



Guest blog by Andrew Wilkins. Reproduced with permission from SGOSS. Original blog posted [here](#).

### **School Governors - Changing The Way We Do Things**

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School governance has gained increasing amounts of media attention as the role and responsibilities of governors has radically changed. This change has been described as a shift from a 'stakeholder' model of governance to 'skills-based' and, as a result, school governing bodies are now sometimes described as 'amateurish' and/or failing to 'challenge heads forensically'. These concerns were brought to mass media attention in 2014 when three schools run by Park View Education Trust were placed in special measures by Ofsted because of 'some governors exerting inappropriate influence over the running of their schools'.

Hence in recent years we have witnessed a growing demand for professionals in school governance or the professionalisation of existing governors. This means that governors are increasingly involved in performance reviews, training and professional development in order to ensure they meet the high expectations now placed on them. Only recently, the Department for Education said 'it was now considering making all schools publish details of governing bodies'. Presumably this would include background details on each governor: skills, knowledge, professional experience, and so forth. Whilst I am not arguing against greater transparency in school governance – in fact, I would argue for more – I think it is important to consider some of these concerns which could lie behind the professionalisation of school governors.

School governance needs to be improved and made more rigorous under this new skills-based model. That is the key message from many of those in power who wish to see greater professionalization of governors, as if professionals are without

question more ethical, trustworthy and impartial in their decision making compared to non-professionals or non-experts. The same message was echoed back in 2013 by Lord Nash when he said 'Running a school is in many ways like running a business, so we need more business people coming forward to become governors'. But governors are not (only) compliance officers. Their role should not be limited to enhancing accountability to external authorities alone, like the Department for Education, the Education Funding Agency, Ofsted and (in the case of maintained schools) the Local Authority. Governors are also accountable to the students, parents and communities they serve.

On this account, it is useful to think about the importance of governors as 'critical citizens': citizens of a democratic polity with rights and freedoms to criticise the structures and processes by which peoples or communities are represented. In other words, we need to be wary of school governing bodies becoming (only) a microcosm for central activity where the role and responsibilities of governors is limited to overseeing checks and balances. The vision of a Big Society is one in which volunteerism, localism and decentralisation drives public sector reform; in which local public servants and communities acquire powers and freedoms to govern themselves according to the desires, needs and aspirations of the people they serve. For this vision to be realised, we need to ensure that volunteerism and localism does not become another means by which government steer school policy.