Being a Parent Governor

I became a Parent Governor for WSAPC in March 2015. Prior to becoming a Governor my experience of schools and how they operated didn’t extend much beyond doing the school run and at first it was quite a surprise to see how elaborate and complicated school management is. However, other Governors were always happy to take the time to answer my questions as were the APC Senior Leadership Team who were happy to spend time with me explaining how things worked. There were also a wide range of (free) on-line resources to help me to get up to speed with the relevant jargon, processes and key issues. West Sussex County Council (WSCC) also offer a range of face-to-face training courses and these were a great way to learn more about the role and to find out how other Governors and Governing Boards go about things.

My reason for becoming a Governor was that my daughter was attending one of the APC centres and I wanted to be able to influence the experience she and other APC students had. However, one of the first things I realised is that being a Governor is about the ‘General’ rather than the ‘Specific’. What I mean by this is that although, for example, my daughter was experiencing some transport problems, being a Governor isn’t about being able to address this specifically but is about bringing a parent perspective to the ‘bigger picture’ of how APC and WSCC can work together to find the best transport solution for *all* of the students who attend the college.

The time commitment involved in being a Governor starts with attending the four ‘Full Governing Body’ (FGB) meetings held each academic year and can extend pretty much as far as you are willing to go. FGB meetings also require some preparation i.e. reading the papers and policies that are to be discussed at the meeting and are emailed out in advance. Additional involvement can include being a member of a sub-committee: APC has two – Learning & Standards and Resources, being a ‘contact Governor’ for one of the APC centres or being a governor representative in key processes such as selection or performance management.

My daughter is no longer at APC – and I am happy to say it served her very well – but I have continued as a co-opted Governor. Why so? Well my experience as an APC Governor has shown me that the Governors have a very real influence on the long-term direction of the college and the policies and procedures it implements. Governors are also in a unique position of being a ‘critical friend’ to a school’s Leadership Team whilst also helping hold WSCC to account and influence their decisions. Education in West Sussex faces a lot of challenges – not least financial ones – and being a Governor is a very positive and practical way of helping ensure that every child in Sussex gets the best possible education.

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