

## CASE STUDY: OWLSMOOR PRIMARY SCHOOL, BRACKNELL

### **Christine Jones, Chair of Governors, gives her thoughts on the impact of Governors' Virtual Office (GVO) at Owlsmoor Primary School:**

'I've been a Governor at Owlsmoor Primary School for 10 years, taking up the position of Chair of Governors in 2011. We have 546 pupils, from nursery and infants, through to juniors.

'Having taken on the Chair position, and with a relatively new Headteacher, I thought it a good time to review the workings of our Governing body. I obtained the views of all Governors and proceeded to reduce down the committee structure from five committees to three. I also took up the opportunity of attending a local workshop (with my Vice Chair of Governors) on the operation of the GVO system as I was aware of another school within Bracknell Forest using the system.

'I was looking for something to help us run things a bit more smoothly. We went to the workshop and we were quite impressed.

'Governor meetings have been evolving over time. Initially, when I started as a Governor, paperwork for the meetings was available in hard copy format only. We then progressed to

receiving much of the documentation electronically via email (although policies were still mainly hard copy). This meant Governors could print off documentation if they so wished to bring to meetings or the school could provide hard copies if required.

'With the increasing use of laptops, committee meetings started to take on the form of a group of Governors all seated in one room but viewing individual screens. Although this was more environmentally friendly (as we did not need to print off the documentation) we found that discussion was inhibited and not all Governors had the current/most up to date document to refer to.

**'We have been using the system now for just over a year and I can honestly say that it has been a Godsend.'**

'We had everyone sitting round the table looking at their own screen and it didn't really feel like a team atmosphere.

### **Governance revolution**

'The GVO system has completely revolutionised the way we as a Governing Body operate. All documentation is on the system, including key documents like the Self Evaluation Form, School Development Plan and Policies. Any Governor can access the documents at a time to suit them

and know that it is the current/most up to date version.

'We do not now email out all documents as there is no need to. It also makes updating documents easy. All our Policies are easily managed and reviewed using the GVO system, whereas before it was quite a task!

'The first thing we did after we set up our school on the GVO system was to run a meeting using an interactive white board. We now use a classroom for our meetings and rather than individuals having their own screens (although there are still a couple of tablets in the room) we all view the same information at the same time. The meetings flow better and we are all focused on the same information. This has negated the need to print off information for the meeting as we go through all the information together on the screen.

### **Team effort**

'We're all looking at the same information and we're all reviewing it together. It helps with discussions in the room. Everyone seems to be working together. People are still coming up with their own views on things when we run through documentation; people still have the opportunity to ask questions and ask about various things as we go along, but we're all looking at the same thing together and understanding it together and working as a group better.

'It is also easy to share news and information via the GVO's "discussion zone", where Governors can add comments.

'We've found another good feature to be the ability to restrict access to certain documents to

particular Governors if needs be. For example, the head teacher performance panel which only needs to be accessed by some governors.

### **Leadership role**

'In terms of using my leadership role to introduce GVO successfully, I think by being a key person involved in the pre-population of the information and upkeep of the documents - in addition to the Clerk to the Governors - I have a very good knowledge of what the GVO system can do. I have also attended a second workshop to share experiences and gain greater knowledge of the system and adapting it to how we operate as a Governing Body.

'We have been using the system now for just over a year and I can honestly say that it has been a Godsend. We are definitely hooked - and would not wish to return to how we used to operate. There is still more to learn about using the system and I found the second workshop great as an opportunity to share best practices etc with other users of the system.

'Certainly I think we're a lot further forward. We seem to be able to manage our meetings very well. I'm very conscious of the fact that the governing body is a team of volunteer personnel, people attending meetings in their own time, and I think it's important that the governing body's work and support is as streamlined as possible. This certainly helps us do that.

'The cost of GVO is very reasonable. Because we're so impressed with the system we've taken advantage of a subscription discount if you book for another three years. It is good value for money. It's a great little system and it's really helped us. We haven't looked back.'