

Effective Governance - Supporting the Wellbeing of Headteachers

A well-informed governor will know that part of their role is to **monitor the wellbeing of the Headteacher**. This is a crucial responsibility for governors. A well supported, happy Headteacher is more likely to lead the school with a clear vision and support their staff and school community. They are also more likely to stay, providing consistency and steadiness in the school.

Some governors may use checklists to measure wellbeing or have a wellbeing day, where governors visit to interview staff. However, **have your governors considered that how they operate as a governing body can have a significant impact on wellbeing** in the school, particularly for the Headteacher? How can the governors show that they have had a tangible *impact* in this area?

Where schools have a good governing body, they support the wellbeing of the Headteacher and contribute to the successful leadership of the school. **Where governors are strong, Headteacher can feel supported, challenged and valued**. It can take some of the pressure off a Headteacher if they know that the governors understand and support the strategic vision of the school and work in partnership on this school improvement journey.

However where governors are ineffective, the pressure on Headteacher can increase significantly. In Kevin Harcombe's book 'How to survive and succeed as a Headteacher' (2010) Kevin describes how powerful the impact of governance can be for the wellbeing of a Headteacher. He splits governors into three categories; the good, the bad and the indifferent!

All this being said, the Headteacher also plays a major role in building a relationship with the governing body. Headteachers can also be 'good', 'bad' and 'indifferent'. **A 'good' Headteacher will understand that many governors do not start from a place of knowledge within the education system** and will therefore support new governors in developing knowledge of the school. In this role, the Headteacher can be as much a critical friend to the governors as the governors can be to the head, building an ethos of mutual trust and transparency. They will also ensure that governors are kept in the loop and consult them where this is appropriate. Through this approach, a Headteacher can forge excellent relationships with the governing body, which can strengthen the support around them.

Governing bodies and Headteacher should take time to reflect on whether the way they function as a governing body has a positive or negative impact on Headteacher's wellbeing. A few examples of this can be seen below;

Preparation for governing body meetings

Positive Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agenda has been planned in partnership by the chair of committee and the Headteacher, well in advance of the meeting. There is a clear reason for all paperwork requested in advance and this is read in advance of the meeting by all governors Governors arrive prepared and with comments or questions 	Positive Impact on head teacher wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comments and questions provide a seesaw of support and challenge, which help the Headteacher to feel valued by the governing body A well-timed meeting, leads to effective time management for the Headteacher. Preparation leads to an effective meeting, which enables the Headteacher to feel part of a strong, supportive team of governors
Negative Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One party (the head or the governors) completes the agenda without the other Governors do not read paperwork sent in advance 	Negative Impact on Headteacher wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A poorly constructed agenda can lead to an overrunning meeting, impacting upon rest, sleep and time with family. An agenda constructed without the input of the Headteacher can lead to stress, as the Headteacher feels that some high priorities for the school may not be able to be shared. The Headteacher may feel unvalued if paperwork is not read Headteacher frustrated by having to answer questions that are answered in the paperwork The Headteacher can feel anxious if there is a lack of preparation before the meeting, as they are unsure of what may be asked of them.

Governing Body monitoring visits in school

Positive Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Headteacher works with the governing body before the visit to plan how to best use the time during the visit. The visit is focused on a school improvement focus There is a clear purpose for the visit There is policy/ system for governor visits that has been read and understood by staff and governors 	Positive Impact on head teacher well being <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governors can celebrate with the Headteacher achievements towards priorities Governors can observe, recognise and validate the Headteacher's opinions of how challenging barriers to learning can be. Governors can contribute to the strategic decision making in the school in an informed way Governors are in an informed position to support the Headteacher when challenged by others The recording of an effective visit gives the Headteacher additional evidence to support their judgements of the school
Negative Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governors visit the school without a clear purpose Governors become operational during their visit and involve themselves in activities that are not a part of their role Governors inadvertently upset staff through a misunderstanding of the remits of their visit. Governors' reports are personal opinion, rather than an evaluative statement linked to progress of a key priority. Governors do not turn up when visits are booked in 	Negative Impact on Headteacher wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headteacher has to find more time to monitor as governor visits cannot be used as evidence Headteacher needs to find time to support other staff that have been upset by a governor visit. Headteacher needs to spend time rebuilding the relationship between staff and governors after teachers have prepared themselves for a visit and governors have not attended. Headteacher does not feel valued by governors

These are only a couple of examples of how governing bodies can have a phenomenal impact on Headteachers; their health, their workload and their attitude towards their role in the school. It is a very powerful and privileged position for a volunteer and the excellent impact that a good governing body can have on the wellbeing of a Headteacher can never be underestimated.

Where there are serious concerns for a Headteacher's wellbeing, which go beyond the remit of a governor

Support for the wellbeing of a Headteacher can only be taken so far for a governing body. Sometimes the role is to recognise where wellbeing may be so low that further professional support will need to be sought. A good governing body will provide good eyes and ears in a school and you may be able to recognise early indicators that enable the Headteacher to find the support they need. Some of the agencies that you may signpost to are below;

- **The employee assistance programme (EAP)** The employee assistance programme is provided for all schools by Cambridgeshire local authority. EAP are intended to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their work performance, health and wellbeing. EAP generally include assessment, short-term counselling and referral services for employees and their immediate family. If you are not already aware of this excellent service available free to Cambridgeshire LA schools, please spend some time reading about the services they can provide. You can find information about the programme by clicking [here](#)
- **Other websites for support**
 - [Young Minds](#) also offer training and support for school staff.
 - [CALM](#) (Campaign against living miserably)
 - [Samaritans](#)