
Email from a Clerk to Governors at a primary school in Berkshire to a Head teacher at another school considering GVO. Reproduced with permission.

From: J
Sent: 27 September 2013 19:09
To: 'JF'
Subject: RE: Governors Virtual Office (GVO)

Dear J

I must apologise for not replying sooner. I have been away for a few days and am just catching up.

I have been Clerk to the GB of our Primary School for 12 years now. We started using GVO 3-4 years ago and haven't looked back. The GB simply would not be without it. Here are a few advantages:

- It is a secure system which cuts the need to send documents as email attachments. This is particularly significant for data protection and circulating confidential items. Within the site various levels of restrictions on access down to specific documents, can be used. This is very useful.
- More governors are using tablets etc and call up documents on their devices at meetings rather than printing out copies.
- I never provide hard copies of anything (apart from when I am feeling benevolent or am particularly asked to) so a lot of paper is saved. We frequently display the agenda and other docs on a white board at the meeting. I never send anything in the post so there is a cost saving there.
- The only hard copies I keep are the record copies of the signed minutes of meetings.
- The website can be accessed from anywhere and governors can log in at work or on holiday just to keep up with things if they want to. When I add anything I notify (by ticking a box) all or selected governors that I have added something. Governors receive a weekly automatic update anyway of all changes.
- Governors have become markedly more engaged with GB and school business. There is a news board and a discussion facility.
- There is a very useful LINKS facility. For example rather than upload a local authority

document to the GVO and put it in the "Library", I provide a link to the LA's website through the Links section. I do this for Ofsted updates, DfE bits and pieces etc and I alert governors to any changes.

- Updating membership is very easy for the clerk.
- You can give access to whoever you like eg Bursar, Associate Members, Ofsted inspectors, auditors etc, for as long or as short a period as you wish....and the Clerk can set the level of access and put restrictions on what individuals can see.
- The Clerk is usually set up as the manager of the GVO. There is quite a lot of work for the Clerk to begin with, and your Clerk must be fairly proficient with using IT and use of the internet. However the learning guides are good and fairly simple. I found it all very intuitive and the support that you get from the company is excellent. I chose to put on some legacy documentation to begin with so that the website had a mature look and feel from the outset and governors could spend time learning how to use it by exploring. It also gave me lots of practice loading documents and setting up folders etc. I put on the previous 2 years worth of minutes, quite a few policies , the school's main docs such as the School Development Plan etc
- Another major advantage is that if I were to be run over by a bus tomorrow and the school had to appoint another Clerk, EVERYTHING is in one place and my replacement could just carry on seamlessly.

I have really only scratched the surface here. There really are many advantages. I am not connected with school leadership systems in any way and I receive no advantage should you decide to sign up. However I would be more than happy to answer any queries you or your Clerk may have. I would even be happy to show you our site. However I know that Michael Thorpe or his colleague will demonstrate the functionality.

I have recommended the site to other Clerks in my LA. I should put my cards on the table here and say that I also work for the LA as a Governor Services Officer, and I know that schools that have adopted the system have all benefited from it. I believe that it creates a more effective and engaged governing body and it also makes the Clerks job easier....and saves time (and money if you pay by the hour) As I said there may be some set up costs in terms of investing time to upload documents but it is worth it.

I am aware that this is overwhelmingly positive of the system. I have had a few problems with bugs in for example my Internet browser, but the support has been swift and problems are resolved quickly. There are also a few functions such as deleting folders or changing the names of committees (the list on the left hand side) that cannot be done by the user but again SLS have been responsive.

Hope this helps

J