

Improving the Inclusivity and Diversity of School Boards in England.

Introduction

As the recent report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED, 2021) indicates, ethnic minorities are under-represented in school governance. Similarly, the Department for Education (DfE, 2020) has highlighted how school boards need governors from a wider range of backgrounds, cultures, ages and perspectives. Inclusive and diverse boards can have a positive impact upon the efficacy - or maturity - of the board and consequently its contribution to school effectiveness (Clapham, 2016, 2020; Clapham and GGI, 2017; Clapham and Vickers, 2018). Despite this, figures from the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER, 2020) show that in England only 3.5% of school governors identified themselves as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and only

Addressing the policy problem

This report outlines how skills-based governor recruitment developed by [Governors for Schools](#) has led to a more inclusive and diverse cohort of governors. The Governors for Schools methodology has resulted in almost 25% more governors from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, and over 50% more governors aged between 18-39, being recruited and placed into schools than the national average.



The policy context

School governors are the largest volunteer force in England, with over a quarter of a million governors in state funded schools (NGA, 2020). The School Governance Handbook (DfE, 2020) stresses that boards need to consist of governors who bring a balanced and diverse blend of knowledge, skills and experience to governance. However, figures from the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER, 2020) show that in England only 3.5% of school governors identified themselves as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and only 9% of school governors are under 40. This contrasts with data from the 2011 census, which shows almost 23% of the United Kingdom population identified as other than White British and that 29% of overall population in England and Wales is under 40 (GOV.UK, 2020).

As the DfE (2020); NFER (2020) and CRED (2021) all outline, the lack of inclusivity and diversity has significant implications for a board's leadership in determining school ethos and culture. The board impacts upon the recruitment of teachers, support staff and senior leaders and has direct influence upon pupils regarding the curriculum, monitoring of behaviour and exclusions. Currently, there is little empirical evidence which examines the impact of more inclusive and diverse school boards and is an area for further work. However, as Clapham and Vickers (2017) suggest, there are several areas where more inclusive, diverse and mature boards can challenge current trends, such as the three following examples:

Example 1.

Boards can provide leadership increasing the retention of minority ethnic teachers which currently is lower than for White British teachers nationally (DfE, 2018)

Example 2.

Boards can provide leadership which challenges the unique problems linked to racial inequality and racism teachers from minority ethnic groups experience (see Haque & Elliott, 2017).

Example 3.

Inclusive and diverse boards can provide leadership which challenges how in some parts of England exclusion rates for black Caribbean pupils are five times higher, and mixed-race white and black Caribbean students four times higher, than white pupils (exclusion statistics 2018-19, DfE, 2021).

Findings

Our study, 'Mapping School Governing Board Inclusivity and Diversity' compared Governors for Schools (GfS) data from 2016-2021 with the NFER (2020) report discussed above. We developed an average GfS governor from these data and contrasted them to the average governor described in the NFER report which led to two important findings.

Finding 1

Whilst 3.5% of governors who responded to NFER identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (p.60), 26% of the governors recruited, trained and placed in schools by GfS identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic.

Recommendation 1: Expand and enhance skills-based recruitment across the country.

Governor recruitment still relies largely on local networks and word-of-mouth recruitment (NFER, 2020). In providing a skills-based governor recruitment service, Governors for Schools reaches a wider, more diverse pool of candidates than is otherwise possible. This approach works to challenge received assumptions around eligibility and fit, and bypasses closed-off or hard-to-navigate informal networks that might act as barriers to wider recruitment. Actions taken by Governors for Schools include:

- Developing bold marketing campaigns to highlight the governor role as a skills-based, strategic position to which volunteers are appointed on merit
- Adopting a uniform application process that emphasises skills and experience
- Targeting existing networks within employers and universities, many of which are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic employee networks, to promote school governance to under-represented groups
- Highlighting governors from a diverse array of backgrounds in advertising and campaigns
- Encouraging applications from a younger demographic of professionals through working with employers and universities to encourage their staff to apply
- Providing ongoing support for governors who may be unfamiliar with the English school system

Traditionally strongest in London, but now much more active across all of England and Wales, expansion would enable the development of targeted campaigns to better establish skills-based governance recruitment on boards, particularly in smaller cities and towns.

Finding 2

NFER indicated that 9% of governors were 18-39 years of age, whereas 63% of the governors recruited, trained and placed in schools by Governors for Schools were aged between 18 and 39. 87% of governors who responded to NFER were aged 40 or over, in contrast, 30% of the governors recruited, trained and placed in schools by GfS were in this age range.

Recommendation 2: Target employer and professional networks

Governors for Schools has had success appointing younger age groups to governor positions by targeting much of its recruitment work through employers and professional networks.

Adopting a core message that unites social responsibility with personal development and growth, Governors for Schools has appealed to a younger, aspiring and civic-minded cohort of volunteers who recognise the full value of volunteering as school governors, both in its social function and a way of enhancing their own skills, perspectives and experiences.

This dual approach has been an appealing fit for many larger employers, corresponding to both corporate social responsibility schemes as well as employee development programmes.

Further expansion would also enable more smaller and medium-sized organisations to be targeted, as well as those based in smaller cities and towns.

Overarching recommendations and next steps

This report outlines how skills-based governor recruitment methods have successfully identified, recruited, trained and placed a significantly more inclusive and diverse cohort of governors in schools than the national average. Although there is a lack of empirical evidence around the impact of more inclusive and diverse boards - an area for further research - the NGA; DfE and CRED all stress how increasing inclusivity and diversity can have a positive impact upon the leadership role of boards. Skills-based methods that have been shown to recruit governors from a great range of backgrounds and ages, and which can be readily up-scaled across the country, are therefore to be welcomed. The report findings suggest that skills-based governor recruitment methods can inform national policies around governor recruitment and go some way to rebalancing inclusivity and diversity concerns regarding the composition of school boards.

Contact

Hannah Stolton CEO of GfS and Dr Andrew Clapham would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas further.

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Governors for Schools

Since 1999, Governors for Schools has been connecting skilled and committed volunteers with schools across England. Governors for Schools finds, places, and supports skilled volunteers as governors and trustees on school and academy boards. We support schools across England and Wales to run effectively by finding high calibre governors to bring their skills and expertise to the table - and improve education for children.

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The [Centre for Behavioural Research Methods](#), School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University is an interdisciplinary hub for nurturing, developing and sharing the theory and practice of social science research methods. Our Centre has critical mass in a range of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies that span the breadth of Behavioural and Social Science Research. The Centre consists of staff with methodological expertise in education; politics and international relations; psychology; social work and community and sociology.

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