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school governance



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Undercurrents

Vol 8 No 6: 16 February 2018

WHAT SHOULD STAFF MEMBERS WHO ARE ELECTED TO SERVE ON A GOVERNING BODY SEE AS THEIR ROLE?

This is the fourth in our series focusing on important matters related to the upcoming governing body elections. These elections, as you will doubtless be fully aware by now, will take place in all public schools across the country in the four-week period between 1 and 29 March 2018.

In this edition we look at the role of members of staff who are elected to serve on the governing body.

It has been disconcerting for us in the Governing Body Foundation to note a significant level of fall-out between staff members elected to serve on the governing body on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the principals and governors who serve with them. Most worrying of all, this fallout not only exists: there is clear evidence that it is on the increase.

In the vast majority of cases, the reason for the growing distance between the parties seems to come down to a lack of clarity around the role each is expected — or expecting — to play, but particularly a lack of such clarity on the part of staff members.

Increasingly, it seems that those elected by their colleagues in schools to serve on governing bodies see their role as that of a type of shop steward: the sort of representative one would find in organised **trade unions** rather than in **governance structures**. While we are not suggesting here that shop stewards have no role to play in a school, the election of a shop steward, and the carrying out of his or her duties by such shop steward, is markedly different from what is expected of those elected to be governors in a school. Staff members on governing bodies are meant to **contribute towards the governance of the school, not to use their position to usurp the role of the shop steward**.

The attached document — *The role of staff members on the governing body* — is our view of what role staff members should play in governance.

We hope that it is quite clear in what it suggests, and we will therefore not attempt to summarise it here. It is designed to be printed (with a few alterations to make it relevant to your school) and distributed to interested and relevant parties in the school. We suggest that principals or governing body chairs distribute them to the staff — those who hope to be elected, in order to clarify their role and inform them about what will be expected of them as governors — but also possibly to those whose involvement in the governing body is limited to voting in one or two of their peers. In this way, the voters can see what sort of person they should nominate and vote into a position on the governing body, and what they can legitimately expect of them, as well as what would **not** be fair to require of them.

We trust that the document eliminates misunderstandings and incorrect perceptions, limits uncomfortable fallouts, and enhances good governance in our schools.