of chairs of governance in this sample with seventeen chairs having more than five years experience of governance. Ten of these chairs reported that they were in their schools at least once a week but all were in telephone or email contact on a regular basis. There were some indications that a small core of governors, on each governing body, did most of the work – this supports Ofsted's (2011) findings that very effective governing bodies relied on a small group of active governors. Links with the local community were considered to be important, even when a school has converted to academy status, thus supporting the views of Larsen, Bunting and Armstrong (2011). Although in the cases of the two newly converted academies in this sample of schools there would need to be further investigation to consider how the community links have been developed since conversion. The findings discussed above have implications for the concepts of 'governor capital' and 'governor agency' and will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.2.2   The Local Community

The chairs of governance and head teachers were generally positive to governors coming from the local community of the school (also see Figure 8). Reasons given were that they knew what the community is like, they understand the children and the culture in which they live. It was thought that local governors were more interested, more invested and that the governance system was a good example of the 'big society'. A head teacher, from an inner city school, noted the value of a parent governor from the Muslim community who could update the governors on religious festivals and so on. Some chairs of governance referred to their schools being the centre or hub of the community. Some schools had tried to recruit people from 'the outside' but found that they did not have the time and commitment with business people being mentioned as having other priorities. One chair of governance was open to recruiting from outside the local community but stated it would be a very strange school to have no governors from the local community. One head teacher was open to recruiting some governors, from outside the local community, believing that they might bring different aspirations and so avoid the possibility of the governing body

becoming too insular. A chair of governance placed emphasis on expertise rather than local people without interest or expertise. Some chairs and head teachers stressed the need to have people who understand the context of the school. One very experienced head teacher thought that it was important for democracy to have members from the local community. He pointed out that, in his 22 years as a head in the school, there had been many occasions when community governors, religious leaders and cultural leaders had helped, enormously, in allowing a child to settle into the school. He mentioned, further, that with up to 38 languages in the school, and children coming from many parts of the world, his governors had often helped with translation skills. A head teacher welcomed the fact that, being in a trust, allowed for greater numbers of governors from outside the immediate school community.

The views summarised above, support the suggestions of Dean et al (2007) that school governors – as an army of unpaid volunteers – represent a massive investment of civic capital. By volunteering as a school governor, ordinary citizens have an effective voice in the way that the education service is run. There are indications, from the views expressed above, that in this sample of schools there would be little support for the concept, as described by Gunter (2011a), of independent academies being governed by localized within-school managerial power and interrelated sponsor-approved networks, to the detriment of local community involvement. The strong community views and experiences, of chairs of governance and head teachers expressed above, support the views presented by Gunter (Ed., 2011) that the establishment of academies could lead to a democratic deficit whereby they are not subject to locally elected scrutiny and parents will have little influence. There appears to be strong support from the chairs of governance and head teachers to the civic rather than the neoliberal argument for schooling (Gunter, 2011b) with an emphasis on local community involvement. The views of Glatter (2011) are supported and are relevant when he points out there is little evidence to show public or parental demand for diversity in schooling (including academies). Ranson and Crouch (2009) have argued that when governance is responsive to the voice of people from a locality, taking into account their needs, they are likely to feel engaged and to participate in the life of the school and the community. This view is supported by the majority of respondents in this study as noted above.

5.2.2 Challenging, Complex, Time Consuming, Capability

There was much agreement amongst the head teachers regarding the complexity of the role of governors. A head teacher reported that some governors left quickly if the role was too complicated for them and stated, that as a governor in a secondary school, he found it difficult with a different set of jargon. Another head teacher conveyed that he was not sure that all governors knew what was required of them and the head teacher of a small inner-city school stated that she was not sure what was required of her governors – they were all capable people but not involved in the school so their ideas were limited. This experienced head of an inner-city school related that she was speaking from a limited perspective since she had not seen any other governing bodies in operation. The executive head of a federation, reported that his governors did complain about more and more responsibility and he felt it was unfair to ask too much of lay people. Another head teacher was confident that his governors were capable of doing the job but thought that too much was being asked of them as volunteers. Similarly, a head teacher reported that his governors knew he sympathised with them as unpaid volunteers - they were not doing the job that Ofsted required of them, mainly because of a lack of time. The head of a large school had found that his governors were being de-skilled by Ofsted telling them what to do – two experienced governors were resigning because of this. The chair of a newly converted academy stated that 60% of her governors were capable of doing the job but that 40% were not. Insights gained in the conduct of this study show, therefore, that the task of primary school governors is time-consuming, complex and challenging for governors (See Figure 9). Some head teachers consider that too much is asked of volunteer governors and this study shows that those governors in employment find it especially difficult. The majority of governors are capable of undertaking their role but it would appear from the findings of this study that not all governors understand their role and not all head teachers are sure of what is required of governors. A House of Commons (1999) report had pointed out the need for more user-friendly guidance for school governors. Whilst the government has expressed their appreciation of governors who give their time and energy to the voluntary work of serving on governing bodies they relate that many governing bodies have expressed concerns over their workload (DCSF, 2010a). Tables II and III, to be found in Chapter 2 of this study, provide more detail of the term-by-term requirements of governing bodies. It has been noted in a House of

Commons (1999) report that governors required more user friendly guidance and, more recently, Balarin et al (2008) expressed concern over whether the government had a clear idea of what governance should be and what governors should do. Balarin et al (2008) found that school governance was important and that it was generally working well but, their research had found, it was overloaded, overcomplicated and overlooked.

5.2.3   Improving School Governance

A number of diverse views were suggested, by the chairs of governance and the head teachers, as to how primary school governance could be improved. Chairs of governance suggested that there should be a review of the requirements of primary school governance, that there should be a reduction in the legal responsibilities and that school governors should have a higher profile. Some chairs thought that a 'consultant' should be on all governing bodies and there were suggestions of more training. With reference to the size of governing bodies – some stated 'smaller' whilst others wanted to keep the number of governors the same as the present number. A new and substantive insight was, provided by Chair S13, that an Ofsted inspection made governance better. This was supported by the views of the head teacher and chair of S8, both commenting on the involvement of their local authority, following an Ofsted inspection, and how this had led to the development of a strategic monitoring group to 'drive' the school forward. The head teachers suggested that governance could be improved by paying governors, making training compulsory and providing more recognition for governors. Some head teachers considered that smaller governing bodies would be better whilst others thought the number of governors could vary according to the wishes of the school. Some suggested that the chair and vice-chair should be paid and a further suggestion was that governors be re-named as 'directors'. This is, of course, the case for academies where the governors are now 'directors' of a limited charitable company. Re-naming all governors as 'directors' might raise their profile and give a more modern business sense to the role. Further suggestions were to require governors to be in schools more often and for all governing bodies to have 'strategy groups'. One head teacher expressed his opinion of abolishing governance so leaving the responsibilities to the head teacher, who would be overseen by Ofsted.

The views noted above are consistent with the views of Evans (2007), Millar (2008) and Jones et al (2010). Evans (2007) made a number of suggestions to improve weak and failing governance including his view that one-size does not fit all. He contended that a smaller governing body can bring rapid improvement to governance within a few months. Evans argued for the payment of semi-professional governors to help weak governing bodies. Millar (2008), however, as an experienced governor herself, expressed a note of caution on the use of smaller governing bodies. She preferred to retain the existing 'stakeholder' model with an inner strategic core group (that is, similar to the 'strategy' group discussed above) to drive the school forward. Jones et al (2010) reported, also, that school governors give an enormous amount to the education system but their contribution is largely hidden from public view.

5.3   THEME 2: THE FUNCTION AND OPERATION OF GOVERNING BODIES

5.3.1 Effectiveness

The Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (DCSF, 2010a) stated the concerns expressed, by school governors, over their increasing workload. It is to be noted that Table XIV (Chapter 4), Governing Body Meetings, demonstrates that there is wide variation in the number of meetings held by the sample schools over the course of a year. S7, an inner-city RC school, appears to be able to discharge its duties through three full governor meetings per year and a further three sub-committee meetings, In contrast, S4 (a federation) holds forty-two meetings, S18 holds thirty meetings per year and S5 (a CE-aided school) holds twenty-eight meetings over one year. Nine schools hold more than three, the minimum number by law, full governor meetings per year. Typically these meetings, in each school, would last about two hours. Further in-depth research, including attendance at meetings and examination of minutes, is needed to investigate how school governing bodies operate as a result of variations in the number of meetings held.

When queried about the effectiveness of their governing bodies there was a variety of responses. Chair S17 and Head S16 reported that they had been judged as outstanding,

by Ofsted. S7, as reported above, holding six meetings per year, and judged by Head S7 as being very supportive, was described as good by Ofsted – mentioning their role in guiding the school through a budget deficit and making staff redundant. Head S11, Head S12 and Chair S5 were positive in their judgements of effectiveness. Head S11 described his governors as being heavily involved in decision making and having the skills to do that. Head S12 judged his governing body as very effective stating that they have long experience, are pro-active and valued. Chair S5 thought that her governing body was extremely effective, mentioning their links with the diocese and the huge community involvement. She reported her weekly meetings with the head teacher when relevant issues were discussed. Governors helped in classrooms and assisted pupils in learning to read. Ofsted had classified them as outstanding: describing them as knowledgeable, very experienced, a strength of the school and of having provided stability during a period of change. Ofsted described the governing body of S12 as experienced and capable, providing effective support and challenge when necessary.

Credit was given by Head S13 and Head S6 to the strong leadership of the chair of governance. Head S6 spoke of very strong leadership and Head S13 referred to his chair of governance having 25 years of experience and having the inclination and ability to take on all the requirements needed. The two schools (S19 and S20) with academy status valued the effectiveness of their governing bodies. However, Chair S20 judged her governors to be only satisfactory and Chair S19 thought his head teacher could be more open and therefore have more discussion. Head S16 reported that her governors had improved over time because she had been very careful to bring good people onto the governing body. Training was seen as important, by Head S9, in establishing effectiveness. Chair S11 supported this view, believing that there should be joint training – all governors with the senior management team of the school. Chair S12 and Head S4 thought that their clerks were important in their governing bodies being effective. Chair S8 described the establishment of a monitoring group as greatly helping with the effectiveness of the school governance.

The responses above, for example the views of Head S6 and Head 13, support the views of Jones (2012) and Scanlon et al (1999) that the role of a Chair of a Governing Body is important. Head teachers and Chairs of Governance were cautious in discussing effectiveness, often using Ofsted inspection reports as their benchmark.

The comments about the effectiveness of governors, within the Ofsted inspection reports of the sample of twenty schools, were, in all cases, very brief.

There was evidence, in this present research, to support the findings of James et al (2011b) in referring to the notions of 'governance capital' and 'governance agency'. S5, for example, appeared to have strong governance capital, that is this school had the support of governors who were capable, motivated, knowledgeable and very experienced. Most of the governing body were said to be professional people. This school, also, appeared to have strong governance agency – that is, the capacity to act. So the governing body of S5 held 28 separate meetings over the school year, had link governors associated with each curriculum area, had strong links with the community and the diocese and had a strategic planning group working with the senior management team of the school. Governors helped in classrooms and assisted with the teaching of reading to the children. Furthermore, Chair S5 was, very active in supporting the school and met with the head teacher weekly. The governing body of S5 supported the suggestion of James et al (2011b) that the interaction of governance capital and governance agency may create a positive amplifier effect (see Table I). S5 was located in an economically above average suburb of a city. S8, located in an inner-city area, did, also, appear to have relatively high governance capacity being led by an experienced, knowledgeable and highly motivated chair of governors. There was a very open working relationship with this chair and Head S8. This governing body was active holding two full governor meetings per term and having developed an over-arching strategy committee. With relatively high capacity and agency the governing body of S8 could be considered as having a positive amplification effect on the school (see Table 1). As a further example of positive amplification - S16, located in a relatively poor area, with a very experienced, knowledgeable, committed chair of governance and a capable head teacher had added to their governance capital by forming and being part of a three school trust supported by a university and industrial partners. In contrast, S7, located in an inner-city area, appeared to have relatively strong governance capacity since the governing body included a number of professional people. However, governance agency appeared to be weak since these governors were too busy in their own jobs to visit or contribute to the school outside of the full governing body meetings – the governors holding only three full meetings per year with three sub-committee meetings being described as "ineffective". Recruitment of parent governors was difficult and often, it was said, they did not

understand their role. The chair of governors, although very experienced, was generally too busy to visit the school. The head teacher had 11 years experience of governance but no experience of governance in any other school. Governance amplification, for S5, was judged to be negative. The identification of positive and negative amplification in the governance of these schools, supporting the ideas of James et al (2011b) and of James et al (2010) when it was described as an under-researched area, is original and substantive.

5.3.2   Relationships

Head teachers and chairs of governance considered that having a good working relationship between them was very important. The key relationship was considered to be that between the head and the chair. Head teachers conveyed that the governors had to be treated with respect and as part of the school. One experienced head teacher reported that if the head teacher has a good relationship with the chair then they are the person that the head teacher confides in, when, for example, there are disputes with parents. Other head teachers considered that the chair needed to have credibility and that there must be mutual respect between the key stakeholders. He recounted a bad experience when relationships had broken down. Further, he stated that as a head teacher it is expected that the governors will be 'critical friends' but that 'friend' is of vital importance (See Vignette 5). A long serving head teacher conveyed that as a head teachers' union representative he had seen the trauma produced as a result of the key relationship - head teacher and chair of governors - breaking down.

The views summarised above support the research of James et al (2012) who described the close and productive relationship between the head teacher and chair of governors as being pivotal in the governance of the school. The need for the chair of governance to build a good relationship with the head teacher was noted, in the research of Scanlon et al (1999), as being necessary for a governing body to be effective.

5.3.3   Challenging and Supporting

Many of the respondents in this study were familiar with the notions of governors supporting, challenging and scrutinising to the benefit of their schools (see Vignettes 6 and 7). A chair of governance stated that, in her view, support and challenge were

the main areas for governance. This support included, in her view, the need "…to look after…" their new head teacher in her first headship. Head teachers were clear about the challenge from governors but emphasised the support they gave. One chair commented on the open relationship the governors had with the head teacher and how the governors scrutinised the figures from RAISEonline and asked questions in relation to the tracking of pupils. The Ofsted inspection reports for many schools, in the sample, reported on support and challenge. So, for example S8 and S18, were praised for their support and challenge from the governors. The governors of S6 were said, by Ofsted, to be very supportive and offered some challenge but this was judged to lack rigour.

The strong sense of 'support' and 'challenge' as being key areas for governance, noted from the responses of chairs of governance and head teachers in this study, may well be related to the fact that these aspects of governance have been scrutinised by Ofsted in recent years. So the 'challenge' of governors could be Ofsted driven and it may be indicative of when there is more clarity of purpose then governors are more likely to be proactive. Chair S7, however, perceived his governing body as mainly a sounding board, despite having a number of professional people on the governing body. Head 19 reported that the governors did support but, he considered, they found it difficult to challenge. Further, he indicated, many governors did not understand their role.

Surprisingly, it is to be noted that the DCSF (2010a) in providing a list of the key areas of governing body functions made no mention of 'support' or 'challenge' although they did refer to the governors having responsibility for the conduct of the school and the promotion of high standards of educational achievement. Scanlon et al (1999) described the relationship between the head and governors in effective governing bodies as being professional and not too cosy. Trust and support, as well as challenge and question, were key features in determining effectiveness. It was not possible to allocate the governing bodies in this sample, as perceived by the head teachers and chairs of governance, to one of the four distinctive types of governance described by Ranson et al (2005a) – the deliberative forum, consultative sounding board, the executive board and as a governing body. Such a classification, while valuable in defining how governing bodies function in England, would require first-hand observation of governance meetings. There was one exception to this since Chair S7 described his governing body as a sounding board. However, as Ranson et al

(2005) has pointed out, a strong chair of governors can, individually, be a critical friend giving support but also challenge and scrutiny to the head teacher and the school.

5.3.4 Integral Part of School Leadership

In reviewing school governance, the DCSF (2010b) stated that governing bodies are an integral part of school leadership. The respondents in this study varied in their response to this idea. Some head teachers and chairs were quite definite that this was the case for their governing bodies and the chairs of the two academies articulated that this was certainly the case since conversion to academy status. Some chairs of governance considered that they were only partially involved and Chairs S11, S7, S12 and Heads S14, S7 were doubtful because, for example, of the lack of time and expertise. Chair S11 suggested that there was not sufficient understanding in the school of what governance is about for them to be an integral part of the school leadership. It is to be noted that Ofsted (2011) described school governors as complementing and enhancing school leadership - the DfES (2004) having previously described the governing body as equal partners in leadership with the head teacher and senior management team. However, the findings of this study suggest clear differences in fundamental ideas about school leadership and the place of governance within that leadership. These are new and substantial insights which this researcher believes are related to a lack of clarity about the purposes of school governance amongst head teachers and chairs of governance. Further, these contrasts in school leadership may relate to governor 'capital' and 'governor agency'. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

5.3.5 Strategic and Operational Roles

Perhaps the most important strategic role of governors is, according to Dean et al (2007), the appointment of a new head teacher. Additionally, governors have a great strategic responsibility during the amalgamation of schools, changing the status of schools – federations, creating clusters, developing a trust, becoming an academy or establishing a free school. Pounce (2008a) argued that the responsibilities placed upon governors makes it difficult for them not to get involved in the operational role. However, most of the head teachers interviewed in this study reported few problems

with their governors interfering with the day-to-day operational role. One very experience head teacher reported that he greatly valued the role of the governors in appointing staff to the school. Head S5 responded that the governance of S5 was strong and intense in the first year of her headship. However, Chair S5 recounted a difficult time when the governors had to get involved in the running of the school because the day to day management was not appropriate. Head S19 and Head S20 indicated that they often lead the governors on strategy. The insights gained here suggest that few governors in this study involve themselves in operational roles however in some cases head teachers have to lead their governing bodies on strategic issues. Where governors do involve themselves operationally there may be precedents where governors have good reason to be involved. This is a new insight since the literature, for example DCSF(2010a) and Pounce (2008a), suggests that governors do involve themselves in day-to-day operational tasks.

5.3.6   School Improvement Partners

School Improvement Partners (SIPs) are leading school leaders, often former or serving head teachers, who are attached to a number of schools with the intention of raising standards. For each individual school they are able to suggest improvement measures informed, in part, by their knowledge of similar schools. At the time of the field work for this study the future of SIPs, in some Local Authorities, was in doubt. When asked about the role of SIPs, many head teachers welcomed the strong educational and independent viewpoint that was provided for governing bodies. Four chairs of governance were extremely positive about SIPs - welcoming the expertise and knowledge that they brought to their schools and so helping the governors to judge the school. The chair of an academy considered that the school would buy-in an external consultant as a result of becoming an academy and losing the support of the local authority SIP. A minority of head teachers or chairs of governors expressed concerns about SIPs, some citing personality as a key issue. There is little research relating to the advantages or otherwise of having SIPs involved in primary school governance so the insights gained here are new.

5.3.7 Do Governors Help to Raise Standards?

It has been suggested (Balarin et al, 2008) that the level of effectiveness of primary school governing is linked clearly and positively to the level of pupil attainment. When asked whether the school governors helped to raise standards in the school there was a range of responses. A number of head teachers and chairs of governance tended to be negative stating that they did not raise directly raise standards - that was the job of the teachers, however, they recognised their role in challenging, supporting and in appointing staff . Other respondents - head teachers and chairs of governance were more positive referring to the monitoring they did, the analysis of data, the setting of targets for the head teacher, asking about interventions, the scrutiny, the questioning during governor meetings, the following of cohorts of pupils right up to the Year 6 Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) and the appointment of staff. One chair considered that everything that the governors were involved in was about improving the learning of the pupils. The diversity of these responses, and the uncertainty of some participants, is related to the concept of governor agency. This will be discussed in the final chapter.

5.4 THEME 3: TRAINING AND INFORMATION SHARING FOR AND WITHIN GOVERNING BODIES

5.4.1 Training

Research on the training of primary school governors, especially recent research, is limited. This is surprising given the increased responsibilities of governing bodies over the last decade. The results of a research project into the induction training of newly appointed governors were reported by Jones (1998). He contended, at that time, that the significance of training for governors had increased as the extent of the responsibilities of governing bodies had expanded. Government legislation, over two decades, he argued, had made major changes to the governance of schools with school governors required to make important decisions relating to the quality of education provided to the nation's children. He reported that only 5.2 per cent of governors,

from a sample of 314 governors, had received any formal training for their role and argued that for governors to function effectively there must be high quality compulsory training before governors begin their work. The induction of new governors was a key issue in a study of nine schools, reported by Scanlon et al (1999), considered to have effective governing bodies. It was found that some of these governing bodies provided for new governors with well-worked out schemes – these included induction packs, training, and mentoring. Staff and governors often trained together. However, these researchers, also, surveyed 600 schools and found that almost one-half of governors had received no further training since induction. Scanlon et al (1999) concluded that the training of governors was an area that required improvement, whilst Jones (1998) argued for a more urgent and proactive stance on governor training.

The data presented in Chapter 4 as a result of this present research, undertaken over a decade after the studies of Jones (1998) and Scanlon et al (1999), showed that most head teachers were vague when asked about the training of their governors. Two head teachers reported that their governors were encouraged to go on courses but other head teachers pointed out that, as volunteers, the governors made their own decisions as to whether they attended courses. One head teacher considered that it was very difficult to get governors to attend training whilst another head teacher argued that there was a wealth of training available but, again, pointed out that it was up to the individual governor to make the decision to attend. Some innovative practice was reported such as holding a training course within a school and recruiting an independent consultant to run courses within a school. However, even in these two schools such events were 'one-off' occurrences not organised year on year programmes. Praise was often given, by the head teachers, to the training provided by their local authorities. However, there was also criticism of the local authority courses by two head teachers and this may be indicative of different training standards within local authorities. Two headteachers did seem more organised – both having allocated annual budgets for governor training and both were more certain that their governors attended training courses. Only two head teachers mentioned that they had an induction pack for new governors. Interestingly, one of these head teachers reported that, in a previous school, she had a governor who acted as an 'inductor' for new governors, however, this system was not in operation in her present school. Only one

head teacher mentioned that his governors had undertaken some on-line training – additionally they had received induction training and some bespoke training on site. A number of head teachers expressed negative, and possibly laissez-faire, approaches to governor training: not a priority; training too blinkered; governors too busy to attend and one head teacher commented that she had never asked her governors about training.

The 20 chairs of governance were generally more positive, and specific, with reference to training. One chair of governance described an innovative approach whereby training was held in a cluster of schools, enabling more interaction between the governors of related schools, whilst another chair, with 33 years of governance experience, reported that he had been on over 30 courses. Some chairs of governance were critical of existing training courses and of the number of new educational initiatives. Only one chair of governance reported using the internet for training. Some chairs recognised the need for training but related that it was up to individuals to attend. After individuals attended governor training, only one school asked them to cascade the information to the rest of the governing body. Four chairs confirmed that their governors attended local authority courses, however, another chair of governance reported that whilst they were involved with a local authority training package he considered that governors were not taught how to be a governor but by being on a governing body they somehow developed. This latter observation was supportive of the views of Jones et al (2010) who, questioning whether the capabilities for effective governance can be acquired within the four year tenure period, proposed that governance skills may well be shaped, perhaps unhelpfully, by governing body custom and practice.

These perspectives, by head teachers and chairs of governance, on the training of governors suggest, therefore, that few of the 20 schools involved in this research had well-worked out training programmes such as using induction packs, mentoring of new governors and on-going training for governors. Training for governance, the findings of this research show, was problematic. Even undertakings such as having an induction pack for new governors or establishing an experienced governor as a 'mentor' were not evident in the majority of the schools involved in the study. Surprisingly, only two schools reported the use of websites for training purposes.

The House of Commons (1999) had, also, noted the critical importance of high quality training for governors, particularly induction training for new governors, newly appointed chairs and joint training for chairs of governance and their head teachers. Their report strongly expressed the view that the training of governors would do much to improve the effectiveness of the school. They did not argue for mandatory training of governors but did recognise that a large proportion of newly appointed head teachers had little direct experience of working with a governing body. This was, also, found to be the case, over 12 years later, amongst the head teachers involved in this present research. Whilst four head teachers reported that they had been on governor training courses and found them useful, a further three head teachers had undertaken the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and reported little or no input on school governance during the course. One head teacher confirmed that she had undertaken a unit on governance during her NPQH – finding the unit very important in seeing things through the eyes of the governors and in making things accessible for them. One head teacher had attended a Leading Programme for Serving Head teachers – this was described as the best course she had ever been on, but she did not remember any input on governance. A recently appointed head teacher of a small school had undertaken a module on governance whilst studying for a post-graduate degree. Three head teachers responded that they had found out about governance by doing the job and two further head teachers reported that they felt that they had been thrown in at "the deep end" and that it had been a "baptism of fire" when dealing with the school governors in the early stages of their role.

These findings can be viewed in comparison to the views of Evans (2007) who suggested a step-change in the quality of governance by having mandatory training and accreditation for all school governors. Basic training for all, probationary periods, mentoring and a commitment to annual training were, also, mentioned. The more recent DCSF (2010a) report on school governance agreed that there should be mandatory training for chairs of governing bodies and that governing bodies should carry out self evaluation to identify and remedy any skills gaps. There was said to be a "strong feeling" amongst this Ministerial Working Group that compulsory induction training ought to be undertaken by all new governors. No firm conclusion was reached, by the Group, as to whether the chairs of governance should be paid.

Table XIII has shown that of the twenty chairs of governance, seventeen had more than five years of experience of governance, and six of the chairs of governance had more than twenty-five years of experience. Whilst this experience may well be useful it may, also, be negative in terms of repeating custom and practice (Jones et al, 2010) whilst being uninfluenced by governance practice elsewhere. This could also be true for the head teachers, seventeen of whom had more than ten years experience of governance but, as discussed above, relatively little training and disparate experience of governing bodies before being appointed to their post.

The insights gained during this present study suggest that the training of governors is a weak area - this is surprising given the responsibilities of governing bodies undertaken on behalf of the state. Moreover, it may be that having to cope with so many changes and increased responsibilities has led to the training of governors being overlooked. Education is largely a national service in England yet the training undertaken by school governors would appear to vary considerably from school to school. This raises questions about the independence and confidence of untrained school governors in understanding what is required of them and in making important decisions. At present, local authorities play a key part in governor training, however, their capacity appears to be diminishing as the number of independent state academies increases and this has implications for the provision of governor training. At present, it would appear, that little use is made of ICT in governing training provision – this could be harnessed, as it is in many aspects of modern life, in order to develop individual and group training for new and serving governors. The findings of this study indicate the need for further, in depth, research on the training needs of school governors and how these requirements could be provided.

5.4.2   Accessing Information

It has been proposed by Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) that inequality in information provision exists within the context of English state school governance, and that it is potentially damaging in the decision making of individual governors. Recognising the substantial responsibilities of governing bodies, they argued that the 300,000 volunteer governors need a wide range of information in order to fulfil an extensive range of tasks and roles. Further, they pointed out that the persistence, or even increase, in inequality of information provision could possibly lead to a

diminishing of democracy. They found, using interviews of individual governors and a questionnaire survey in one local education authority, that there were variations in training and information use by individual governors: LEA governors were poor attendees at training sessions; head teachers and staff governors felt they received enough information through their professional sources; some long-serving governors felt they knew enough already; some new governors felt far too intimidated to attend courses and co-opted governors were concerned with their specialist contribution rather than wider governance matters. No specific mention was made, by Banwell and Woodhouse (1996), of the views of chairs of governance. Pointing out that the principal source of information for governance was national government, Banwell and Woodhouse (1996) referred to the different ways in which this government information may be 'filtered' before reaching individual governors. So, local authority newsletters, the written and oral reports of head teachers were examples of this process. Rural school governors, in comparison to urban school governors, may have less access to training and meetings (a geographical filter). These researchers argued, therefore, that there is fragmentation in information provision against a background of legislative and financial changes requiring responses from school governors. Fuller et al (2002), in an assessment of the offline and ICT support for governors, indicate that (at the time of the research) governors oversaw delegated public expenditure of around £20 billion per year. They argued that governing bodies' responsibilities, particularly since the 1998 Education Reform Act and the implementation of local management of schools, is such that public interest requires that they operate effectively. Fuller et al (2002) argue that governing bodies need relevant and timely information; the chair of governance is seen as a special case – can take action independently, shapes the governing body agenda and, perhaps, decisions – and therefore needing different information and networks. Fuller et al (2002) concluded that the government and local authorities had made considerable efforts to transmit knowledge to governors but that very little was known about how governors use ICT; one study (Earley et al, 2002) showing that less than 30% of head teachers and chairs of governance used ICT to support their governance roles.

There is clear evidence from this present research to support the findings of Banwell and Woodhouse (1996), Fuller et al (2002) and Earley et al (2002). It is apparent that there continues to be fragmentation in information provision for governors against a

background of increasing legislative and financial changes, requiring responses from school governors who are responsible for overseeing large amounts of public expenditure (Fuller et al, 2002). The findings of this study, as presented in Chapter 4 and summarised diagrammatically in Figure 15, showed that there were great differences in the ways in which the governors of each school accessed the information they needed to undertake their task. Sources of information for governors, and 'filters' as described above, were the head teacher, the local authority (often in the form of publications such as newsletters), the clerk to the governing body and other governors at the formal governance meetings. Three head teachers and four chairs of governance made reference to the 'Governors Guide to the Law' (also available on DVD) as a source of information – this was a surprisingly low number of respondents, less than 20%, given that this file was the main national government reference for school governors, although there was criticism that this document was "…too full of jargon." Five respondents referred to information being available via websites (unspecified) and others referred to the National College for School Leadership, Governornet (a national website), Ofsted, newspapers, Governors TV (no longer in existence since the government withdrew the funding), by going into their school and during the meetings. Some governors were said not to use the internet. Only one school had developed a specific, password-protected website for their governing body and this enabled individual governors to easily access school information and data at a time of their choosing. This was the only school to be judged innovative, by this researcher, in providing information for the use of a governing body. One head teacher, in fact, admitted that he was "unsure" about where his governors were getting their information from although he did suggest a number of possible sources.

In summary, it would appear from the insights gained by this research, that the provision of information for school governors, continues to be unequal with no common sources of information being used. This disparate approach could, as has been suggested previously be detrimental to decision making and democracy. Furthermore, this research has provided some insights into the use of ICT by school governors. These insights, relating to the unequal provision of information and the lack of uptake in the use of ICT for and by governors, are new and substantive.

5.5 THEME 4: CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS FOR AND WITHIN GOVERNING BODIES

5.5.1   Turnover of Governors

Scanlon et al (1999) and James et al (2010) have raised issues due to the annual turnover of governors and hence a possible loss of expertise within a governing body. The latter pointed out that governors have a four year term of office – so there is a constant turnover of governors. They argue that a governing body is in a constant state of flux.

The head teachers and chairs and governance involved in this present research varied in their responses when questioned about turnover and their strategies to recruit new governors. Some head teachers found it relatively easy to recruit new governors – these head teachers appeared to be proactive in seeking to find potential governors and some held elections. Two head teachers reported that they had difficulty recruiting governors because parents were busy working and under pressure – both of these schools were in prosperous, advantaged areas. Three church schools reported difficulties recruiting foundation governors and thought that this may become even more difficult as church congregations age. One head teacher claimed that the role of a governor was now too onerous especially for business owners and parents.

Therefore, the findings of this research support Scanlon et al (1999) and James et al 2010) but recruitment patterns appeared to vary from school to school both in disadvantaged areas (see below) and in more prosperous areas. Some church schools had specific difficulties recruiting governors as a result of their ageing congregations.

5.5.2 Governing in Disadvantaged Areas

Dean et al (2007), in a study involving ten primary schools, researched the challenges of governing schools in disadvantaged areas. The study involved linked case studies and over 100 respondents were interviewed, some more than once. Many of these schools found it difficult to recruit parent governors and, often, the governing bodies of these schools relied on the activity of a small cadre of very involved governors – the rest being regarded as 'passengers'.

In this present research some head teachers, involved with schools in disadvantaged areas, also reported difficulties in recruiting new governors especially parent

governors. The chair of one school responded that the parents of the school had very little idea of what governors did. The head teacher of the same school reported that they had recruited a number of professional people, from outside the school catchment area, onto the governing body – however, they did not have the time to visit the school outside of governing body meetings. Another head teacher reported that it was not easy to recruit parents since they were too busy with their own lives and families whilst in a further school some parents found governance to be too complex and did not say much at meetings. However, some schools in disadvantaged areas had little difficulty recruiting parent governors, with both chairs and head teachers emphasising the strong school links with the local community. A chair of governance responded that becoming a hard federation had helped with recruitment since fewer governors were needed across two schools. One head teacher, with experience of three different primary schools, reported that the area a school is in determines the governing body.

 This present research, therefore, broadly supports the findings of Dean et al (2007) in the difficulty of recruiting parent governors in disadvantaged areas. However, the findings of this present study show that having close links with the community can provide a ready supply of parent governors even when the school is in a disadvantaged area.

5.5.3   Governing Body Responsibilities and Effectiveness: The Stakeholder Model

In an analysis of the responsibilities of school governing bodies, and the way they function, Balarin et al (2008) revealed a number of different roles for governing bodies – support, challenge, representation, skill, operational, strategic, managing and scrutiny (see Figure 2). Balarin et al (2008) expressed the view that a clearer definition of school governors' responsibilities would enable them to undertake their work more effectively. Evans (2007) recognised the increasing responsibilities of school governors and outlined the features of a failing governing body. He stressed the urgent need to address the problem of weak and failing governance. Millar (2008) cautioned against smaller governing bodies and advocated the continuance of the present stakeholder model with the addition of an inner-executive group (see Figure 3). Ranson and Crouch (2009), however, were critical of the present 'stakeholder' model of governance, identified three other possible models (see Figure 4) and argued

that good governance tightens learning and teaching and leads to improved standards of achievement.

In probing their understanding of governing body responsibilities and effectiveness, it was found the participants in this present research focussed on support, challenge and scrutiny; no mention being made of representation, skill, operational, strategic, management or the stakeholder model. Some head teachers reported that their governors were good at supporting but not so good at challenging. The support of his governors was appreciated by one head teacher, as the role, in his view, was sometimes a lonely occupation. Two head teachers described their governors as supporting, challenging and effective in their scrutiny. One head teacher, as revealed in Vignette 9, was disappointed with his governing body believing that they were incapable of 'challenging' him as required by Ofsted. A chair of governance of a village school believed that she did most of the challenging at meetings whilst a chair of governance of a school in a disadvantaged area claimed that a monitoring group, that had been set up by his governors, was very effective at scrutiny. Other chairs described their role as being a 'critical friend' whilst the chair of governance of a school in a disadvantaged area, claimed that the presence of a professional person, a solicitor, helped the challenging and scrutiny procedures.

The findings of this present research broadly support, therefore, the concepts of 'support', 'challenge' and 'scrutiny' as the responsibilities of governing bodies, as perceived by participants in this study. It was found, however, that not all respondents thought their governing bodies were effective in relation to 'challenge'.

5.5.4 Future challenges

A Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (DCSF, 2010a), set up following The Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007), had proposed that smaller governing bodies tended to be more effective. DCSF (2010a), whilst reporting that limited research had been conducted specifically on school governors claimed, however, that two-thirds of school governance was good or better, the rest being satisfactory - despite head teachers suggesting that one-fifth of governing bodies were ineffective. Governors, it was reported, find it difficult to challenge head teachers; a core of

governors within each governing body do most of the work and governor vacancies were particularly prevalent in inner city areas.

It was found that in discussing future challenges, the head teachers and chairs of governance, in this research, were often parochial. For example, one head teacher was retiring so a challenge for the governors was finding his successor. Some head teachers were concerned about their next Ofsted inspection. The head teacher of a newly formed academy, was worried about the time needed for governance especially when the governors were business and professional people. Concerns were expressed by one chair of governance about the future and the burden on volunteer governors, without the support of a local authority.

5.5.5 The Governing Body Clerk

DCSF (2010a) describe a governing body clerk as akin to the clerk to a court and therefore much more than a note-taker. An effective clerk was seen to be essential to guide governors on their duties. However, they argued, too many governing bodies used the school secretary or a member of the administrative staff rather than a trained clerk. The House of Commons (1999) supported the use of trained clerks and believed that their cost was a worthwhile investment. They recommended that LEAs should offer clerking services to schools, but other providers could be used. James et al (2010), Pounce (2008b) and Ofsted (2011) support the use of trained clerks for effective governance. However, James et al (2010) reported that there was no evidence that the in-house clerk was consistently worse than the professional clerk model.

The findings of this research demonstrated that many of the twenty schools used governing body trained clerks. Fifty per cent of the head teachers referred to their trained clerks as being very good, excellent, experienced, vital, invaluable, bringing information from the Local Authority and very knowledgeable. The chairs of governance were similarly appreciative of the Local Authority trained clerks regarding them as the experts on protocol and having answers to the governors' questions. However, one chair of governance described how they were using a Local Authority clerk but the cost was doubling as the Local Authority was in decline. Furthermore, four schools used a member of their administrative staff as the clerk to

the governing body. One chair of governance (see Vignette 10) considered that his clerk – the school secretary – needed to be replaced as she was not sufficiently skilled or knowledgeable. It appeared that one head teacher (see Vignette 11) actually wrote the minutes for his governing body. Further, another school was making use of a Local Authority clerk but conversion to academy status meant that a change in clerking would be needed. The findings of this research are comparable to national findings, as described above, in the use of valued trained clerks but with a surprisingly high proportion - one-fifth of schools - making use of administrative staff. If this proportion was repeated, on a national scale, then over three thousand school governing bodies would be without the services and expertise of a trained clerk. The possible demise of Local Authorities, the source of many trained school governance clerks, and the growth of independent academies has implications for this valued service.

5.5.6 New Challenges – Academies, Clusters, Trusts, Federations, Chains of Schools, Free Schools

The DCSF (2010a) has reported that many governors are apprehensive over their increasing workload and the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander (Ed.), 2010) has supported their views by stating that since 2006 national education policy has changed with considerable speed and frequency. James et al (2010) argued that governance is likely to become even more complex with new forms of schools working together and being governed together.

When asked about the challenges of these new schools, the chairs of governance and head teachers involved in this present research revealed a variety of viewpoints. Two schools had converted to academy status and the chair of governance of one explained that they had converted to academy status knowing that other schools in the local authority were also intending to become academies (see Vignette 11) and that they would be part of a network of new academies – especially for human resources, accountancy and legal services. The head teacher of this school explained that the local authority had become smaller due to national cuts and they provided less service. This newly formed academy had chosen to keep the same number of governors. The head teacher of the second newly-formed academy, situated within another local authority, reported that it had made little difference to governance – they had been receiving little support from their local authority.

However, across a range of local authorities and schools, many head teachers expressed negative views about conversion to academy status, being worried about losing support from the local authority family of schools and about the perceived increased responsibilities on governors (see Figure 16). Many chairs of governance also expressed negative views towards conversion to academy status citing, for example, being against the privatisation of schools; whilst they would gain money but this would need managing by appointing a business manager; a greater burden on governors and not being keen on disconnecting from the local authority. One head teacher, however, was not concerned about becoming an academy, stating that there was not much left of his local authority.

It was found that there was considerable resistance to working with other schools. The head teacher of an academy stated that she had no experience of clusters or chains – in the small villages of her county the governors were against any amalgamations, wanting to retain 'their' village school. However, the head teacher of another village school in the same county, presented a different view – believing that clusters would develop with executive heads and that this would help small village schools to remain open. Another head teacher conveyed that they were rivals with other schools, wanting their children to do well. A similar viewpoint was expressed by the experienced head teacher of a large primary school who believed that governors were parochial, wanting to be involved with 'their' school. It was believed that if local authorities no longer existed then schools would need the assistance of paid expert, consultant governors. Views were expressed against federations and clusters and it was suggested that the future might be one governing body for a whole town. One school was part of a trust (see Vignette 12) involving four schools and six external partners. Both the chair of governance and the head teacher, of this school, were very enthusiastic about being part of the trust. The head teacher did believe, however, that governors or directors were needed for each school within an over-arching trust guided, in their case, by business people and an entrepreneur. Finance and time were considered as constraints, by some respondents, in allowing staff to attend cluster and federation meetings. This section of the research provided, therefore, a number of new and substantial insights into the perspectives of key stakeholders in primary school governance, in particular the resistance to conversion to academy status and the reluctance to working with other schools in federations or trusts.

5.6 Summary of Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter has analysed and discussed the research data, presented in Chapter 4, with reference to the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2. The data analysis and discussion has been categorised under the four over-arching themes identified earlier. The concept of school governance was strongly supported by the head teachers and chairs of governance from the sample of schools studied. Some head teachers were very clear, stating that that without their governors they would be unable to do their jobs. The great number of unpaid volunteers involved in school governance was seen to be a massive investment of civic capital. However, school governance was presented as challenging, complex and time-consuming. Doubts were expressed as to whether the government had a clear idea of what they required of school governors. In order to improve school governance some diverse views were expressed: paying governors, having smaller governing bodies, raising the profile of governors and using groups of semi-professional governors. The discussion of the civic role of school governance included reference to a range of relevant research, as mentioned in Chapter 2, for example DCSF (2010b), Balarin et al (2008) and Dean et (2007).

There was wide variation in the number of governor meetings held by each governing body during the school year. By law, primary schools are required to hold a minimum of three governing body meetings per year. In the sample of schools studied, one governing body functioned by holding six meetings per year whilst another governing body held forty-two meetings every year. The effectiveness of governing bodies was often judged by reference to the latest Ofsted inspection report. Within these reports, Ofsted made only brief comments relating to the governance of each school. Having an open culture, regular training and using a trained governing body clerk were all cited as helping to develop an effective governing body. Having a strong and capable chair of governors was necessary for the governing body to be effective. The concepts of governance capital and governance agency were apparent in the analysis of some schools and the lack of capital and agency identified in others. The amplifier effect or lack of it (James et al, 2010) was noted in a number of the sample schools. A necessary requirement for all governing bodies was that there needed to be a good relationship between the head teacher and the chair of governance. This was identified, in the literature, as being a pivotal relationship. To challenge and to

support were frequently mentioned as good governance. Some governing bodies gave strong support but little challenge. One governing body's role was said to be a sounding board. There was some hesitancy in describing governors as an integral part of school leadership. The respondents in this study were clear that the governors had a strategic role and that they did not get involved in operational matters. The head teachers very much appreciated the role of the governors in appointing staff. There was strong support for the part that School Improvement Partners (SIPs) played in school development and one newly converted academy planned to buy-in an external consultant to carry out a similar role. Governors helped to raise standards in schools by their analysis of data, monitoring, questioning during meetings and following cohorts of pupils up to their Year 6 SATs.

The training of governors and the sharing of information has been shown, by the literature, to be of significance against a background of increasing responsibilities. The perspectives of head teachers and chairs of governance in the twenty schools studied showed that few, if any, had well-organised training schemes for their governors. Information provision was, also, problematic across the sample of schools studied despite the increasing legislative and financial changes, with governing bodies being responsible for over £20 billion of public expenditure.

Many schools, in this sample, had difficulties recruiting new governors especially parent governors and foundation governors – not all schools in disadvantaged areas had problems recruiting new governors and some schools in affluent areas reported problems with recruitment. Most of the schools used a local authority clerk – four schools used school administrative staff. The majority of the respondents were unsure about converting to academy status, preferring the safety net of the local authority, and lacked knowledge of other types and groups of schools. Head teachers and chairs of governors had a strong attachment to 'their' schools.

The next chapter presents the conclusion of the thesis and includes the main findings of this research, the professional implications and the contribution to knowledge that this study has made.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In England, over 300,000 school governors serve some 23,000 schools, influence the lives of over 7 million children and oversee a budget in excess of £20 billion. School governors, as unpaid volunteers, are said to have responsibilities and duties that are unprecedented in the voluntary sector. These responsibilities and duties are likely to become even more demanding and complicated as changes in the education system are implemented. Despite this, there has been limited research on primary school governance.

The research, presented here, set out to investigate the perspectives of key stakeholders in primary school governance – the head teachers and chairs of governance. The primary aim of the research was to contribute to knowledge and understanding of primary school governance through analysis and synthesis of the literature and new evidence obtained by empirical research. Adopting a qualitative approach the researcher used maximum variation sampling to select 20 contextually different primary schools. The head teacher and chair of governance of each school was interviewed, during 2011, using a semi-structured approach to elicit 'thick descriptions' about primary school governance. Additional information about each school was obtained from the most recent Ofsted inspection report for the school. Four themes emerged from the literature review and were used to structure the interview schedule, to present the data and in discussing and analysing the data. This chapter presents the main findings of the research; the professional implications and recommendations for practice; reflects on the research process; gives some ideas for future research and concludes by discussing the contribution that has been made to knowledge about primary school governance.

6.2 Main Findings

The main findings of this research are as follows.

Head teachers and chairs of governance considered that primary school governance is important and worth the time and effort. They thought that governance was complex but that most governors were capable of doing the job. The chairs of governance, unpaid volunteers, were remarkable in terms of commitment to their role. Many of the chairs of governance were retired and gave much time to their schools. Seventeen of the chairs had more than five years experience of school governance. A majority of respondents supported the notion that governors help to raise standards in schools.

The head teachers and chairs of governance strongly believed that school governors should, in the main, come from the local community because they understood the context of the school. It was clear that school governors represented the local community and overall were an important and substantial investment of civic capital. Schools were said to be 'hubs' of the community and governors were described as helping to 'root' schools in their communities.

Head teachers valued greatly the support given to them by their governors. Some head teachers considered that their job could be lonely and appreciated the support, challenge and experience of their governors. Even very experienced head teachers valued their governors. The majority of head teachers had little or no experience of governance until they became a head teacher. Having a good working relationship between the head teacher and chair of governance was considered vital but whether school governance was an integral part of school leadership was not clear to all head teachers and chairs of governance. Most of the head teachers reported no interference, from the governors, in their day-to-day operational roles.

Governance was considered, by chairs of governance, to work well when a head teacher is 'open' and honest with his/her governors. However, it was thought that the role of school governor lacked clarity so that individual governors, even head teachers, were unsure as to what the government required of them. The majority of the respondents were, nevertheless, aware of scrutiny, challenge and support as part of

school governance. Strong leadership by the chair of governance was important in considering the effectiveness of a governing body.

There was wide variation in the number of meetings held, by each governing body, over the course of the year to discharge their responsibilities: one school held six meetings whilst another held forty-two meetings. The head teachers and chairs of governance were unsure of how governance could be improved – some payment was considered, as was having less people on a governing body. Some believed that the responsibilities of governing bodies should be reduced and they should be given more recognition. School Improvement Partners (SIPs) were welcomed, in most cases, for their expertise and independent viewpoint. There was clear evidence to support the notions of 'governance capital', 'governance agency', 'negative amplification' and 'positive amplification' (see Figure 17 below). There was, also, some evidence to show that governance was improved after Ofsted inspections and with the support of Local Authorities.

Few, if any, of the schools had well worked out training development programmes such as induction packs, mentoring of new governors or on-going training for governors. Whilst many of the head teachers and chairs of governance were very experienced school governors, this may be unhelpful in terms of repeating custom and practice whilst being uninfluenced by governance practice elsewhere. There was inequality in information provision for the school governors. The governors in this study made little use of national governor organisations or websites.

Governing bodies faced a number of challenges and tensions. Recruiting governors, for example, could be problematic in disadvantaged and in more affluent areas. Sixteen of the schools sampled valued and benefited from the use of a trained clerk. However, four schools used a member of the school's administrative staff and it appeared that in one school the head teacher wrote the governing body minutes. Developing strong links with the local community was advantageous in recruiting new governors. Governance was described as now being too onerous for business people and some parents. Two schools had converted to academy status - in both cases because their local authorities were providing little support. However, across a range of local authorities and schools, it was found that head teachers and chairs of

governance were unenthusiastic about converting to academy status – being worried about the increased work for governors and preferring to stay within the local authority family of schools. Further, head teachers and chairs of governance had strong attachments to "their" schools and many were resistant to working with other schools. One school was in a four-school trust. The head teacher and chair of governance were enthusiastic about how this was working. Governance capital and agency were increased as a result of this model.

6.3 Professional Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings presented above show the importance of school governance in the effective running of primary schools in England and therefore to the public education system as a whole. The chairs of governance gave much time and effort to their role: this was even more impressive given that their role is unpaid and voluntary. Particularly revealing was the value that the head teachers gave to their governing body and especially to the chair of governance. It was apparent that many head teachers would find their jobs even more difficult without the support of their chair of governance and the governing body. Despite their commitment to civic society, the contribution of governors is hidden from public view, even when school leadership is discussed. This needs to be rectified.

Head teachers had very little experience or understanding of school governance prior to appointment as a head teacher. It is recommended, therefore, that 'school governance' is included in pre-service and in professional development training courses. As an important part of school leadership, governance should be included within all courses, local and national, for school leaders. Aims for such initiatives would include head teachers appreciating the role to be played by governing bodies in all schools and that governance works best when head teachers are open and transparent with their governing body. Furthermore, most primary schools now have 'senior management teams' – consideration should be given to including all of these members of staff on governing body meetings, if not as full members then as observers. Other teachers, within a school, should be given the opportunity to observe governor body meetings.

Head teachers and chairs of governance believed that their governors should come from the local community because local people understood the context of the school. School governance was considered complex but the head teachers and chairs of governors considered that their governors were capable of doing the job. Many governing bodies welcomed the additional expertise and impartiality of School Improvement Partners. Where these school partners are phased out, under local authority changes, it is recommended that schools buy-in the services of educational consultants.

Some respondents were unsure of what was required of school governors and the view was expressed that the government did not know either. Many respondents appeared unsure as to whether governors were an integral part of school leadership despite being described as strategic leaders. It is recommended that the government review their documentation in order to clarify what they require from school governance and, at the same time, reduce the workload on governing bodies.

There was wide variation in the number of meetings held by governing bodies – the range being from six to forty-two meetings per year. Research needs to be conducted to investigate the differences in function and operation of such governing bodies (see below).

The concepts of governance 'capital' and governance 'agency' are important and, from this research, can be considered valid. These ideas need to be understood by governing bodies as do the associated terms 'positive amplification' and 'negative amplification'. It is important that head teachers and chairs of governance reflect on the capacity and agency of their own governing body and take action, if necessary, to improve the positive amplification of the governing body. Figure 17, below, devised by the researcher from data collected in this study, clearly shows the great benefits to a school where the governing body has 'capital' and 'agency'. It is this researcher's view that a school without this 'positive amplification' is at a considerable disadvantage.
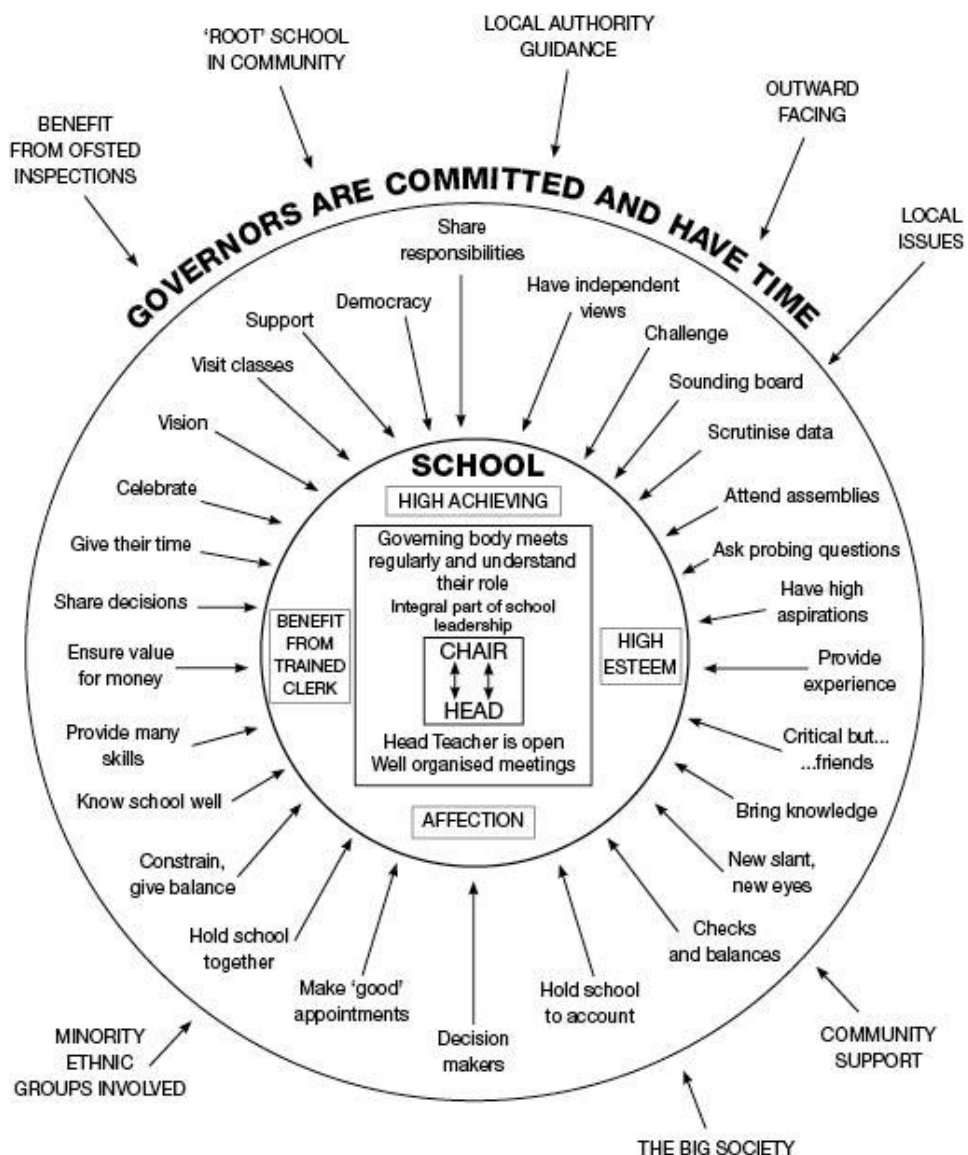
Figure 17: Positive Amplification

Training for new governors and existing governors was inadequate with few, if any, schools having well-worked out training programmes. Training courses, organised by local authorities, were said to be numerous and of a good standard but governors, as unpaid volunteers, were not compelled to attend. Governors and chairs of governance had many years of experience but this experience did not, necessarily, include experience of other governing bodies. Given the importance of school governance it is

recommended that more use is made of ICT in providing training. The possible growth of primary academy numbers and the associated decline of local authorities, and therefore governor training units, make this development urgent.

This research found that there were inequalities in the provision of information to governing bodies with very few making use of national websites or national associations. As a result governing bodies may be making decisions without having the necessary information. It is recommended that governors are made more aware of national websites and organisations. A government website for school governors would be helpful.

Recruitment of new governors was a difficulty in disadvantaged areas but also in more affluent areas. Where schools established strong community links the recruitment of governors was less problematic. Some schools in disadvantaged, and affluent areas, had no difficulty recruiting new governors. A raised profile for school governors would help recruitment and consideration of governance capital and agency, by key stakeholders (see above), might help them to be pro-active with regard to recruitment.

Sixteen schools used, and valued, a trained governing body clerk – mostly from the local authority. Four schools used administrative personnel from their school. The literature (see Chapter 2) in discussing the role of a governing body clerk stated that they were more than just a note-taker and made an analogy with the role of a clerk to a court. It is recommended that it be mandatory for all schools to use a trained clerk. The training of these clerks should involve a national qualification so ensuring that there is some standardisation of governing body procedures.

Amongst a majority of the schools, there was no wish to become an academy or to work with other schools but there was a strong wish to stay in the local authority family of schools. Chairs of governance and head teachers were attached to "their" schools, even in small village schools when links with other schools would seem very beneficial. One school greatly valued their belonging to a four-school trust. Head teachers and chairs of governance need to become more aware of the functioning of soft- and hard-federations, trusts and academies.

6.4 Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

Despite the significance of school governance, it is, as has been argued above, an under-researched area. Moreover, little research has been conducted specifically on primary school governance in England. Previous research on school governance has been conducted on a narrow range of schools, but has revealed the great challenge and complex demands on governing bodies and, more recent changes in governmental policy would suggest, these challenges are likely to increase when, for example, schools become independent of local authorities. Previous research on school governance has revealed relatively little about the perspectives of key stakeholders on governing bodies – the head teacher and the chair of governance – and the need for more studies of governing bodies has been indicated. Using maximum variation sampling: twenty, contextually-different, primary schools across the North of England were selected. The head teachers and chairs of governance of these schools were interviewed and generated a relatively large data-set. This data was analysed and a number of conclusions drawn with the intention of making a contribution to understanding about primary school governance.

It is to be noted that Silverman (2005: 68-73) and Phillips and Pugh (2000: 63) argue that, in the context of a Ph.D thesis, an "…original contribution to knowledge…" is a very shaded term and unlikely to involve a paradigm shift in the researcher's field of study, but is best viewed as an apprenticeship prior to admission to a community of scholars: the research demonstrating that the researcher has learned how to do research to a professional standard. Hart (2003: 23-24) showed, in diagrammatic form, some of the associations that can be made from different definitions of originality. Blaxter et al (2002: 13), using the work of previous authors, listed fifteen definitions of originality. In addition to the issues documented above, the present researcher, drawing from the diagram provided by Hart (2003: 24) and the definitions of originality listed by Blaxter et al (2002: 13), claims that this present research is original in the following ways:

- It is authentic and the result of the researcher's own thoughts and faculties.
- The thesis is new in substance and has not been produced before.

- The study used an interview schedule that was devised by the researcher, and is original.

- The synthesis of the literature review is original.

- By interviewing the forty participants, in twenty different primary schools, the researcher produced a data-set that is original.

- The analysis and synthesis of the data, as shown in Chapter 5, is original.

- The conclusions are original, being based on an original sample of schools and respondents.

Furthermore, the conclusions of this study defined a number of significant outcomes for research to further advance understanding and development of primary school governance.

The present research supports and confirms the work of previous studies, as detailed in Chapter 2, but a number of original and substantive insights into primary school governance have been revealed. It has been shown that primary school governance is considered important in the development of education in England. Primary school head teachers have articulated the great support they get from their chairs of governance and their governing body. For some head teachers their jobs would be very difficult without this support. Chairs of governance have been shown to be committed to their roles and active in supporting and challenging schools. As unpaid volunteers, primary school governors give much time and effort to their role but remain generally hidden from the view of the public. Head teachers have little experience of school governing before appointment to their leadership role. School governance was found to be complex but governors were judged to be capable of doing the job. However, what is required of governors needs to be clarified by central government. The training of governors was found to be inadequate and there was inequality in information provision for governors. Recruitment of new governors was problematic for some schools in disadvantaged areas but, also, in more affluent areas. Some schools developed very close links with the community and had no difficulty with recruitment of new governors. Most primary school governing bodies use the services of a trained clerk and very much appreciate their expertise. Two schools in the sample of twenty schools had converted to academy status but the majority of the

other schools had little wish to change their status, preferring to stay within the local authority family of schools. Chairs of governance obtained benefit from the role of School Improvement Partners. Ofsted inspections and Local Authority support appear to aid the development of governance procedures.

Finally, the concepts of governor capital, agency and amplification (discussed in Chapter 2 and noted as under-researched) were found to be valid and need to be developed further by primary schools. Substantive and original insights into these concepts were provided by the present research – Figure 17 (an original diagrammatic representation) summarises the 'positive amplification' available to a school when governor 'capital' and 'agency' are strong. The strong 'capital' is shown by the range of knowledge, skills, capabilities and experience that individual governors bring to the governing body and, therefore to the leadership of the school – such governors typically being drawn from the parents, teaching staff, local community, local authority, universities, businesses, churches and including the head teacher and chair of governance. The limited period of governor tenure –and the consequent continual state of 'flux' - means that governor 'capital' may need to be considered annually by a governing body. An experienced, trained clerk makes an important contribution to the notion of strong governance 'capital' and with the head teacher and chair of governance forms a key section of the capital of all governing bodies.

The 'agency' of a governing body can be assessed by the level of "…proactivity, exertion, effort and endeavour…" (James et al, 2010: 85) of those involved in governance. A governing body with strong agency (as shown in Figure 17) meets regularly, has well-organised meetings and has a good understanding of their role. Such a governing body is outward facing and uses Ofsted inspections and local authority guidance to improve the governance process. The governors are committed to their roles and function, give much time to their governance tasks, consider themselves as part of the 'big society', involve minority ethnic groups and ensure that the school is rooted in the community. They know the school well as a result of regular visits to classes and school assemblies, their involvement in staff appointments and in full governing body meetings and sub-committees. During such meetings they have independent views, provide 'fresh eyes' and 'new slants' on issues, challenge, scrutinise and ask probing questions but also ensure that they are supportive and share

responsibilities and decision making. They act, at times, as a sounding board but ensure that the school is held to account and ensure that appropriate 'checks and balances' are considered. They have high aspirations for the school and all involved in it. They help the school 'celebrate' success. Such governing bodies act in a sophisticated, collaborative and collective manner with good working relationships.

The successful effect of this 'positive amplification' by governors, with strong capital and agency, was apparent in some schools in this present study but the lack of 'capital', 'agency' and the consequent 'negative amplification' was unfortunately evident in other schools. Individual governing bodies, local authority governance units and Ofsted need to give greater attention to these important concepts.

6.5   Reflections on the Research Process

This research involved forty interviews with each interview lasting approximately 50 to 70 minutes each. These interviews generated a relatively large data-set under four emerging themes. The transcription process was time consuming as was the analysis of so much data. Although a flexible design was used the findings were generally qualitative with little quantitative data. On reflection it may have been more appropriate to have used a questionnaire, so producing more quantitative data, and to have interviewed a smaller number of head teachers and chairs of governance. On the other hand, given the access difficulties described in Chapter 3, it may have been difficult to get sufficient responses from a questionnaire sample.

6.6 Future Research

During the course of this study a number of aspects of school governance have been revealed as requiring further research. Firstly, the results obtained in this study may have been influenced by the nature of the experimental sample employed. Further research is required to discover if similar findings are obtained when other samples are used. School governing is in a continual state of flux, particularly as a result of the possible year on year changes in governing body members, so longitudinal studies need to be conducted. There is very little research that has probed into what actually happens in primary school body governing meetings. Access to such meetings would probably be difficult but, for example, this study has shown great differences in the number of governor meetings held every year, yet each governing body has a similar

task to carry out. To understand primary school governance this researcher believes the need for such research into governance meetings is vital. Further insight is needed, beyond the study of Ranson et al (2005) in Wales, as to *how* governing bodies operate and the possible associated links with school performance. The outcomes of this present research suggest that other significant matters for further research are: the training of governors; the provision of information for governors; the recruitment of governors; the role of the governing body clerk and the governance of new forms of schools such as primary academies, free schools and trust schools. This study has focussed on the governance of primary schools in England, however, valuable insights into school governance may be gained from further research relating to secondary school governance and governance research from other school systems.

6.7 Concluding Comments

At the outset of this present study, school governance was described as being of international and national significance. Further, at the commencement of the study, and during the course of the investigation, scholars argued that school governance, despite being important, was an under-researched field. The research-based literature on school governance was considered to be less extensive than the literature relating to other aspects of school leadership, management and organisation. It is now evident that a number of recent substantive research studies – including Balarin et al (2008), Ranson (2011) and James et al (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012 and 2013) – have begun to address that imbalance. These studies have indicated the need for further research into, for example, the role of the chair of governance, the notions of governance capital and governance agency and the necessity of undertaking longitudinal studies of school governance.

This thesis describes a research project which investigated primary school governance in a sample of twenty primary schools drawn from ten local authorities in England. The views of key stakeholders – twenty head teachers and twenty chairs of governance – on primary school governance were elicited using semi-structured interviews during 2011. The findings of the research revealed the complexity, importance and worth of primary school governance. The importance of the 'civic capital' invested by volunteer governors from the local communities of the schools was shown. Particularly revealing was the value given, by headteachers in the sample,

to the support given by their governors. Governance was considered to work well when a head teacher was open and honest with his/her governors. However, concerns were expressed over the lack of clarity in what was required of school governors and governing bodies appeared to operate in a variety of ways with wide diversity in the number of meetings held per year in order to discharge their duties. The recruitment and training of governors, inequality in information provision and the use of trained clerks were shown to be challenges for the system of school governance. The concepts of governance 'capital' and governance 'agency', with the associated 'positive amplification' and 'negative amplification, have been shown to be of significant importance in the development of the work of governing bodies.

Finally, in addition to the context of this present research within the expanding national picture of school governance research, as described above, note needs to be made of the changes being made to the state education system as a result of government policy. This is resulting in an expanding number of new forms of primary schools – such as academies, free schools and trust schools – and new forms of governance in these schools. Additionally, since many of these new schools are directly funded by central government and, therefore, are independent of the present system of Local Authorities, new and independent families of schools such as 'chains' of academies are being developed. This neoliberal agenda, embracing privatisation and deregulation, with possible marginalization of the public domain and dismantling of the long established Local Authority system, has been studied by some scholars - for example Gunter (2011) and Gorard (2011) – but, along with the governance of academies and free schools, is a ripe area for further urgent research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

.

Adamson, S. (2007) *Start Here: What new school governors need to know,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd.

Adamson, S. (Ed.) (2008) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2008,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd.

Adamson, S. (Ed.) (2009) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2009,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd.

Adamson, S. (Ed.) (2010) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2010,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd.

Adamson, S. (Ed.) (2011) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2011,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd.

Adamson, S. (Ed.) (2012) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2012,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd.

Alexander, R. (Ed.) (2010) *Children, their World, their Education – Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Abingdon: Routledge.

ASCL, NGA, NAHT (2008) *What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies*, downloaded from www.nga.org.uk on 12th January 2009.

Association of Teachers and Lecturers (1999) *The School Governor,* London: ATL.

Balarin, M. and Lauder, H. (2008) *The Governance and Administration of English Primary Education* (Primary Review Research Survey 10/2), downloaded from www.primaryreview.org.uk on 3rd March 2008.

Balarin, M., Brammer, J., James, C. and McCormack, M. (2008) *The School Governance Study (University of Bath),* downloaded from www.bitc.org.uk/resources/publications/school_governance.html on 3rd September 2010.

Ball, S.J. (2011) 'Academies, Policy Networks and Governance' in H.M.Gunter(Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 146-158.

Banwell, L. and Woodhouse, R. (1996) 'Inequality in information provision: the case of school governors', *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 28, 1: 25-32.

Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. (2007) *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top*, London: McKinsey & Company.

Bassey, M. (1990) 'On the nature of research in education (Part 1)', *Research Intelligence,* BERA Newsletter No. 36 (Summer): 35-38.

Bassey, M. (2002) 'Case study research' in M. Coleman and A. Briggs (Eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, Chapter 6, 108-121.

Beckett, F. (2011) 'Preface' in H.M.Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, xx-xxiii.

Bell, J. (2004) *Doing Your Research Project* (3rd edn), Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bell, J., Bush, T. and Fox, A. (1984) *Conducting Small-Scale Investigations in Educational Management,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing /Open University.

BELMAS (2011) 'Special Edition: International Perspectives on School Governing under Pressure', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4 London: Sage.

Berry, R.S.Y. (1999) *Collecting data by in-depth interviewing,* paper presented at the BERA Annual Conference, University of Sussex at Brighton, September, downloaded from www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000001172 htm on 22nd September 2011.

Bird, S. (2002) *Governance Matters,* London: The Education Network/Co-ordinators of Governor Services (COGS).

Bird, S. (2003) *Do the Right Thing – How Governors can contribute to Community Cohesion and Accountability*, London: The Education Network/DfES.

Blaxter, L., Hughes, C. and Tight, M. (2002) *How to Research* (2nd edn), Buckingham: Open University Press.

Brehony, K.J. (1992) ''Active Citizens': the case of school governors', *International Studies in Sociology of Education,* 2, 2: 199-217.

Bryman, A. (2004) *Social Research Methods* (2nd edn), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brundrett, M. (2006) 'The impact of leadership training: stories from a small school', *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education,* 34, 2: 173-183.

Brundrett, M. (2012) 'The academisation of education: are schools getting better, worse, or just changing names?' *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 40, 3: 223-226.

Buchanan, C. and the Institute of Education, University of Warwick (2009) *An Investigation of Maintained Schools with a Non-faith Foundation* (Research Report DCSF-RR066), Nottingham: DCSF Publications.

Burton, D. and Bartlett, S. (2005) *Practitioner Research for Teachers,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Burton, N., Brundrett, M. and Jones, M. (2008) *Doing Your Education Research Project,* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Bush, T. (2002) 'Authenticity – reliability, validity and triangulation' in M. Coleman and A. Briggs (Eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, Chapter 4, 59-72.

Bush, T. and Bell, L. (Eds.) (2002) *The Principles and Practice of Educational Management*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Bush, T. and Gamage, D. (2001) 'Models of self-governance in schools: Australia and the United Kingdom', *International Journal of Educational Management*, 15, 1: 39-44.

Busher, H. (2002) 'Ethics of research in education' in M. Coleman and A. Briggs (Eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 73- 89.

Cabinet Office (2011) *Big Society*, downloaded from www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society on 23 August 2011.

Caldwell, B.J. (2011) 'The New Enterprise Logic of the Academy Programme' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 171-181.

Cavan, S. (1977), cited in L. Cohen, L. Manion and K. Morrison *Research Methods in Education* (5th edn.), London: RoutledgeFalmer: 56.

Chapman, C., Lindsay, G., Muijs, D., Harris, A., Arweck, E. and Goodall, J. (2010) 'Governance, Leadership and Management in Federations of Schools', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* 21, 1: 53-74.

Chikoko, V. (2007) 'Negotiating Roles and Responsibilities in the Context of Decentralised School Governance: A Case Study of One Cluster of Schools in Zimbabwe', *International Studies In Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management),* 35, 1: 22-40.

Children's Services Network / Local Government Information Unit (2008) 'Refocusing the role of governors' Conference – papers and personal notes, Congress Centre, London, 2nd June.

Children's Services Network / Local Government Information Unit (2009) 'Governance for 21st Century Schools' Conference – papers and personal notes, Novotel Hotel, London, 25th June.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2003) *Research Methods in Education* (5th edn.), London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) Research Methods in Education (7th *edn.),* London and New York: Routledge.

Coleman M. and Briggs A. (Eds.) (2002) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Connolly, M. and James, C. (2011) 'Reflections on Developments in School Governance: International Perspectives on School Governing under Pressure', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 39, 4: 501-509.

Coombes, H. (2001) *Research Using IT,* Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Creswell, J.W. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (3rd edn.), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark V.L. (2007) *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research,* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Croke, N. (2011) 'Academy Status' in S. Adamson. (Ed.) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2011,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd, 36.

Daniels, D. (2011) 'From Reality to Vision: The 'Birth' of the Petchey Academy in Hackney' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 92-104.

Dawson, C. (2007) *A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (3rd edn), Oxford: How to Books Ltd.

DCSF (2007) *The Children's Plan, Building Brighter Futures,* London: HMSO.

DCSF (2008a) *Governor's Guide to Trust Schools,* London: John Brown Group.

DCSF (2008b) '*Research into the role of school governors',* downloaded from http://www.governornet.co.uk on 6th March 2010.

DCSF (2009) *Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system,* London: HMSO.

DCSF (2010a) *The 21st Century School: Implications and Challenges for Governing Bodies* (A report from the Ministerial Working Group on School Governance), downloaded from http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk (ref: DCSF-00351-2010) on 20th April 2010.

DCSF (2010b) *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, The Rose Review*, Nottingham: DCSF Publications.

Dean, C., Dyson, A., Gallannaugh, F., Howes, A. and Raffo, C. (2007) *Schools, Governors and Disadvantage*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Deem, R. (1994) 'Free Marketeers or Good Citizens? Educational Policy and Lay Participation in the Administration of Schools', *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 42, 1: 23-37.

Denscombe, M. (2003) *The Good Research Guide* (2nd edn)*,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds) (2005) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (3rd edition),* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Department for Education (2012) *'Categories and roles of school governors'*, downloaded from www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance/becoming a governor/role on 7th July 2012.

DfE (2010) *The Importance of Teaching - The Schools White Paper*, London: HMSO.

DfES (2004a) *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, London: HMSO.

DfES (2004b) *Governing the School of the Future,* downloaded from http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk on 13 March 2008.

DfES (2006) *2020 Vision, Report of the Teaching and Learning Group,* Nottingham: DfES Publications.

DfES (2007) *A Guide to the Law for School Governors*, London: DfES.

Dobbins, K. (2009) 'Teacher creativity within the current education system: a case study of the perceptions of primary teachers', *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education,* 37, 2: 95-104.

Document Summary Service (2009) *The Bristol Guide: Professional Responsibilities and Statutory Frameworks for Teachers and Others in Schools*, Bristol: University of Bristol Graduate School of Education.

Earley, P. and Creese, M. (1998) 'School Governing Bodies: Rationale, Roles and Reassessment*', Viewpoint* (Institute of Education, University of London), September No. 8, 1-12.

Earley, P. and Creese, M. (2000) 'Walking the Tightrope? The Role of Teacher Governors'*, School Leadership and Management*, 20, 4: 475-487.

Earley, P., Evans, J., Collarbone, P., Gold, A. and Halpin, D. (2002) *Establishing the Current State of School Leadership in England*, HMSO (online) at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR336.pdf downloaded on 3rd October 2007**.**

Education Guardian (April 2008) 'The Governor – We look forward to having a say', 6.

Elliott, J. (2011) 'The Birth of Norwich's First School Academy: A Case Study' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme*, London: Continuum, 52-65.

Evans, K.M. (1984) *Planning Small Scale Research* (3rd edn), Windsor: NFER-NELSON Publishing Company Ltd.

Evans, R. (2007) *Who Governs Our Schools,* Axminister: Triarchy Press.

Farrell, C.M. (2005) 'Governance in the UK Public Sector: the Involvement of the Governing Board', *Public Administration,* 83, 1: 89-110.

Farrell, C.M. (2010) 'Citizen Participation in Governance', *Public Money and Management,* 20, 1: 31-37.

Farrell, C.M. and Jones, J. (1999) 'Evaluating stakeholder participation in public services – parents and schools', *Party and Politics,* 28, 2: 251-262.

Farrell, C.M. and Morris, J. (2003) 'The Neo-Bureaucratic State: Professionals and Managers and Professional Managers in Schools, General Practices and Social Work', *Organisation,* 10, 1: 129-157.

Faulkner, D.(1993) *Methodology Handbook: Professional Development in Action,* Milton Keynes: Open University.

FEdS/HTI (2010) '*Strategic Leadership in the 21st Century School – Report of the Second National Conference for Employee Governors'*, London: FEdS Consultancy Ltd.

FEdS/Unilever (2008) *'21st Century Governors – Report of the Inaugral National Conference for Employee Governors'*, London: FEdS Consultancy Ltd.

Fisher, D. and Hanstock, T. (1998) *Citing References,* Oxford: Blackwell's / Nottingham Trent University.

Frankel, H. (2010) 'Beyond Repair', *TES Magazine,* May: 10-17.

Frazer, L. and Lawley, M. (2000) *Questionnaire Design and Administration,* Brisbane: John Wiley and Sons.

Fuller, M., Fuller, U. and Cooley, R. (2002) *'E-Governor: web-enabled support for knowledge management in school governance'*, downloaded from http://www.cs.kent.ac.uk/pubs/2002/1521/content.htm on 17th December 2007.

Gibton, D. (2011) 'Post-2000 Law-based Educational Governance in Israel: From Equality to Diversity?', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4: 434-454.

Gillard, D. (2011) *Education in England: a Brief History,* downloaded from www.educationengland.org.uk/history on 30th June 2014.

Glatter, R. (2002) 'Governance, Autonomy and Accountability in Education' in T. Bush and L. Bell. (Eds.) *The Principles and Practice of Education Management,* London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 225-240.

Glatter, R. (2011) 'Joining Up the Dots: Academies and System Coherence' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 159-170.

Glatthorn A.A. (1998) *Writing the Winning Dissertation: A Step by Step Guide,* Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.

Gleeson, D. (2011) 'Academies and the Myth of Evidence-Based Policy: Limits and Possibilities' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 198-211.

Goldring, E. and Mavrogordato, M. (2011) 'International Perspectives on Academies: Lessons Learned from Charter Schools and Choice Options around the Globe' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 185- 197

Gorard, S. (2011) 'Are Academies Working?' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 120-132.

Gordon, P. (1974) *The Victorian School Manager,* London: Woburn Press.

Governornet (2008) '*Research into the role of school governors'* downloaded from www.governornet.co.uk on 28th May 2008.
Governornet (2010a) 'Class Action', *Governors,* 1.
Governornet (2010b) 'Sharing the Load', *Governors,* 1.
Greenfield, T. (Ed.) (2002) *Research Methods for Postgraduates* (2nd edn), London: Arnold / Hodder Headline.

Gunter, H.M. (Ed.) (2011) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum.

Gunter, H.M. (2011a) 'Introduction: Contested Educational Reform' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 1-18.

Gunter, H.M. (2011b) 'Conclusion: Public Education and Academies' in H.M. Gunter,. (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 212-233.

Hammersley-Fletcher, L. and Brundrett, M. (2005) 'Leaders on leadership: the impressions of primary school head teachers and subject leaders', *School Leadership and Management,* 25, 1: 59-75.

Hammersley, M., Gomm, R. and Woods, P. (1994) *Study Guide: Educational Research Methods,* Milton Keynes: Open University.

Harris, A. (2009) 'Leading Schools', *School Leadership and Management,* 29, 4: 335-336.

Harris, A. and Allen, T. (2009) 'Ensuring every child matters: issues and implications for school leadership', *School Leadership and Management,* 29, 4: 337-352.

Hart, C. (2003) *Doing a Literature Review,* London: Sage Publications.

Harwood-Smith, G. (2008) *Thinking Ahead: Exploring the strategic role that head teachers and governors carry out in partnership* (Research Associate Report), Nottingham: National College for School Leadership accessed at www.ncsl.org.uk and downloaded on 20th November 2008.

Hatcher, R. (2011) 'Local Government against Local Democracy: A Case Study of a Bid for Building Schools for the Future Funding for an Academy' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 39-51.

Heystek, J. (2011) 'School Governing Bodies in South African Schools: Under Pressure to Enhance Democratization and Improve Quality', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4: 455-468.

HM Government (2005) *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All: More Choice for Parents and Pupils*, London: HMSO.

HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government,* London: Cabinet Office downloaded from http://www.direct.gov.uk on 21st May 2010.

Holbrook, A., Bourke, S., Fairbairn, H. and Lovat, T. (2007) 'Examiner Comment on the Literature Review in Ph.D. Theses', *Studies in Higher Education, 32, 3: 337-356.*

House of Commons (1999) *Select Committee on Education and Employment (Fifth Report) ' School Governors',* United Kingdom Parliament Hansard Archives downloaded from http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect on 28th May 2008.

Huber, S.G. (2011) 'School Governance in Switzerland: Tensions between New Roles and Old Traditions', *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4: 469-485.

Information for School and College Governors (2007) *A Manual for Governing Bodies and their Clerks,* London: ISCG.

James, C., Brammer, S., Connolly, M., Fertig, M., James, J. and Jones, J. (2010) *The 'Hidden Givers': A Study of School Governing Bodies in England,* Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

James, C., Brammer, S. and Fertig, M. (2011a) 'International Perspectives on School Governing under Pressure', *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 39, 4: 394-397.

James, C., Brammer, S., Connolly, M., Fertig, M., James, J. and Jones, J. (2011b) 'School Governing Bodies in England under Pressure: The Effects of Socio-economic Context and School Performance', *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4: 414-433.

James, C., Brammer, S., Connolly, M., Fertig, M., James, J. and Jones, J.(2012) 'The Role of Chairs of School Governing Bodies in England', *School Leadership and Management,* 31, 1: 3-19.

James, C., Brammer, S., Connolly, M., Spicer, D.E., James, J. and Jones, J. (2013) *The Chair of the School Governing Body in England: Roles, Relationships and Responsibilities*, Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

Jones, J.L. (1998) 'Managing the induction of newly appointed governors', *Educational Research,* 40, 3: 329-351.

Jones, L., Pickard, A. and Stronach, I. (2008) *Primary Schools: The Professional Environment,* (Primary Review Research Survey 6/2), downloaded from www.primaryreview.org.uk on 3rd March 2008.

Karlsen, G.E. (2000) 'Decentralized centralism: framework for a better understanding of governance in the field of education', *Journal of Education Policy,* 15: 525-538.

Kerry, C. (2005) 'Head teacher performance management: an investigation of the role of the governor', *School Leadership and Management*, 25, 5: 473-492.

Kerry, C. (2006) 'High performance, higher standards', *Managing Schools Today,* 15, 6: 38-41.

Knowsley Council (2008) *The Knowsley Governor,* Autumn/Winter Issue 18.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009) *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Second Edition), Los Angeles: Sage.

Larsen, J., Bunting, V. and Armstrong, D. (2011) 'What Works? An Empirical Assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses and Next Steps for the Academies Initiative' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 105-119.

Leunig, T. (2011) 'Hold head teachers to account by giving governors greater power to remove those who underperform' *Times Education Supplement,* 13 May, 29.

Liverpool Education, Library and Sports Services (2004) *Governor News,* Autumn Issue 45.

Lord, P., Hart, R., Martin, K. and Atkinson, M. (2009) *Narrowing the Gap in Outcomes: Governance,* Slough: National Foundation for Education Research.

Macintyre, C. (2000) *The Art of Action Research in the Classroom,* London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd

Mansell, W. (2009) 'Who's in charge here?' *Education Guardian*, 10th November, 1.

Mansfield, S. (2009) 'Slimming Down – The governance review' in S. Adamson (Ed.) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2009,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd., pp 10-11.

Mansfield, S. (2011) 'The Ministerial Review, at last' in S. Adamson (Ed.) *The School Governors' Yearbook 2011,* Norwich: Adamson Publishing Ltd., pp 25-26.

Marley, D. (2009) 'Burden of responsibility weighs heavily on governors' heads', *Times Educational Supplement*, 13 March, 24-25.

Marley, D. (2011) 'Thousands of faith schools to be reborn as academies', *Times Education Supplement,* 6 May, 1.

Marriott, D. (2009) *Being Strategic: A Practical Guide for School Governors* (Second Edition), Norwich: Adamson Publishing.

Marriott, D. (2011a) *Monitoring and Evaluation: A Practical Guide for School Governors* (Third Edition), Norwich: Adamson Publishing.

Marriott, D. (2011b) *Being Strategic: A Practical Guide for School Governors* (Third Edition), Norwich: Adamson Publishing.

Martin, J. and Holt, A. (2007) *Joined-Up Governance: Making Sense of the Role of the School Governor* (2nd edn), Ely: Adamson Publishing.

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994) *Beginning Qualitative Research: A Philosophic and Practical Guide*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

McCrone, T., Southcott, C. and George, N. (2011) *Governance Models in Schools,* Slough: NFER.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd edn*),* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Millar, F. (2008) 'We need to keep governors on board' *Education Guardian,* July 8, 4.

National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (2009). *School Leadership Today,* Nottingham: National College Publishing.

National Governors' Association (2007) *Governors' News,* February.

Newcastle City Council (April, 2012) *GoverNews*, Issue 41.

Newman, J. (2001*) Modernizing Governance,* London: Sage.

Ofsted (2011) *School governance: learning from the best,* downloaded from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100238 on 16th June 2011.

Parker, L. and Raihani, R. (2011) 'Democratizing Indonesia through Education? Community Participation in Islamic Schooling', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 39, 6: 712-732.

Pearson, S. (2011) 'Narrowing the Gap between 'Intention and Reality': The Case of Special Educational Needs Governors in English Schools', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 39, 6: 695-711.

Phillips E.M. and Pugh D.S. (2000) *How to get a Ph.D.* (3rd edn), Buckingham: Open University Press.

Potter, S. (Ed.) (2002) *Doing Postgraduate Research,* London: Sag /Open University.

Pounce, M. (2007) *Head teachers and Governing Bodies: a practical guide to making the partnership work*, Norwich: Adamson Publishing.

Pounce, M. (2008a) 'Head teachers and governors: a marriage made in heaven?', *Management in Education,* 22, 8: 8-10.

Pounce, M. (2008b) '*A fresh look at reporting and accounting'* downloaded from http://www.teachingexpertise.com/articles on 9th June 2008.

Pounce, M. and Mansfield, M. (2008) 'Smaller and more effective governing bodies' *Governors'Agenda,* 52, May: 1-2.

Purcell, K. (2011) 'Academy Consultation Meetings: Local Discourse on a National Policy' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 66-75.

Ranson, S. (2011) 'School Governance and the Mediation of Engagement', *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4: 398-413.

Ranson, S. and Crouch, C. (2009) *Towards a new governance of schools in the remaking of civil society - research paper*, Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

Ranson, S., Farrell, C., Peim, N. and Smith, P. (2005a) 'Does governance matter for school improvement?', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 16(3): 305-325.

Ranson, S., Arnott, M., McKeown, P., Martin, J. and Smith, P. (2005b) 'The participation of volunteer citizens in school governance', *Educational Review,* 57, 3: 357-371.

Ranson, S., Martin, J., McKeown, P. and Arnott, M. (2003) 'Parents as Volunteer Citizens: Voice, Deliberation and Governance', *Parliamentary Affairs,* 56: 76-732.

Reeves, G. (Ed.) (2002) *The Governor's Handbook: The Complete Guide to Being a Primary School Governor*, London: pfp Publishing Limited.

Rhodes, C. and Brundrett, M. (2006) 'The identification, development, succession and retention of leadership talent in contextually different primary schools: a case study located within the English West Midlands', *School Leadership and Management,* 26, 3: 269-287.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research* (2nd edn), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Robson, C. (2004) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Rowley, H. and Dyson, A. (2011) 'Academies in the Public Interest: A Contradiction in Terms?' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 79-91.

Sallis, J. (2001) *Basics for School Governors,* Stafford: Network Educational Press.

Sallis, J. (2004) *Questions School Governors Ask,* Stafford: Network Educational Press Ltd.

Scanlon, M., Earley, P. and Evans, J. (1999) 'Improving the Effectiveness of School Governing Bodies', *Research Brief No. 111*, London: DfEE, 1-4.

School Governors' One-Stop Shop (2009) Make a difference in the community – be a school governor, *Newsletter No. 15*, April.

Shearn, D. et al. (1995) 'The Changing Face of School Governor Responsibilities: a mismatch between government intention and actuality?', *School Leadership and Management,* 15, 2:175-188.

Silverman, D. (2005) *Doing Qualitative Research* (2nd edn), London: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (2006) *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (3rd edn), London: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (2007) *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Qualitative Research*, London: Sage Publications.

Spencer, A. (2005) 'Robust relationships', *ldr The Magazine for School Leaders,* Nottingham: National College for School Leadership, June 2005, 17: 26-29.

Stake, R.E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research,* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Stake, R.E. (2005) 'Case studies' in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (3rd edition),* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 443-466.

Stake, R.E (2006) *Multiple Case Study Analysis,* New York: The Guilford Press.

Sugrue, C. (2009) 'From heroes and heroines to hermaphrodites: emasculation or emancipation of school leaders and leadership?' *School Leadership and Management,* 29, 4: 353-371.

Taylor, F. (Ed.) (2007) *A Manual for Governing Bodies and their Clerks,* London: Information for School and College Governors (ISCG).

Teachernet Online Publications (2004) '*Governing the school of the future'* (DfES reference 0786/2004), downloaded from http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk on 13th March 2008.

Teachers TV (2009) *Newsletter for School Governors,* Issue 1 (Autumn 2009) downloaded from www.teachers.tv/governors on 3rd December 2009.

Teachers TV (2010) *Newsletter for School Governors,* Issue 2 (Spring 2010) downloaded from www.teachers.tv/governors on 21st January 2010.

The National Strategies (Primary) (2009) *Strengthening governance: knowing your school,* The Improving Schools Programme, DCSF, downloaded from http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk on 11th September 2009.

The Open University (1994) *The Roles and Responsibilities of School Governing Bodies,* Milton Keynes: The Open University.

The United Kingdom Parliament Select Committee on Education and Employment Fifth Report (1999) *The Role of School Governors,* downloaded from www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmselect/cmeduemp/509/50904 on 26 May 2008.

Thody, A.M. (1990) Towards a New Interpretation of Governors' Roles in the 1980s, Unpublished Ph.D., University of Leicester.

Thody, A.M. (1992) *Moving to Management: School Governors in the 1990s,* London: David Fulton Publishers Ltd.

Thody, A.M. (Ed) (1994) *School Governors: Leaders or Followers?* Harlow: Longman.

Thody, A.M. (1997) *Leadership of Schools: Chief Executives in Education*, London: Cassell.

Thody, A.M. (1998) 'Training school principals, educating school governors' *International Journal of Educational Management*, 12, 5: 232-239.

Thody, A.M. (2006) *Writing and Presenting Research,* London: Sage Publications.

Thomas, G. (2013) *How to do your Research Project,* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Thomas, G. (2014) *How to do Your Case Study,* London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Walsh, M. (2001) *Research Made Real: A Guide for Students,* Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd.

Waterhouse, J. (2008) 'Raising aspirations within school communities: the Learning Catalyst project', *School Leadership and Management,* 28, 4: 369-384.

Waterman, C. and Shaw, G. (2010) *A Plain Guide to the Academies Act 2010,* Great Missenden: Iris Press.

West, A. and Ylonen, A. (2010) 'Market-oriented school reform in England and Finland: school choice, finance and governance', *Educational Studies,* 36, 1: 1-12.

Wisker, G. (2001) *The Postgraduate Research Handbook,* Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Wolfe, D. (2011) 'Academies and the Law' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy: The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 19-38.

Wong, K.K. (2011) 'Redesigning Urban Districts in the USA: Mayoral Accountability and the Diverse Provider Model', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 39, 4: 486-500.

Wragg, T. (2002) 'Interviewing' in M. Coleman and A. Briggs (Eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 143-158.

Wrigley, T. (2011) ''Rapidly Improving Results': Penetrating the Hype of Policy-Based Evidence' in H.M. Gunter (Ed.) *The State and Education Policy:The Academies Programme,* London: Continuum, 133-145.

Yin, R.K. (1994) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2nd edn), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2003a) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd edn), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2003b) *Applications of Case Study Research* (2nd edn), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Yin, R.K. (2014) Case Study Research: Design and Methods (5th edn), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1
Types of Governors

Parent governors

Each governing body has a number of places reserved for parents. All parents of registered pupils are eligible to stand as parent governors. Parent governors are elected for a period of four years. Elections are normally held – all school parents having the right to vote.

Local authority governors

Governors can be nominated by the local authority but not all local authorities take-up this option. Prior to 1988 the local authority governors were in the majority on many governing bodies.

Teacher governors

Teacher governors are elected from the teaching staff employed by the school. They cannot chair meetings and may be asked to withdraw when some 'sensitive' issues are being discussed.

The head teacher

The head teacher has the right to attend all governing body meetings but cannot chair any meetings. The head teacher can choose whether or not to be a governor. If they decide not to be a governor then they can attend meetings but have no voting rights.

Co-opted / community governors

These governors are not elected but are asked (co-opted) by the governors to join the governing body. Often they have local business interests or links with the local community. They might have skills or enthusiasm that the governors regard as valuable.

Foundation / partnership governors

Certain schools have foundation governors (sometimes called partnership governors). These schools are often supported by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England or other organisation or trust.

Trust governors

When a school is part of a cluster of schools supported by a trust then each governing body may have trust or sponsor governor as part of their governing body

The above has been compiled by referring to Adamson, S. (Ed.) (2011), Adamson, S. (2007), Alexander, R. (Ed) (2010), Information for School and College Governors (2007), Reeves, G. (Ed.) (2002), Newcastle City Council (April, 2012) and The Open University (1994).

APPENDIX 2
Categories of Schools

Community / Maintained Primary Schools

Community / Maintained primary schools are owned by and supported by the local authority. Some of these schools will be for children with severe special educational needs. All of these schools are required to have a governing body.

Foundation Primary Schools

These schools are state-funded but the governing body has greater freedom in running the school than in community schools. These schools replaced grant-maintained schools which were funded directly by central government. Foundation special schools meet the needs of children with severe special needs.

Voluntary-Aided and Voluntary-Controlled primary schools are varieties of faith school being closely linked to a Church or other religion. Voluntary- Aided schools are owned by the Church or a religious charity who appoint a majority of the governors and partly fund the schools. The premises of voluntary controlled schools may be owned by the Church or a charity but the schools are fully funded by the local authority. Only a minority of the governors are appointed buy the Church or charity.

Primary Academies

An academy is an independent school, free from local authority control, funded directly from central government. The land and buildings are owned by a trust. The trust appoints the governing body – this does not have the same rules about its constitution as a community school.

Free Schools

Free schools are independent schools, funded by the state, set up in response to demand from parents, an education charity or a religious group. They have academy status and therefore the same independence. Free schools are governed by non-profitable charitable trusts that sign funding arrangements with the Secretary of State.

Federated Primary Schools

Federations are groups of schools with agreements to work together to raise standards. Schools described as a 'hard federation' have a single governing body. Schools that have decided to federate less tightly are referred to as a 'soft federation' – each school retaining their governing body.

Independent Schools

These schools are often referred to as 'public schools' and private schools. However, they are completely independent of local authorities and the parents of pupils at these schools have to pay annual fees. Many of these schools have 'governing bodies' but the composition of these groups varies from school to school.

<u>Trust Schools</u>

A Trust School is a Local Authority maintained school supported by a charitable trust which appoints some of the governors. It operates within the same framework as other Local Authority maintained schools. The school's governing body becomes the employer of the staff. A trust school remains part of the LA family of maintained schools.

APPENDIX 3
Families of Schools

Local Authorities

Following the 1944 Education Act, over 100 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were established across England having responsibility for infant, junior, primary, secondary and special schools. The education service was often described as 'national with local administration'. More recently the amalgamation of children's services with education services has led to the establishment of Local Authorities (LAs). Governor Services, within each LA, provide training and information.

Chains of Academies

Following the creation of independent academies a number of such schools now belong to newly established 'chains'. Such chains of academies provide, for example, training and information for governors which was previously supplied by LAs.

Multi-School Trusts

Another 'family of schools' are established when a number of schools jointly form a trust. In such cases the trust is often supported by a business or a range of businesses. The schools stay within their local authority, have their own governing bodies, but work to their advantage collectively within the trust.

Clusters / Networks

In many LAs schools are organised into clusters or networks. Each school still operates as normal with their own governing bodies. The cluster or network might organise, for example, subject training or joint training for staff and/or governors.

APPENDIX 4
School Details

Details of the primary schools studied as individual cases are given below. Ofsted reports have been used in compiling the details for each school.

S1

S1 was a mixed community primary school with approximately 270 pupils, aged 3 to 11, on roll. The school was located in a relatively disadvantaged area of a town in the North East of England. Within the school there were over 34 different minority ethnic groups – nearly three quarters of these children did not speak English as a second language. More pupils than normal moved in and out of the school during the school year. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs was higher than average. A high proportion of pupils had circumstances which made them vulnerable. The governors provided a breakfast club every morning. The Ofsted inspection grading for this school was 'satisfactory'.

S2

Located in a small village in North Yorkshire, this mixed, Church of England, voluntary controlled school had approximately 68 pupils, aged 4 to 11, on roll. This school was smaller than average and had three mixed age classes. All pupils were of White British heritage and few were known to be eligible for free school meals. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was about half the national average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs was broadly average. This school was judged by Ofsted as 'satisfactory'.

S3

S3 was a mixed community junior school in Merseyside with approximately 226 pupils on roll. The pupils were aged between 7 and 11 years. The vast majority of the pupils were of White British backgrounds and an average proportion were entitled to free school meals. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was above average. The school had the Financial Management Standards in Schools Award. The Ofsted inspection grading for this school was 'outstanding'.

S4

 S4 was a hard federation of two Roman Catholic primary (voluntary aided) mixed schools situated in an inner city area with well above average levels of social deprivation. The federation was above average in size having approximately 388 pupils, aged 3 to 11, on roll. 82 per cent of the pupils are White British and there is a mix of minority ethnic groups – mainly Black African and Caribbean. Approximately 8 per cent of the pupils were from refugee families or seeking asylum, and some of these were at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. Their first languages include French, Lithuanian and Portuguese. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs was above average at 25 per cent. The needs of these children included moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties or autism. Children entered the nursery with well below average attainment. Pupil mobility was significant by the end of Year 6. This hard federation was judged by Ofsted to be 'outstanding'.

S5

This mixed, Church of England voluntary aided, junior school was located in a socially and economically above average suburb of a city in the North of England. With approximately 210 pupils on roll the school was an average sized junior school. Nearly all of the pupils were of White British heritage; a small number of pupils were learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was below average. The number of children having special educational needs was below average. The number of pupils joining or leaving the school other than at the usual times was about average. This school was rated 'good' by Ofsted.

S6

This larger than average (364 pupils) mixed community junior school was located in a relatively advantaged small town in the North of England. Most pupils were of White British heritage; the number of pupils from minority ethnic groups was much lower than the national average and few pupils spoke English as an additional language. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals was smaller than the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs was in line with the national average. Ofsted judged this school as 'good'.

S7

This voluntary aided, mixed, Roman Catholic, primary school was located in a disadvantaged area of a northern inner city. It was a one form entry school with more boys (60 per cent) than girls. The proportion of the 164 pupils eligible for free school meals was three times the national average. The proportions of pupils from a minority ethnic background and those who speak English as a second language was higher than in most schools – these are mainly Polish pupils. The school has double the average of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Reduced numbers in recent years had led to a local authority review of places – as a result the school had to reduce the numbers of teachers and teaching assistants. The governors managed a breakfast club. This school was judged by Ofsted to be 'satisfactory'.

S8

Most of the pupils in this inner-city, mixed, community school were from an extremely wide range of minority ethnic groups. With approximately 232 pupils aged 3 to 11 on roll. S8 was an average sized school. An increasing number of pupils were from European countries and they joined the school with no English. A significant minority of pupils joined and left the school at other than the normal times. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was much higher than that seen in most similar schools. The proportion of pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities is above average. A breakfast club was provided by the school. Ofsted graded this school as 'good'.

S9

Situated in a relatively poor area of a small town in the North of England, S9 was a larger than average sized mixed primary school with approximately 280 pupils on roll. An above average proportion of pupils had special educational needs and disabilities. One third of pupils, well above the national average, were known to be eligible for free school meals. Almost all of the pupils were of White British heritage with none at the early stages of speaking English as an additional language. This was a 'satisfactory' school as judged by Ofsted.

S10

This voluntary aided mixed Roman Catholic primary school had approximately 200 pupils, aged 4 to 11, on roll. Located on the edge of a city in the North East of England the school catchment area covered a wide socio-economic range. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was well below average. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was below average. This school was judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding'.

S11

S11 was a mixed Church of England (voluntary-aided) primary with approximately 421 pupils on roll. This much larger than average primary school was located in a relatively prosperous area in the north-west of England. The vast majority of pupils were of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals was below average as was the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Ofsted rated this school as 'good'.

S12

S12 was a mixed community infant school with approximately 260 pupils on roll. This larger than average school was located in a former mining community within a city in the North East of England. Almost all of the pupils were of White British heritage – none of whom spoke English as an additional language. A higher than average number of the pupils were known to be eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was above average. The school had extended its services - providing day care and Kiddywinxs for pre-school children. Additionally breakfast, after school club and a holiday club were provided for the school pupils. This infant school was judged as 'good' by Ofsted.

S13

Located in a relatively prosperous suburb of Merseyside, S13 was a mixed community junior school. With approximately 346 pupils, aged 7 to 11 years, on roll, S13 was larger than average in size. Most pupils were of White British heritage with a small proportion speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was about half that found nationally. A smaller percentage of pupils had special educational needs and/or disabilities than that found nationally. The Ofsted grading for this school was 'satisfactory'.

S14

This voluntary aided Roman Catholic junior school – located in a small town in the North East of England - was in a hard federation with the adjoining infant school. The schools shared the same head teacher and governing body. The vast majority of the 154 pupils of this school were of White British heritage. An average number of pupils were eligible for free school meals. The number of pupils with special educational needs was above average. This school was judged by Ofsted as 'satisfactory'.

S15

S15 was a mixed, voluntary aided, Roman Catholic primary school located in a small Yorkshire town. The school was much smaller than average with 27 children, aged 4 to 11, on roll. The pupils accessed the school from a wide area and were of different social backgrounds. Almost all the pupils were of White British background. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was higher than average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was above the national average. S15 was judged to be 'satisfactory' by Ofsted.

S16

Located in a small Lancashire town, S16 was a voluntary aided Church of England mixed primary school. With approximately 170 pupils on roll the school was smaller than average. The area from which the pupils were drawn was of considerable social and economic disadvantage, consequently the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was above average. Most of the pupils were from White British families; the number of pupils from minority ethnic groups was well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was slightly above the national average. More pupils joined and left the school at times above the national average. This school was judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding'.

S17

S17 was a voluntary controlled Methodist mixed primary school located in a northern city. With approximately 230 pupils, aged 3 to 11, this school was smaller than average and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was below average. Most pupils were of White British background. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds was well below average. The number of pupils with English as an additional language was well below average. The number of pupils with special educational needs was well below average. S17 was, in Ofsted's judgement, a 'good' school.

S18

Situated in a relatively advantaged suburban area of a northern city, S18 had 410 pupils, aged 4 to 11, on roll. Just less than one quarter of the pupils were Jewish.
In this voluntary-aided mixed school the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was well below the national average. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities was below the national average. Ofsted rated this school as 'satisfactory'.

S19

This mixed school was located in a pleasant suburb within a large town in the North of England. With approximately 390 pupils, aged 4 to 11, on roll it was larger than the national average. The vast majority of pupils were of White British origin with a small number from other ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals was much lower than average. The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs was lower than the average for similar schools. The infant and junior schools were federated and had recently acquired academy status. The governing body and leadership team were shared by both schools. Ofsted judged S19 as a 'good' school.

S20
This much smaller than average, approximately 60 pupils on roll, mixed community primary school was located in a North Yorkshire village. All of the pupils were of White British background. All spoke English as their first language. No families claimed free school meals. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was average. The school had recently acquired academy status. Ofsted judged this school as 'satisfactory'.

APPENDIX 5

Map: Location of the Schools

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

DATE

Dear Colleague,

Primary School Governance

Following my recent telephone conversation with you, I enclose further details of my Ph.D. research on primary school governance. I am undertaking this research at Liverpool John Moores University, under the supervision of Professor Mark Brundrett.

In our conversation you expressed an interest in being involved in this study and, consequently, I include a participant information sheet which gives you further information on the purpose of the study and your involvement. I also include a consent form – I would be most grateful if you could complete this and return it to me. If you agree to be interviewed I will then telephone you to arrange a convenient time and date.

As we discussed, it would be most helpful if I could interview your Chair of Governance and I include a participant information sheet and consent form for you to forward to him/her. It would be extremely helpful if I could interview you both (approximately 1 hour each) on the same day.

I believe that this research has the potential to add significantly to knowledge in this field – there are relatively few studies of primary school governance at present – and therefore help the development of school governing bodies.

Your assistance in participating in my research is very much appreciated. If you require any further information please contact me.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Dixon
Principal Lecturer in Primary Education / Partnership Manager
Tel: 0151-231-5284, email: m.r.dixon@ljmu.ac.uk

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR HEAD TEACHERS AND CHAIRS OF GOVERNANCE

Title of Study-   Primary School Governance: The Perspectives of Head Teachers and Chairs of Governance

Researcher – Malcolm Dixon (Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure)

"You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide if you want to take part or not."

1.   What is the purpose of the study?

Over 350,000 unpaid volunteers currently serve as school governors in primary and secondary schools throughout England – influencing the leadership and management of 23,000 schools and the education of over 8 million children. Currently, there appears to be relatively few research studies of primary school governance and it has been argued that studies of educational management and administration often neglect the framework of governance within which school leaders operate.

The purpose of this study is to inform the further improvement and development of primary school governance. It will explore current practices and experiences in the governance of primary schools by drawing on the perspectives of head teachers and chairs of governance from 20 contextually different primary schools. The 20 schools have been selected, from primary schools in the north of England, to ensure that they represent the full diversity of primary provision in terms of school size and type including inner-city, suburban and rural; a multi-cultural mix (from schools with a low percentage of ethnic minority pupils to those with a high percentage of ethnic minority pupils) and a range of religious denominations. The sample includes high, medium and low achieving schools – school league tables and Ofsted reports being used to help assess the extent to which the sample of schools are representative of English primary schools.

2. Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this study is voluntary.

After reading this information sheet you are asked to decide if you wish to take part in the study.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

3. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you wish to take part then I would be grateful if you could complete the consent form and return it in the envelope provided. I will then contact you to arrange a suitable day and time for a short interview. The interview will take place in a quiet room within your school and will last approximately 50 to 70 minutes.

4. Are there any risks / benefits involved?

No risks are envisaged by participation in this study. The interview will give you an opportunity to contribute your views and experiences to a research study into school governance. The study aims to improve and develop the effectiveness of school governance and so contribute to an important area of school leadership.

5. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

The information provided in interviews is totally confidential. No names will be reported in any research publications. Similarly, direct quotations when used in research reports will not be traceable to individuals or schools. Data stored on the investigator's computers will be password protected. Written files will be kept in locked cabinets. Tape recordings of interviews will be stored in locked cabinets and destroyed after transcription.

Contact Details of the Researcher:

Malcolm Dixon
Principal Lecturer / Partnership Manager
Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure
Liverpool John Moores University
Marsh Campus
Barkhill Road
Liverpool L17 6BD

Email: m.r.dixon@ljmu.ac.uk
Tel: 0151 – 231 – 5284

Note: A copy of the participant information sheet should be retained by the participant with a copy of the signed consent form.

LIVERPOOL JOHN UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Primary School Governance: The Perspectives of Head Teachers
and Chairs of Governance

Researcher: Malcolm Dixon (Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

    YES   NO

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, and that this will not affect my legal rights.

    YES   NO

3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential.

    YES   NO

4. I confirm that I agree to be interviewed and understand that this interview will be tape-recorded (this tape will be destroyed once the interview is transcribed).

    YES   NO

5. I understand that 'direct quotations' made during my interview may be used in research reports, but that these will be anonymised and not traceable to myself or my school.

    YES   NO

6. I agree to take part in the above study.   **YES   NO**

Name of Participant:
Date:
Signature:

Name of Researcher:
Date:
Signature:

On completion, 1 copy of this form for participant and 1 copy for researcher.

LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Governing Primary Schools : The Perspectives of Head Teachers and Chairs of Governance

Name of interviewee:
Email address:
Position: Head teacher / Chair of Governance

Read Participant Information Sheet? YES / NO (tick)

Completed Consent Form and given a copy? YES / NO (tick)

Location of interview:
Date:
Time:

Thank you for being willing to take part in my research on primary school governance.
There appears to be relatively little research on primary school governors. As a former chair of governance, and university principal lecturer, I am investigating current practices and experiences, in the governance of primary schools, by interviewing head teachers and chairs of governance in 20 different schools across the North of England. The overall aim of this research study is to contribute to the further development and improvement of primary school governance.
This interview will last about 60 minutes. All of the information you give will be totally confidential and anonymous. I am interested in your opinions and experiences. Anything you would like to ask at this stage?

Warm Up Question: **Could you start by briefly telling me about yourself and how and when you started your involvement with school governance?**

QUESTIONS and PROMPTS	FIELD NOTES
Theme 1: The Civic Role **How important do you consider primary school governance to be? Does it matter? Is it worth the time and effort?** Why? Benefits? Examples? **Is it necessary for governors to come from the local community?** Reasons? **Do you consider that your governors find their roles challenging, complex and time consuming?** Examples? **Are your governors capable of doing the job required of them?** Examples? **How could we make primary school governance better?** How? Smaller? Larger? Specific examples?	

QUESTION and PROMPTS	FIELD NOTES
Theme 2: Function and Operation **How many full governor meetings and sub-committee meetings do you hold each year?** Probe what the sub-committees are for? **How effective is your governing body?** Why is it like that? Benefits to school, staff and pupils? How does it operate? Rating? Outstanding? Good? Satisfactory? Ineffective? **How important are relationships in the operation of your governing body?** Key relationships? Developing the team? Team building? **Do you consider that your governing body 'challenges' and 'supports'?** Examples? Is the 'challenging' difficult to do? **Do you regard the governing body as an integral part of the school leadership?** **Has the 'strategic' role of the governors ever caused difficulties with the 'operational' role of the head teacher?** Examples? **What are your views on School Improvement Partners (SIPs)?** Should they be more involved? **Do the governors help to raise standards in the school?**	

QUESTIONS and PROMPTS	FIELD NOTES
Theme 3: Training and Information	
What training have <u>you</u> had in relation to being a school governor?	
Head teacher?	
Chair?	
NPQH / Masters / Initial training	
Do you need more training?	
What training takes place, on an annual basis, for your governors?	
Funding allocated?	
More training needed?	
Where does your governing body get the information it needs to fulfil its role?	
Government guide to the law?	
Governor services?	
Websites?	

QUESTIONS and PROMPTS	FIELD NOTES
Theme 4: Challenges and Tensions	
Do you have any difficulties with the turnover of governors?	
How do you recruit new governors?	
What are the future challenges facing your governing body?	
Do you use the services of a governing clerk? Local authority? School? Other? Value? Cost?	
Finally, what are your views on the future challenges of different types of schools, such as academies, trusts, free schools, academy chains, federations and clusters of schools?	

The questions have now finished!

Is there anything you would like to add?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

THANKS, again, for your time and help.

APPENDIX 10
Case Study School S16 - Transcripts

Located in a small Lancashire town, S16 was a voluntary aided Church of England mixed primary school. With approximately 170 pupils on roll the school was smaller than average. The area from which the pupils were drawn was of considerable social and economic disadvantage, consequently the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals was above average. Most of the pupils were from White British families; the number of pupils from minority ethnic groups was well below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities was slightly above the national average. More pupils joined and left the school at times above the national average. This school was judged by Ofsted as 'outstanding'.

CHAIR OF GOVERNANCE

Warm Up Question: **Could you start by briefly telling me about yourself and how and when you started your involvement with school governance?**

I'm retired…71 today…started my involvement when my children were at school… 1974, 1975…became the school correspondent… then became a governor…have been a governor here for twenty years…12 years the chair here. I enjoy it, it is a fantastic school with a fantastic head and staff. It wasn't always like this…it was run down…our new head teacher has made it much better. We get young teachers and train them up. I am enthusiastic…I'm on the Schools Forum…wouldn't have time to work these days.

Theme 1: The Civic Role

How important do you consider primary school governance to be?
Does it matter? Is it worth the time and effort?

I sometimes wonder. I think the secret is to have a good head teacher. We have 18 governors but only about 5 really get involved. The role of the governing body is to put the children first; we are an outstanding school but we are always striving to be better. I think the best head teachers are innovators. The school could probably operate without the governors but we did appoint the head teacher and we went to three rounds of interviews before we got the excellent head that we have now. We had to advertise three times to get the person we wanted. Generally we are a very happy governing body. Traditionally we are a 'critical friend' – our role is to challenge as well as dealing with the 'red tape', the statutory stuff. Relationships between myself and the head are very good – I couldn't imagine anything else, it is essential. We got 'outstanding' from Ofsted…this is on the internet…parents see it.

Is it necessary for governors to come from the local community?

I don't suppose it is really…probably a mixture I suppose. My appointment is through the church…most of the governors have come through the church.
We have 10 governors from the church and eight other governors including some from the Trust…they can't always attend, that is a bit of a problem.

Do you consider that your governors find their roles challenging, complex and time consuming?

Yes they do. With all my experience I still find it challenging. The 'main' people don't have any difficulties.

Are your governors capable of doing the job required of them?

We could do with more expertise, say finance…but I have an insurance background so I'm happy with figures.

How could we make primary school governance better?
Can always make things better. I think probably a smaller governing body, less

dead wood. To try to encourage them to do more training.

Theme 2: Function and Operation

How many full governor meetings and sub-committee meetings do you hold each year?

One main meeting per term….November, March, April. Starts at 4pm and finishes at 6pm. Might have 35 items on the agenda. Two other sub - committees per term.

How effective is your governing body?

Could be better if more people got involved. Now we are in a Trust we have business and university partners. The head teacher got them on board. I think we are good on most things, I don't think we are outstanding.

How important are relationships in the operation of your governing body?

Our relationships are very good…couldn't imagine any thing else…it would be horrendous. You've got to have a good working relationship with your head teacher.

Do you consider that your governing body 'challenges' and 'supports'?

All of our children are individually monitored…we have access to all of the data, same with the finances. I do give the head and the school a lot of support.

Do you regard the governing body as an integral part of the school leadership?

Yes, I suppose we are. We try to raise standards.

**Has the 'strategic' role of the governors ever caused difficulties
with the 'operational' role of the head teacher?**

No, but she does run everything before me. We get on like a house on fire.
We work together.

What are your views on School Improvement Partners (SIPs)?

They are on the way out. We have good and bad ones. We are buying in one as a
consultant because she was so good.

Do the governors help to raise standards in the school?

Directly... no...that is the teachers' job. But we do ask questions and probe into the
achievement of the children. We want the best for our children. We have made great
efforts to recruit male teachers and we have 7 men on the staff. Consequently we have
a broad curriculum including a wide range of sporting activities. Important to have
male teachers on the staff…some schools don't. If we challenge, then it is for the
children…to make things better. (Chair S16)

Theme 3: Training and Information Sharing

What training have <u>you</u> had in relation to being a school governor?

I've been on every course. I go at least three times a year. Over the years I must have
been on over thirty courses. I go to refresh myself. Some are good, some aren't!

What training takes place, on an annual basis, for your governors?

At every meeting we encourage them to go on courses. Not everyone does go.

**Where does your governing body get the information it needs to fulfil its
role?**

From the head teacher basically. At the resource committee.
The head shows us the RAISEonline data. I'm sure one governor uses the
internet and there is on-line training now.

Theme 4: Challenges and Tensions

Do you have any difficulties with the turnover of governors?

Sometimes it is difficult to recruit. We are one short at present.

How do you recruit new governors?

Mainly through the church.

What are the future challenges facing your governing body?

Academies…funding…budgets are being cut or frozen. Our staff are relatively cheap because they are young.

Do you use the services of a governing body clerk?

Yes, we use a trained clerk. He was a clerk for the local authority but now has his own clerking business**.** He is very good.

Finally, what are your views on the future challenges of different types of schools, such as academies, trusts, free schools, academy chains, federations and clusters of schools?

We are part of a Trust here, with three other primary schools...outside partners ...a football club, a university, two large companies, a television channel. Our head teacher got most of the partners. Mixed views about becoming an academy. It would require more work from the head teacher and we would lose the support of the Local Authority. We would gain about £90,000 but it would have to be managed – a business manager - and we would have to buy in more services. We are still batting it around – although it looks like all schools could become academies. So much going on with our Trust…we have a Chief Executive now. The representative from the football club has been very helpful…with waste management, energy etc. If we became an academy it would mean more work for the head teacher. Our head teacher could cope…but what would happen with another head teacher.

HEAD TEACHER

Warm Up Question: **Could you start by briefly telling me about yourself and how and when you started your involvement with school governance?**

Have been head here from 2000. My first involvement as a governor was 25 years ago in my children's school. So I have 25 years experience of governance.

Theme 1: The Civic Role

How important do you consider primary school governance to be?
Does it matter? Is it worth the time and effort?

Definitely. As a primary school head you feel very responsible, very much alone, taking big decisions. You need to share those decisions because you are dealing with public finances. You need to recruit your governors carefully – as important as recruiting good teachers. You need support and challenge from the governors. You need to empower your governors to challenge you, they don't do it easily. Need a wide range of skills on the governing body. Our meetings are very business-like. Little from the local authority.

Is it necessary for governors to come from the local community?

I think it is important for the chair to come from the local community, especially in a church school. But I don't think it is important for the rest to come from the local community – in fact I think you could be quite blinkered. Being in a trust we have a good number from outside the immediate school community.

Do you consider that your governors find their roles challenging, complex and time consuming?

There are different layers of challenge. The people who have been on courses, the business people who relate the school to things happening in their own business. It is time consuming…but it is their choice.

Are your governors capable of doing the job required of them?

I meet the chair every week, we trust each other. He knows the school very well and I am very open with him.

How could we make primary school governance better?

A school has to be a successful business, making it the best school we can make it. The governing body has to take risks, within the law, and be creative.

I think there should be some accreditation for the governors. The governors are like a board of directors and they should be called school directors. They can put it on their CVs. Evening meetings devalue the governors – have to have afternoon meetings, three per year. Have to run the meetings slickly.

Theme 2: Function and Operation

How many full governor meetings and sub-committee meetings do you hold each year?

One main meeting per term, resources meeting and others as we need them.
The Trust meets every term and we hold fortnightly meetings for the heads.

How effective is your governing body?

Wasn't very good at all...we had one governor who brought her knitting, it was a social occasion. I have been very careful to bring good people onto the governing body and now it is a very professional outfit. The meetings are very focussed and business like. Outstanding as judged by Ofsted. We have systems in place so that they challenge me. Need a wide range of skills on the governing body. Ofsted said the governors are good. Since then we have worked on challenging.

How important are relationships in the operation of your governing body?

Has to be a good relationship between the chair and head. Our chair is strong but not a bully. He is passionate and takes great pride in the school.

Do you consider that your governing body 'challenges' and 'supports'?

Yes, the meetings make decisions. Waste of time if the governors don't make decisions to make the school better.The chair of governors gives me great support.

Do you regard the governing body as an integral part of the school leadership?

Yes I do. We have people with a wide range of skills...finance, marketing, an entrepreneur and an IT expert. Being part of a trust has helped us to bring new people onto the governors. This has 'lifted our game'.

Has the 'strategic' role of the governors ever caused difficulties with the 'operational' role of the head teacher?

When I first became a head, the then chair of governors, who was high up in the church, did get involved in the day to day management. He was very controlling. Now, with a different chair this never happens. I do want their help strategically…I don't want to be a 'dictator'.

What are your views on School Improvement Partners (SIPs)?

You pay them as a consultant…they shouldn't ask more than you ask them to do.

Do the governors help to raise standards in the school?

What they do is to make me lift my game.

Theme 3: Training and Information Sharing

What training have you had in relation to being a school governor?

Have been on some courses but have experience.

What training takes place, on an annual basis, for your governors?

I don't think the training is good enough...it is too blinkered, it should be much more business related so that the governors are more creative, risk taking, so that they are always searching to make the school better. I regard our governor meetings as business meetings ...they are our board. We hold them in the afternoon, not

the evenings. The meetings need to be run well, business like.

Where does your governing body get the information it needs to fulfil its role?

From me and the chair.

Theme 4: Challenges and Tensions

Do you have any difficulties with the turnover of governors?

Not easy to recruit from the church for governors but that might be because we are seeking the right people. Plenty of parents want to be governors.

How do you recruit new governors?

Through the Trust and the church.

What are the future challenges facing your governing body?

Building up our Trust.

Do you use the services of a governing body clerk?

Yes. He used to work for the local authority, now he has his own private business...governor services.

Finally, what are your views on the future challenges of different types of schools, such as academies, trusts, free schools, academy chains, federations and clusters of schools?

I have no experience of federations. We are in a Trust, it is fantastic. We have a chief executive now for the Trust. So we have 4 schools and 6 partners. We have three representatives from the trust on our governing body. It is working very well. Working in a trust has given us benefits in terms of advice from business people and other specialists. Helped with procurement and therefore financial benefits. Becoming a trust has strengthened everything and made the governors raise their game. We have business people on our governors and an entrepreneur who has lots of good ideas. We have a very good chair – he lives and breathes the school. However I do think you need governors or directors for each school, even though we have an over-arching group meeting as the Trust. This gives us a strategic way of working together.