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School Governor regulation in England's changing education landscape.

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Abstract

The changing education landscape in England combined with a more rigorous form of governor regulation in the form of the Ofsted 2012 Inspection Framework are placing more demands than ever before on the 300000 volunteer school governors in England. School governors who, in many cases, are directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Education. Using a form of Goffman's frame analysis and drawing on theory that indicates that head teachers and inspection reports are highly influential to the ways in which governors make sense of their environment and accountability, this paper traces the development of a system which is highly specific to England, in order to evaluate to what extent present governor regulatory accountabilities can be seen as conflicting or in harmony with head teacher and inspector understandings of the role. The paper concludes that there is considerable evidence that the current regulatory framework combined with conflicting and often contradictory head teacher and inspector understandings of governance is giving rise to what Koppell terms 'Multiple Accountabilities Disorder' and that this is creating tensions in the system of education governance and regulation in England.

Introduction

The recent crisis in English Education, The Trojan Horse Affair, nicknamed Trojangate by bloggers and tweeters,(Phipps, 2014), exerted a profound influence on the communities in which these schools were situated. Equally as importantly it revealed considerable flaws in the systems of governance and accountalbity within English schools.

The affair, prompted by a letter which is now thought to be a hoax, has prompted an unprecedented level of school inspections which have been carried out to investigate the alleged infiltration of hard line Muslim ideology into the curriculum of 25 Birmingham Schools.An infiltration alleged to have taken place largely due to mismanagement of school governors. As a result, five of the schools were placed in special measures, the lowest school inspection category available, with a further nine schools re-categorised to 'requires improvement'. The scandal, amongst other factors has brought to light issues with the whole issue of school governor operations and their role in overseeing in what is essentially a new education system in England (Baxter , 2014a). It has also raised questions that apply not only to England, but are equally pertinent in terms of the democratic governance of education more broadly-particularly in view of the neo liberal education agendas that have been adopted

throughout Europe and beyond (see Ozga & Segerholm, 2014). These agendas, characterised by an increase in schools that are not subject to local control and operate largely in a free market environment (Ball, 1993, 2009; A. Wilkins, 2013), are also subject to increasingly rigororous and politically motivatied acountablity regimes in the form of inspection and regulation (Grek & Lindgren, 2014; Ozga, Baxter, Clarke, Grek, & Lawn, 2013). The Trojan Horse Affair has been a catalyst for examining how the rapid changes to the English system of education – changes that have gained in pace and intensity since the inception of The Coalition Government in 2010- have affected the way in which education in England is governed.

Although The Trojan Horse Affair has placed school governance firmly in the eye of the media the whole area has been under scrutiny for some time now. Recent parliamentary enquiries, reports by the English Inspectorate of Education, Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), have all questioned how a system which has grown organically over the past hundred years, is to be monitored and governed given the many and varied changes to English school structures.Changes that began under New Labour and have continued to gain pace under the Coalition Government from 2010 (Ofsted, 2011; Parliament, 2013b, 2013c).

History of School Governing

In order to understand what the current challenges are, it is important to understand how the system of education governance has evolved. Particularly as it is a system which is in many ways unique to England, evolving as it has in response to both educational and political imperatives that are particular to that country (Lawton, 1978; Sallis, 1988b)

School governance in England dates back some 600 years; first introduced to ensure financial probity it continued in this vein until the 1944 Education Act laid down the partnership between central and local government and set out in some detail the roles and responsibilities of governors and the division of responsibilities between the LEA and individual school bodies (Parliament, 1944). The Act changed the shape and form of governing boards, increasing their powers and specifically articulating their modus operandi through sections 17 -21.

After that the most substantial changes in the form and shape of school governance emerged during the early sixties. The pace of change in the composition of governing bodies would have been far slower had it not been for the radical and transformative work done in the City of Sheffield in the late sixties. This was largely due to innovative Labour policy initiatives prompted by an extended period out of office (Sallis: 114). These changes resulted in a far larger more participatory form of school governance. As a result of these changes, governor numbers rose dramatically and these changes gave rise to the Taylor Inquiry, which instigated the

Taylor Report (1977), arguably one of the most influential reforms on school governance since the 1944 Act .

The Taylor Report recommended that five main interests should be represented on governing bodies: the LEA, parents, teachers, older pupils and the local community. In addition it recommended that all LEAs provide training and development for governors. The report was shortly followed by The Education Act 1980 which allowed any governor to stand for Chair (not just LEA governors). The 1986 Education Act concentrated its efforts on partnership between central and local government ensuring the end of the dominance of governing bodies by LEA representatives both strengthening the role of governors reporting to parents whilst also highlighting the role of individual schools within their communities. A facet all but negated in the later act.

The radical changes to education brought about by the 1988 Education Reform Act which introduced a national curriculum and centralised education by removing power from Local Education Authorities and greatly increasing the powers of the Secretary of State for Education (Parliament., 1988), also impacted on governance. Increasing emphasis on school self-management through the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) reflected the neo liberal turn adopted by many countries in an effort to find, *'the right blend of state, market and democratic institutions to guarantee peace, inclusion, well being and stability,'*(Harvey, 2005:10). All elements thought to be threatened by successive economic downturns in capitalist systems. For the Conservative government of the time the English education system was seen to be over bloated and difficult to control; the 1988 Act was intended to create more competition between schools and reduce what were seen as inefficiencies in the system.

This resulted in a far greater impetus for schools to engage governors from the business community, an element described in Thody's 1994 study on school governors which describes, 'An advice book for business community governors that, 'schools need to run like companies with the governing bodies being boards of directors and the headteachers the managing directors (Thody, 1994:22).

The three challenges of a changing system

Today's school governor is faced with a number of issues, not least with regard to the substantial changes in the education landscape over the past 20 years. The Academies project, a flagship policy first instigated by the New Labour Government under Tony Blair, was set up to improve failing schools by offering them financial and curricular independence (Ball, 2009). In 2010 the project was intensified and widened by the Academies Act 2010 (Parliament, 2010).Under the new regulations, outstanding schools too could opt for academy conversion. During the Conservative /Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010-2015) the Act was used to progress a neo-liberal

belief in the efficiency of the market by using the powers of Ofsted and The [former] Secretary of State for Education- Michael Gove to force academisation on failing schools (Gorard, 2009). Although the government is currently in the process of establishing a middle tier of accountability for schools, it is still not clear how this will function.

The second issue facing governors is the increasing incursion of groups of schools, either chains or federations which have developed sophisticated,multi-level governance structures. In some cases governors may be responsible for a number of schools, supported by local governing groups who have consultative but no decision making powers- this has raised questions over what it really means to be a school governor (see for example Baxter & Wise, 2013; Chapman et al 2010).

The third major challenge for school governance arises from the increased regulatory emphasis placed upon it by the English School Inspectorate, Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education, children, families and skills).

Regulation under the 2012 Ofsted Framework for Inspection

As in the case of other public services, increasing levels of purported independence have led to growth in the powers of regulatory authorities set up to manage and monitor new 'freedoms' (see Clarke, 2008 for further insights). In the case of education the English inspectorate charged with regulating education in England-Ofsted- was set up in 1992 by John Major's Conservative Government and founded originally upon the principles of transparency and value for money, defined within his Citizens Charter (Parliament, 1991). Established in order to provide greater information that would in theory enable a more informed quality of parental choice in an increasingly marketised environment '(Lawton, 1978:13), it proclaims its independence to inspect, '*Without Fear or Favour'*, a powerful mantra designed to indicate the agency's lack of partiality to any particular political agenda and its freedom from influence by the teaching profession (Ofsted, 2012).

Since its inception in 1992 Ofsted has employed numerous frameworks via which it evaluates schools (and other bodies falling under its remit). The inspectorate replaced the previous system of Her Majesty's Inspectorate; a far less regulatory body with a particular focus on school improvement (Maclure, 2000), and one which whilst possessing a good deal of credibility with the profession was unpopular with government who for some time before its demise had accused its inspectors of promoting a liberal curriculum and of being far too complicit with the teaching profession.

The most recent framework to be used by the inspectorate was introduced in 2012 (Ofsted, 2012a). A self-declaredly tougher version than previous ones it was instigated largely at the behest of the new Chief Inspector of Schools (HMCI), Sir Michael Wilshaw. The Framework among other things was designed to respond to increasing

political disillusionment with falling standards in English education, largely brought to light by the influential (but highly contentious and contested) PISA- Programme for International Student Assessment. Among the many changes within the framework, discussed in more detail in other publications (Grek & Lindgren, 2014), the new version places far more focus on school governance than any previous iterations. At a time when governor support is at an all-time low funding for Local Education Authority governor support and training has in many cases been cut. This has meant that schools wishing to invest in the type of governor training needed to support development of the extensive range of skills required for the role in its current form, often need to buy it in at far greater cost than previously, and of a quality that according to the 2013 Parliamentary Inquiry into School Governance, varies from the excellent to the execrable (Parliament, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

The changes to the School Inspection Framework and accompanying speeches given by HMCI (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools) place emphasis on governors being able to strategically lead the school (Ofsted, 2012). As school leaders school governors are measured on their ability to 'challenge and support the school so that 'weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met' (page 14, section 2). The framework evaluates governors not only on their capacity to strategically lead the school but also places considerable emphasis on their ability to hold the senior leadership team to account. The integration of governors work under a single judgement of Leadership and Management rather than rendering it as separate judgement has profound implications for the regulation of the governor role; leaving governors responsible for specific areas of oversight that were not apparent in previous iterations of the framework (see for example Ofsted, 1993, 2005; Ofsted, 2009). The previous framework published in 2009, judged the work of the governing body as just one element out of eight sub-judgements falling under the Leadership and Management section (ibid:14: section 2); articulating it as:

> *2. The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met*

In contrast in section 58 of the 2012 Framework the governors' role is not only specified in an overarching judgement:

> *'Inspection examines the impact of all leaders, including those responsible for governance, and evaluates how efficiently and effectively the school is managed. In particular, inspection focuses on how effectively leadership and management at all levels promote improved teaching, as judged within the context of the school, and enable all pupils to overcome specific barriers to learning, for example through the effective use of the pupil premium. (Ofsted, 2012: 19 section 58)*

But specifically outlines how inspectors are to qualify their judgements within the accompanying Inspection Handbook; these areas are outlined in Figure two.

Under the new framework and because of the overarching judgement, it is far more difficult to see where staff duties end and governor duties begin- an issue which has exercised governors for some time now judging by the number of allegations of too great an operational interest and not enough strategic steering on their part (see for example Carmichael & Wild, 2012; DFE, 2011).

Changes to inspection documentation were only one of a number of changes to the inspectorate's approach to inspection. In addition to this, accusations that schools judged to be satisfactory were failing to improve-that they were coasting-led to a change in the inspection judgements: Outstanding, good, satisfactory and special measures became: Outstanding, good, *requires improvement* and special measures. The change in terminology has meant that schools hitherto considered to be adequate are now the focus of more regular and stringent inspections (Ofsted, 2012).

Multiple regulatory accountabilities

The substantial changes to the context in which governors are working, alongside changes in how they are regulated are creating multiple demands on this volunteer body, who not only have to assume far greater and more extensive responsibilities, but are also being subjected to far more rigorous form of regulatory control.

Although, as this paper has already detailed, governors have traditionally shouldered a good deal of responsibility, particularly in ensuring financial probity, research indicates that the multi-faceted accountabilities faced by today's governors have no historical precedent. Koppell sees these multiple accountabilities as problematic for public service organisations, arguing that this type of over accountability induces what he terms 'Multiple Accountabilities Disorder' or MAD (Koppell, 2005). He argues that government attempts to make individuals and organisations accountable in terms of more than one accountability objective, in turn

> *Reduces flexibility, focus and stability, discouraging innovation and entrepreneurial behaviour; making leaders risk-averse and rule-obsessed; incentivising tunnel-vision and ritualization; and increasing the proportion of resources dedicated to rebuttal or defensive image management (Flinders, 2008:171).*

Flinders takes this further arguing that in attempting to answer to too many accountability objectives, organisations dedicate a disproportionate amount of their time to rebuttal or defensive image management (Flinders, 2008: 22). A facet which has appeared across other public service organisations (Currie & Suhomlinova, 2006; Storey, Bullivant, & Corbett-Nolan, 2012).

MAD, or multiple accountabilities disorder; is theorised as a phenomenon which occurs when the regulation of public bodies encompasses too many objectives,'

> *Each with different objectives, making distinct data demands, have different expectations based on varying sets of norms, and may therefore pass completely different judgements:' (Flinders, 2008:171).*

The seven objectives that he outlines are illustrated in figure one (Flinders, 2008:170).
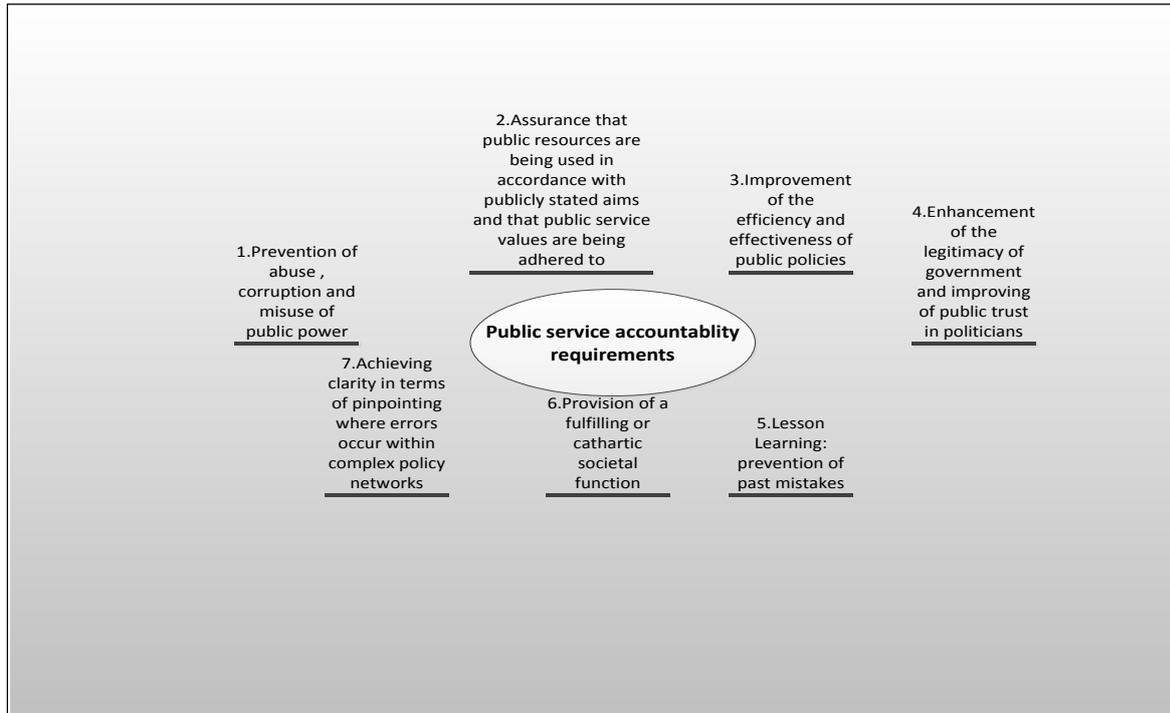

Figure 1 Public Service accountability requirements (Flinders, 2008)

Other writers argue that public service accountabilities are in essence multiple and must be so in order to effect efficiencies and continuous improvement in what has become a highly competitive quasi privatised environment (see for example House, 1980; Peters & Waterman, 1982). But others argue that the incursion of private sector marketised models into public sector evaluation systems has left evaluation systems lacking in terms of their core function- to improve service delivery(Squires & Measor, 2005; Talyor & Balloch, 2005)

Earlier work carried out by Deem, Brehony and Heath (Deem, Brehony, & Heath, 1995), along with more recent work carried out by Wilkins (2014), looks in depth at governor accountabilities and outlines a shift in focus for governors – arguing that new government and media discourses around school governing, alongside the professionalization of governing bodies are streamlining the number of accountabilities, in some cases eradicating the need for democratic accountability that featured in governance structures from the late sixties until the mid-seventies (See Thody, 1994 and Sallis, 1998).

In order to find out whether there is indeed a reduction in governor accountabilities, this paper uses Flinders seven objectives of public service accountability requirements to investigate the extent to which, differing emphases on accountability requirements appearing within Ofsted reports and head teacher interviews and discourses around governance reflect current regulatory requirements. The paper also looks at whether the changes to governors' work and accountabilities in this new school education landscape appear to be producing the kinds of negative behaviours outlined earlier. The principal questions for this study are:

1. **To what extent do inspectorate and head teacher discourses reflect current governor regulatory requirements?**
2. **Is there any evidence that multiple accountabilities produce negative or defensive governor behaviours?**
3. **What are the implications of current governor regulatory requirements for the English system of education governance?**
4.

Headteacher Discourses

Many existing studies into school governance rely upon interviews with school governors in order to investigate the phenomenon. This study takes a slightly different approach in using inspector reports and head teacher discourses to explore the research questions. The rational leading to this emanates from work in the field of organisational learning and the ways in which individuals make sense of their environments (Agyris, 199; March & Olsen, 1976; Weik, 2001), along with previous research by the author into working identities and constructivist learning (Baxter, 2004; Baxter, 2011, 2012).

This work asserts that when individuals are attempting to make sense of their work and environments, they often tend to formulate decisions in terms of trusted reference groups. In both literature on school governance (Deem et al., 1995; James et al., 2011) and literature that looks at governing across the not-for-profit sector, (Cornforth, 2004; Cornforth & Edwards, 1999), one of the primary sources of reference us the CEO (in corporate terms) or the head teacher in educational contexts. Reports and surveys into the area of school governance still show that in spite of all external data now available to schools from organisations such as The National Governor Association or The Key for School Governors (https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/),there is still ample evidence to suggest that head teachers (and their senior teams) exert considerable influence on both governor decisions and the ways in which governors perceive their role and function (Balarin, Brammer, James, & McCormack, 2008; Baxter & Wise, 2013; Hill & James, 2014; James et al., 2013) .Drawing on this evidence this study investigates head teacher discourses on accountability, viewing these as strong influences upon

governors, and concomitantly on governing bodies. The results of this study have since been carried forward to be used in order to carry out further investigation into governor identities and roles (and the primary influences upon these roles) in areas of high socio economic deprivation (Baxter, forthcoming).

One of the criteria for successful public service regulatory regimes is that the regulators possess an in depth understanding of those whose work they regulate. Therefore it is important to the success of any regulatory system, that those who submit to it, understand how their work fits with the criteria that is employed by it regulatory body (see Boyne, 2002, OECD, 2014). The opinion of head teachers and inspectors is understood to be highly influential in governor retention, one of the underlying rationale for undertaking this study (Balarin, et al, 2008; James et al, 2013). I therefore chose to analyse inspection reports and to interview head teachers for this particular study, with the intention of moving on\to investigate governor perceptions depending upon the results of this work.

Data collection and analysis

The documentary evidence for this paper includes an analysis of fifty inspection reports, Ofsted thematic reports, policy documents and government inquiries combined with 12 head teacher interviews. The twelve heads that were interviewed all came from secondary schools within a single geographical area in the North of England. The inspection reports also came from the same area although not all of them emanated from the specific schools in which the heads were based. It was decided that on the basis of previous studies, that fifty would give a reasonable sample on which to base this paper within the given time frame (see for example Baxter and Clarke, 2013). A single geographical area was chosen as the site for the study in order to provide an ideographic approach aimed at revealing deep insights into the ways in which the governor role is perceived in regulatory terms. This approach is recognised to yield the rich datasets required to investigate prevailing discourses that are central to this particular project (Gomm et al 2000).

The inspection reports were published between 2009 and 2012 and cover two different inspection frameworks (there are two versions of 2012 Framework; one produced in January 2012 and later amended in September of the same year-there is little difference between the two) (Ofsted, 2009, 2012a, 2012b). This time period was chosen in order to evaluate the ways in which both the inspectorate and head teachers were viewing the role and regulation of governors during a period of intense change to inspection frameworks. The period also spans an electoral cycle-the new Coalition Government was elected in 2010 and a new head of Ofsted, appointed on January 1st 2012, both events exerting a potential impact on the thinking around governor regulation. In addition, this paper spans a period in which the White Paper, The Importance of Teaching, and follow up Education Act 2011 combined with The

Academies Act of 2010, paved the way for the increasing school autonomies discussed earlier in the paper (DFE, 2010; Parliament, 2010, 2011a). A major review of The Role and Performance of Ofsted in 2011 was also influential on thinking on governor regulation (Parliament, 2011b).

As the study is primarily investigates prevailing discourses around governors: their role and regulation, the data were analysed using a combination of critical discourse analysis which focused on Harvey Sacks member categorisation analysis using NVIVO software (Silverman, 1998). Concordance software was employed to analyse the prevalence of particular terms such as: expertise, understanding and skills.

The project investigates the discourses, (Foucault, 1980), or the normative assumptions around the governor role that both heads and inspectors employ when talking or reporting on governance. In order to further understand how governance is understood by both parties, I also employed elements of Goffman's Frame analysis (Goffman, 1974).This method was important in ascertaining what cognitive frames of understanding were inherent within the inspection reports. By aligning this with concomitant head teacher frames of understanding it was possible to identify which regulatory functions fell outside of these frames in both elements of data. In analysing the language used in reports and head teacher interviews it was possible to ascertain how governors fitted into their particular worldviews and, to a certain extent, what understandings of governance fell outside of these frames. In analysing this the paper then related these understandings to regulatory functions, interpreted through Ofsted categories. Understandings of governance that fell outside of inspector and head teacher frames of understanding were assumed to be difficult to regulate.

A coding framework based on Flinders seven requirements for public service accountability was employed in order to analyse data. The findings were then grouped under the broad headings illustrated in figure two and aligned with the appropriate sections of the Ofsted 2012 Framework for Inspection.
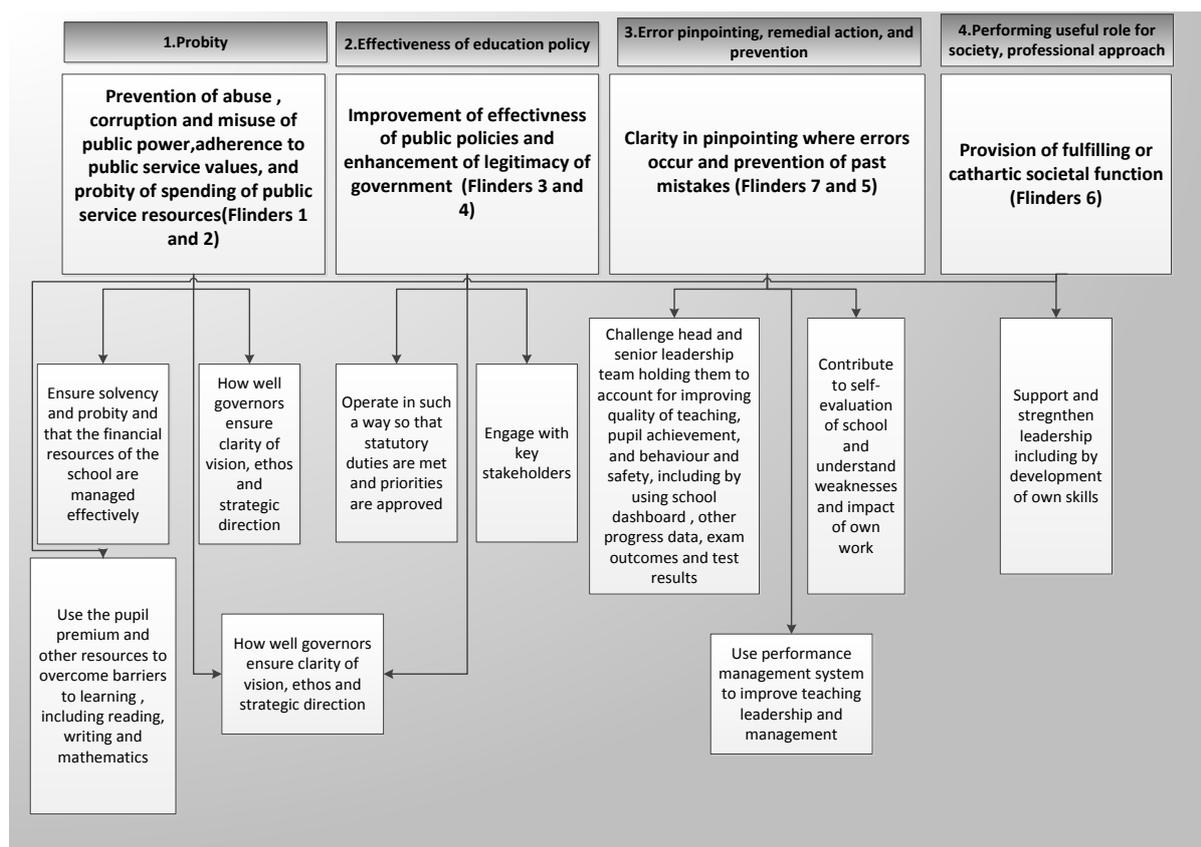
Figure 2 Flinders Seven Functions of accountability mapped to Ofsted Inspection Framework 2012 – Requirements of governors.

The framework in Figure two was developed in order to link the areas of governor regulation with Flinders seven functions of accountability. This was then intended to add greater clarity to how school governing maps on to a broader perspective of regulatory accountability. It also aims to show which areas within Flinders' model were focused on within the context of governor regulation. This then enabled the data to be analysed not only in terms of the Ofsted requirements, but equally in terms of the broader model of regulatory accountability. This was directed at offering a clearer picture of whether there was any evidence of accountability overload and in which areas this appeared to be. It also looked to create a framework which would enable an analysis of any defensive behaviours by governors categorising according to regulatory areas.

Regulatory emphasis.

In responding to the three research questions the data analysis revealed that there was evidence that Flinders seven accountability requirements and their accompanying Ofsted requirements were being fulfilled to very varying degrees.

However data within both reports and gathered from head teacher interviews revealed that although governor roles and accountabilities had changed perceptions by head teachers and inspectors, they did reveal an emphasis on some elements of the governor role whilst all but negating others. This is discussed under the four headings which appear in figure two.

1. Probity

Head teachers and inspectors (articulated through reports) were fairly comfortable with the idea of the governor role as one of probity, although this was only reflected by certain elements that fell under this heading.

In a number of instances there appeared to be an implicit belief in amongst inspectors that there was an 'old tradition' of governing, which was, in this case being successfully combined with the new. This rather grey and ephemeral reference to times gone by is articulated in this quote from an inspection report which states that:

> *'The governors have successfully integrated the best of the old traditions with a clear vision for the future in order to inaugurate further developments and expansion.' (Ref: 03: 2009)*

What these old traditions are, we can only guess, but taken in context they appear to reflect the kind of financial responsibilities reflected under heading one in figure two.

More recent reports (those from 2011 onwards) do reflect the move towards the new inspection framework introduced in January 2012; and a markedly different emphasis in regulatory objectives (Ofsted, 2012b). Although the framework had not yet been introduced it is important to point out that the inspectorate's thinking around governor responsibilities would have taken place a considerable time before the formal introduction of the framework. This may have been prompted by research reports which occurred within that period, or equally from work being done within the inspectorate- such as their report produced in 2011: School Governance : Learning from the Best (Ofsted, 2011b). Yet even within these reports, actual commentary on the specific work of governors is sparse and suffers from a lack of detail on governor performance; particularly in the case of failing schools. In 70% of these reports governors were solely evaluated in terms of the discharge of their statutory duties; with scant attention devoted to their strategic role in shaping the direction and ethos of the school. These reports reflect the considerable focus on Flinders' accountability requirement two: Provision of assurance that public resources are being used in accordance with publicly stated aims. Equally, they represent a move away from school governors' accountability as cathartic societal function (Flinders six).

The emphasis on financial probity may well in part be due to a reaction on the opprobrium evident within number of high profile school financial scandals which

occurred during this period, adding a specious quality to The Coalition Government's project to enhance the financial autonomies of schools under the academies project (Hasan, 2012). It may also be due to the fact that research has shown that in other organisations with similar governing arrangements, for example third sector bodies, the monitoring of financial performance is far more straightforward from a governor point of view, than the monitoring of non financial performance (see for example Cornforth, 2004; Cornforth & Edwards, 1999).

2. Effectiveness of education policy

The reports and interviews illustrate that the combination of shifting regulatory requirements, combined with the focus of the 2012 Inspection Framework which demands multiple regulatory accountablity from governors; is leading to the creation of a number of discourses. One such powerful one is that of 'the professional governor,' This term, although it appears with increasing regularity in parliamentary inquiries and the media, is used in very diverse ways: Often being employed by some to to mean someone from a business background (see for example Parliament, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).While others- such as the National Governors Association (NGA)-argue that the term professional relates to the skills that governors posess rather than relating to their areas of employment. The confusion is in part due to a discourse of professionalism that appeared much earlier in accounts of governing by Angela Thody (Thody & Punter, 2000) and has been echoed in more recent parliamentary inquiries and reports (Wilkins, 2014 ,Carmichael & Wild, 2012; James et al, 2011), in which governors with a business background do very often come with very valuable skills.

However this discourse appears to have taken on a life of its own in both inspection reports and head teacher discourses and is often interpreted as an implicit acknowledgement that people from business backgrounds (particularly from the private sector), make the best governors, as this headteacher in a large secondary school remarked:

> Yes our chair really keeps us on our toes; he's very experienced and a trained inspector – so he knows what he's about. (EP14)

This is affecting the interpretation of government policy and is to a certain extent undermining the system of accountablity. It also reflects neoliberal thinking in terms of an implicit assumption that individuals from the world of corporate competition will be able to perform the job more efficiently than those from other backgrounds.. It also strongly in head teacher discourses , as this quotation from the head teacher of a very large comprehensive in a deprived area demonstrates when they parse what they see as a volunteer from the discourse of 'the professional governor.' The quotation which follows is rich in its capacity to demonstrate the thinking and

normative assumptions held by a number of head teachers and inspectors: the fact that business people are volunteers too is apparently immaterial.

> *We have a good set of governors here, good in the sense that they are committed, but they are not professionals that can hold a head to account really. The problem is with the new framework (2012), is that the majority of governors, well they are all volunteers, not all from professional backgrounds, who'll be driven away under this new framework cos they haven't got the skills or time to do the job (EP20).*

Another important element to consider under this particular heading is the whole issue of stakeholder governance. Traditional models of stakeholder governance raise questions in the current system about who the stakeholders actually are. For many years, particularly in the wake of The Sheffield Project mentioned earlier, there was little doubt- stakeholders were by and large parents or representatives of the local community. But in the current system many schools are having to recruit governors who may live some distance from the schools – this is particularly so in the case of federations or groups of schools working under a single governing body.

> *Some of our governors are local, yes but others don't really have any idea about the local area- they are good at the skills elements though.' (EP 21)*

This does leave questions in terms of how far current governor accountablities are demonstrably able to both engage with key stakeholders and ensure that their vision of schools is in alignment with local priorities. This has not been helped by comments from public figures such as Michale Wilshaw- Her Majesty's Chief Inspector- Head of Ofsted- who stated that, School governance focuses on the marginal rather than the key issues. '*In other words, too much time spent looking at the quality of school lunches and not enough on Maths and English'* (Wilshaw, 2012). This combined combined with the normative approaches of head teachers and inspectors, leads to a fundamental undermining of the effectiveness of an education policy which has put 300,000 people in charge of schools many of whom are apparently from the 'wrong sort of background.' It also creates issues in terms of diversity, as reflected by a recent study by The University of Bath (James, 2014).

2. Error pinpointing, remedial action, and prevention

The discursive emphasis on the value placed by the inspectorate on a skills based approach to governing becomes increasingly evident in reports that date from 2011 onwards. This is accompanied by a greater focus on the ability of the governing body to challenge rather than a reliance on the previously quoted shibboleth of: 'challenge and support.' A phrase that appears with consistent regularity not only in Ofsted reports in the period 2009 – 2011, but also in the numerous thematic reports produced by the agency around this time (Ofsted, 2011a, 2011b, 2012b; Parliament, 2011b). Although this ability to challenge is discursively aligned with the notion of

governor skills, the narratives again reflect a particular emphasis on the praising of those particular governor skills which are derived solely from governors' particular professional background- as discussed in the previous section.

In 98% of the reports where these skills were mentioned they occur purely in relation to praise for excellence in governance. There is a distinct silence throughout the reports around those governors recruited for professional backgrounds that were in fact failing within their governing role.

The shift from supporting and challenging to one of challenge was intended to sharpen the ways in which governors hold senior leadership teams to account. A number of reports during the period 2006-12 state that this is an area of difficulty and one in which governors have been reliant on the honesty of the head teacher to present the school as it really is (Carmichael & Wild, 2012; DFE, 2011). The shift in focus offers the public the verisimilitude of improving governor performance: of focusing on the professional capacities of governors to hold head teachers and senior leaders to account. But it must be remembered that this shift also appears at a time when Ofsted was asked to cut its budget- since 2004 it has been tasked with reducing its overheads from an operating budget of £226 million in the period 2004-5 to a mere £143 million by 2014-15 (Baxter , 2014b). In part this was to be achieved via the introduction of proportional inspection for schools judged to be outstanding. Inspections were only to take place only if data showed a fall in results, or if problems raised by parents and/or governors indicated the necessity for re-inspection. But following a succession of high profile governor failures the inspectorate have had to somewhat rethink this strategy introducing light touch inspections every two to three years (Ofsted, 2014b).

Proportional inspections and the risk analysis associated with them was first raised at a conference of The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates in 2009 (SICI, 2009). Linked to the ideal of the self-improving school, (Ehren & Visscher, 2008; Janssens & van Amelsvoort, 2008; MacBeath, 2006); this innovation whilst undoubtedly representing a positive move towards internally driven school improvement, has in the case of regulation in England been interpreted as yet another task to be placed firmly on the shoulders of governors.

This has left some governors with feelings of de-professionalisation- sometimes to such an extent that even those with a background in education have felt the need to train as inspectors as this head reported:

> They [the chair of governors] that it was a good idea to train as an inspector so they did so ' […] they really talk with authority when he says this is how it is, this is how it is (H6).

In this case, it was no longer enough that this individual had steered the school to its outstanding status; in this case the accountability demands being placed on the

school (one which would be subject to the proportional inspection referred to earlier), were resulting in what Flinders describes as,

> 'Increasing the proportion of resources dedicated to rebuttal or defensive image management.' (Ibid: 171).

Evidence of the amount of time and energy that this defensive image management was very apparent, as schools were finding new hoops to jump through with regard to regulation; this was particularly evident in a comment by this head teacher:

> 'We are covered, I mean it's noted at every governing body meeting when one of the governors challenges me or the SLT (Senior Leadership Team), I mean literally- x challenged x at 8.05 on Thursday evening! (H10-2012)

A focus on skills within the reports was very often accompanied by references to governor lay knowledge particularly in reports between 2011 and 2013, where the professionalism of governors was discursively aligned with their levels of school knowledge. But this knowledge was problematized by school leaders who in virtually all cases felt that this knowledge was, by the very nature of its lack of professional focus fairly limited. This was particularly well articulated by one school leader who told us:

> Now they [the governing body] are very good and they ask all the right questions but without my SIP [School improvement partner]to tell them whether I am telling the truth or not, I could tell them anything, they wouldn't know. Now ok at some point the data doesn't lie, but schools that have gone down the pan, they have governing bodies equally as adept as my governors, but they were lied to. (H10-2012).

One head felt that even the best intentioned and capable governors were seriously at a disadvantage when it came to holding professional staff to account, explaining that:

> 'Most of our meetings are about giving governors information so that they can take decisions that they never have quite enough information to take (H08-2012)

Although the inspectorate have made efforts to help governors by installing The Data Dashboard in 2013,

> 'The Data Dashboard provides a snapshot of performance in a school, college or other further education and skills providers. The dashboard can be used by governors and by members of the public to check performance of the school or provider in which they are interested.'(Ofsted, 2014a)

It still appears from this study, that head teacher perception of governor capabilities to hold them to account in a meaningful manner are circumspect to say the least.

Another element which apeared in the data, was the lack of confidence displayed by governors in the holding to account of head teachers as this head reported:

> *'You can tell by the questions being asked, my School Improvement Partner asks a damn sight better questions than the governors, they don't understand it or …are …..Intimidated' (H02-2011).*

This element is likely to become increasingly problematic as an increasing number of LEAs have their funding cut, some in response to negative inspections when as a consequence schools are to be placed in the charge of businesses and third sector organisations (Walker, 2013)

Balarin and colleagues were particularly concerned by the ways in which governor roles became operational rather than strategic when governors were recruited for professional skills, remarking,'*The boundaries are further blurred when educationalists take leading roles within governing bodies, a common trait within this area' :* (Balarin, Brammer et al., 2008). This shift demonstrates the type of incompatiblitiy between one accountabilty objective and another (Flinders, 2008:169).

As I discussed earlier, a body of research shows that in public service boards the ability to monitor financial performance is in many ways easier than monitoring an operational performance. The myriad elements involved in poinpointing where errors occur and in trying to prevent future errors relies on a complex mix of skills and knowlege not to mention an accurate and incisive insight into one's own performance- in this case the performance of the governing body as a whole. In cases where governors are no longer supported by a long term relationship with a School Improvement Partner from the Local Education Authority, the lack of confidence at holding schools to account in many cases is likely to persist.

4. Performing useful role for society, professional approach

Concordance analysis of the reports indicated that the words most readily associated with governors in the earlier reports (2009-10) tended to be those that praised volunteer principles: terms such as hard-working, dedicated and even, in some cases; devoted, indicated the way in which inspectors interpreted the earlier iteration of the inspection framework in ways which allowed for recognition of the volunteer aspect of the governor role *(Ofsted, 2009).* But although these attributes appear to be highly valued in these reports, they are rarely collocated with evidence to support the effect and impact this hard work has had upon the school and its leadership.

The marked tendency within the reports to give the least detail and evidence on governor performance in schools being awarded grade 3 (satisfactory/requires improvement) or lower; demonstrated some reluctance on the part of inspectors to pinpoint governor deficiencies (Flinders' point seven); this was compounded by a

lack of clarity around the ways in which governors had particularly contributed to a school's mediocre performance contrasting with the cathartic function of governors that featured highly in reports from more successful schools (point, six).

Development of governors' own skills has been a focus of governing bodies for some time now. Although at the time of writing initial training is not mandatory, governors are expected to self-assess in an informal way, this may vary from regular skill audits to group self-assessment at the end of meetings.

Conclusion

The study has shown that in spite of the fact that the 2012 Ofsted Framework does indeed include all seven of Flinders accountability requirements, conflicting discourses of what good governance actually is are interfering with standardisation in regulatory terms. The two distinct discourses underpinning both inspectorate and head teacher understandings of governance; one which perceives governors as well-meaning but ineffectual volunteers and the other which imagines them as professionals performing a professional function are undermining regulatory accountabilities.

The frames of understanding, articulated through the data offered conflicting and often contradictory evidence on what constitutes good governance, often excluding meanings of governance that are explicit within the 2012 Framework. Without interviewing governors it is not possible to identify to what effect this is having on governing bodies, but it is worthy of further study- particularly in terms of governor abilities to self-assess. Realistic governor self-assessment is very difficult to achieve as a recent project carried out by Hill and James reflected (Hill and James,2014), it is therefore reasonable to assume that governors, to a certain extent look to inspection reports and head teachers for confirmation of validity in role. If as this study suggests, they are faced with conflicting signals- ones that do not always reflect regulatory requirements, then this may be problematic for both governors and schools.

There was some evidence throughout the study that governors, in an attempt to fulfil their substantial regulatory accountabilities, were adopting some behaviours which indicated some confusion around the exact nature of their role.What came over very clearly was that in attempting to fulfil objectives linked to improvement of efficiency many governing bodies have taken a managerial perspective of improvement of efficiency and effectiveness (requirement three) and place inceasing emphasis on the professional skills of governors.This is perhaps unsurprising- they are more lmeasurable in terms of accountablity.It is far easier for the performative elements of

accountablity and far less risky from a political perspective for schools to demonstrate for example, that their financial probity is sound, by having an accountant on the board of governors. When compared with the need to demonstrate that individuals with little background in finance are capable of steering the not inconsiderable budget of a school (particularly if the school should ever find itself on the front pages of the newspaper charged with financial mis-management).

The recent discussion of school governing, prompted not only by the Trojan Horse Affair but by increasing numbers of high profile cases of governance failure, have brought a new impetus to government to look for solutions to the seemingly intractable problem of reconciling the old system of governance, based upon the principles of volunteerism with the new professional approaches demanded by both government and the new school system. In giving recent evidence to The Education Select Committee on an inquiry into extremism on schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw HMCI summed up his view of the crisis stating:

> *'We have relied on amateurish governance to do a professional job.'*
> *(Coughlan, 2014)*

Reiterating his previous call for governing bodies to have one or two 'professional' governors who would be paid and who could assist the rest of the governing body. This public recognition of the two prevailing discourses within governance today and the conflict between them is in some ways reassuring, however the means by which they may be reconciled is less evident and infinitely more perplexing. Regulation is one thing but if expectations and perceptions of the two most important influences on governor job understandings do not, as it appears in this paper, conflate, then it may provoke barriers to good governance that may not otherwise be present.

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