

Case Study: Storrington First School

“A wonderful tool in improving the effectiveness of our Governing Body”. So says Peter Surtees, Consultant Governor, Chair of Governors at Storrington First School, and Chair of West Sussex Governors’ Association. He’s talking about the Governors’ Virtual Office (GVO).

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Just before Christmas 2009, Peter arranged a demonstration of a new tool – the Governors’ Virtual Office – for the Chairs Group at Storrington First School, West Sussex. They liked what they saw and asked their Clerk, Dids Branchflower, to study it in more detail and report back.

The result was that School Leadership Systems Ltd were asked to set up a GVO to Storrington First School’s specification during the spring term. It is a very simple to use, secure web site, laid out to reflect the structure and working pattern of Storrington First School’s governing body. It includes libraries for storing documents, facilities for sharing the latest news, an online discussion area, a policy maintenance function, a calendar and facilities to help the Clerk prepare and distribute agendas and meeting papers.

So, how is it helping? According to their Clerk, Dids Branchflower, “It’s great because it puts all we need in one place. It gives people access to information whenever they want and wherever they are, provided they have an internet connection.” From Dids’ own point of view, it has resulted in a much more efficient working pattern, as she can access and work on the GVO from any PC.

It also reduces significantly the amount of paper used and time spent copying, and that is reducing cost. Dids puts the efficiency point like this “Having a single conduit for communication has helped efficiency. In fact, in that sense, it’s invaluable, a great housekeeping tool – no excuses for mislaid paperwork!” She adds “Having the GVO has cut out hundreds of emails.”



Turning to how the GVO helps the effectiveness of Storrington First School’s governing body, Peter Surtees, the Chair, says “Using the GVO, it is easier for governors to be informed and they



generally are better informed. Governors can and do participate in debate in the discussion forum ahead of meetings and meetings have become more effective. In fact, using the GVO tends to change the mood of a meeting. We project documents from the GVO onto a white board and this facilitates and focuses discussion of details of, for example, budgets, plans and policy documents”.

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It’s important to recognise that technology alone cannot improve the effectiveness of a governing body. Leadership is critical. Peter Surtees has provided this not only in the general sense, but in particular, he has gone out of his way to put into the GVO information that he receives in his capacity as Chair, and through his work with the Local authority in his capacity as Chair for West Sussex Governors’ Association. Peter and Garry Smart, the Head, promote on line discussion in the GVO on relevant topics, asking for input from governors on subjects that affect the school in the medium or long term. Furthermore, Peter has prepared a termly programme of work that he

wants each of his subcommittee chairs to be responsible for, and linked that to relevant information supplied by the Head. This includes the school’s development plan, the SEF and School Improvement Partner reports. Thus he has developed a process by which the governors can use the information in the Virtual Office to discharge their responsibilities.

Peter says “We made a conscious decision to transfer to a paperless way of working – to keep all our information electronically, in one place. Governors have easy access to all the information they need to be as fully informed and engaged as they feel they need to be. This really helps improve the effectiveness of our governing body”

Peter Surtees would be happy to answer questions about Storrington First School’s Governors Virtual Office. He can be contacted by email at Peter@Surtees696.freeserve.co.uk

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