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School Governance in Wales

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ABSTRACT  This article focuses on the involvement of governors in the governance of schools in Wales. Set within the context of the devolved education system, school governance has gone from being on the margins of interest to centre stage. This reflects a new focus on pupil performance and outcomes and the need for pupils in Wales to be successful internationally. As new regulations come into place in Wales which demand more from governors in relation to promoting school performance and educational achievement, there is a requirement for governors to undertake particular training. Governors will have to decide whether to federate governor arrangements or not in relation to their leadership of schools. Two key themes emerge in this article. First, there is greater control and direction from the centre over governors in how they undertake their governance roles. Second, there is an expectation that governors will collaborate with each other in the governance of schools. Both of these aspects are different from existing governance arrangements and the extent to which pupil outcomes improve will be fundamental to the success of the new regulations.

KEY WORDS: Governance, devolution, Wales

Introduction
The establishment of devolved government in Wales in 1999 has marked a change in the nature of governance in education in the country, with new opportunities to develop policies in Wales for Wales. With a further increase in powers following the Referendum in March 2011, it is expected that education policies will diverge further. This article focuses on a key aspect of education in Wales – that of school governance. Part one presents the historic and policy context of education in Wales. Part two, the model of governance adopted in Wales is presented. Part three sets out the current focus of education policy and governance in Wales and puts forward issues relating to its development in the future. A breakdown in the consensus around education and the involvement of governors in schools is outlined. Part four reviews and analyses recent policy changes in school governance.
and issues relating to the impact of these reforms are drawn out. The conclusions indicate that more will be expected from governors in Wales in the future. As school governance has taken centre stage, so too has the control and direction of governing bodies. The policy agenda around education in Wales is currently focused on improvement and it remains to be seen whether the reforms to school governance will have the intended consequences.

1. The context of education in Wales

Prior to devolution in 1999, education policies decided in Westminster were generally applied equally in England and in Wales. The practice was that policies decided in London would be administered by the Welsh Office in Cardiff and its role would be one of rubber stamping and also translating into the Welsh language before sending out to local authorities\(^1\) to implement (Farrell and Law 1998, Jones 1988). The implementation stage allowed local authorities the flexibility to decide how policies should be put in place and also to reflect cultural and other circumstances such as the National Curriculum being different in Wales with the Welsh language being a compulsory element (Farrell and Law 1995). Whilst the policies themselves were the same, the context of Wales was different and this, it has been argued, had a significant impact on the policy that was actually delivered on the ground in Wales. Work by Farrell and Law (1999a) highlights the differences in context. The first of these relates to size and the second to politics. In Wales, education policy was directed by the Welsh Office rather than the Department of Education in London and relationships between the centre and the local authorities in Wales were less formal, with close networks between the directors of education and Welsh Office officials. Until 1996, there were only eight directors and even after this increased to 22, relationships remained close. The small size of Wales both geographically and in population size facilitated close networks of policymakers and practitioners to exist in areas like education. Also, as highlighted by Farrell and Law (1999a, p. 300) ‘the coherence of the policy community was not just a function of geography, but also politics in that none of the LEAs was Conservative controlled’. Reynolds (2002, p. 97) highlights that the context in Wales did not allow many of the ‘market based’ reforms of the 1980s to be put in place. There were not any specialist schools in Wales, ‘consumer information’ was not published in league table format and there was not a focus in Wales on initiatives like the literacy and numeracy strategies.

It is the implication of these differences for education in Wales which is of interest here. The significance of the close policy community which was unified by both geography and politics meant that some of the market oriented reforms put in place by the Conservative governments were not dominant in Wales and most schools had the same governance
arrangements. Wales had few grant maintained schools and no city technology colleges, for example. In their review of educational accountability in Wales, Farrell and Law (1999a) concluded that the market model often featured less than the professional model. Their conclusions highlight that ‘politicians and officers, although operating within the legislative framework of market accountability, are attempting to prevent its successful implementation. They have used their position as implementers of policy and their membership of the educational network to effectively interpret, rather than execute policy’ (Farrell and Law 1999a, p.308).

Prior to devolution then, there is evidence that within education there were some apparent differences between England and Wales. UK devolution provided the opportunity for further development in policy terms as the agenda allowed and encouraged new policy initiatives to emerge and there were expectations that devolution would improve public services (Mitchell and Bradbury 2005).

With devolution, there is now a different approach to improving public services in Wales and this is based on the promotion of the citizen model of participation rather than the consumer model. There is also a strong emphasis on collaboration rather than competition between public organisations. The Beecham Review of public services (2006) argued that the citizen model of public services is more appropriate in Wales than the alternative consumer model as it ‘fits with the historical, cultural and geographical context in Wales’ (Beecham 2006, p. 5). This important report for public services in Wales stresses new aspects of the citizen-focused agenda in Wales around the provision of information on performance to citizens and trust and openness in delivery. For example, the report recommends ‘publishing and promoting balanced and objective information on the performance of public services in Wales and the satisfaction with those services’ (Beecham 2006, p. 70). The Welsh government has fully endorsed the citizen-focused agenda promoted by Beecham and also the new focus on performance information for citizen engagement (Welsh Assembly Government 2006). It is clear that there is much emphasis on the citizen model and the promotion of ‘voice’ in public services in Wales. It is likely that the citizen focus will continue to be put in place as this was a Labour manifesto commitment prior to the election in May 2011.

In the early years of devolution, the Welsh government’s education policy focused on putting in place choices for learners with the development of 14–19 Learning Pathways, a desire to broaden education with the creation of a Welsh Baccalaureate, the promotion of learners’ rights and entitlements and a goal to create a less adversarial education system with the ending of school league tables and the abolition of Standard Assessment Tests (SATS). More recently, there has been an emphasis on pre-school support for families with the creation of ‘Flying Start’ in 2005 and informal play-led learning in the early years with a Wales wide launch of the ‘Foundation Phase’ in 2008 after earlier pilots. The ‘Learning Country’ published in 2001, and its second
phase ‘The Learning Country: Vision into Action’ published in 2006, together outlined the then government’s strategy in education. The Welsh government’s increasing emphasis on collaboration in public services has, in the case of schools, manifested as ‘School Effectiveness Framework’ (SEF). The SEF has been a high profile initiative which seeks to create conditions for sharing best practice throughout and between schools and local authorities (Welsh Assembly Government 2008).

2. School governance

The model of school governance currently in place in Wales is, with minor differences, the same model which exists in maintained schools in England. This stakeholder model originates from the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 when governing bodies were re-constituted to include parental, teacher, local authority and co-opted (or community) representation. Part of the rationale for this reform was to firmly establish the powers of governing bodies of county, controlled and maintained special schools in relation to the functions of the local authority and the head teacher (DES 1985). Subsequent Acts and regulations have made changes to the constitution of governing bodies but the ‘stakeholder model’ remains fundamentally unchanged.

Until recently, school governance has had a low profile in Wales. Governor recruitment and retention have, with local exceptions, been high with a low vacancy rate. Data relating to January 2009 indicate that the vacancy rate for primary schools was 5.9% and 5.1% for secondary schools (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). The Welsh government has provided direct support to governors with guidance publications and indirect support by funding Governors Wales to provide independent advice, guidance and support. There is also support provided through the All Wales Centre for Governor Training and Research which publishes ‘Cadwyn’ – a national governor newsletter and produces governor training materials for local authorities in Wales.

Governing bodies in Wales are now established according to regulations made under the 2002 Education Act. They are made up of a combination of appointed, elected and co-opted governors. Membership depends on the category of school and the number of registered pupils. Secondary schools with fewer than 600 registered pupils have smaller governing bodies than other secondary schools. All primary schools have a choice, within regulatory limits, about the size of their governing body; and those with fewer than 100 registered pupils may have even smaller governing bodies than other primary schools. Of the most commonplace categories of governors, parent, teacher and staff representatives are elected parent governors by other parents of pupils at the school and teacher and staff governors are elected by their peers. Local authority governors are appointed by the local authority and are often, but not always, local authority councillors. Community governors, persons who live or work in the locality served by the school, are co-opted, that is
selected and appointed, by other governors. In making their selection about who to co-opt, governors are advised to make sure that their governing body reflects a balance of interests. Historically, there has been emphasis on making sure that the local business community is represented (Welsh Office 1998), though this requirement is interpreted loosely and in many cases persons who are engaged in the community in other ways or just live locally, or have been parent governors at the school, are co-opted. A small minority of schools (foundation, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled) have foundation governors whose membership reflects the school’s instrument of government. In practice, in Wales this nearly always means Diocesan Authorities making appointments to the governing bodies of schools with religious character. Additions to the make-up of governing bodies include associate pupil governors in secondary schools and additional community governors in primary schools located in areas served by a community council.

The responsibilities of school governing bodies are outlined in the School Governors: A Guide to the Law (Welsh Assembly Government 2010). The Guide to the Law suggests that the governing body role is essentially a strategic one with operational and day-to-day management matters to be performed by head teachers and staff. The strategic role was originally identified as one of three functions of the governing body identified in the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act. In this legislation the key roles of governing bodies were identified as being: setting the school’s strategic direction, securing accountability and monitoring and evaluating (including supporting and challenging). In their strategic role, governing bodies have been compared to the company board of directors (Levacic 1995, Boyett and Finlay 1996), in which they provide annual feedback to parents as ‘shareholders’.

It was in the policy context of a settled, long established school governance system that the National Assembly’s Enterprise and Learning Committee conducted a review of school governors in 2009 (National Assembly for Wales 2009). The committee took evidence from a range of stakeholders on how to improve the current Welsh school governance model. The recommendations covered many issues but there was a strong element of how to improve support for governors and to strengthen the capacity of governing bodies through better training, advice and support from local authorities, clerking and raising awareness of government policy. The majority of these areas for governor development have also been highlighted in relation to governor development in England (McCrone et al. 2011). Here, it is stressed that the strategic role of governors could be enhanced with specific training in key areas, including data interpretation. In Wales, the committee seemed to accept, or perhaps not consider, that the role of school governors should be different or changed, or that there might be alternative models of governance for the school system. The committee and persons giving evidence did not challenge the status quo of the stakeholder model of school governance nor did they question whether the range of duties and powers that governors hold was appropriate or perhaps
could or should be handled in other ways. This might be regarded as a missed opportunity.

3. A breakdown in consensus

In strong contrast to the previous decade, since the 2009 report, education in Wales has been characterised by criticism and challenge of the Welsh school system. Wales performed poorly in the 2009 results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) published in 2010 (OECD 2010). PISA surveyed 15 year olds in 132 schools in Wales, focussing on the three learning domains of reading, mathematics and science. Welsh performance was poor in all three areas. In reading and mathematics, the mean Welsh scores were significantly lower than other countries and all other UK jurisdictions. Performance in science was around the international average but significantly worse than the rest of the UK. To compound these results, Welsh performance in all three learning domains was also worse than in the previous PISA surveys. In short, Wales was going backwards in terms of school improvement and results.

The Welsh government’s education minister was quick to respond frankly, saying: these results are disappointing. They show an unacceptable fall in our overall performance – everyone involved in the education sector in Wales should be alarmed . . . Countries with less money spent on education than Wales have done better than Wales. Schools, local authorities and ourselves as government need to look honestly at these results and accept responsibility for them . . . We all share responsibility for this and we must equally share in the difficult task of turning things around (Andrews 2010).

Within months of the publication of the PISA report (OECD 2010), the education inspectorate, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for education and training in Wales – Estyn – published its annual report (Estyn 2011). This report also included a review of the previous six-year inspection cycles to draw longer term conclusions about the school system in general. The report noted that some progress and improvement had been made, especially in early years’ provision. However, the report dealt a second and weighty blow of criticism of the Welsh school education system, pointing to the failure of pupils to reach their potential, poor standards in literacy and numeracy, a need to improve data use, self-evaluation and assessment and also a recommendation to improve collaboration between schools and the education system. The Chief Inspector argued that in 30% of schools in Wales, standards were below what they needed to be (Estyn 2011).

The minister responded to the PISA (OECD 2010) and Estyn (2011) reports in a much publicised speech ‘Teaching Makes a Difference’ in February 2011 (Andrews 2011). Repeating his earlier statement about
failure, he highlighted the need for greater honesty in education performance. The minister attacked what he saw as too much focus on choice, a cultural unwillingness to challenge or criticise which, in turn, led to failure to set stretching goals, breeding complacency and reluctance to hold people to account. The minister set a goal of the Welsh education system being in the top 20 by the 2015 PISA survey, with interim improvements to be secured by 2012 compared to the 2009 results. Key priorities included the need to improve literacy, numeracy and tackling the link between poverty and poor attainment. In pursuit of the goals, the minister identified a number of important action points in the improvement of standards. These include improved pupil assessment, grading of schools, setting minimum levels of performance, better leadership, improved teaching through initial teacher training and continuing professional development. In the future, local authorities would be expected to work in consortia in a collaborative manner. For the first time since the creation of the stakeholder model, school governance featured prominently in new government policy for Wales. There was commitment to new laws for governor training and clerking, new powers for local authorities to propose and implement school federations, and a requirement that in order to pass Estyn school inspections, governing bodies would have to demonstrate that they had fully considered school performance data and have decided actions to improve school performance.

In March 2011, an independent committee set up to review the structure of education services in Wales published its report (Thomas Committee 2011). The report recommended standardised, compulsory training for governors with induction, chair-training and training for assessing head teacher performance to be priorities. The report also added to the impetus for joint, collaborative working in the education system by recommending that four regional consortia of local authorities be put in charge of driving collaboration in the education system. The report was followed quickly by the establishment of a School Standards Unit within the Welsh government’s education department, a sign of the strengthened focus on performance standards.

Thus the combination of PISA report, the critical Estyn report and the Thomas review have all led to new questions about education performance and also the role of governors in driving improvements in standards in schools in Wales. These questions are being asked within the context of tighter public service budgets with a need for greater financial efficiency (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2010). Since the election in May 2011, there is also a new government in Wales – Labour – and with new law-making powers for the legislature approved in the March 2011 referendum, there now exists the legal power and political will in Wales to structure the education system, and, within that, educational governance, on the basis of a model devised in Wales which is focussed on higher standards rather than learner choice.
Stimulated by the 2009 committee review of school governance and the growing policy emphasis on public service collaboration, the first significant change was the passing of the Education (Wales) Measure 2011 by the National Assembly on 29 March 2011. This was the first ever Wales only primary legislation for school governance. Of relevance to this article, the measure made law for governor training, governing body clerking, school federation and collaboration between local authorities, schools and further education institutions. Details about these will be prescribed in regulations which the Welsh government expects to have in place by September 2012, but the main policy thrusts are clear enough already.

Governors will be required to undertake training in specified topics – with induction training for new governors, training for chairs and training for governors in how to use school performance data anticipated to be key topics. Training will remain free for governors with local authorities duty bound to provide it themselves or to arrange it. It is likely that governors who do not undertake prescribed training will be forced to resign or will be automatically expelled. This move to compulsory training, at least in a small number of what are probably widely regarded as core topics for school governors, is a significant change in Welsh government policy. Until recently, the Welsh government had argued against compulsory training because it regarded it as being at odds with governors being volunteers.

There are clearly also expectations in the new agenda about the need for governing bodies to accept greater responsibility for school performance. Shifting the agenda away from an approach that could be characterised as ‘the professionals know best’, the focus is now on standards with further policy intentions to introduce a new national system for the grading of schools, which will be operated by all local authorities/consortia. Each school will be graded annually and schools will be expected to reach certain minimum standards. Pupils will also be given annual targets to ensure that one year of educational progress is made in each calendar year. All schools will have to produce an annual public profile containing performance information in a common format. They will also be expected, in a school development plan endorsed by their governors, to set out how they will reach improved standards of educational performance based on targets set by Ministers for Education in Wales. The Welsh government’s central argument is that if governance is improved, standards achieved in the classroom will also improve. The minister has argued that ‘if governing bodies are indeed fulfilling their duties to best effect, then we would expect that to manifest itself in the educational achievements of their schools. A nation-wide test and long term improvement in the performance of pupils will be the real test of the effectiveness of school governors’ (Andrews 2010).

In relation to the inspection of schools in Wales, there will be a new Common Inspection Framework, which the minister has stated will mean that ‘no school will pass an inspection unless it can demonstrate that its governing
body has discussed the family of schools data and other relevant performance
data and has set in place actions to improve its position’ (Andrews 2010).

4. Review and analysis

The question following these developments is: what does it mean for school
governance and governors in Wales? The Welsh government has trialled the
actions it proposes but their impact may not be known for some time nor
may it be possible to attribute change to specific actions given that action
across the education system may interact.

The Welsh government’s focus is on raising standards in schools and the
Minister, Leighton Andrews, has outlined, at least in part, what that means
for governors. Clearly, there is now an expectation, and indeed there will be
a legal requirement, for all governors to have a basic level of training. There
is an overt recognition that to be a successful governor increased
commitment and performance is required. The inspection of a school will
focus much more fully on the performance of the governing body in
promoting standards and leadership within the school. In terms of the
impact of these changes, what will compulsory governor training mean for
governor recruitment? Will governors continue to undertake volunteer roles
when there are much greater expectations and demands from them? Ranson
et al.’s (2005) work highlighted the difficulties of ‘volunteer’ governors and
greater work expectations. Whilst attracting governors in Wales is not an
issue at a national level, this may not be the case in all parts of Wales. Even
when recruitment is buoyant, it does not mean that enough governors have
the right calibre or potential to improve. Ensuring that future governors
have the right skill set to improve schools, and that they are willing to use
those skills, will be an important part of the improvement agenda.

In relation to the clerking of governing bodies, local authorities will have
to offer a clerking service to all schools. Governing bodies will have a choice
whether to take up a local authority offered service or to make their own
arrangements. But in the same vein as mandatory governor training, the
new law for Wales will see regulatory standards being set for clerks and local
authorities will be duty bound to offer appropriate training. These changes
are doubtless motivated by a desire to raise governance standards with the
Welsh government having the view that good clerking underpins good
governance which in turn supports better performance in schools.

Other key aspects of the new policy changes concern the relationship
between governing bodies and local authorities. The 2011 measure provides
new powers for local authorities to propose and implement school
federations. This change removes the right of governors to determine their
governance arrangements. Previously governing bodies alone could enter or
leave federations, although there has been little opportunity for them to do
so in Wales because enabling regulations only came into effect in April 2010.
The recent policy changes provide local authorities with a powerful new tool
to arrange school governing bodies as they think appropriate with one
governing body governing two or more schools. The minister suggested that
federation would ‘bring many benefits, such as shared resources, staff,
facilities and a single governing body would be able to benchmark best
practice and monitor standards across the federation with a view to
improving outcomes for all learners’ (Andrews 2010).

The federation of schools is an important aspect of the policy changes in
Wales. Federation is viewed as a way to unify and concentrate school
leadership. It is unstated, but likely, that there will be an important interplay
between federation and school reorganisation because in practice both are
about decision-making structures. There will be an impact on head teachers
and school leadership teams. It might be that as federations of schools
become established with new governing body arrangements, the standard of
governors will improve because the demand for them will be less and it will
be easier to secure higher calibre people. Additionally, if resources to train
and support governors remain at least the same, there may be more
resources to support a small number of governing bodies in Wales and fewer
governors. Federations may also promote greater sharing of staff, skills and
other resources. In governance terms, the 2011 measure expands powers
provided in the Education Act 2002 and the Education and Inspections Act
2006 that permit school and further education governing bodies to establish
joint committees. This would open up the possibility of innovative
governance arrangements which have not existed before.

The current direction of policy in education is very much towards
consortium with local authorities and others working in partnership. The
new governor regulations will enable shared governance structures, more
official clerking arrangements and mandatory governor training. It can be
expected that much, or may be all, of what local authorities currently do in
support of governing bodies will, in the future, be delivered or arranged by
consortia. These changes may present operational challenges but could be
an opportunity to build on areas of strength where they exist. The success of
new arrangements will depend to a degree on their capacity to raise scrutiny
of school performance standards, to spread best pedagogical practice and to
plan provision across wider geographical areas.

It is clear that the Welsh government expects more from governors in
terms of leadership, the promotion of collaborative working between
schools and ensuring that school performance improves. Governors are
being expected to become more involved in the evaluation of school
performance. This evaluation is intended to make closer links between the
work of the governing body and school outcomes in terms of performance,
school planning and also head teacher appraisal. Inspections will also
require greater governor involvement. A key assumption underlies all of
these developments – if governance is improved, school performance will be
enhanced. Existing research in terms of good governance suggests that good
governance can promote school improvement. Moving towards a model of
governance which is like an ‘Executive Board’ is the ideal type of governing body for promoting successful schools (Ranson et al. 2005). This model is also that presented in a recent OFSTED review of effective governing bodies (OFSTED 2011).

It is not known how the announced changes will work in practice. Crucial to success is whether enough current or prospective governors want to work in these new ways or are capable of doing so effectively. Whilst the changed law provides ways for schools to federate or collaborate, will governors understand these opportunities and will they have the drive and skills to make use of them? Or will local authorities lead the changes, identifying federation and collaboration possibilities and persuading or cajoling governing bodies to change? If neither local authorities nor governing bodies do this, then school governance arrangements are unlikely to change much on the ground irrespective of the potential for new arrangements. There are also questions around governor training – what about existing governors who refuse to engage in training? Will governors who do not sign up to training be disqualified from their governing bodies? In addition to governor training issues, what action will be taken in relation to governors who operate ‘inadequate’ governance?

It is possible that there will be further changes in law. Recent legislative change for governors in Wales represents a shift to more central control, greater prescription and less autonomy for individual governing bodies. Governing bodies will be required to concentrate on specified performance data, to provide evidence that they are on top of improvement and development plans and also head teachers’ performance. It seems likely that local authorities, or consortia of authorities, will become more involved in governance matters, not only through the changes to the law for governor training and clerking but because the emphasis on improved standards demands more from governors. The spotlight on governing bodies will be more intense.

Clearly, the question of what will happen if governing bodies are unwilling or incapable of rising to the challenge is an important one for the future? Are there sufficient numbers of governors or prospective governors with the skills, aptitude and time to be the governors that the changed law and policy will need to work successfully? Existing evidence suggests that a high proportion of governing bodies and governors act as ‘supporters’ clubs’ and are ineffective ‘challengers’. This is not a new problem and is probably deeply embedded behaviour, perhaps reinforced by the experiences, expectations and perhaps behaviour of many school staff and head teachers also. Change to the law around governors is relatively easy and is a powerful statement of intent, but it may not lead to an improvement in governance if governors do not fully engage in the new reforms.

If governors do not lead change, it brings the question of what other choices does the Welsh government have? Foremost must be whether governing bodies’ roles will change further. The Welsh government has commissioned reviews of governance in the higher and further education
sectors. Different models may be considered for school governance stimulated by these reviews or models further afield, from outside Wales. Given the emphasis on collaboration in the education system, one possibility would be to focus governing bodies on the wider community of learners and education providers rather than focussing on their own institution alone. How that might be achieved in law and practice is a complex question but addressing it would probably mean change to how schools are funded and admission decisions are made. Another possibility might be to choose governors on the basis of their skills and knowledge rather than the stakeholder group they represent.

Other policy choices could mean change to governors’ powers and duties. Staff employment is a difficult area with a duality of governing body and local authority functions that can be difficult to understand and perhaps to operate. One way in which governing body inability or unwillingness to address school performance issues might manifest is tackling poor staff performance and school leadership. If there was doubt that governing bodies were up to the task there would probably be a desire to change the law to remove governors from such matters altogether.

But there are also more radical options for governance in Wales if the new arrangements do not work. There is the model of governance in Scotland which might be looked at. In this, ‘parent councils’ exist for schools but their role is very much that of sounding board and adviser and they do not have significant powers and duties. They provide a means for parents to have a voice and to be a ‘critical friend’. However, the model avoids the problem of placing considerable power and responsibility in the hands of governing bodies which may not fully understand their role or have the skills or willingness to exercise it effectively. A more radical option altogether would be to abolish governing bodies and for local authorities or another public body to directly and centrally manage and govern schools.

Conclusion

School governance in Wales has gone from low to high priority on the political agenda. Two themes are emerging. The first is greater control and prescription from the centre about how governors should fulfil their responsibilities. There is now less discretion for governors to focus on what they view as critical within the school and much greater emphasis on their responsibilities in relation to pupil performance and educational outcomes. There is also a notable change in expectations – the Welsh government’s rhetoric is centred on outcomes. This is market facing to parents and pupils, whilst, at the same time, requiring governors to also deliver on management accountability to local authorities, the inspectors, the Welsh government and others. This represents a shift from professional accountability, which had been the dominant form of governor accountability in Wales (Farrell and Law 1999b).
The second theme to emerge from this article is the collaborative agenda that Wales is promoting through school governance and across public service delivery in other policy fields. The drivers for the collaborative agenda are the need to create efficiencies and also to spread best practice. It could be argued that this agenda of collaboration fits in well with the ethos of education in Wales with its small and close policy networks. However, collaborative working as a model of improvement may not be straightforward. The capacity and willingness of schools to work collaboratively could be undermined by a school funding system which allocates funding to schools individually. Although competition between schools is not actively encouraged, the funding system and admissions decisions could have unintended effects on policies to promote collaboration.

The governance of schools in Wales is going to demand more from governors in the future. Apart from new requirements about what governors need to do regarding improving school performance, governors will need to attend training sessions. This alone might be considered too great a requirement for some governors who may not be willing to undertake the additional hours required. The role is a voluntary one and the more that is expected from governors, the more difficult it might be to recruit them.

Governance in Wales has now moved to the centre of the political agenda in education. Much is being expected from governors in the future. Clearly there is an expectation that compulsory training and additional local authority support will improve the governance of schools and pupil performance. There is a definite shift noted in school governance towards greater involvement in school performance and leadership. However, it might also be the case that not enough governors are able or willing to step up their efforts in the way the policy changes demand. Collaborative working and federation of governing bodies may help ease changes and strengthen the quality of governing bodies but this model of governance is untried and untested.

This article has reviewed the governance of schools in Wales up to the new policy reforms announced in recent months. From having an ‘arms-length’ level of control from the centre, there has been a clear shift towards controlling and directing governing bodies. With its newly devolved powers, the Welsh government has taken its responsibilities for the governance of schools very seriously. There is much expectation that school performance and the results obtained by students in schools in Wales will improve as a consequence. Wales now moves to the next chapter in terms of school governance and there will be many in education focussing on the difference made by governing bodies in the improvement agenda.

Notes on contributor

Catherine Farrell is the Professor of Public Management in the Faculty of Business and Society at the University of Glamorgan. Currently she is researching public
sector effectiveness and improvement; the management of schools; school governance; and citizen involvement.

Note

1. In this article ‘Local Authorities’ and ‘Local Authority’ mean what used to be called ‘Local Education Authority/ies’.

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