

## **No quick fixes! A Long Term Perspective by School Governor Alison Farnell**

Twenty-nine years ago, I became a school governor at one of our local secondary schools. Being a governor fused my natural talents and spiritual gifts with my passion for education and gave me the opportunity to bring a Christian influence into the environment in which children receive their education. I have been a school governor ever since. The role gives an expression to my desire to seek to bring about God's kingdom in my local community.

Education is such a formative experience for children so it has been a privilege to have served as a governor in various schools. Parents are key in the education process and are a vital support for school activities. As Christian parents, our faith motivates us to be involved. I have discovered that consistent and unconditional service to the well being of the school gradually earns a right to be heard on all sorts of issues. We have to learn to communicate our faith in ways that people with a different faith and worldview can understand. We need to find the right language and develop appropriate skills to work in a school's culture in an effective way.

Most Community Schools still have an ethic that is derived from our Christian-Judaic heritage. In such a context, a school governor can talk about principles and values that are Christian; these are usually compatible with the school's values. Yet, we shouldn't shy away from explaining *why* we think certain matters are important. We are, after all, called to give an account of the reason of the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Recently, I became a new governor at a school where I was embarrassed to be introduced as 'Alison, who is a Christian, has lots of experience of school governing and will be a great governor'. I'd have chosen to say 'Alison, who had three children at this school'. But we shouldn't hide our faith under a bushel. It is vital that others know why we work for the common good, and why we do what we do.

One of the most significant responsibilities of school governors is the appointment of head teachers. Recently, I met up with a head teacher we had appointed nine years ago to lead a school that had been struggling in a major way. Today, this same secondary school is one of the most improving schools in the country. I ascribe much of its improvement to the leadership exercised by the head teacher who saw her appointment very much as a calling from God. There are no quick fixes. Bringing about change is often about the long haul. And thinking strategically is vital to change making.

I became founding Chair of Warwickshire Governors' Forum, a collaborative venture between local authority officials, county councillors and representatives of governors of all schools in the county. The early '90s seemed the opportune time to create this triangle of politics (county councils), local education officers and governors; the partnership created a forum from which our collective voice could be heard much more strongly. This became a significant factor in

the county's education strategy and resulted in a sizeable increase in the funding we were able to secure. Where Warwickshire would have suffered a lack of funding due to the formula employed by the Department for Education and Science (now Department for Schools and Families), this countywide alliance exercised a more powerful advocacy on behalf of the local community.

Chairing that Forum gave me an opportunity to contribute to shaping education in such a way that more of our schools become places in which more children could flourish. Every child deserves the best educational opportunities. My Christian faith motivates me to get involved, to try make a difference, particularly on the side of the 'voiceless' and in seeking the common good, to establish something of God's kingdom.

In all that I do in a voluntary capacity as a governor, I am inspired and guided by the scripture in Micah 6:8.

'He has showed you, o man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'.