

# Why shouldn't governors be paid?

It's amazing how a modest proposal from Wilshaw that governors of schools in challenging circumstances should be paid has created such a tub-thumping chorus of disapproval. From the Guardian to the Telegraph, the indignation has been tumultuous. Outraged of Tunbridge Wells is stalking the land.

Richard Preston from the Telegraph was typical. "It's an insult to the 300,000 governors who work for nothing," he cried. And Wilshaw's argument that it would attract more competent professional people was just utter tosh! "Look at the health service," Preston demanded, doubtlessly referring to the Mid Staffordshire hospital scandal. Top paid professionals there were totally incompetent, and taking home fat salaries didn't change that. (Richard Preston obviously believes the less one is paid the better one performs.)

The National Governors Association is against it on the grounds that governors themselves, lemming-like, don't want to get paid! ASCL doesn't want it because they are worried about where the money is going to come from - possibly concerned that it might take school money away from headteachers' increasingly large salaries.

The most universal argument against paying governors is that it would undermine the ethos of voluntarism and create a divide and rule culture where the paid governors, the chairs of boards, would be on a pedestal and siding with fellow paid professionals, the headteachers, rather than with his or her governor peers.

The ethos of all tugging along together, sharing the work and the rewards would go out the window - it's a truism that paying some governors would to some extent undermine voluntarism. But is voluntarism a sacred end in itself if it's failing to do the job?

The best responses actually came from Mumsnet, where some governors were complaining at the workload, how they had had to give up holidays, pay for babysitters, and take unpaid time off work just to do the job properly. "Why shouldn't we get paid for it?" some asked. Now this is a very interesting point, because one of the reasons politicians at national level and increasingly at local level get paid is to stop Old Privilege being able to occupy all the positions of power. The moneyed classes can always be liberal with their time for voluntary efforts because they don't have to work.

So paying governors could introduce more diversity into the people who become chairs. Would they become too cosy as a paid professional with the other main paid professional on the board - the head? Frankly, a lot of chairs are too cosy with their headteachers already. This is Wilshaw's point and he is right. A lot of heads see the correct relationship between themselves and the chair of governors as one of the leader with his faithful helpmate at his side.

If appointed by the governors (they appoint headteachers after all), the paid chair's first line of accountability would be to the governors, who could sack him if they felt he had been suborned completely by the head. But the biggest winners could be the heads themselves. Most local authorities no longer pay for School Improvement Partners, but this critical friend role could be vitally important for a head whose school has fallen under the disapproving eye of Ofsted. They could lend some objectivity and accountability when, in a crisis, the main response of a leadership team can often be defensive myopia. If the staff see them as a real authority, chairs might be able to pick up on warning signs before morale and decline slips too far. And if dark clouds really start to gather, they can be an important line in the defence of the head's job.

For those schools in Academy chains, paid chairs appointed by governors could represent an important redress in community accountability which has now drifted, completely unaccountably, up to the paid executive and directors at the pinnacle of these corporate structures. It could add new status and authority to the role of governors in general. With the arrival of Academies and chains, this new status and greater expertise is needed more than ever.

## Special Needs and TAs

What would you say if you found out that your local hospital was reserving its most qualified and expert doctors to treat the patients who were least ill and giving the most seriously unwell patients to juniors and nurses? You would think it was a scandal on the scale of the Mid Staffordshire Hospital. Yet this is precisely what is happening in schools across the country, with the most learning disabled children being dumped on TAs. It shows just how far teacher professionalism still has to travel. Perhaps strong, paid governors would be able to put a stop to it.