

Quality Education News

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How good is your school governance?

Dear Friend of Quality Education

The children might have been very happy but the teachers less so. During April 2011 there were only nine teaching days. All those holidays made many children happy. Teachers saw the holidays from a different viewpoint. There was so much work to be covered and too many holidays! One can have too much of a good thing! May 2011 has only two holidays: Workers' Day and the Municipal Election Day. Let's get down to quality work once more!

Alan Clarke made this pertinent comment about school governance in his definitive book, *The Handbook for School Governors*:

Good school governing bodies, like good principals, can make or break a school.

An effective and efficient school governing body (SGB) usually ensures a good school. When the school is excellent there's the likelihood that the SGB is too. If a school is in a shambles, cast your eyes towards its' SGB.

In recent years there have been schools that have gone from trash status to success stories. Not many years ago those schools were rubbished by their local community. Parents were reluctant to enrol their children at them. Some of those schools were 'named and shamed' in the newspapers, on radio chat-shows and on TV. Those selfsame schools have again reappeared in the media but for a very different reason. They've been transformed.

Who waved the magic wands? Amongst the 'magicians' were the parent and staff members of the SGBs of those schools. They steered their schools through the rocks of chaos and set them on course towards quality education. That way forward was charted on the basis of sound governance practices.

The SGBs courageously and incisively identified what was wrong with their schools. Decisive action was then taken. Teaching methodologies were brought into the 21st century. Staff development programmes were given high priority. If

there was flotsam in the staffroom, strategies were devised on how to improve teaching performance. Everyone was getting the message: Shape up or ship out.

In the last issue of *Quality Education News* I wrote about the CGF-Proudly South African Governance Awards. The awards are the initiative of Corporate Governance Framework (CGF), Proudly South African (PSA) and the South African Quality Institute (SAQI). The three organisations believe that every school can be a place of education excellence. When the school has outstanding governance, quality education happens.

The Awards aim to salute those schools that are well-governed. Crucially though, sound governance is not dependent on financial resources. There are very poor schools governed according to the highest levels of ethical practices and principles.

Proudly South Africa will shortly issue the Quality School Governance Award application form. More details can be obtained by contacting them on 011-327-7778. Their email address is info@proudlysa.co.za. Dalene du Preez is your contact person.

The organisers warmly welcome entries from any public/state school in South Africa. By entering such a competition, a school can self-evaluate how much it is doing right as regards sound governance. It can affirm all the good governance that has taken place as well as be a spur to achieve even more. Proudly South Africa will host the Awards ceremony in October. It will be a night to remember. Be there!

Sincerely

Richard Hayward



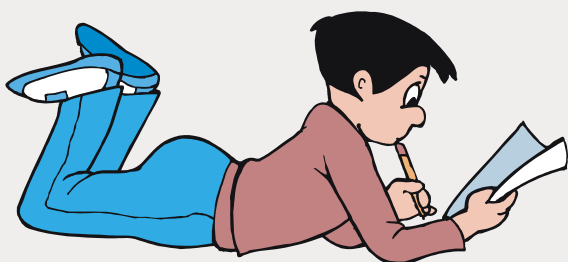
This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



What is the purpose of Education?

Times Educational Supplement (TES) asked the above question in its 1 April 2011 issue. The article referred to Doug Belshaw and Andy Stewart who had invited teachers and educators from around the world to answer the question. Answers had to give in not more than 500 words.

Before a School Governing Body and community formulate their Vision and Mission statements, they should be asking the same question. The TES article quoted five responses to this question ... and what different viewpoints were expressed! Here are excerpts from their replies:



Tom Barrett, deputy principal of a primary school:

My son asks questions when it seems there are none to ask. I don't want education to answer them all for him – I want it to be there to listen to him, and to encourage him to question more.

My son dreams up imaginary characters, worlds, situations, predicaments, plot lines, battles, relationships and plays them out with what he has around him. I hope education shines a light on this creativity and seeks it out. Education should draw from him those precious sparks and help him craft them into something beautiful.

To work in education, it helps to be passionate. I want my son to see the drive and determination in another person at some point in the next few years.

My son is happy at school. Education should be about cradling happiness.

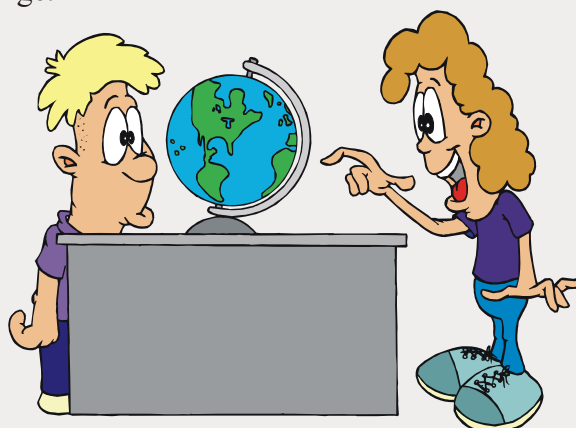
Josie Fraser, social and educational technologist:

To many children and young people, adults seem distinguishable by their finishedness, their completeness. We have 'grown up'. We have become inflexible, we have ceased to play, to imagine; our

appetite for adventure has been diminished, not increased by our understanding of the world; our wild and even gentle ambitions have been curtailed by the demands of the 'real world'. Instead of growing in confidence enough to be wrong and to change our minds, the adult world seems very often to promote an infantile belief in the benefits and possibility of absolute certainty, mastery, and fixedness.

The assumption of due respect for this completeness often establishes authority and provides boundaries within formal education: I am the one who knows and you are the one who is in the process of knowing.

For me, then, a fundamental purpose of education should be to acknowledge the inevitability of change ... Education should ensure that children, young people and adults are equipped to be unsettled, confronted by difference, to be changed and to effect change.



Rob Thomas, high school principal:

In some ways, it is easier to start with the reverse: the purpose of education is not about getting the maximum number of students past a particular marker – for example, achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and Maths. This should be an outcome of an effective education system but not a key driver.

Targets and league tables have become very important in making sure we raise aspirations. I am a supporter of the way they have driven the attainment-raising agenda but I do believe there is much more to education than this.

So what is the purpose of education? In my opinion, it

is to provide our young people with the skills they will need to become confident, independent decision-makers who will be able to shape our future ... It is the way in which we prepare them for this role that is of utmost importance. That has to involve a collaborative view of learning and a commitment to continuing to research how we make this happen in our schools.

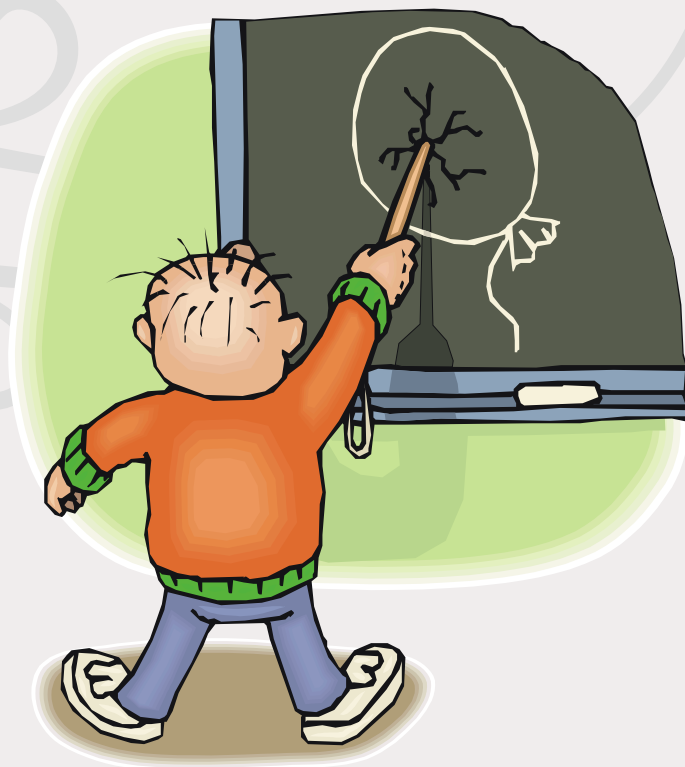


Dawn Hallybone, senior teacher and ICT co-ordinator:

I want my children to be happy at school, to be resilient, to be able to persevere, to be aware of the feelings and needs of others and to appreciate their own place in the world. Our current formal education system does not always take these factors into account – there is no education certificate in happiness or resilience but these are personal skills that will serve children well in the world.

Education needs to change, to move on with the change in technologies, to recognise the skills our children are using at home when playing games, surfing the net, emailing and using a range of apps. Often, children in my class, and my own two, want to take on this learning themselves, as it both engages them and is of interest.

The same is true for books, music, languages, arts – it is about engaging the children in the learning process and opening their eyes to possibilities that lie ahead. Education is derived from the Latin ‘educare’ or ‘bring up’, which is related to ‘educere’ or ‘bring out’, ‘bring forth what is within’, and ‘bring out potential’.



Ian Yorston, director of digital strategy at a boys’ college:

I think the purpose of education is to teach children how to fail. To drive them to failure and see what happens.

If you’re not failing every now and again, it’s a sure sign that you’re not trying anything very innovative.
Woody Allen

It takes 65,000 errors before you are qualified to make a rocket. Wernher von Braun

Success is going from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm. Winston Churchill

We’re too nice to children. We used not to be. Not to Tom Brown. Not to Oliver Twist. Education has become progressively gentler – in a manner that has not always been helpful. Children have moved from fear to security, to dependency – one step too far – too dependent on adults, on teachers, on parents, on technology...

We need to find new ways for children to fail. We need to step back, let go a little, be less helpful.

Of course, our students won’t always like this approach. But I suspect that they’ll learn a lot more. And, with a bit of luck, they’ll learn how to succeed.

The rots from the head

The above headline is the title of a book by Bob Garratt. The sub-heading of the book is: 'Developing Effective Board Directors'. When Garratt uses the word 'head', he is not referring to a sole person such as the Chairman (used for both genders) of the Board. He refers to all Board members.

Although Garratt's book is directed mainly at the corporate world, there are parallels to the Governing Bodies of schools. A Board of Directors in the business world represents various stakeholders such as the CEO (Chief Operating Officer) and shareholders. In a school situation, the membership consists of interest groups such as parents and staff. The principal's position can be compared to that of the CEO. Both have to turn Board decisions into realities within the organisation.

Too often, the principal can become the scapegoat when things go wrong in a school. That person is viewed too narrowly as the 'head' who is solely responsible for what happens. The SGB as an entity is responsible. Members of the Governing Body are expected to support the

principal when agreed-on decisions are being implemented. If implementation hiccups occur, the SGB needs to be a guiding influence. Yet it should not micromanage the situation.

The principal has a pivotal position in a well-governed school. Being a head is demanding, exhausting and – at times – stressful. The SGB should see their role as that of being a helper not a hindrance. Should the principal not be suitable for the post, the governors will find it difficult if not impossible to achieve the school goals and ideals. The SGB would then have to take corrective action. That action would be ethically-driven and imbued with empathy. The SGB would be mindful of the often challenging, complex situations that confront the principal. A principal is answerable not only to the SGB. A good principal listens and responds to the viewpoints of the wider parent community, staff, education department officials and most importantly, the children. Then, of course, the principal will have a personal perspective of the situation. Most principals soon learn that adroit verbal juggling skills are an asset!

Give the Chairman six top tips!

Adrian Cadbury in *Corporate Governance and Chairmanship* has described the attributes of a good chairman. At least these six aspects should be evident:

1. One is not to talk too much from the chair.
2. The chairman's job is to listen and not to chatter.
3. There is a need to orchestrate the discussion so that it comes to a meaningful conclusion
4. The chairman needs to have the ability to integrate the different threads of complex issues so that there can be fruitful conclusions.
5. There has to be the ability to integrate the different skills and perceptions of those sitting around the boardroom table.

6. There is a need to have an holistic understanding of the organisation in the context of the wider community.

The chairman, according to Cadbury, needs to remember that the position is only that of being boss of the board of directors, not of the company. There's the parallel in the school. The SGB chairman should not behave as if he or she is in charge of the school. If that's done, the person will clash with the principal and senior management team. Day-to-day management and leadership reside in the executive staff of the school.



Total Quality Education (TQE)

Does your school or education department office understand Quality practices and principles? Do you 'Walk the Quality talk'? SAQI does leadership and management programmes in all nine provinces. Programmes are adapted to specific organisational needs. Poor schools are sponsored. For more details, please contact Vanessa du Toit (012-349-5006; vanessa@saqi.co.za) or Richard Hayward (011-888-3262; rpdayward@yahoo.com)