

Phil Bromwich's speech

I was born in St Thomas' Hospital in 1948 opposite the houses of Parliament though never had any ambition to work there.

I lived in Clapham then the family moved to Norbury (near Croydon) where I eventually passed the eleven plus and went to Selhurst Grammar School for boys. It was right next door to the girl's grammar school and there was no barrier between the two sites. It was the swinging sixties so I will leave the rest to your imagination.

I initially worked for Barclays Bank where I met my wife to be at their training centre. We were both instructors but our paths only crossed by one week. It was one of the few times in my life that I moved into action quickly! She is from north of Watford, Bradford in fact.

We married in 1971 and moved to Sittingbourne where we have lived ever since. In the same house I might add. We were both the first members of our families to go to Grammar Schools and our two sons were the first members of our families to go to University after they left Borden.

I worked for the Marley Group at Lenham for a while as travelling to London became too arduous and expensive. The last 30 years of my life I worked for a manufacturing company in Whitstable for P & B Metal Components as their costing and estimating manager. Since retirement in 2013 I have been heavily involved with our local church in Murston. We opened a branch of a credit union bank in the church and will be shortly opening a debt advice centre. I am also the lay chair of Sittingbourne Deanery and a member of Archbishops Council for Canterbury Diocese.

I am now in my 25th year as a governor having been persuaded by Bryan Short to become a parent Governor initially and then to represent KCC some years later. I was recently Vice Chair for a second term having been Chair for 5 years. I am now a Community Governor.

Governors have a huge responsibility now and it must be remembered that they are unpaid volunteers. No Borden Governor claims expenses yet they are expected to travel to meetings and attend training courses in various parts of Kent in 2 hour stints. At Borden we are responsible for a budget of £4 million.

In addition under latest Ofsted guidelines Governors are interviewed for anything up to an hour to show what they actually know about the school. If it is felt they do not know enough detail the school can be put in special measures never mind how good the teaching is. In fact the Minister can actually replace the whole governing body if they are not performing.

There are now only three levels of grading: Outstanding Good. and Requires Improvement. So as you can see Borden was good three years ago and although it has improved it was still only graded as good just before last Christmas as there are no intermediate stages.

It is all a bit of a battle sometimes and you often wonder why. For example in a recent report on school performances we noticed that there was a grammar school in East Kent whose average A Level grade was E+ and ours is C+. So that was quite encouraging until we found out that the school had been rated outstanding by Ofsted.

Meetings generally last between 1 ½ to 2 hours. We have 3 Full Governing Body meetings and one extra to approve the annual accounts. There are three main committees, Standards, Personnel and Pastoral and Finance and Resources. These generally meet 3 times a year apart from Finance which is 5 times.

Extra meetings may be arranged as required, Most Governors are on two committees. In addition we have a committee to annually determine our Admissions Policy, a Pay committee and a Disciplinary Committee both of which have separate Appeals Committees.

The school is bound to operate under a series of policies. Currently there are 18 statutory policies and about forty others some of which are only in place because they used to be Statutory but no longer are. All these have to be reviewed (some annually) to ensure they meet current legislation. Some of these policies have to be posted on the school web site so it is important they are up to date. Particularly so because if some of the Statutory ones are out of date or wrong or perhaps not even there then an Ofsted Inspection can stop and the school failed .

When I was first on the Governing Body we generally were people who had a desire to serve the school. Now we are encouraged to have governors with specific skills that will be of use to the school. But it is not always possible to find willing volunteers with the skills needed. However, just wanting to be a governor is not these days a valid reason. We are expected to carry out a skills audit of all governors on a regular basis to ensure that we have the skills to carry out our duties at a strong level.

When I joined I felt we were generally yes men who followed the lead of the head and the chair although it is fair to say that at Borden that was not an issue as they both actually had a really had a good handle on what was going on. One governor regularly fell asleep during meetings. Nowadays you have to be really pro-active and are noticed if you do not take an active part in meetings.

Over the years we have had a number of characters on the governing body and I particularly had a soft spot for Dennis Jarrett and Graham Barnes both of whom have sadly recently passed away. Graham brought a sense of humour to our meetings.

I recall at one first full governors meeting of the year we were asked to introduce ourselves as we had a number of new governors. Graham introduced himself as “I am Graham Barnes and I am a reformed alcoholic” Typical of the man who also had a very serious side when it came to important matters. Dennis was a different personality altogether. Very straightforward, he did not say a lot but you knew that when he spoke he was going to be worth listening to. He was excellent in dealing

with pupil discipline of course due to his experience as a head teacher. Edmund Doubleday was a governor for forty years.

Some years ago you may remember that there was a scheme called Building Schools for the Future promoted by the then Labour Government. Many schools across the country were refurbished or rebuilt in accordance with the condition of the buildings. I am not going to go into the whys and wherefores of the scheme but strangely it seemed that Borden, Highsted and Fulston were all deemed to be in a similar state and were in the fifth tranche. We had meetings with government representatives over how the 3 schools would be best served under this scheme. The last proposal seemed to involve Fulston moving to a brand new site (where the new Tunstall Primary has been built at Cromers Corner, their old site being demolished and rebuilt for Borden to move into. Costs were to be defrayed by the selling off of the current Borden site. We had a meeting only days before the general Election when Gordon Browne lost and were pressurised to sign agreements to proceed with the proposals which is all they were as we had no plans, no costings or knew little about what would happen. We refused. The plan was to get something in writing so that if Labour lost the election at least our project would go ahead. An idea of the sort of pressure governors have to deal with.

When we became an Academy we undertook to make as few changes as possible to the way the school was run as staff were concerned that many other schools who were changing were making staff cuts etc, We have tried to keep to that pledge as long as we could do so within changes any government may make in legislation.

A thought for you

The teachers were being feted by a number of business groups in the neighbourhood. At the end of his welcoming speech, the head of the Chamber of Commerce said, raising his wineglass, "Long live our teachers!!" A voice in the back said, "On what?" This explains really the pressure on staff who have had annual pay increases restricted by the government for a number of years now.

Our school is extremely well placed with the staff it currently has and has had in recent years. They are dedicated to the education of the pupils in their care and will go the extra mile to provide their education. I firmly believe that this is as a result of the trust that has built up between them, successive head teachers and the governors To the point that if we need to start a redundancy process they come forward with suggestions as to reducing their hours to save costs.

You must appreciate that in the present climate funding for schools is being reduced year on year. Savings have been made in many areas but needless to say large savings can only be made by reducing staff costs as they represent the biggest part of our costs.

Some years ago when I was Chair of Governors I was presiding over the Annual Prize giving in the Wyvern Hall across the road from here. As normal before the start Deputy Head Laurel Townend asked the parents and guests to turn off their

mobile phones so as not to interrupt the proceedings. Everything went well until the very end when I stood and asked the audience to stand and join in singing the National Anthem. It was at this point that my wife rang me on my mobile phone for a lift home from another event.

Of course I was the one person who had not switched their phone off so you can imagine my embarrassment!

The school continues to excel at a variety of sports and encourage pupils to take part in sports that the school does not teach. Some years ago we obtained a specialism in Sport and modern foreign languages. (You were not allowed to just have a Sports specialism on it's own). This attracted extra funding but now the title and the money no longer exist.

Examples of what we have done in recent years.

We have by careful management maintained the buildings, built the all weather hockey pitch in conjunction with the Hockey Club, built the library and added the Short Block. Many classrooms have been updated and modern more cheerful furniture purchased to make the teaching environment more conducive to learning.

Numbers of pupils joining the school has in recent years been a headache. In recent years we have generally achieved an intake of 120 or a little under by the skin of our teeth. In 2013 year only 70 boys passed the Kent test and we only achieved an intake of 108 after appeals. This of course reduces our financial income and carries on year on year as that group passes through the school. In recent years the school has been very proactive in promoting itself and has run after school classes for prospective primary pupils to feed their interest and give them a taste of what to expect. 2015/2016 saw an actual intake of 137 pupils. But this can only be a one off as there is insufficient accommodation to allow for this sort of intake every year.

The school is ready for when the government issues its next tranche of monies that we can bid for to improve/increase our facilities. That is the way of the world of education these days. We have a plan ready to send in with a bid but the last two bidding processes have not covered what we could apply for.

Of course in the recent past we allowed girls (or young ladies should I say) into the sixth form which has added to the ethos of the school and has been hugely successful. We work closely with Highsted and Fulston to provide a wide ranging sixth form curriculum in an effort to reduce duplication of courses.

These days (although to a lesser degree at Borden than most) there is often a very different perception between the view of pupils that the school has and the view the parent has. As a result Borden is not immune to suspending or expelling pupils although the incidents are lesser in number than most schools.

A teacher wrote home to a child's parents "If you don't believe half of what he says goes on in school, then I won't believe half of what he says goes on at home either."

Attendance is very high and in general pupils enjoy coming to school.

Just to finish I will leave you with an example of one instance of what I had to deal with as Chair of Governors. One bright Saturday morning my post arrived at home. Amongst it was a huge packet from a firm of solicitors. I thought perhaps I had been left some money. But no such luck. It was a letter of complaint about how the school had dealt with a boy at school and his issues with other boys with paperwork evidence that had been provided by the school at a discipline hearing. What made it worse was that it had been copied to the Prime Minister, The Secretary of state for Education, The Head of Ofsted. KCC , our local MP and the American Embassy (the boys father was American). You can imagine what that did to my weekend. Our MP was supplied with all the papers and came to the school and his view was the school had done nothing wrong. After discussion with KCC they confirmed the same to Ofsted and the matter then went to our insurers as the parents made a claim on them. So as a volunteer I had to suffer all the stress that went with it. Of course so did the Head.

All this caused by some a disagreement over which year the boy should have been placed in and his attitude to other pupils had resulted in some supposed bullying by his peers.

Nothing went further other than his parents removed him to a school in Maidstone and then tried to claim his travelling expenses from our insurance company.

We have had to deal with a number of complaints over misuse of the internet in recent years. Commonly boys posted their views on other boys that have caused them upset. The classic being a parent who complained about such an incident and we had to point out that their son was under 14 and was not permitted to be on Facebook anyway.

I hope this has given you some insight in what can be involved in being a school governor nowadays.