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Primary school parent governors in a deprived South Wales community: how do their experiences contribute to our understanding of school governance?

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## Abstract

This research is about an institution which appears to have inherent structural weaknesses; the stakeholder model of school governance. Specifically, it is about primary school parent governors whose schools are located in a disadvantaged South Wales valley community. The study took place in the context of a programme of reform, where established practices were considered unable to accommodate the demands of contemporary school governance. It exposes the absence of the parent voice in school governance, the nature of this acquiescence and its implications from a practical and theoretical perspective of school governance as a collaborative undertaking.

A mixed methods, interpretivist approach was used. Data was collected from ten participants using a semi structured interview. This was complemented by one open and one closed questionnaire which were used to gather background data. Following the interview phase and participant validation of their accuracy, data were transcribed and uploaded to NVivo qualitative software to assist in preliminary analysis. A thematic approach identified common patterns able to address the research questions.

The research found that, prior to taking office, the participants expressed positive views of what the parent governor role entailed. However, in office no participant played an active governor role. Reasons for this centred on the imbalance in status, knowledge and confidence inherent in the headteacher/professional - governor/amateur relationship. Several participants became resigned to playing a supportive role. No distinct governor enablers, which promoted governor agency, were identified but several had the potential to do so. There were several barriers.

A strong school-community relationship was important for all participants. The social cohesion, which characterised the distinct socio-cultural-geographic features of the research site, proved a basis to strengthen this relationship. All participants recognised the multifarious negative effects of socio-economic deprivation at school and community level, and the initiatives the school, local authority and the Welsh Government had introduced to ameliorate them.

This thesis fills a gap in the current knowledge of school governance in Welsh primary schools situated in a deprived area. It identifies the factors which restrain governor agency, makes suggestions for how this could be addressed, and examines the effect of deprivation on how governors perceive and execute their role. This is a less developed area, yet fundamental to our understanding of school governance and the relationship of the respective interlocutors. It makes a theoretical and a professional contribution which helps explain governor passivity. At present many parent governors are stakeholders in name but not in practice. To address this requires a radical and structured approach so that Welsh school governance is inclusive, egalitarian and collegial.

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## Glossary of terms

Academy schools	<p>Academy schools receive funding directly from the government rather than a local authority and are run by an academy. They have greater freedom than other state schools over the curriculum, teachers' pay and conditions and finance.</p> <p>Academies in England are inspected by Ofsted. They have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions as other state schools and students sit the same exams. There are no Academies in Wales.</p>
Challenge Advisers	<p>In Wales, Challenge Advisers are responsible for ensuring schools are equipped to sustain improvements in raising standards and providing high quality educational provision. The challenge adviser acts as an agent of change, supporting and challenging school leaders to improve performance and offering support that has a positive impact on learners. They may be employed full time by a consortium or be bought in on a part time basis.</p>
Community First	<p>A Welsh Government programme from 2001 – 2018 aimed at reducing poverty. The programme was community focused and supported the most disadvantaged people in the most deprived areas of Wales with the aim of alleviating persistent poverty.</p> <p>Each Community First cluster focused on areas among the 10% most deprived in Wales according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2011. In its final form each area covered a population of, on average, 10-15,000 people known as Communities First Clusters.</p>
Community school	<p>A type of state-funded school in which the local education authority employs the school's staff and owns the school's estate. The local authority sets the entrance criteria (such as catchment area) and decides which children are eligible for a place.</p>
Community-based intervention (Wales)	<p>A programme delivered by the Welsh Government to alleviate poverty. This programme introduced the early years Flying Start, Families First, the Pupil Deprivation Grant programmes.</p>

Devolution in Wales/Welsh Government	The National Assembly was created by the Government of Wales Act 1998, which followed a referendum in 1997. Currently twenty areas of responsibility have been devolved to the National Assembly for Wales including Economic development, Education and training, Health and Social Services, Housing and Local government. On 6 May 2020 the National Assembly for Wales became known as Senedd Cymru - Welsh Government.
Education marketisation	A trend in education policy from the 1980s where schools were encouraged to compete against each other and act more like private businesses rather than institutions under the control of local government (Thody, 1994).
Estyn (Welsh verb meaning 'to reach out' or 'extend').	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales. Established under the Education Act 1992, its function is to provide an independent inspectorate and advice service on quality and standards in education and training provided in Wales. It is independent from, but funded by, the Welsh Government. Estyn inspects and reports on the quality and standards of education and training provided in Wales, including: how far education and training meet the needs of learners and contribute to their development, wellbeing; standards achieved; and the quality of leadership and training.
Governing bodies	All schools have a governing body, which is responsible for overseeing many of the strategic decisions of the school. In the main, these responsibilities relate to: setting targets and promoting high standards of education.
Holiday Hunger Playworks Pilot	Introduced in July 2019, the Welsh Government their provision of food in areas with high levels of deprivation, where the risk of 'holiday hunger' is greatest.
Local authority in Wales	Since 1 April 1996, Wales has been divided into 22 single-tier principal areas for local government purposes.
Maintained schools	There is no single definition of what is a maintained school but broadly it is one which is wholly or substantially financially maintained by a local authority (Welsh Government, 2018b).

Neoliberalism/ markets	The 20th-century resurgence of 19th-century ideas associated with laissez-faire economic liberalism and free market capitalism.
Poverty (UK)	There is no single definition of poverty. The UK government defines poverty as those with less than 60% of median income. The poverty line in the UK is defined as a household income below 60% of the average. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines poverty as, ' <i>When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation)</i> ' (Goulden and D'Arcy, 2014).
Pupil Deprivation Grant	The Pupil Deprivation Grant was introduced in 2012-13 and provides schools with additional resource to raise levels of achievement of a particular group of economically disadvantaged learners. Pupils eligible for free school meals can apply for a grant to buy school uniform and sports kit. Year 7 pupils can apply for extra money recognising the increased costs associated with starting secondary school. .
Welsh Government Mandatory governor training	Came into force in September 2013. It consists of induction training for newly appointed or elected governors, training for Chairs and training for all governors on the use and understanding of school data.
Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation	Published once every five years, the WIMD is made up of eight separate domains of deprivation: income; employment; health; education; housing; access to services; environment; and community safety. It ranks 1909 geographic areas from 1 (most deprived) to 1909 (least deprived). In 2012 this programme was subsumed by the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Programme (TPAP).
Regional Education Consortia	The four regional education consortia in Wales work with schools to raise standards in literacy and numeracy, providing a range of support which includes professional development and intervention programmes. Funded by the Welsh Government and came into force in 2012.
Social Exclusion Unit (SEU)	The UK Labour government (1997) established the SEU to create policies to tackle poverty and promote social justice. It

	was abolished in November 2010 and its functions absorbed into the Office for Civil Society.
Stakeholder model of school governance	Members consist of those with an interest in the success of the school. In Wales, the core stakeholders are parents, staff, local authority and headteacher who is an ex-officio governor who can decline to take up the position.
Taylor Report, 1977	This reviewed school governance in England and Wales, recommending the transfer of responsibility away from locally elected councillors to community stakeholders, and gave the headteacher discretion to be a governor if they wished (Taylor, 1977).
Universal benefit	Introduced in 2010. It is a benefit for working-age people, replacing six benefits and merging them into one payment: (income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance, income-related employment and support allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit, working tax credit).

## Acronyms

BERA	British Educational Research Association
FSM	Free School Meals
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
GTST	Governor Training and Support Team
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NVivo	Qualitative analysis software
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment commissioned by the OECD
TPAP	Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Programme

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2019, there were 1,569 schools in Wales.<sup>1</sup> All have a governing body. Their role is to run and control the direction of their school to achieve certain goals. To the casual observer governing bodies may appear homogeneous and constant. Those who research educational management, however, make no such assumption. Schools are different in many ways. They may serve a population which is affluent, poor or a combination of both. They grow, contract, amalgamate, change their headteacher; new governors replace others and fresh regulations make different demands on the governor's time and abilities. Underscoring this, (James, et al., 2010), commenting on the responses of over five thousand school governors to their survey, noted: '*The governing of a school and the context for governing are typically in a continual state of flux* (James et al., 2010, p.3).

For those who conduct research into school governance this raises questions. If schools are run and controlled by their governing body, what does 'being in charge' and 'in control' mean? Is the power and authority to influence and direct people's behaviour to achieve prescribed goals evenly distributed; if not why, and who are the principal players? It also raises the question of what is meant by 'good governance.' The Welsh Government provides guidelines to achieve specific goals and prescribe organisational structures to regulate the behaviour of school governance (Welsh Government, 2018b). This makes plain that governor inclusivity and effectiveness are desirable and the hallmark of 'good governance.'

This research took place in a period of reform, where the Welsh Government made individual school governing bodies responsible for raising attainment standards. This reform process had its origin in the poor Welsh results on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009. Evidence suggests that Welsh education is, in fact, more robust and healthier than is commonly acknowledged (Rees and Taylor, 2014). Yet, the Welsh Government

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<sup>1</sup> This included 9 nursery schools, 1,238 primary schools, 19 middle schools, 187 secondary schools, 75 independent schools and 41 special schools (Welsh Government - Schools' Census Results: as at January 2019).

remains mired in what is frequently portrayed as the weakness of state education (Farrell, 2014).

Following concerns over the quality of educational standards and accountability, governing bodies in Wales have increasingly been made responsible for these measures (Wilkins and Gobby, 2020; Farrell, 2014). To provide oversight, new forms of accountability and inspection have been introduced. This has changed the conduct of school governance. Significantly effectiveness has become defined in terms of attainment standards (Rees and Taylor, 2014).

There is a correlation between the quality of school governance and outcomes. A governing body lacking the necessary skills to be effective is a considerable disadvantage (James et al., 2010). A capable board of governors has been shown to be able to improve school performances, raise pupil attainment, and enhance management effectiveness (Ranson, 2011; Balarin et al., 2008; Dean et al., 2007; Ranson et al., 2005).

In 2008, Balarin et al. (2008) noted the dearth of published research into school governance. This has changed as governing bodies have become increasingly important (Farrell, 2014; Young, 2014). Historically, the research focus within the UK has predominantly been on school governance in England (Connolly et al., 2014). Political devolution, however, with each of the four home nations gaining control over education has produced a rich seam of research literature. This thesis seeks to gain a meaningful understanding of the parental contribution to school governance in deprived communities which complements the current state of knowledge, and which informs professional practice and theory.

This chapter sets out the rationale and background of the research. It explains my interest in the research focus from both a personal and professional perspective. The specific aims and the potential for contributing to theory and professional practice are made explicit. It concludes by outlining the structure and content of the thesis chapters.

## **1.1 Aims of this research**

Professionally it is intended the research will make a theoretical contribution towards a deeper understanding of the nature of school governance. The professional contribution is an empirically grounded exemplification of how parent governors in a deprived community perceive and execute their role. The current body of research knowledge on this is limited.

The research was conducted in a Communities First area which consists of the 100 most deprived electoral divisions as identified by the 2000 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. The findings of this research may have particular significance for other schools throughout Wales who share similar socio-economic characteristics.

Currently school governance in Wales is in the process of undergoing major change. In April 2019, the Welsh Government published a consultation paper on the future direction of school governance alongside their responses (Welsh Government, 2019d). Its commitment to all governors being recruited on the basis of the skills they possess was a major development.

### **The research questions**

The main research question is:

*How do parent school governors in a deprived community describe their contribution to school leadership and accountability?*

Sub research question1:

*What do these parent governors believe is the value and effect of the ‘enablers’ and ‘barriers’ they have experienced to prepare them to play a purposeful role in school governance?*



Sub research question 2:

*In what ways and to what extent does socio-economic deprivation affect how parent governors in a deprived community perceive and execute their role?*

## **1.2 Impetus for the research**

My interest in the research focus is located in my experience of being a parent governor (1983-87) in two primary schools in a South Wales valley. During my tenure I played a passive role, with the respective headteachers exerting a powerful presence. Discussions were rarely inclusive with the headteachers, in conjunction with the chair controlling meetings with governors being compliant. The crisis in Welsh education following Wales's poor 2009 PISA results, however, resulted in a process of introspection where the Welsh Government reflected on the structure and ethos of state education with the aims of securing improvement (Farrell, 2014; Rees and Taylor, 2014).

School improvement subsequently became the cornerstone of Welsh education with the implementation of policies designed to achieve this end. Instrumental in this process was the Regional Education Consortia and the School Challenge Advisers, introduced in 2012 and charged with ensuring schools made sustained improvement in standards of attainment (Egan, 2017). This was followed in the following year by mandatory governor training which identified deficits in governor knowledge as a cause of poor standards (Welsh Government, 2018). Schools were subjected to periodic inspection by Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales (Rees and Taylor, 2014).

Conversations I subsequently held with acquaintances who were parent governors suggested that little had changed. Their experiences painted a picture similar to my own when I was a parent governor, that is, one of passivity. After gaining a Masters' degree in education from the Open University I was eager to develop my research skills while exploring an area which was relatively under researched, and which had the potential to inform theory and professional practice. To date, few studies have sought to uncover the processes by which school governance

becomes undemocratic and exclusive. The impetus to research school governance in a deprived community with an emphasis on the parental contribution proved irresistible.

The thesis's research questions emerged over an extended period of time as the focus to be studied was refined. It evolved as I acquired new knowledge and fresh insights gained by reading published materials and reflecting on discussions that I held with individuals with an academic and/or lay interest in school governance. This is discussed in the methodology chapter.

I now discuss my background. The purpose of this is to highlight the importance this has for the way in which I construct and conduct my researcher identity.

### **1.3 Researcher's background**

*A writer who is himself from the working classes has his own temptations to error...I am from the working classes and feel even now both close to them and apart from them. ---it is bound to affect what I say (Richard Hoggart, 1958, p. 6.)*

This quotation resonates deeply with me. The reason for this is it shows that humans have a social history which can prove enduring and contribute to how they see the world. Hoggart's impoverished childhood appeared to cast a long shadow, even when a celebrated academic. His classic work, for example, published when he was thirty-nine years of age, documented the break-up of the old working-class, close community culture of his formative years (Hoggart, 1958). Berger and Luckmann's (1966) study of socialisation further highlights the power and significance of the individual's early years. Primary socialisation during the childhood years is highly charged emotionally and unquestioned; the secondary socialisation phase much less so.

A common theme of both Hoggart (1958) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) is that the way in which adults see the world is to some degree fashioned through the prism of their past experiences, especially those of the early years. The

geographic focus of this research is schools that are located in a socio-economic deprived community. This makes it necessary to set out details of my own background and history (see Appendix 1 for a more detailed account). The aim of this is to help explain why I was attracted to the research focus.

Individuals will have a view about how they construct their social and economic identity. This is a complex business. One's identity is rarely fixed. It depends on how others see them as much as their own self-perceptions. For clarity I now explain how I define my identity.

I am an elderly, white man with middle aged children and teenage grandchildren. Objectively, I am from a working-class community which has an enduring history of high unemployment and social and economic disadvantage. I continue to live in this community and feel part of it. I am from a working-class family. My father was a labourer, my mother a stay at home 'Mam.' On the basis of educational achievement and the occupation of a retired school teacher, I am middle class (Goldthorpe, 1987). This, I find difficult to reconcile with, the reason being my formative years.

My history has contributed to me holding certain beliefs about education. The first is intrinsic; there is enormous pleasure to be gained from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The second is instrumental. It has enabled me to make informed decisions and be able to justify them. Lastly, it has strengthened my view that equality of educational opportunity in the UK is demonstrably unfounded. The English educational system is, historically, one of social class reproduced inequality, entrenched and resistant to change (Ball, 2013a; Reay, 2006). The situation in Wales is remarkably similar. State education, until devolution in 1997, was legislatively and administratively a dominion of England: '*...an addendum in the 'England and Wales' state*' (Jones and Roderick. 2002: vii).

Education and social inequality are central themes in this thesis. Over the last three decades, these have undergone great change. In social class investigation, this presents new challenges requiring fresh approaches (Savage, 2016). A Bourdieuan (1984) analytical framework is considered particularly suitable for this

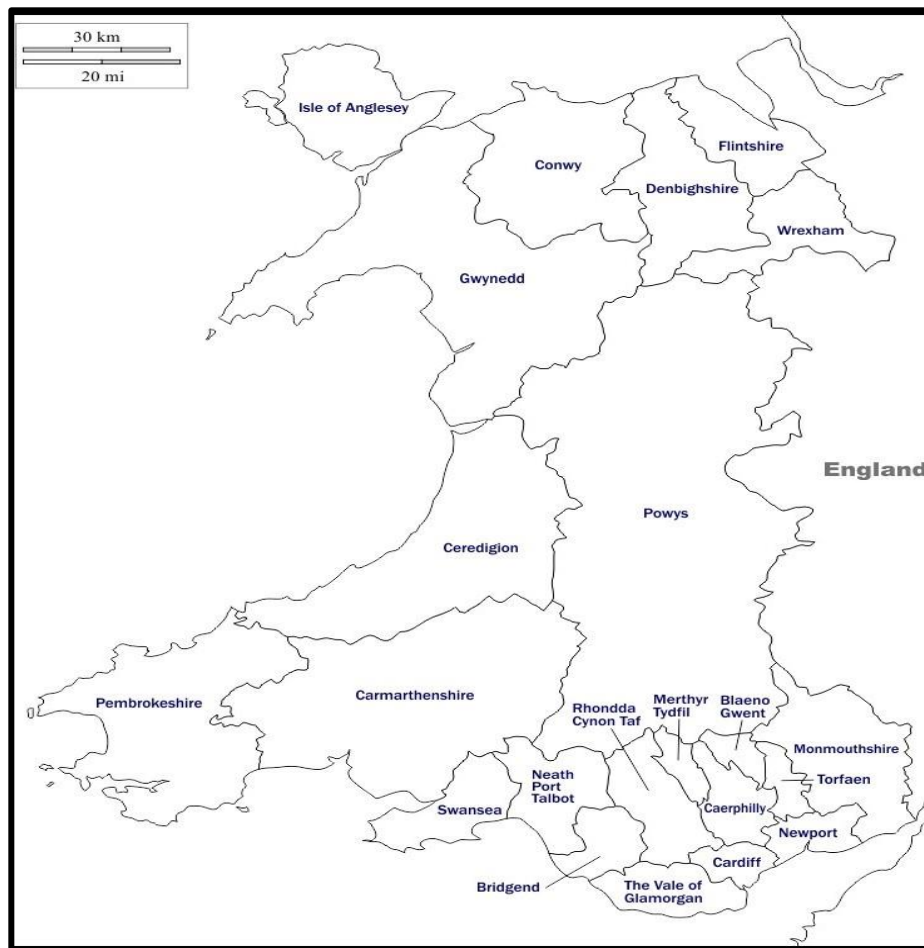
study. This is because it recognises the significance of the cultural aspects of social class as embedded in the concept of habitus. These are the values, attitudes and norms held by different social groups which are able to help explain the individual's life chances and their relationships to power and authority. In the following chapters this framework will be revisited to help explain how the parent governors in this research perceived and executed their role.

The narrative presented above brings into relief the importance of researcher positionality in relation to the population being studied. Positionality may be presented in binary terms. That is, the researcher is either an 'insider', who shares some identity, sympathy or common ground with those being studied, or an 'outsider' who does not (Kanuha, 2000). This issue is important because lack of attention to it can contribute to weakening the integrity of the research. To address this, at all stages of this research I critically reflected on my assumptions and beliefs. This process is characterised by self-introspection with the aim of identifying the salient factors which enable appropriate measures to be taken. This is discussed in the methodology chapter.

#### **1.4 Setting the scene: the research site**

Having discussed some of the personal considerations which have relevance for this thesis, I now turn to the broad geo-political features of the research site. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the importance of physical, social and cultural characteristics.

Figure 1.1 is a political map of Wales, a constituent country in the United Kingdom. At the time of the 2011 census, the population of Wales was 2,903,085, which has increased to the present time by approximately 100,000. The geographic research focus is the south east valleys; Rhondda Cynon Taff, Merthyr Tydfil, and Blaenau Gwent. The precise location is withheld to preserve participant anonymity. The local authority where the research was conducted is referred to throughout this thesis by the pseudonym *Middleton Council*.



**Figure 1.1 Political map of Wales, showing the research site**

Once dependent on coal mining and heavy industry, these areas since 1945 have experienced major de-population. Economically, they are among the poorest parts of Europe, with high levels of unemployment, welfare dependency, social exclusion and educational underachievement (Adamson, 2008).

Based on income, approximately 20% of the population of Wales lives in a state of permanent poverty, with a further 30% living close to the poverty line, moving above and below it over time (Adamson, 2008). In these post-industrial areas, poverty is closely related to unemployment. Yet most people living in poverty in Wales live in a household where at least one adult works (Egan, 2017).

The link between poverty and pupil attainment is not deterministic (Balarin et al., 2008). Schools situated in areas experiencing high socio-economic deprivation may achieve good standards of pupil achievement, while those in more

prosperous areas may achieve relatively poor results. Research into the long-term effect of poverty in Wales is striking. It includes high levels of chronic unemployment, high welfare dependency, poor health and, at school level, a notable and enduring gap in attainment between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children (Welsh Government, 2015b).

The Welsh Government recognises the relationship between educational achievement and the level of entitlement to free school meals (FSM) in schools. As the level of entitlement to free school meals increases, the level of academic achievement decreases (Welsh Government, 2019c). Over the past decade, the most significant weakness exhibited by the Welsh education system is one of inequity (Egan, 2012a).

Settling on an appropriate measure by which individual schools and their pupils can be considered disadvantaged is contested because conceptions of poverty are multidimensional and fluid. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines poverty as when a person has insufficient resources to meet their minimum needs (Goulden and D'Arcy, 2014). Entitlement to free school meals, however, is a more meaningful way to assess the level of poverty (Strand, 2014) This is because such entitlement is a direct measure of family poverty and only pupils from families in receipt of state benefits, such as income support, jobseeker's allowance or child tax credits (if below 60% of national median income), are eligible.

In Wales, 154,000 state school children live in poverty (The Children's Society, 2019). Around 113,000 of these children meet the eligibility criteria for FSM which means that at least 41,000 children living in poverty do not receive a free school meal. This situation is clouded because not all of the children who meet the eligibility criteria, receive a FSM every day. Around 28,000 of these children are not registered for FSM with their school, and, of those registered, each day around a further 22,000 do not eat the meal (The Children's Society, 2019). Therefore, of the 154,000 school children living in poverty in Wales only 63,000 receive FSM. This means that each day at least 91,000 children in poverty do not get FSM.

The roll out of Universal Credit in 2013 exacerbated this situation. It replaced the three benefits cited above as conferring eligibility to FSM. However, as Universal Credit covers families both in and out of work, many thousands of children who are living in poverty miss out on receiving free school meals (Bulman, 2017). In 2018, The Bevan Foundation (2018) estimated that 55,000 children in full time education in Wales were living in poverty, yet would not be entitled to any support with the cost of their school meal. A significant number of these are pupils who attend schools in Middleton Council. Ominously, the Welsh Government Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, predicted that by 2021-22 relative child poverty in Wales will increase to affect an extra 50,000 children (Welsh Government, 2018a).

In the year 2016, 39% of the population of Middleton Council were identified as living in poverty whereas the Wales average is 22.7 % (Wales Government, 2016c). In the same year, 5,202 or 23.2% of primary school children in Middleton Council were eligible to receive FSM; the average percentage for Wales is 16% (Welsh Government, 2016c). By 2020, 8,651 pupils living in Middleton council were receiving free school meals, the second highest of the 22 local authorities in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020a). (Added to this, free school meals' entitlement in schools in the research was considerably higher, in the region of 30-40%. Over the period 2005 to 2017 one school in this study had eligibility for free school meals which ranged between 70 - 78% (Appendix 2).

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the process of industrialisation fractured and then recast social and economic structures (Tonnie, 1887). To house the army of newly urbanised labour, terraced housing was built on an industrial scale. Primarily, it served as a source of shelter, but also mediated social relationships (Fisk, 1978).

The terraced housing in the research site was shaped by its physical geography and industrial history. Most of the housing in Middleton Council was built with speed from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards to accommodate the mass influx of miners and their families (Davies, 1993). The first houses were built in close proximity to the colliery and, thereafter, upon the higher valley mountain slopes. In

Rhondda, for example, from 1809 to 1909, seventy nine collieries or levels were opened, this within two valleys each eight miles in length (Hughes et al., 1994). This terraced housing resulted in the inhabitants constructing their identity, in part on a distinct geographic area, which prevails to the present time (Fisk, 1978). Figures 1.2 and 1.3 show views of a South Wales community which is typical of the research site.



**Figure 1.2 A South Wales valley community, typical of the research site - view 1**





**Figure 1.3 A South Wales valley community, typical of the research site - view 2**

Figure 1.2 shows a valley community of several hundred terraced houses clustered around where the colliery once stood. It has a distinct geographic boundary and at its heart stands the local primary school. Figure 2 shows the predominantly terrace housing which is predisposed to significant face to face contact and neighbourliness which promotes social cohesion, collective identity and a sense of community (Fisk, 1978).

The South Wales valleys are often contextualised in terms of 'community' (Fisk, 1978). Even though ambiguous and ill-defined, the concept of community evokes positive feelings, centring on socio-cultural constructs which resonate with the German social theorist, Ferdinand Tonnies (1887). Tonnies classic study of social cohesion identified two idealised groups, 'gemeinschaft' and 'gesellschaft.' Gemeinschaft characterises social relationships in terms of 'community', with significant face to face contact, shared values which traditionally embrace broad socio-economic needs and interests. In contrast, gesellschaft, translated as 'society', describes social relationships where mutual obligations, social cohesion and wider social responsibility are notably weaker.

In a historical and international context, the post 1945 period has witnessed a decline in the level of social engagement in western industrial societies. This has weakened relationships and civil engagement (Daley, 2009; Coburn, 2000;

Putnam, 1995). The significance of this resides in the importance that social networks and relationships contribute to social cohesion which are frequently used to characterise the research site (Adamson and Bromiley, 2013). It is the desire for cooperation, mutual engagement and shared interests which characterise contemporary definitions of community (Wilkins, 2010; Frazer, 1999). In terms of education, key to the success of primary school governance in Wales is the school's close ties with its community, a process in which the governors had an instrumental role in bringing school and community together (Ranson et al., 2005).

The concept of 'community' is a central theme in this research. In Wales, education is a devolved service, overseen by the Welsh Government. Unlike England, the Welsh Government remains committed to community-based schools and also recognises the importance that socio/economic/cultural factors play in fostering a strong school-community relationship (Welsh Government, 2018b).

Further, the Welsh Government has marshalled other devolved areas such as economic development, health and health services, housing, local government and social welfare to tackle disadvantage and poverty. This has found expression in community-based form. From 2001 to 2018, the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty policies was the *Communities First* programme (Welsh Government, 2015).

## **1.5 The research participants**

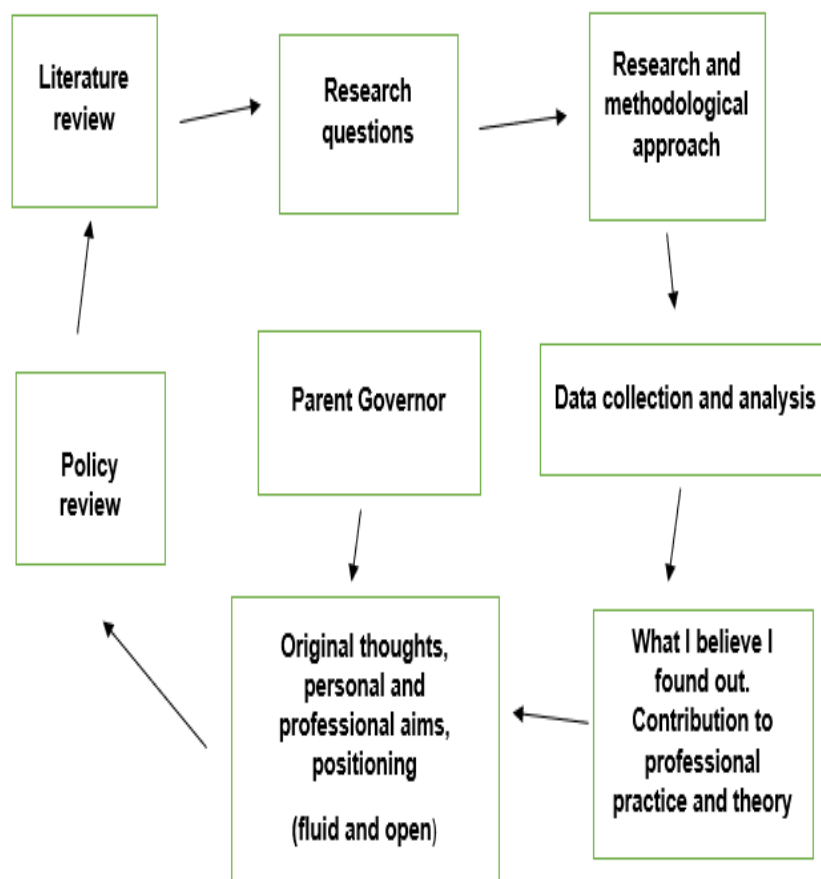
At the centre of this research are the ten participants, the parent school governors. For clarity, I shall qualify their status as research participants. First, the boards of governance in Wales comprise a diverse and overlapping membership. The procedures by which they become governors include being elected (as with parent governors), co-opted, nominated or, as in the case of the headteacher, they can opt in or decline to be a member. Second, parents put themselves forward for election for a range of reasons. Overwhelmingly, they are what broadly might be considered as altruistic - to give something back to the community; they feel that they can help the school. Some do so for more personal or limited reasons such as to promote their own child's education or to secure a certain end (Wylie, 2007;

Ranson et al, 2005). Nevertheless, all categories of governor, including the headteacher in this role, are volunteers (Welsh Government, 2018b).

Third, governors are representatives. In the case of parent governors, there is no formal mandate for representation of the parent body to the parents who elected them. It will be shown in the findings chapter that this constituted a source of unresolved tension. Fourth, constitutionally all governors enjoy parity of esteem with decisions made on a majority vote (Welsh Government, 2018b). Yet, as will be shown, in practice there are differences in professional and personal status, knowledge, authority, and expertise which weakens the principle of parity of esteem.

Fifth, parent governors will have children in their school, but they may also work there in a paid capacity – for example as teaching/support staff, or caretaker. Further, certain categories of governors (co-opted or nominated) may have children in the school. Finally, all participants in this research were governors in schools in Communities First areas that the Welsh Government has classed as ‘deprived’. For the purpose of clarity, the parent governors in this research were drawn from Communities First schools and elected by other parents.

Before outlining the structure and content of the thesis’ chapters, Figure 1.4 presents an overview of how I contextualised the research process.



**Figure 1.4 Overview of the research process**

The parent governor stands at the heart of this research. It is their perceptions and experiences of school governance that the thesis investigates and discusses. The research process began by exploring my initial thoughts and professional aims that encouraged me to undertake the research. At that stage, these were fluid and capable of change in light of fresh insights. I then explored the international, national and local policy documentation with the aim of understanding the formal contexts in which the parent governors function. This was followed by a literature review so I was able to gain a broad understanding of the research which had been conducted in the area of school governance, the methodological approaches they adopted, and their strengths and weaknesses in informing this study. At that point, the research questions became refined although not fixed.

Next, the methodological phase charted how I believed the research questions could best be addressed. This was followed by the data collection and analysis and the presentation of what I have discovered. This takes us full circle and back

to my original position where again I reflect upon the thoughts I held at the outset of the research. This set up a fresh round of research exploration, evaluation and refinement.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

The overall structure of the study takes the form of six chapters. The present chapter, discussed above, is the foundation of the research upon which the others rest.

Chapter two is about policy, the context in which school governance operates. It identifies and evaluates national and local educational policies and historical - cultural factors which inform the researcher's understanding of the issues being investigated. The implementation process is critically explored, showing how it is capable of being impeded or thwarted. The potential sources of tensions and conflict in policy documentation, as they affect the research participants, are highlighted. It then charts how post-devolution, school governance in Wales has responded to a changing legislative landscape. Both historical and contemporary geo-socio-economic factors, specific to the research focus and germane to the study, are identified and examined. Following this, the significance of key global education trends and reforms, notably the market driven international comparisons of educational attainment, and the drive for school self-improvement and self-management within a devolved education service, are discussed.

Chapter three begins by outlining the procedures used to search for and critically engage with a wide range of literature on school governance. The aim of this is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge. Although focusing primarily on the UK, it explores governance in educational settings in other English-speaking countries. It begins by exploring the concept of school accountability and leadership, focusing on and drawing inferences from the complexity of the headteacher - governor relationship; specifically, the formal and informal interplay of the 'critical friend' and 'support- challenge' roles. Following this, I explore and evaluate the 'barriers' and 'enablers' that governors experience to prepare them to play a purposeful role in school governance. The research

literature on school governance within socio-economic disadvantage is then examined and evaluated. Collectively this helped in the framing of the research questions so that they are able to gain a deep understanding of the respective phenomenon.

Chapter four focuses on methodology and methods. It begins with a detailed and critical account of reflexivity. This is a tool which equips the researcher to be able to reflect on the dilemmas faced throughout their study. The chapter has two sections: Part 1 deals with the procedures and principles used to acquire knowledge about how the primary school parent governors in this research executed their role. Part 2 deals with the decisions made about the empirical research. It begins by briefly discussing the pilot study and how it was able to inform the direction of the main study. I then discuss ontology and epistemology and how they relate to the chosen interpretivist approach. This is followed by an account of participant enrolment, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis.

Chapter five presents the findings and how, with reference to reflexive practice, I interpreted the data which emerged from the collection instruments. The findings, or more correctly how I interpreted the data, are then presented. To provide context, small extracts are given from the policy and literature research chapters. Where reference is made to specific sources it is shown where they are located in the appendices. The findings within each theme are presented with a range of anonymised direct quotations. There are three sections which address each of the research questions. Within each section a range of anonymised direct quotations are given to support the claims made.

Chapter six is the discussion and conclusion. It begins by reiterating the aims of the thesis and why these are important. Next is a discussion of the key findings in relation to each research question; this makes reference to the themes and salient issues highlighted in the policy and literature review chapters. I then show how the research has contributed to the respective state of knowledge in school governance, how it might be utilised by future researchers, and the contribution it makes to theory and professional practice. The contribution to theoretical

knowledge centres on the reasons which contributed to the participant passivity, the negative consequence this presents for stakeholder governances, and reasons why they continue as members of their board of governors when they acknowledge that they are marginal figures. The contribution to professional practise stems directly from the factors which impede governor agency; they are based on the premise that the parental governor voice should be at the heart of governance, and are designed to achieve this goal. This is followed by an exposition and explanation of the research's theoretical underpinning. I then reflect on the challenges I encountered throughout the research and how they were addressed. Next, I discuss the limitations of the research and identify areas appropriate for further study. In the penultimate section I reflect on my experiences during the duration of my research. Finally I briefly discusses how the Covid19 pandemic of 2020 had implications for the themes and ideas identified and examined in this thesis.

## **1.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter provided an introduction to this thesis. It identified and synthesised key themes drawing attention to my reasons for conducting the research, my background, research positionality, reflexivity and the relevancy of Bourdieu's concept of social capital. Mapped onto this were the salient socio/economic and cultural factors of the research site and my personal and professional aims in completing the thesis. Finally, an overview of the sequential stages from research inception to completion were presented and discussed.

The next chapter explores the policy documentation in which school governance functions. This will show the complexity of policy and the tensions that they are capable of generating.

## Chapter 2: Policy context

The previous chapter outlined the aims, focus and contextual setting of this research. This chapter examines the policy context in which school governance functions. Policy is a course or principle of action adopted by an organisation, designed to achieve specific aims and regulate its members' behaviour (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). It therefore plays a key role in school governance (James, et al., 2013). A detailed policy review is able to inform the researcher's understanding of the issues being investigated (Dumas and Anderson, 2014). It can: '*...provide us [the researcher] with ways of thinking and talking about our [thoughts] to others*' (Ball, 2015, p. 2).

The research focus, the perceptions and execution of parent school governance in a deprived community, necessitated exploring literature from the fields of education, economics, social policy and sociology. I begin with a critical discussion of the process of making policy, its implementation and the potential for the disconnection between the two. Following this, key national and local educational policies and initiatives both pre and post 1997 are discussed. At this latter time, control and responsibility for education was devolved from Westminster to the Welsh Government. I include the published views and reflections of notable Welsh political figures who were instrumental in shaping policy in the early years of devolution.

My study focus is Wales. My discussion considers the impact of global trends and international comparisons of educational standards on the PISA programme of educational policy in Wales. This is followed by an exposition of policy which relates directly to the composition, functions and responsibilities of school governing bodies in Wales. Next, the Welsh Government's policies on key aspects of school governance are examined; these are leadership, accountability and educational management. The penultimate section examines how educational marketisation has resulted in different categories of governor being valued on the skills they are perceived to possess. Finally, policies designed to tackle socio-economic disadvantage and to promote educational equality at national and community level, as they affect Welsh school governance, are explored.



Collectively, this process informs the research questions so that they are able to contribute to our understanding of the question posed by the thesis title:

*Primary school parent governors in a deprived South Wales community: how do their experiences contribute to our understanding of school governance?*

Educational policy is designed to create a framework to regulate behaviour. There are times, however, when policy fails to deliver what its architects intended (Hill, and Irving, 2008). A powerful reason for this is that those charged with the making policy pay insufficient attention to its implementation (Ball, 2012). The introduction of the stakeholder model of school governance under the 1980 Education Act, for example, required 350,000 volunteers, the entire population of Coventry. The problem of recruitment and retention, however, has proved enduring and over recent years has worsened (Holland, 2018; National Governance Association, 2018). This appears to be exacerbated in schools with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage (Baxter, 2015; James, et al, 2011). Policy makers, responsible for this aspect of the 1980 Education Act it would seem, paid insufficient attention to the scale of volunteering necessary for successful implemented.

Against the backcloth of three decades of major educational reform, Viennet and Pont's (2017) OECD report showed how the implementation of educational legislation can be delayed or even thwarted. One cause is policy makers giving insufficient attention to deficits of finance or technical knowledge in the receiving organisation (Viennet and Pont, 2017). In the context of this research, schools situated in disadvantaged areas may encounter particular difficulties that schools in more affluent areas do not (Connolly and James, 2011). The issue of improving physical health in schools will illustrate this. In 2018, the Westminster government published a report detailing how it planned to tackle the growth in childhood obesity by making physical exercise a core curriculum concern (Department for Education, 2018). In the same year, however, of the fifty three free schools opened in England seventeen had no on site provision for physical education, a condition essential for successful implementation (Allen-Kinross, 2019).

The example cited above may be considered a logistical oversight. However, research into educational policy implementation in America over several decades shows it is what happens in the classroom that is the arbiter of its success or failure (Hess, 2013). National policy makers do not run schools; they merely tell teachers what is expected of them. The fate of policy, therefore, ultimately rests on those who are responsible for its implementation, the 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1981). Hess (2013) cited examples where those responsible for policy detail were forced to abandon them because of negative outcomes at the classroom level.

Research in Wales reported on a situation where the principal players responsible for policy implementation were able to keep within the letter of the law while simultaneously contributing to its failure (Farrell and Law, 1999). The authors interviewed the Chief Officers and the Chair of the Education Committee in Wales. They concluded that the policy content of market-based reforms in accountability conflicted with established professional practice to the extent that they were able to persuade the respective local authorities to thwart the implementation.

More recently, in the wake of the 2020 Covid19 epidemic, the plan of England's Education secretary to open all primary schools before the end of the summer term was dropped in face of parental and trade unions opposition. These examples highlight the negative consequences when policy makers pay insufficient attention to the factors which surround the implementation process.

## **2.1 Governing bodies in Wales: structure, functions and responsibilities**

Education in the Welsh maintained sector is delivered through community schools. Here the school and land are owned, maintained and staffed by the local authority, subject to those responsibilities delegated to its governing bodies. Maintained school governing bodies have corporate status with a legal identity independent from its members. They are legally responsible for the actions taken in its name by individuals or committees to which it has delegated certain functions. However, the law is clear that individual governors will not have any personal liability for

anything which they have done in good faith, and exercised reasonable care in discharging their powers (Governors Wales, 2007).

Governing bodies must meet a minimum of three times a year as a full body. Here the ongoing business of committees, the governing body, and the school are discussed, reported on, and where decisions are taken by a majority vote (Welsh Government, 2018a). Governors serve a four-year term from their date of appointment. Figure 2.2 presents an overview of the structure, functions and relationships of Welsh school governance.

### **Wales Assembly Government**

Consists of 60 members

Minister for Education and Skills

Decides structure, powers and responsibility of local authorities and schools, curriculum and governor training programme.

### **Local authority**

The 22 unitary local authorities ensure efficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the people in its area.

Must secure that their education and training functions are exercised with a view to promoting high standards and promoting the fulfilment of learning potential.

Must secure that sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education are available for its area.

Plays a key role in the financing of schools.

### **Individual Governing body**

**Membership** – ‘Stakeholder’ model where all members are equal.

**Core composition** – Staff, parents, community, local authority, headteacher (optional).

**Headteacher** – Formulates aims and objectives, policies and targets for the governing body to consider adopting; responsible for the day to day running of the school. Accountable to the governing body – both for the functions performed as part of the head teacher’s normal role and for powers delegated by the governing body.

**Governors** – Responsible for the school. Taking a broadly strategic role in the running of the school. Decide aims and set the strategic framework for getting there. Act as ‘critical friend’ and ‘support/challenge’ the headteacher.

**Figure 2.1 Welsh school governance: relationships, structure, functions**

The figure shows that the Welsh Assembly government is made up of 60 members. Electors have two votes: 40 members are elected by the First Past the Post voting system in individual constituencies, and a further 20 are elected by the Regional Top-Up system in which voters vote by region. The governing legislation permits a maximum of 12 Welsh Ministers including Deputy Welsh Ministers, but excludes the First Minister and the Counsel General. The maximum size of the

Welsh Government is 14. In 2021, 16 and 17-year olds and legally resident foreign nationals will be allowed to vote for the first time.

The Welsh Government is responsible for the structure, powers and responsibility of local authorities and schools, curriculum and governor training programmes. The 22 unitary local authorities in Wales must ensure efficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the people in its area. It must secure that education and training promote high standards and learning potential. They play a key role in the financing of schools (Wales Government, 2018a).

At school level the individual governing body is responsible for the conduct of the school. Since 2010, schools in Wales have been able to federate. Federation of schools is a legal process which enables schools to work together through a formal structured process by sharing a governing body that will make decisions in the best interest of all the schools, staff and pupils in that federation. In 2019, there were 31 federations across Wales, which represents about 5% of all schools. Nearly all of these consist of primary school federations (Estyn, 2019).

Welsh governing bodies are constituted on the 'stakeholder' model where all members are equal. Core members are staff, parents, local authority and headteacher (optional). The basic composition of governing bodies of Welsh maintained primary schools, and their allocation of governors is dependent on school size. Table 2.1 demonstrates the composition of governing bodies in Welsh primary schools.

**Table 2.1 Basic composition of governing bodies in Welsh primary Schools**

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Staff governors elected by staff.	1 or 2 members.
Parent governors, elected by parents.	3 – 5 members.
Local authority governors nominated by the local authority.	2 – 4 members.
Headteacher	An ex-officio staff governor, who can decline to take up the position.

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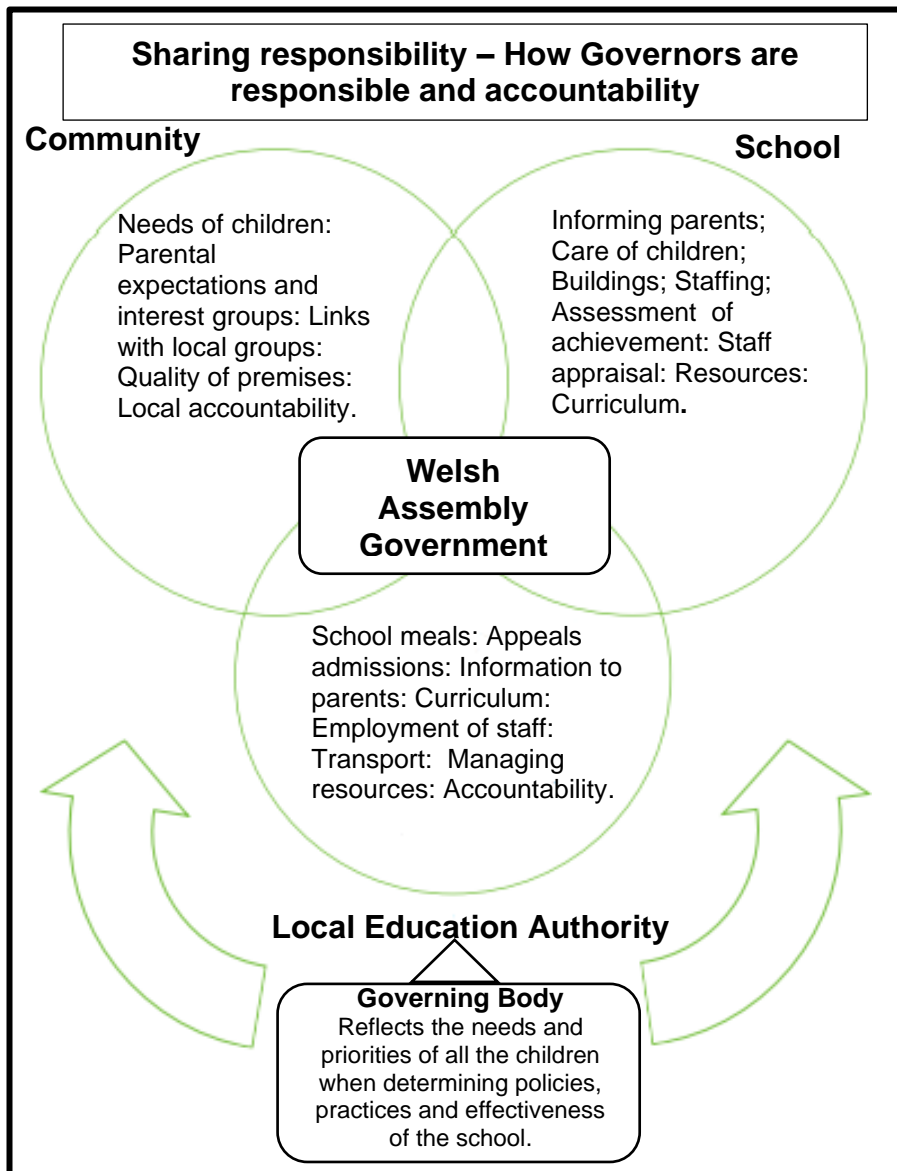
Source: adapted from School Governors' guide to the law (Welsh Government, 2018b).

Additionally, there may be community governors appointed by the rest of the governing body; foundation, partnership and sponsored governors; and representatives of any sponsoring electorate.

Parent governors are elected to represent the interests of parents of pupils currently attending the school. While parent governors can express their personal views during meetings it is expected such views would be representative of the interests of the parents at the school. Individual governors are expected to exercise their best judgement when contributing to the decision making of the governing body. The governing body can, if no parents, or not enough parents stand for election, appoint parent governors (Welsh Government, 2018b)

## **Accountability**

Accountability in schools functions in a diverse range of contexts, each having different modes of accountability (Wilkins, 2015; Møller, 2009; Moos, 2005; Glatter, 2003; Adams and Kirst, 1999; Ranson, 1986). Successive education reforms have emphasised the role of governing bodies, both in terms of their responsibilities for raising standards and their accountability to parents and others in the community for their oversight of the conduct and standards of a school. Many of the direct responsibilities which governing bodies currently discharge have been progressively transferred from the Local Education Authorities (LEA) (Governors Wales, 2007). Figure 2.1 shows the range of bodies and persons governors in schools in Wales are responsible and accountable to.



**Figure 2.1 The range of bodies and persons governors in schools in Wales are responsible and accountable to.**

The governing body must be prepared to explain its decisions and actions to those with a legitimate interest. This may include staff, pupils, parents, the LEA and the Welsh Government (Welsh Government, 2018b). Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children attend school to access full time education. The LEA is responsible to ensure that parents comply with this duty. The governing body is accountable to the parents to act in the best interest of pupils, discharging its general responsibilities through the school/parent partnership. The prime concern of the governing body is the welfare and education of the pupils attending the school. The LEA however, share with governing bodies responsibility for standards in schools and discharging strategic responsibilities for the overall

provision of education services in their particular area. The LEAs provide governing bodies with strategic and support services to create a level of common policy planning practices that all schools share. Governing bodies must, therefore, have regard to the role and responsibilities of their LEA in the way in which they conduct themselves and in the course of decisions that they take (Governors Wales, 2007).

Governing bodies are accountable to the communities they serve and must appoint governors to represent the community and make decisions (in partnership with the LEA) about the community use of the school. Governors are accountable to the Welsh Assembly Government for ensuring policies for schools are implemented locally and must discharge their duties with regard to UK legislation (Governors Wales, 2007).

In a formal context the headteacher is accountable to the governing body for the school's performance. The relationship between the headteacher and the governing body is of crucial importance because within school governance, accountability is formally exercised through the 'support/challenge' and the 'critical friend relationship' (Welsh Government, 2018b). The policy documentation that governs the responsibilities of the headteacher and the governing body is publicly available. Table 2.2 outlines the relationship between these two parties.



**Table 2. 2 Formal relationship between governing body and headteacher**

Governing body	Headteacher
<p>The governing body is responsible for: taking a broadly strategic role in the running of the school; deciding aims and setting the strategic framework for getting there. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● setting aims and objectives for the school;</li> <li>● adopting policies for achieving those aims and objectives;</li> <li>● setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives; and</li> <li>● reviewing progress towards achieving the aims and objectives.</li> </ul> <p>In consultation with the headteacher the governors set and publish targets for their pupils' performance in the Key Stage 2.</p>	<p>The headteacher is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● formulating aims and objectives, policies and targets for the governing body to consider adopting; and to report to the governing body on progress at least once every school year.</li> <li>● Internal organisation, management and control of the school and for implementation of the strategic framework set by the governors.</li> <li>● Accountable to the governing body – both for the functions performed as part of the headteacher's normal role and for powers delegated by the governing body.</li> </ul> <p>*In maintained schools with a delegated budget, governors are responsible for conducting certain other, related functions.</p>

Source: Adapted from Governor Bodies: Powers, Duties and Relationships (Wales Government, 2018a).

As can be seen, there is overlap in the responsibilities of the respective parties. For example, the governing body is formally responsible for deciding the aims and objectives (of the school), setting the strategic framework for achieving these and adopting the required policies. The headteacher's role includes formulating aims,

objectives, policies and targets for the governing body to consider adopting. The headteacher can opt to become a member of the governing body. The Welsh Government says that all headteachers have chosen to become a member of the board of governors. Thus, the headteacher uniquely is both a school 'governor' and the school's 'chief executive', responsible for day to day control. Whilst not necessarily a source of tension, the following literature review chapter will show it has frequently proved to be so.

The genesis of this situation resides in the Education Act 1980 (Great Britain, Education Act, 1980). This Act implemented much of the Taylor Report (1977) whose review of school governance in England and Wales recommended the transfer of responsibility away from locally elected councillors to community stakeholders, and gave the headteacher discretion to be a governor if they so wished:

*The headteacher [of] schools maintained by a local education authority shall unless he [sic] elects otherwise, be a governor of the school by virtue of his office (Taylor Report, 1977, p.5).*

Evidence submitted to Taylor (1977) by the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), the headteachers' trade union, anticipated the potential problems that might arise if the headteacher became a member of the board of governors:

*It has been argued that the head's position should largely be advisory because he [sic] needs a measure of independence which cannot be maintained if he is a member of the governing body (Taylor Report, 1977, p. .27).*

The NAHT's reservations were that the headteacher's role of governor combined with that of the school's 'chief executive' were potentially conflictual. For this reason they recommended that the headteacher should not be a member of the governing body. Rather, it was argued their role should be to advise the governing body in an independent capacity. The Taylor Report, however, recommended otherwise. Subsequently, the headteacher's right to elect to become a governor was enshrined in the 1980 Education Act (Great Britain, Education Act, 1980). As

will be shown in the literature review (Chapter 3), the NAHT's misgivings have proved prescient.

Notwithstanding, school governance in Wales ostensibly operates on stakeholder principles (Wales Government, 2018a). That is they should be pluralistic, egalitarian and recognise the strengths of the different participants (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017; Taylor, 1977) Stakeholder governance is able to be efficient while strengthening organisational pluralism (Dean et al., 2007). To function in this manner, all parties must commit to its underlying principles and be prepared to accommodate differentials in status, power, knowledge and authority. The following chapter will show that frequently these conditions are unmet and constitute an ongoing source of tension within school governance.

## **2.2 School governance policy – tensions and challenges**

Over the last four decades, the structure and ethos of UK school governance and management have been transformed. This has been due to the enactment of national policies, local initiatives, political ideology and participation in the international comparison of student attainment. The post 1945 period was, in terms of control over education, politically pluralistic, egalitarian, and overseen by locally elected councillors (Ranson and Crouch, 2009). By the late 1970s this situation was primed to undergo change.

In April 1975, The Committee of Enquiry into school governance in England and Wales, under the chair of Mr Tom Taylor, was established. The terms of reference for the Committee of Enquiry were:

*To review the arrangements for the management and government of maintained primary and secondary schools in England and Wales, including the composition and functions of bodies of managers and governors, and their relationships with local education authorities, with headteachers and staffs of schools, with parents of pupils and with the local community at large; and to make recommendations (Taylor, 1977, p.1).*

Before the Taylor Committee reported, the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan gave a speech on education at Ruskin College, Oxford on 18 October 1976. This is regarded as having begun 'The Great Debate' about the nature and purpose of public education. After this time the purpose, structure and delivery of state education was irretrievably deposited in the domain of political debate.

Criticism of the existing structure of school governance centred on local authority councillors who, it was argued, wielded excessive power with unsatisfactory levels of accountability (Deem et al., 1995). To address this, the Taylor review (1977) recommended the transfer of responsibility to community stakeholders in a reconstituted system (Taylor, 1977). The Education Act 1980 (Great Britain, Education Act, 1980) subsequently mandated local authorities in England and Wales for schools to have a governing body with parental representation. The aim of this was to make individual governing bodies and their headteacher accountable for the conduct of their school (Department of Education and Science, 1992)

Throughout the 1980s, governments in both the UK and the USA portrayed state education as being in a state of crisis (Edwards and Whitty, 1992). In the UK, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher made the standards of attainment in state education a major political issue, claiming many Labour controlled authorities deprived their pupils of a good education. Underpinning this was the claim that this exacerbated educational inequality (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). The UK Conservative government, ideologically wedded to liberal, market principles, advanced the argument that this deficit was best addressed by applying competition to education. The framework to achieve this was the Education Act 1980.

For this study, this development is pivotal. It established stakeholder oversight of individual schools and sought to balance the competing rights of parents to choose their child's school. Simultaneously, local education authorities were charged with the responsibility of managing these schools in an effective way at a time of falling school rolls and economic constraints (Stillman, 1986).

The Education Act 1980 paved the way for further major change enacted under the Education Reform Act (1988). Schools were to compete in the market for customers and parents were treated as consumers with choice over where their children were educated. Schools were given control over their budgets and independence from local authority control. Individual governing bodies were charged with driving up standards within a National Curriculum overseen by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Edwards and Whitty, 1992). Ranson and Crouch's (2009) characterisation of post 1945 pluralistic, locally democratic oversight of education held no longer.

The education reforms of the 1980s sought to tackle inequality through market principles and parental choice (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). To promote social mobility, the Assisted Places Scheme of 1980 enabled children from poorer backgrounds to go to private schools. Under the Assisted Places Scheme, 75,000 pupils receive publicly funded and means-tested assistance to attend some of the most selective and prestigious private schools. Rather than benefiting children of manual workers, however, the policy was 'colonised' by middle classes parents lacking financial resources but otherwise culturally and economically advantaged (Power, 2016). Middle-class parents, in this context, were depicted as 'skilled choosers', using their social capital to gain admission for their children to better achieve schools (Ball, 2003). Policy to achieve specific outcomes may have unintended consequences. Latent functions are the unintended consequences of a certain action (Merton, 1936). The Assisted Places Scheme, rather than advancing a socially equitable agenda, appeared to secure middle class vested interests (Ball, 2003).

The transformation of UK state education throughout the 1980s was continued with the election of the Labour government in 1997. Delivering on their manifesto pledge, a referendum on the creation of a Welsh Assembly was held on 6 May 1999. A majority voting in favour led to the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales which in time would gain control over key areas of policy, including education.

Prior to this time, the Westminster government framed policy to be applied throughout England and Wales. The Welsh Office would then endorse its content, making local authorities responsible for the implementation (Farrell and Law, 1999). At local authority level, discretion existed to adapt policy to accommodate cultural or other significant circumstances; for example, the Welsh language became a compulsory component of the National Curriculum (Farrell and Law, 1995). The view that, in terms of education, Wales was, '*an addendum in the 'England and Wales' state*' (Jones and Roderick, 2002, p. vii), no longer held.

The last national census in 2011 showed that the population of England was approximately 53 million. The population of Wales was approximately 3 million (Office for National Statistics, 2019). This helps to explain why research into school governance has largely focused on the English experience. Political devolution to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, however, has given control over education to their national governments. Although there exist common features across UK borders, it has afforded the comparison of educational outcomes as a product of a specific mode of delivery:

*... while inspection and performance...have grown in importance in all four nations, they have been applied differentially across the four nations of the UK. Governance in its totality is different as a result* (Connolly et al., 2014, p. 889).

Wales's first Secretary (the title changed to First Minister in October 2020) was Alun Michaels, a close ally to Prime Minister Tony Blair. After nine months, Rhodri Morgan succeeded Michaels as first Secretary and sought to establish a distinct Welsh political identity. In his 'Clear Red Water' speech, delivered at Swansea University on 11 December 2002, Morgan articulated his intention to break with the divisive economic agenda of successive Westminster governments and replace it with a system based on the principles of social justice:

*The actions of the Welsh Assembly Government clearly owe more to the traditions of Titmus, Tawney, Beveridge and Bevan than those of Hayek and Friedman* (Emery, 2016, p. 5).

Under Morgan's stewardship, Wales was set to govern in a manner different from that established by Margaret Thatcher and her successors. Reflecting this, the first major education policy-making in Wales under devolution was heavily influenced by the principles set out in 'The Learning Country' (Welsh Government, 2001). The document was a bold statement of ambition where education would become a lifelong facility designed to strengthen civic engagement. School improvement and a reduction in poverty lay at the heart of the blueprint where families and communities would act as agents of change. This devolved vision of the purpose and ethos of state education stood in contrast to that of England, where education was contextualised in terms of promoting economic regeneration (Ranson et al., 2005).

Unlike England, the Welsh government sought to strengthen their working relationship with the educational professionals. At this time the Welsh Government was less critical of the professionals than in England and were:

*...to be trusted, to be listened to and to be respected rather than criticised and 'shamed' as in some English educational policy discourse (Reynolds, 2008, p. 757).*

It is important to appreciate that Morgan's vision of a politically distinctive left leaning Welsh government would, in terms of education, be undermined. The cause of this was the relatively poor performances of Welsh schools in the PISA international comparison of school standards.

Educational neoliberalism is an integral part of this thesis. It is a defining characteristic of the majority of countries who participate in PISA testing. The underlying principles of PISA are that there exists a small set of skills which are valuable across all nations, irrespective of their stage of socio-economic development (Sjøberg, 2015). The origins of neoliberalism are located in the economic theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century economist Adam Smith (1776). Self-interest and the invisible hand of the market, it was argued, resulted in an optimum allocation of resources because the consumer was best able to make informed decisions; government intervention was best when it was minimal.

The resurgence of Smith's economic theories as a political ideology in the UK and the USA in the 1970s coincided with claims that both national educational systems were in a state of crisis (Edwards and Whitty, 1992). The neoliberal policies designed to address this decline were associated with the economic theory of Nobel Laureates Friedrich August von Hayek (2010) and Milton Friedman (2017). Like Smith (1776), both men believed markets and competition promoted efficiency. The Education Acts of 1980 and 1988 applied neoliberal principles to education. Schools became semi-autonomous businesses, with parents the customers (Hooge et al., 2012; Mudge, 2008). Regulation was exercised through independent inspection and governmental codes of accountability (Wilkins, 2015b; Connell, 2013). Tomlinson and Simon (1989) argued that the aims of the Educational Acts of 1980 and 1988 were twofold. First, the aim was to sever the power of the local education authorities over the control of education, and second, to reinforce an hierarchal system which brought them under greater central control. Additionally it helped cement the head as the primary school leader (Earley and Weindling, 2004).

In 2000, the Labour government launched Academy schools which are directly funded by the Department for Education and independent of local authority control. The growth in academies was significant. By January 2018, 46.8 % of pupils studying in state-funded schools in England were in academies and free schools (Department for Education, 2018). In terms of governance, in schools which have embraced marketisation, preference has been shown for governors with business skills. When schools compete in the market for pupils, they: *'need to run like companies with the governing bodies being boards of directors and the headteachers the managing directors'* (Thody, 1994, p. 22).

The consequence of this is that governors with non-specialist skills, often attributed to parents, are considered a less valuable organisational asset. As parent governors ordinarily have the closest links with their local community, this development threatens to weaken this relationship (Young, 2017).

The power of educational neoliberalism to shape global educational systems



surpasses that of any single piece of legislation (Dumas and Anderson, 2014; Tröhler et al., 2014). Until the 1990s, national tests in European schools were rare. By 2009, only five European education systems had no national student assessments (Grey and Morris, 2018).

Yet the definition and usage of the term 'economic liberalism' has shown capacity to accommodate change (Taylor and Boas, 2009). Educational neoliberalism, based on the economic views of Smith (1776), must be understood in conjunction with Smith's (1759) ethical framework, embedded in his earlier work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Hanley, 2015). Amartya Sen (2010), the Nobel economics Laureate, commented that the contemporary application of neoliberal economics to education is devoid of the principles of social justice and fairness which were integral to Smith's economic theory:

*Smith was concerned not only with the sufficiency of self-interest at the moment of exchange but also with the wider moral motivations and institutions required to support economic activity in general* (Sen, 2010, p. 50).

As my argument develops, I will demonstrate the major effect that marketisation has had on school governance. Specifically, leadership and accountability have been refashioned into auditable measures; that is, oversight through scrutiny of data and statistical analysis largely devoid of concern for those curriculum areas which are not amenable to quantification. There is reason to believe that Hayek would have disapproved of this:

*...being a classical liberal he [Hayek] believed profoundly in the value of a liberal arts education, and would have resisted the notion of an education geared to the economy...*(Devine, 2016, p. 6).

Several factors have contributed to the transformation of schools and school governance over the last four decades. This includes marketisation, testing, a national curriculum and the four UK nations' participation in the PISA. Globally, educational systems have become embedded in a market framework, their status as a good or bad school validated by their PISA ranking (Egan, 2017).

The roll out of educational reform based on diversity of school types in England stand in contrast to the Welsh Government's commitment to community-based education. To deliver an educational system driven less by competition, Wales has adopted a distinct approach to testing. Primary and secondary schools do not publish performance indices from which 'league tables' can be compiled and comparisons made. Further, the effect of socio-economic disadvantage, which may affect attainment levels, are acknowledged (Lingard and Mills, 2017; Alexiadou, 2005). The overall Welsh Government approach to school standards is therefore designed to reflect capacity for improvement.

The testing regime in Wales was designed to shield education from competition and the Welsh Government formally extols the virtues of educational cooperation (Hargreaves, 2010). This, however, has been undermined by individual boards of governance charged with raising standards and their continued participation in the PISA programme (Welsh Government, 2018a). The mechanism for improving standards in Wales *is* market based where schools *do* compete for pupils (Egan, 2017). The emphasis on school standards and testing has therefore brought Welsh education closer to other UK home nations and distanced itself from the educational aspirations, as expressed in 'The Learning Country' (Welsh Government, 2001).

*There has been increasing congruence between the education policies adopted by the UK and Welsh Government in relation to school standards, including the emphasis on standardised testing such as PISA (Egan, 2017, p.4).*

Wales has been unable to extricate itself from the PISA and the organisation's commitment to market principles (Egan, 2012b). Organisationally, the PISA is a body which evaluates seventy-nine government education departments by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' performance in the core subjects, mathematics, science, and reading. Wales' PISA results have consistently lagged behind the other constituent UK nations which has proved a source of protracted political embarrassment:

*Wales performed poorly in the 2009 results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), published in 2010 (OECD 2010), [where results] were significantly lower than in other countries and all other UK jurisdictions...In short, Wales was going backward in terms of school improvement and results (Farrell, 2014, p. 928).*

The dominant narrative of underperforming Welsh schools is based on less than robust evidence (Rees and Taylor, 2014). To the question 'is there a crisis in Welsh education', Rees and Taylor (2014) gave a cautious, 'No'. Justifying this, they draw attention to the difficulties in using quantitative data to make international comparisons, and also to research which found that 65% of Welsh parents were 'very satisfied' with primary education and 50% with secondary education (pp.111-112). Nevertheless, Rees and Taylor (2014) noted that such a narrative rarely features in political debate and public pronouncements.

The Welsh PISA results of 2019 showed modest improvement, but Wales remained the lowest performing nation in the UK (Welsh Government, 2019b). They are also frequently portrayed as an accurate barometer of a nation's future international competitiveness. Consequently, poor rankings can prove a major political embarrassment (Breakspear, 2012). A minor rank change can be the difference between:

*jubilation or depression, promotion or demotion, pride or shame. But win or lose, the PISA results are read as valid and reliable gauges of a country's educational performance (Meyer and Benavot, 2013, pp. 17-18).*

Historically, Wales' 2009 PISA results sparked a national debate on the quality and future direction of Welsh education. Their relatively poor ranking in 2009 resulted in a 'PISA shock' which forced the Welsh government to acknowledge the need for substantial educational reform (Swaffield, 2017; Schleicher, 2014). The Welsh Government subsequently revised its education policy under the influence of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) phenomenon (Egan, 2017). The GERM is a global body committed to reforms in school accountability, corporate management, standardisation and a narrowing of the curriculum to focus on core subjects/knowledge (Fuller and Stevenson, 2019). To improve

educational performance, the Welsh Government 'grafted' on policies taken from the GERM (Egan, 2017).

Wales's large-scale school improvement reforms in 2011 were subsequently reviewed by the OECD (2014). This marked the beginning of an ongoing relationship which show that UK educational governance functions in a global and fluid real world context. In 2016, the Welsh Government invited the OECD to conduct a review of education and to make recommendations to promote improvements. This was to coalesce around school improvement becoming the educational cornerstone of education policed through accountability and inspection (Rees and Taylor, 2014). This has reduced the individual governing body's capacity for autonomous action while simultaneously making them primarily responsible for outcomes: '*In relation to pupil performance and educational outcomes both nationally and internationally*' (Farrell, 2014, p. 923).

The PISA quantitative data used to construct league tables are arguably insufficiently robust to draw meaningful conclusions (Meyer, 2017; Rees and Taylor, 2014; Sjøberg, 2012). This is because, methodologically, quantitative data can yield superficial insights which: '*... are not an assessment of the 'knowledge and skills for life' of students, but only of 'knowledge and skills in assessment situations*' (Dohn, 2007, p. 1).

More damaging is the charge that political actors have represented PISA data in a way which supports the proposition that greater educational marketisation is the key to improvement (Lewis and Lingard, 2016; McGregor, 2009). From this perspective, underachievement is best remedied by the introduction or furtherance of educational marketisation (Grey and Morris, 2018). Expressing such sentiments, in 2013, Michael Gove, then English education secretary, was clear why Welsh schools performed poorly in PISA tests: '*... in Wales, there are no academies, no free schools, no league tables, no chief inspector like Sir Michael Wilshaw, no determination to reform*' (Cornock, 2013).

This assertion, however, is contentious. While it is true that English academy schools put great store by their governing autonomy being able to raise standards, the Local Government Association found that *Council-maintained* schools were more likely to retain their good or outstanding status than their academy counterparts (Eichler, 2019). Despite a contested record of achievement, neoliberalism remains unchallenged in the public sphere (Crouch, 2011).

So far, this thesis has focused on structure, functions and the challenges and tensions inherent in Welsh school governance. Before examining and evaluating the role that 'community' plays in this research, the following section will discuss the significance of governor skills and knowledge which has been a major development in some English schools, a development which Wales is to follow.

### **2.3 Stakeholder governance, skills and knowledge**

The goals and aims that governing bodies are expected to aspire to were discussed earlier in this chapter (Wales Government, 2018a). To secure these goals requires that governors possess the appropriate skills and knowledge. In the context of stakeholder governance, Welsh school governors are required to act as the headteacher's 'critical friend' and 'support/challenge' them (Wales Government, 2018a). In terms of policy, this means that the governing body should be able to offer support and constructive advice to the headteacher, and should also have the confidence to question proposals and seek information to make informed decisions (Wales Government, 2018a).

When parent representation was brought into school governing bodies under the 1980 Education Act, their value, in line with stakeholder principles, resided in their lay, non-specialist knowledge and their relationship with their local community (Young, 2017). The introduction of mandatory training in 2013 represented a movement towards a skills-based system. The impetus for this development was the poor 2009 PISA results. The Welsh Government argued that these results highlighted the increased complexity of school governance, and to be able to discharge their responsibilities in a competent manner required a skilled overseeing body: '...[Governors] *need to be knowledgeable to carry out their roles*

*and responsibilities and to effectively contribute to the school performance agenda'* (Wales, 2018a, Chapter 7, p.1).

An examination of the training programme facilitates an understanding of how the Welsh Government perceived school governance at the time of its inception. The programme has two strands. First, *induction training* is designed to raise awareness of governor roles and responsibilities. This training strand provided an overview of the legal context within which governors conduct their business; the aim of this was to instil confidence and to enable governors to take a full and active part in governing body discussions (Wales Government, 2018a).

The second strand, *understanding school data*, aimed to equip governors with the skills necessary to improve school performance. Being able to analyse school performance data was instrumental in enabling governors to question and challenge their headteacher (Wales Assembly Government, 2013).

The Welsh Government envisaged mandatory training in tandem with local authority support as key to improving the quality of school governance (Farrell, 2014). Yet, if success is based on improving PISA outcomes in relation to other UK countries, the training programme has fallen short of Welsh Government expectations. However, on the importance of governor skills it has sent out mixed messages. As at 2018, the Welsh Government said: '*At first sight the range of legal responsibilities may seem daunting, but governors do not need to be experts to undertake them*' (Wales Government, 2018a, Chapter 1, p.1).

In 2016, three years after the introduction of mandatory governor training, the Welsh education minister published a consultation paper on the future structure and functions of school governance. Proposals included the recruitment of governors on the basis of their skills. The proposed reconstituted 'stakeholder-plus model' would include skilled governors, a new category of co-opted governors recruited specifically for their skills, and an increase in the number and category of parent governors so that appointed parent governors could work alongside elected parent colleagues (Welsh Government, 2016 b).

In April 2019 the Welsh Government published the consultation paper with their responses. Two specific issues are discussed here because they have direct relevance for this research. These are governors recruited on the basis of skills, and the role and responsibilities of the headteacher.

On the issue of governors recruited on the basis of their skills the Welsh Government displayed a strength of purpose it had hitherto shied away from. It argued that skills must be the fundamental consideration when all categories of governor are appointed and governors could be co-opted on this basis. What these skills were, the Welsh Government promised to clarify. Nevertheless, subsequently, in what might be seen as avoiding responsibility, the Welsh Government announced that individual governing bodies would be free to identify and incorporate what skills they required new governors to possess, having undertaken a process of self-evaluation. Despite this major development, the Welsh Government maintains it did not represent a movement away from stakeholder governance. Rather it recognised: '*-- the increasingly important role of each governor as being part of the 'corporate' body*' (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019, p.5).

On the issue of the headteacher's role in governance, the consultation document of 2016 included reference to amending their role. One option was:

*....The headteacher will be able to offer advice to the governing body; he or she will not be directly responsible for formulating the school's strategic direction, ethos, aims, objectives or policies, or for setting school targets* (Welsh Government Consultation, 2016, p.38).

Broadly this option was in line with the NAHT's evidence to the Taylor Report (1977) which recognised the potential for conflict if the headteacher was a governor. On this basis, the NAHT argued that the headteacher should not be a member of the board of governors. Past experience shows that the headteacher's dual role of governor-chief executive is able to impede inclusivity. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government opted to retain the existing situation allowing the headteacher the option of becoming a member of their board of governors.

To ensure that the governing body functions in an inclusive manner, the Welsh Government, as it had done previously, invested faith in the support and advice of the educational professionals - the Headteacher, the Challenge Adviser, and feedback from Estyn inspections - to support the governor agency (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019). Past experience suggests that the faith the Welsh Government places on these agencies to empower governor agency is optimistic.

Reflecting on educational change and policy developments in Wales over the past several years, a number of inferences may be drawn. First, mandatory training, inspection by Estyn, monitoring by local authorities, and the work of the School Challenge Advisers has had limited success in raising attainment standards if judged on the PISA rankings. Second, the Welsh Government contend this deficit can be addressed by reconstituting school governance, moving it towards a skills model as in English academy schools. The English experience, where preference is shown to governors with skills, is almost undeniably incompatible with stakeholder principles. If governors are selected on the basis of business skills this will almost certainly weaken the role of the parent governor, recruited on the basis of their non-specialist knowledge, and their relationship with their local community. When schools are seen as best governed by those who have the requisite skills, the lay parent governor serves little purpose (Connolly et al, 2017).

Having examined the importance of skills and knowledge in school governance, I turn now to a theme which was introduced in the first chapter, that of ‘community’. As my argument develops, I will demonstrate that the community occupies a central position in the Welsh Government’s education and social policy, especially as it relates to tackling poverty and deprivation and providing a foundation to support school improvement.

## **2.4 Community: Wales Government policy**

An understanding of how school governance functions demands not only an exploration of the formal policies designed to create structure, but also the factors which are specific to the research site. It is therefore necessary to: *‘locate current*



*governance debates within a historical, political and social context* (Connolly et al., 2014, p. 890).

Community, albeit a difficult concept to define, usefully describes the characteristics of the research site. These characteristics include their socio-cultural-characteristics, a former mining area with distinct geographic boundaries, predominantly terraced housing, significant face to face contact and a shared history (Clarke, 2009; Fisk, 1978).

In a contemporary context, conceptions of community are expressed in terms of communitarianism, a philosophy that stresses the relationship and connection between the individual and their community (Avineri and De-Shalit, 1992). In practical terms this is characterised by the desire for cooperation, mutual engagement and shared interests; these are qualities which stand in stark contrast to those generated by contemporary public sector, market driven economic policies (Wilkins, 2010). The Welsh Government recognises the benefits of an enduring school-community relationship: *'Schools and governing bodies do not exist in isolation from their wider community [they]... play an important and pivotal role in the community'* (Wales, 2018a, pp. 5-8).

Most governors have limited experience of current educational practice (Earley and Weindling, 2004). An essentially volunteer, low profile, underappreciated body threatens recruitment and retention (James et al., 2013). To furnish a full board of governors has, nationally, proved difficult to achieve (Holland, 2018). For schools located in deprived areas the problem is exacerbated (Earley, 2013; James, et al., 2011; Dean et al., 2017). The reason for this appears to be associated with the extra pressures these governors have to negotiate (Baxter, 2015; James, et al., 2011). In some circumstances, to recruit a sufficient number of members, headteachers and/or governors have deliberately sought out potential candidates; this is a situation that high performing schools rarely experience (James et al. (2011). The findings chapter will show that a number of participants in this research were elected to office unopposed.

Poverty, deprivation and social exclusion within industrial society has an enduring history (Disraeli, 1845). In 1997, the UK Labour government established the Social

Exclusion Unit (SEU), charged with creating policies to tackle poverty and promote social justice (Levitas, 2016; Barry, 1998). In Wales, this found expression in community-based policies, with a minister responsible for Communities and Tackling Poverty.

Over the period 2001 to 2018, the cornerstone of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty policies was the Communities First programme (Welsh Government, 2015). This introduced measures to help the 100 most deprived electoral divisions as identified by the Wales Government's (2020) Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). This is made up of eight separate domains of deprivation: income; employment; health; education; housing; access to services; environment; and community safety (Welsh Government, 2018c). This programme was subsumed by the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Programme (TPAP) in 2012 (Welsh Government, 2015). The TPAP introduced the early years Flying Start, Families First, the Pupil Deprivation Grant, credit unions, advice services and health initiatives. Despite spending £432 million over the period 2001 – 2017, when discussing plans for the closure of the TPAP, the Welsh Government admitted: '*it is still unclear as to whether this approach [Community First] is successful*' (Welsh Government, 2017. p. 6).

Others have been critical of Community First programme, arguing that the Welsh Government's two decades of anti-poverty policies have met with little success (Clapham, 2014).

Twenty-four years ago in 1996, the effect of poverty in the South Wales valleys was disturbing:

*A generation of Welsh people are being born into social disadvantage which will ensure that they will underperform in school, be unemployed or work in marginalised and low paid employment, live in some of the poorest housing in Europe and be prone to disease and ill health* (Adamson, 1996, p. 7).

A decade later the author, revisiting the same landscape, reported that little had changed (Adamson, 2008). Adamson commented on what he described as the corrosive effect of unemployment and socially excluded communities.

Claims that neoliberalism promote efficiency are of questionable veracity. The UK financial crisis of 2008 witnessed a deepening of socio-economic distress in already ailing areas (Clarke and Newman, 2012). Malnutrition and food poverty have become normalised, and educational opportunities for pupils from poorer backgrounds have been disproportionately harmed (Tienken, 2013). Despite this, neoliberalism has remained unscathed, with governments implementing fiscally conservative policies, the consequences of which affect the most vulnerable individuals and communities (Crouch, 2011).

The last three decades has witnessed a barrage of UK and post devolution Welsh Government educational reform and policy implementation. This has changed little and policy appears to have had a reinforcing effect:

*[The] ongoing reform of the school system, the relationships between opportunity, achievement and social class have remained stubbornly entrenched and have been reproduced by policy (Ball, 2013, p.4).*

The following chapters will show the impact poverty and deprivation have had on the communities, schools and their board of governors which feature in this research. In doing this, it will show how this affects how the parent governors in this study perceive and conduct their role.

## **2.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter has identified and discussed the significance of national and local policies and the historical and contemporary characteristics of the research site as they impact upon the research focus. It has showed the difficulties which may arise when policy is implemented without adequate consideration. Such lack of attention raises the potential for disconnection between the framing of policy and its success, failure or abandonment at the implementation stage. Attention has been drawn to policy which regulates governor powers and responsibility and the potential for conflict between professional and lay members, stemming from the headteacher's unique 'governor-chief executive' role.

It has showed how Welsh education has become both embedded and embroiled in the international PISA rankings. The potential consequences for stakeholder governance in a reformed school governance were discussed as were the contemporary characteristics of the research site. Specifically, the Welsh Government community-based programmes, formally designed to ameliorate the effect of poverty and educational disadvantage, were identified, discussed, and judged to have had limited success.

The conclusion which can be drawn from this policy chapter is that the South Wales valleys are permanently economically distressed, poverty is endemic and that this situation is forecast to worsen over the next four years (Wales Government, 2018a). School governing bodies in deprived communities have the unenviable responsibility for driving up standards, competing in an imperfect market for pupils and accommodating the considerable additional needs of many of their pupils. It is these considerable challenges that the participants in this study must engage with and resolve.

The following chapter will build on the themes identified and discussed here to explore the literature on school governance, as it relates to the research focus. This will inform the research questions which will be presented and their significance explained.

## Chapter 3: Literature review

The previous chapter examined the policy discourses which created the framework in which school governance functions. National policies are designed to be applicable to multiple schools; nevertheless, scope will exist for different interpretations (Connolly and James, 2011; Stokes and Clegg, 2002). This can be observed through conducting a literature review.

In research, the literature review serves several important purposes. First, it enables the researcher to gain an understanding of what research has been conducted in a particular area, the methodological approaches adopted, and the strengths and weaknesses (Boote and Beile, 2005). This process can inform the research questions so that it is possible to gain a deep understanding of the subject matter.

This chapter critically engages with the literature on school governance. It begins by describing the review approach I used. Following this I review the key areas of school governance, that is, accountability and leadership. It is argued that these are frequently poorly understood and executed. Within the context of educational change, the effect marketisation has had on governor recruitment on the basis of their skills is then explored. This, it is argued, has changed the structure and ethos of school governance in English academies, a development Wales is to follow. I then examine the 'enablers' and the 'barriers' which promote/facilitate or impede governor inclusivity. The evidence suggests that these frequently ill-prepared governors do play a purposeful role. Finally, the literature on school governance and socio-economic disadvantage is explored and evaluated. Here, the research suggests poverty does affect how parent governors perceive their role, that a strong school-community relationship is mutually beneficial, but governors rarely seek to actively strengthen this relationship.

### 3.1 Conducting the literature review

I began the literature review process by reading articles which offered advice on the best ways to do this. Several articles were particularly insightful and resulted in my literature review following sequential steps. This involved:

- Narrowing the research topic, making it manageable and of personal and professional interest;
- Searching for literature within a range of academic databases, using key words, and including articles which hold contrary positions;
- Reading the selected articles and evaluating them;
- Organising the selected papers, searching for patterns and developing subthemes;
- Summarising papers and ideas in a few sentences; and
- working to develop a writing style that shows order, progression and coherence, prioritising analysis over description.

*Adapted from Denney and Tewksbury (2013) and Boote and Beile (2005).*

By Autumn 2017, I had identified my broad research focus, parent school governance in Wales. To refine the focus I reviewed a range of peer reviewed publications on school governance. This included Academic Search Premier, the Open University online library, Google Scholar and JSTOR. I also consulted official publications issued by the Welsh and Westminster governments, and Middleton council.

The key words and terms I used to search for literature at this time proved too broad and were narrowed. This restricted focus subsequently defined the parameters of my review (Appendix 3). It also developed my understanding of the areas of interest to me, the methodological approaches they employed, and the findings which helped me identify potentially profitable avenues of exploration. As the search evolved, new folders were created on themes and topics related to the research focus. These were:

'What governors do.'

'How do they carry out their roles?'

'What affects them in carrying out their roles?'

'The legislative and policy context'.

'Schools, poverty and community links.'

Folders were added as new themes emerged.

To illustrate the content of these folders, I give an example of 'What does a governor do?' This includes attending meetings; conduct of meetings; leadership; accountability; and representation. This process was complicated by the interconnectedness of the research focus where themes appeared suitable for different folders. Where this occurred I deposited them in all the folders I judged to be applicable and refined this process at the thematic analysis stage of the research.

As the research process progressed, discussions with my supervisors made me reassess the parameters of the study. To strengthen the thesis, new areas of research were explored. The research focus, for example, was Welsh school governance. However, the absence of an international perspective on educational governance resulted in a narrow focus which led to the literature search being refined. New searches were periodically conducted to discover overlooked and new publications.

### **3.2 Typologies of governing bodies**

Boards of governors are diverse organisations, yet they can exhibit distinct characteristics (Levacic, 1995). 'Typology' refers to the study and classification of school governing bodies based on their characteristics such as the degree of inclusivity and/or exclusivity they exhibit. Three research studies into governing body typologies are discussed here. They span two decades and each have a different focus. They therefore present a longer term overview of research conducted at key moments in the evolution of school governance.

The first study focused on the exercise of *authority* in school governance (Kogan et al., 1984). It was conducted shortly after the landmark Education Act 1980 (Great Britain, Education Act, 1980) which transferred responsibility for the conduct of schools to community stakeholders. The second, Creese and Earley (1999), examined the extent of *support and challenge* within school governance. The third was a comparative study conducted against the backcloth of UK devolution and researched schools in the four constituent UK nations (Ranson et al., 2005).

Kogan et al. (1984) provided an insight into the workings of the embryonic stakeholder governance. The authors argued that the Taylor Report (1977) defined the responsibilities of governance in identifiable tasks. The formal relationship between the governing body and headteacher. Kogan et al. (1984) identified four distinct typologies with emphasis on the functions of accountability, advisory, supportive and mediator. These related to the different aspects of the support/challenge and critical friend role as enunciated by Taylor (1977).

Creese and Earley (1999) researched the nature of challenge in the governor/professional relationship which produced four typologies of governance; 'abdicators', 'adversaries', 'supporters clubs', and 'partners.' 'Abdicators' were boards of governors where its members were content to let the professional headteacher, whom they thought was doing a good job, make decisions. 'Partners' were characterised by their inclusivity in decision making where the governors and headteacher worked in partnership within a trusting and respectful relationship.

Ranson et al.'s (2005) research took place post devolution when Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales had gained control over education. In the study one local authority (two in England) was chosen in each nation of the UK selected for, '*the emergent development of civic active characteristics (partnership, participation, performance review)*' p. 538. Ranson et al. (2005) developed typologies based on the power relationship between the headteacher, chair and governors in the process of decision making. Four distinct typologies were identified; these were governance as a 'deliberative forum', 'a consultative sounding' 'an executive



board', and a 'governing body.' The 'deliberative forum' was led by a headteacher with an autocratic management style who led discussions. In this scenario parent governors felt they were unable to question or challenge the headteacher.

Conversely, the 'governing body' typology had a strong headteacher providing strong leadership but, significantly where the governing body, took overarching responsibility for the conduct and strategic direction of the school.

Ranson et al. (2005), with different researchers, sought to identify, describe and understand differences in patterns of behaviour exhibited by different boards of governors in Welsh schools. The researchers selected schools which reflected a range of socio-geographic contexts. This included 'rural', 'industrial valley', 'urban' and 'border' schools. The research reported 57% of the schools studied had typologies of governance which operated on 'consultative sounding' principles where the headteacher brought policies to the board to be endorsed. Less than 10% of the schools researched operated on 'governing bodies' principles where the governing body took overarching responsibility for the conduct and strategic direction of the school.

This overview shows that governing bodies differ significantly in the manner in which they operate and occupy a range of positions on the democratic-undemocratic spectrum. An understanding of governing body typology has informed my research, not just retroactively but prospectively, being useful in helping me make sense of the data where participants describe their experiences of governance. This theme will be returned to and discussed in the findings and discussion chapters. Attention will now focus on leadership and accountability within school governance.

### **3. 3 Leadership and accountability**

Leadership and accountability, central to educational governance, function within diverse and competing frameworks. Earley (2017) notes the importance and many definitions assigned to educational leadership, '*The importance of leadership has long been recognised but as a concept it is elusive and there is no clear, agreed definition of it*' p.162). In a similar vein Ranson (1986) describes the

nature of school accountability as complex and multi-layered. Within this context the research literature on educational leadership and accountability will be explored.

Accountability rests on identifying who is answerable to whom, for what specific aspect which depends on the evaluation of information and the authority to apply sanctions (Webb, 2005; Ranson, 2004; Farrell and Law, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999). School accountability however, is a multidimensional phenomenon operating in diverse and competing frameworks (Glatter, 2003; Ranson, 1986). Adams and Kirst (1999) see accountability in education as linking standards, testing and professional development within several typological models (Adams and Kirst, 1999). This includes 'political accountability', where individual board members vote to ratify decisions; 'legal accountability' where the courts enforce legal issues; 'bureaucratic accountability' where, within the school individuals are accountable to those who occupy a more senior position for some area of responsibility, and 'moral accountability' where deontological principles of duty and obligation guide the governor's behaviour (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009).

Moos (2005), drawing on the work of Adams and Kirst (1999), develop a five typological model of school governance accountabilities. 'Managerial' accountability where schools are part of the state, and agents of the national and local government secure accountability; 'market' accountability where schools are accountable to the parents as consumers for standards of attainment; 'political/public' accountability where the local community assesses the school's performance; 'professional' accountability where the school must achieve the professional standards stipulated by the teaching profession, and 'ethical/legal' accountability where the school must meet the values and norms as befitting an organisation which acts in loco parentis for the wellbeing of pupils.

Møller's (2009) 'attainment- resources' accountability model holds that those who make policy and prescribe pupil attainment targets are accountable for ensuring schools receive appropriate funding and allocation of resources to meet these targets. Here, policy makers are accountable to individual schools, governors, parents and pupils (Møller, 2009).

This overview has identified and briefly discussed a range of educational modes of accountabilities. In practice a composite of accountability types are likely to operate in any educational system (Moos, 2005). However, four decades of educational reform, where individual governing bodies have become custodians of financial probity and responsible for pupil attainment standards, has significantly shaped accountability (Wilkins, 2015a; Levy, 2010). This has seen professional accountability eclipsed by market based, corporate accountability where the local authority and boards of governors are accountable to the parents for pupil standards and organisational efficiency (Ranson, 2010).

Within a market based framework a distinction can be made between 'contractual' and 'responsive' accountability (Glatter, 2003). The former is concerned with the extent the board of governors fulfil their expectations, specifically in terms of standards of pupil attainment. 'Responsive' accountability, is a more nuanced, negotiated process where boards of governors acknowledge and accommodate the interests of its different stakeholders who may hold differing and competing perspectives on the schools' goals, aims and priorities (Glatter, 2003), which Moos et al. (2000) notes can be a source of tension.

The Welsh Government expects that the governing body will play an active leadership and accountability role. This means taking a strategic role, setting aims and objectives, and holding the headteacher to account (Wales, 2018a). To do this governors must understand what their role entails and be committed to achieving it (National Governance Association, 2019b). Research has shown that among the governing body's most difficult tasks is managing the headteacher (National Governance Association, 2019b). Dean et al.'s (2007) research in areas of socio-economic deprivation found that governors preferred offering their headteacher their uncritical support rather than challenge them. The situation was complicated because governors frequently lacked educational knowledge and were dependent on the headteacher to set a strategic direction for the school (Dean et al., 2007). It is unsurprising therefore, that frequently governors contribute little to school accountability and leadership (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014).

Within school governance, accountability is formally exercised through the 'support/challenge' and the 'critical friend relationship' (Welsh Government, 2018b). This is characterised by a trusting, open relationship, built on mutual respect, with the aim of achieving mutually shared goals (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2005); something which will take time to develop (Creese and Earley, 1999). The development of a trusting relationship however, is likely to be compromised by the constant turnover of governors and the time necessary for them to become familiar with the procedures of governance (Earley and Weindling, 2004). In practical terms it means that the governing body should be able to offer their support and advice to the headteacher, and able to challenge them. This involves using information and questioning proposals to make informed decisions (Wales Government, 2018a). While a transparent mechanism, governors frequently lack clarity about what is involved in this process (Balarin et al., 2008).

Considerable power and authority is invested in the position of the headteacher (Wales Government, 2018a). They uniquely play a 'governor' and 'chief executive' school leadership role. Their professional training means they will almost certainly possess greater educational knowledge than other governors. Further, their position of school leader is one of high status.

The 'crisis' in Welsh education, stemming from the poor 2009 PISA results, proved a catalyst for change. Individual governing bodies were made responsible and accountable for the conduct of their school. This did not, however, lead to an equitable distribution of power and inclusive decision making. Rather, the principal beneficiary of this transfer of power and responsibilities was the headteacher whose executive and non-executive roles were strengthened (Earley, 2000). Their executive role involves management responsibilities; their non-executive role is divorced from daily management. This accumulation of power and responsibilities stems from the manner in which the headteacher is able to execute their unique 'governor'-'chief executive' role which, in the process, can be arbitrary and blurred. In this context, headteacher dominance resulted in governors often struggling to execute their responsibilities:

*--- the headteacher can be the dominant figure in determining the school's direction and vision and some governing bodies can play a*

*comparatively minor role [and]...struggle to fulfil their responsibilities...[including]... being able to 'call the Headteacher' to account* (Connolly et al., 2017, p.15).

Connolly et al.'s (2017) observation, that some governing bodies experience difficulties in playing a meaningful leadership and accountability role, requires examination to understand the factors which contribute to this situation, and also to determine whether governors can be complicit in their passivity.

Political devolution, educational knowledge and Wales' participation and poor showing in the PISA international comparison of educational standards have proved a powerful agent for change. Schools charged with meeting targets and driving up standards have resulted in leadership and accountability being narrowed and redefined in terms of oversight of short term, auditable measures (Rees and Taylor, 2014). This involves the scrutiny of data, information, plans and policies, ensuring targets have been met (Young, 2017; James et al., 2010).

The Welsh Government attaches great importance to data handling competence as a means to secure accountability and improve performance. This can be gauged with reference to the mandatory training programme which outlines how governors should execute their role. They should: '*...carry out their key roles of strategic planning, target setting, monitoring and evaluation and accountability*' (Wales Assembly Government, 2013, p.10). However, research has found that often the primary role of governors is to monitor targets and outcomes and endorse proposals (Wilkins, 2016a). Here individual governor's financial and commercial acumen are deemed desirable skills (Wilkins, 2015a), of greater value than the local knowledge and civic engagement that lay member bring to the table (Wilkins, 2016b).

Further, when school governance is conducted as an audit based activity governors must have the skills necessary to understand data. The quality of training is clearly important (Farrell, 2014a). However, as will be shown later in this chapter, even when the training is judged to be of a good standard, some individuals will struggle. For these individuals, their potential to engage in discussions which demand understanding and interpreting data will be compromised. However, even when governors possess the skills to understand

data, the data may provide superficial insights only. This may be a poor basis on which to make decisions (Meyer, 2017; Breckon and Roberts, 2016; Grek and Ozga, 2009; Mortimore, 2009). Research in two Australian secondary schools to evaluate the benefits and losses which accrued when making decisions on the basis of data highlight this danger (Selwyn, 2016). The author reported that many governors found that large amounts of data added to the complexity of decision making. Specifically, it was judged a poor basis upon which to inform long term planning.

However, even when governors possess competent data handling skills, to be able to express their views and contribute meaningfully to discussions requires confidence, which may not always be present. Lastly, disproportionate emphasis on data to inform decision making can serve to devalue the areas which are not amenable to quantification. The National Curriculum, introduced under the Education Reform Act (1988), was prescriptive, target driven and stressed pupil entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum (Wales Assembly Government, 2015). It also prioritised assessment of core subjects- English, mathematics and science. This runs the risk that creative subjects and social development, which do not lend themselves to quantification, are devalued or ignored. It is this which has led to accusations that pupils in UK primary and secondary schools have access to a restricted curriculum (Hooge et al., 2012). Significantly, research reported that governors, when asked to rank the problems that their school faced, said the most important issue was balancing the budget (71%) ; this was compared with ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum (22% ) (Holland, 2018).

The Welsh PISA results of 2019 showed a modest improvement. Still trailing the other UK home nations proved politically embarrassing (Cornock, 2013). If judged solely on PISA attainment, the Welsh mandatory governor training has not been sufficient to drive up standards of attainment; nor has it promoted levels of governor agency. In 2016, three years after the introduction of mandatory training, many Welsh primary school governing bodies were found not to question or challenge the headteacher (Wales, 2016). Thus the call for governors to take a strategic role in the running of the school and secure accountability remain, in many cases, unfulfilled (Welsh Government, 2018).

To draw some conclusions, one aim of the Education Act 1980 (Great Britain, Education Act, 1980) was to improve the levels of accountability. To achieve this, the responsibility for the conduct of school governance was transferred away from elected councillors to local stakeholders. Frequently, the headteacher has been found to play the dominant governor role, reducing other governors to marginal figures (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014). This suggests that the poor levels of individual school accountability, previously dispensed by democratically elected local councillors, has been replaced by equally poor levels of individual school accountability, dispensed by the appointed headteacher. In spite of this, the Welsh Government's proposals for school governance remain committed to the principles of stakeholder governance which, with continued guidance and support from professional bodies and individuals, is able to work (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019).

The next section will now focus on school governance, management and leadership. The interconnection between these different elements will be explored in terms of their relative importance in the implementation of policy.

### **3.4 Governance and management**

School governance involves the implementation of policies and monitoring their progress in achieving prescribed goals (Welsh Government, 2018b). Management is the process of dealing with or controlling things or people (Connolly et al., 2017). School governance and leadership are interrelated, complex and, because of the headteacher's governor-school leader role, a potential source of conflict.

The structure of governing bodies is both hierarchical and bureaucratic. An analysis of the mechanics of educational leadership highlights the formal chain of command where accountability and decision making are exercised by those at the top of the organisation (Bush, 2011). To regulate the conduct of governance there is a comprehensive body of rules and regulations (Jørgensen, 2012; Weber, 1968). In Wales these are contained in the School Governors' guide to the law which contains over three hundred pages and twenty eight chapters (Wales, 2018).

Theories of educational leadership centre on the governing body, headteacher and their relationship with, and access to, sources of power and control (Bush, 2011). These are associated with those who occupy key organisational positions, authority and expertise and power and control over other members (Bush, 2011). Ordinarily it is the headteacher who occupies these key positions.

To function in a competent manner, school governance requires expert educational knowledge. A deficit runs the risk that the school may slip into decline (James, et al. 2010). Ordinarily, in their role of governor, it is the headteacher who possesses the most educational knowledge. Uniquely their governor role is part of their full-time job. This demands they are conversant with educational policy and the frequently revised body of regulations which adds to the complexity of school governance (Earley, 2013). There may be cases where other governors possess significant knowledge about education. They may, for example, be professionals in other educational settings. However, the headteacher will have specific knowledge about their school that other governors will almost certainly not have.

'Knowledge' in school governance is an ambiguous concept which exemplifies the 'slipperiness' of the term (Young, 2017). It may find expression in binary terms, such as 'lay' and 'expert.' Young (2017) argued that knowledge in the context of school governance takes at least two forms, 'educational' and 'managerial'. Educational knowledge is about the rules and regulations which regulate the conduct of governance. Managerial knowledge is that which enables policy to be implemented. Increasingly managerial knowledge - implementing new policy and arrangements within the school - has assumed the greater importance (Young, 2017). This has devalued educational knowledge and contributed to weakening the positive connotations associated with lay knowledge (Young, 2017).

The implementation of policy in a bureaucratic school governance framework draws the distinction between educational leadership and management (Connolly et al. 2017). Frequently governors rely on the headteacher for guidance and advice as they possess superior educational knowledge (Yolles, 2019). This highlights the importance of power, control and hierarchy, where those occupying



higher [management] positions have greater power and responsibility than those lower down. From this viewpoint 'educational management' has connotations of control and dominance over those deemed to occupy lower standing in the hierarchy (Connolly et al., 2017).

The relationship and distinction between educational and managerial knowledge and leadership are frequently blurred. This in part is due to the ambiguous role of the headteacher. The situation is complex with much depending on how the headteacher perceives their role. This factor has appeared significant in determining the degree of democracy that governing bodies exhibit (Earley, 2000). Earley (2000) found that a headteacher who was resistant to inclusivity was a powerful barrier to overcome. However, the assumption that the headteacher always seeks to dominate meetings and governors always wish to play an active governor role may be less than realistic. Dean et al. (2007) for example, reported instances where governors, believed they lacked the knowledge and competence to become active members and deferred to the headteacher, and some parent governors were overwhelmed by the prospect of playing a managerial role (Dean et al., 2007). In this respect governors may well have modest aspirations and self-limit their leadership role:

*It was not necessary for heads to be manipulative in order for governor involvement to be limited. Governors were quite capable of putting limits on themselves. (Dean et al., 2007 p.42)*

Previous research has established that the attitudes new members bring with them to school governance is likely to significantly shape how they execute their role (Dean et al., 2007). Significantly, many governors appear to be content to play a passive role. This appears particularly true of lay members, those with non-expert knowledge. This is not merely about competences but how the individual governors see themselves, the role they wish to play and their perceptions of others members. How they construct their identity will significantly affect the manner in which they execute their role (Connolly and James, 2012).

These insights highlight the complex nature of school governance and the need for caution when discussing matters of educational governance, knowledge,

management, leadership and accountability. A danger of conducting a one-sided investigation, as this research does by exploring the experiences of parent governors, is that it risks presenting an oversimplified narrative which is discussed in the findings and conclusion chapters. A central aspect of this research is the role power, authority and knowledge play within school governance, specifically as it relates to mediating the headteacher-governor relationship. To gain a meaningful understanding of this relationship a Bourdieusian framework was used. A strength of this approach is it can help explain why some groups engage in specific behaviours, while others do not (Bourdieu, 1984). In this framework, social class is not a discrete variable; rather it is dependent on the possession of social capital, and its relation to status, power and authority (Bourdieu, 1991,1987). This is particularly valuable for research which has at its core issues of deprivation, poverty and relations to authority. A Bourdieusian framework can help explain how an individual's behaviour can be shaped by their history when confronted by socially challenging events (Reay, 2015, 2006). In the 200 plus research papers reviewed for this literature review, the number of references to 'class' or to 'habitus' found few that explored how the individual's past experiences affect their present behaviour. Nevertheless, it is this which can help the researcher to better understand the informal aspects of school governance which appear an important, yet under researched area.

Reay (1998b), using Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, identified seven factors which impeded mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling. These were their material resources; educational qualifications; available time; information about the educational system; social confidence; educational knowledge; the extent to which entitlement, assertiveness, aggression or timidity characterised mothers approach to teaching staff. Winston (2013), drawing on Reay (1998b) explored the motivation and experiences of five women parent governors in inner city primary schools in England. In their private lives, confident and vocal, Winston (2013) noted as governors they were passive and did not challenge the headteacher. There were several factors which helped explain their reticence and deference (Winston, 2013). First, they were not rich in cultural capital and lacked knowledge about the educational system. While the women were sufficiently confident to apply to be governors, it was insufficient for them to

play a significant leadership role. Second, the women learned to be governors from other members. However, meetings were dominated by the headteacher to the extent that the whole board of governors played little part. Winston (2013), concluded these factors contributed to his participants' acquiescence.

There is evidence that, in the execution of their duties, governors are happier to offer support rather than challenging the headteacher (Dean et al., 2007). Several factors appear to contribute to this situation. One, discussed here, highlights the importance and complexity of personal relationships in explaining patterns of behaviour, specifically those of loyalty and deference. A national study of school governors found that being supportive of the headteacher was ranked higher than challenging them (Balarin et al., 2008). Other research which analysed seven thousand questionnaires distributed to governors arrived at a different conclusion. Here, it was found that the most valued quality in new governors (98% of the total), was being prepared to ask challenging questions (James, et al., 2014). The authors felt this demonstrated personal qualities of assertiveness.

If the findings of James et al. (2014) were to be widely held, one would expect research to find a larger number of governors who did play an active role than is the case. The disparity in the findings of Balarin et al.(2008) and James, et al. (2014) draws attention to the potential weakness of using questionnaires, which may provide a superficial understanding only. This is discussed in the following chapter. Further, with the James, et al., (2014) findings, while being *prepared* to ask questions was rated highly in new governors, there is no indication of the number of new governors who acted in this manner.

Notwithstanding, both Balarin et al.(2008) and James, et al. (2014) found that governors who were prepared to play an active governance role were seen as possessing a positive quality. This raises the question as to why so many fail to act accordingly when in office. A plausible explanation is that organisations have a particular ethos and distinct patterns of behaviour which its members consider valuable and worth preserving (Yolles, 2019). The established members therefore seek to 'shape' new recruits in ways which are sympathetic to their particular ideological and goal orientations and behaviour. If this is so, the socialisation

process of becoming a governor appears powerful, and capable of exerting considerable influence. This research explores this theme and reports on it in the findings chapter.

### **3.5 School governance, skills and values**

In all English state schools the skills-based model for governors has been forwarded by DfE (Department for Education, 2017). In the context of educational marketisation, English academies have exhibited a preference for governors with 'business skills' (Connell, 2013; Thody, 1994). The Welsh Government has hitherto been reluctant to adopt a skills-based system of school governance, and the stakeholder model remains nominally intact (Connolly et al., 2017; McGregor, 2009). However, 19 years after its establishment the Welsh Government, following a process of consultation on the structure of school governance are set to move towards a skills-based model:

*...skills must be the fundamental consideration when all categories of governor are being appointed and governors could be co-opted on this basis (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019, p. 5).*

Despite this statement of intent, the Welsh Government have shown reticence in declaring which skills will be considered valuable. Rather it has delegated this task to individual governing bodies who will be able to identify appropriate skills when appointing new governors, using a process of self-evaluation.

The Welsh Government lauds a strong school-community relationship, recognising the benefits which accrue to both parties (Wales Government, 2018a). However, in English academies, the preference shown for governors possessing business skills has weakened their relationship with their local community and resulted in parent governors being marginalised (Young, 2017).

The organisational principles and ethos of English academy schools include greater freedom than other state schools over the curriculum, teachers' pay and conditions, finance and funding from central government. It must be noted,

however, that when James Callaghan made his 'Great Debate' speech on public education in 1976, the Education Secretary of State had three powers over schools. By 2016, the incumbent had in excess of 2,500 and was personally responsible for over 5,000 individual institutions (Millar, 2016).

Notwithstanding, the organisational principles of English academy schools remain anathema for a Welsh Government where Rhodri Morgan's 'Clear Red Water' speech remains a powerful, albeit weakened, reminder of how education was contextualised in a newly devolved political regime (Egan, 2017). However, Wales is to move purposefully towards a skills-based model of school governance, thus bringing it closer to the English academy model. If the English academy experience is replicated, Welsh school governance is likely to become narrower in scope, more audit based and where local issues are diminished in importance as are its custodians, the parent governor (Young, 2017). It further runs the risk that discussion on wider educational goals and aims would be limited. James et al 's (2010) English study found that 'challenging the headteacher' and 'calling the headteacher to account' were absent from the governing bodies they studied. Here, the principal contribution governors made was oversight of data, policies and plans.

The Welsh Government contend that its proposals for school governance do not represent a movement away from the stakeholder model (Welsh Government Consultation, 2019). Stakeholder governance depends on governors being valued as equals with the opportunity to develop and contribute in their own ways (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017). On this basis, the evidence suggests, in practical terms, that many Welsh governing bodies do not operate on stakeholder principles, and proposals for a skills-based governance will reinforce this.

Deficits in the stakeholder and skills model of governance have led to alternative models being advanced. One such model is Carver's Policy Governance (Carver, 2001) which have been adopted by organisations in the private and public sector. Policy Governance is driven by achieving the aims of the organisation while avoiding tensions in the governor– management relationship with attendant poor standards of accountability (Carver and Carver, 2001), which the literature review

shows often weakens the stakeholder and skills models of school governance. To avoid these deficits board members work as a team within a prescribed framework, avoiding sectional interests to create policies. In an educational context Policy Governance draws a distinction between governance (the domain of governance) and management (the domain of the headteacher). Here, the 'Ends' is the responsibility of governance, the 'Means' the responsibility of management. This allows the board to focus on achieving specific aims while maintaining accountability and empowering the headteacher to act to secure the aims that the board have set (Carver, 2006). The board's policies are monitored periodically by reports from the headteacher, internal audits and, in an educational context, external inspection.

Policy Governance clearly has strengths however, potential weaknesses of the model have been identified. A longitudinal case study examined the implementation of Policy Governance in a private, independent school (Curry et al., 2018). The drive to adopt the Policy Government model was the school had grown and so had governor committees. The researcher's reported an immediate positive influence on leadership including a 'trickle down' effect on shared leadership. However, the researchers identified potential weaknesses in the model. This included governors might neglect the need to monitor operational matters effectively, the board may not follow its own policies, and in crisis situations the threat of the board being taken over and Policy Governance jettisoned. Although crises may be considered a rarity The National Governance Association (2020) carried out research exploring the effect of governing bodies in the unprecedented times of Covid 19. A major finding was governors did not know if they needed to plan for the short, medium or longer term. In a Policy Governance context this might jeopardise the continuation of the model. In Curry et al.'s (2018) research, Policy Governance had been sustained through its fifth year of implementation. Yet the researchers cautioned that even strict adherence to the Policy Governance model and support among board members, and strong board and administrator leadership may not be enough to support sustainability (Curry et al., 2018). This issues is returned to Chapter 6, Discussions and conclusions.

Before proceeding to examine deprivation and the school-community relationship I shall review the literature on governor 'enablers' and 'barriers.'

### **3. 6 Governor enablers and barriers**

Although our understanding of school governance has increased over recent times, much less is known about factors which promote or impede governor agency. In this thesis, I use the term 'enabler' in its broadest sense to refer to the formal or informal aspects which promote or facilitate governor inclusivity. Barriers are defined as the formal or informal aspects which impede inclusivity in school governance. This section examines the literature on this issue, arguing that the barriers are frequently significant, the enablers are limited which ill prepares governors for their role.

Prior to 2013, school governors in Wales attended their first meeting having received no formal developmental opportunities or support to play a meaningful role. This changed with the introduction of mandatory training in that year; the aim being to improve the quality of school governance and raise standards (Farrell, 2014). The training programme has two strands - *induction* training focusing on governor roles and their responsibilities, and *understanding school data* to improve school performance. To date, little research has been conducted to discover how effective the governor training programme has been, something that this research will help to address.

In 1992, research found that governor training may have little benefit in preparing governors for office, and may contribute to a sense of inadequacy (Waring, 1992). It appears that over the intervening period little had changed. Training programmes, which furnished governors with lists of questions that they might find useful to establish if their school was complying with national policies, are restrictive (Young, 2016). It suggests that the conduct of governor training is defined in terms of oversight and compliance, rather than taking a strategic role in the running of the school as the Welsh Government expects (Welsh Government, 2018a).

School governance and decision making procedures must comply with prescribed regulations (Welsh Government, 2018a). There is, for example, a period of notice before meetings take place; a certain number of governors who must be in attendance for the meeting to be quorate; decisions are made on a majority basis; minutes must be made and confirmed for their accuracy; there may be committees to whom functions have been delegated, and the agenda dictates what can and cannot be discussed.

New members will take time to become familiar with the conduct and procedures of governance. This can impede governor agency and also limit their willingness to participate in discussions (Young, 2017). Language of a professional or technical nature also has the capacity to weaken governor agency (Farrell and Jones, 2000).

Small issues have been shown to have a disproportionately negative effect on governor inclusivity. Cases have been documented where new governors had not been introduced in their first meeting and they did not know the names of other members (Young, 2017). In her earlier research, Young (2014) argued that for meetings to be inclusive, there was the need for an enabler, someone who possesses the skills, authority and commitment to bring all governors into discussion. This duty formally falls to the chair who is charged with securing consensus and '*acts as a de facto chief executive of the school*' (Farrell and Law, 1999, p.7). Yet research into primary school governance discovered this role was often performed by the headteacher (Young, 2014).

There is evidence that the headteachers spend time 'informing' their governors (Young, 2017). 'Informing', however, is sufficiently ambiguous to be able to embrace a range of meanings which may, or may not, be designed to encourage governors to ask questions and challenge the headteacher. The headteacher often perceives their role as persuading governors to accept their proposals (Farrell, 2005). This sits within the framework of their duties as specified by the Welsh Government which includes formulating aims and objectives for the governing body to consider adopting (Wales Government, 2018a). Despite this, Farrell



(2005) found governors were rarely involved in shaping school strategies, rather having a limited concern specific areas as they had a significant interest in.

Governing bodies must meet at least three times a year as a full governing body (Welsh Government, 2018a). Nevertheless, there will be times when matters require urgent attention. Michels (1959), studying organisational behaviour, found that, irrespective of original democratic intentions, they become oligarchies with decision making powers concentrated in a small number of well-informed, professional individuals. This resonates with contemporary educational research which reports the headteacher is the dominant school governor (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014).

Research in deprived areas found that governing bodies divided themselves informally into a small active core, who did most of the work and made decisions, and a less-active peripheral group who made fewer contributions (Dean et al., 2007). This finding is supported by Young (2014) whose research involved observing twenty-three governing meetings with a further twenty-five interviews of governors in eight schools supported this finding. Young (2014) found the existence of widespread oligarchy with an established system of core and peripheral members. The headteacher, chair and a small number of active governors were responsible for making the important decisions; the peripheral governors endorsed them. This dichotomy was a characteristic of full governing bodies and subcommittees (Young (2014a). This typology of board of governors is characteristic of Creese and Earley's (1999) 'abdicators' and Ranson et al.'s (2005) 'deliberative forum'. However, other research, while finding the existence of a core set of active governors, concluded their contribution was positive (James et al., 2010):

*There was evidence that an authoritative, experienced, long-standing and hardworking core group of governors in the governing body can be very helpful (James et al., 2010. 2010, p.50).*

For schools in disadvantaged communities the core-periphery dichotomy gains additional traction. This is because the dominant core governors tend to be less

representative in demographic terms of the local population (Dean et al., 2007). This skewed decision making away from parent governors, who ordinarily had the closest relationship with the local community, thereby weakening the school-local community relationship (Young, 2017; James et al. 2010; Ranson et al., 2005; Dean et al., 2007).

### **3.7 Deprivation and the school-community relationship**

A significant body of evidence highlights the relationship between poverty and deprivation, and low pupil attainment (Lingard and Mills, 2017; Welsh Government, 2015; Egan, 2012; Cooke et al., 2006; Alexiadou, 2005). In many cases governing bodies make a vital contribution to the development of their schools and strengthen the school-community relationship (Preston, 2013; Wilkins, 2010; Frazer, 1999). However, the increasing complexity and accountability of school governance has had a significant effect on those charged with its oversight, especially in schools situated in deprived areas (Dean et al., 2007). Dean et al. (2007) for example, reported many governors were required to act within inflexible and intricate policy frameworks they felt they were unable to challenge. This appears to affect recruitment and retention of governors with the necessary skills and confidence especially in schools in deprived areas (Dean et al., 2007).

Dean et al. (2007) contextualises the role of the governing body in three different ways. These are *managerial*, improving the schools' efficiency and effectiveness; *localising*, bringing local knowledge to the implementation of national policies and informing the decision-making of headteachers; and *democratising*, enfranchising local people in the delivery of education their children receive. In deprived areas Dean et al. (2007) found difficulties with all three aspects of school governance. First, many governing bodies lacked the capacity to fulfil a managerial role. Second, with localising, boards of governors were often unrepresentative of local people and had little discretion of action. Third, because of the disconnection from local activist groups, many governors were unable to perform a democratising role.

Political devolution in the four home nations of the UK has witnessed differences in terms of educational policy. They have nevertheless developed a similar legislative framework and function in a broadly similar social context (Machin et al., 2013). Specifically, Machin et al. (2013) noted the comparable level of inequality across many education indicators.

An approach which appears able to mitigate educational inequality is the development of a strong and enduring school-community relationship. There is compelling evidence, for example, that such a relationship is mutually beneficial (Shatkin and Gershberg, 2007). Parental and community participation in school governance is able to benefit both parties, acting as a catalyst for collective action around community-development issues (Shatkin and Gershberg, 2007). Benefits which stem from this relationship include supporting family wellbeing, establishing domestic conditions conducive for achievement, improvement of attendance rates and behaviour, and supporting local services for children and families (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ball, 1991). In Wales, close ties with their community were reported as key to a school's success, with governors being instrumental in this process (Ranson et al., 2005).

Research in schools in English and Scottish cities report that, in terms of importance, after family it is school and community support which were key factors in improving school attainment (St Clair et al., 2011). This is in line with an earlier America study which found that family and community group cooperation supports pupils learning, and that there were both short and longer term benefits in relation to developing favourable attitudes of pupils to education (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Notably, for the present research, such benefits tended to be more pronounced in disadvantaged communities (Battistich et al., 1995)

Analysis of America post-1945, reported that the decline in communication between individuals reduced the level of social capital (Putnam, 1995). This impoverished social relationships and weakened civil engagement. In his more recent work, Putnam (2015) examined education, specifically schools in disadvantaged areas. Here, he identified a source of untapped or absent potential which was capable of improving pupil engagement and achievement through

community involvement. Further studies have identified themes of co-operation, mutual engagement and shared interests, as being characteristic of contemporary communities and able to strengthen school-community relationships (Preston, 2013; Wilkins, 2010; Frazer, 1999). To summarise this argument, the benefits of a strong school-community democratic relationship appear to be multiple. To harness this potential requires reconnecting education to the instruments of local democracy to build cohesive and enduring structures (Ball, 2013).

Many school governors in deprived areas consider it incumbent upon them to take a wider role to embrace the needs of all the young people in the local area (Baxter, 2015). However, it appears only a minority of governors felt their governing body were challenging the headteacher and promoting local community relationships (McCrone et al., 2011). It is well established that governors frequently perceive themselves as accountable primarily to the schools and/or Schools inspectorate (Ranson and Crouch, 2009; Balarin et al., 2008). The need to take collective responsibility for the conduct of the school appears to have narrowed governor vision and weakened school-community representation (James et al., 2014). However, headteachers, generally recognising that their governing body represented their local community, were reported as eager to build a strong relationship (Pricewaterhouse Coopers (2007).

The Welsh Government champions the school-community relationship as a means to promote engagement and attainment recognising that:

*Schools and governing bodies do not exist in isolation from their wider community (Wales, 2018a, p.5).*

Egan (2017) endorsed the value of such a relationship in developing a strong and enduring school-community relationship. At the time of writing he considered it under developed, yet in terms of potential:

*it is probably here that the greatest potential of all resides for developing the distinctive and progressive education system that... has not yet been fully realised through the opportunity provided by [Welsh] devolution (Egan, 2017.p. 18).*

Educational marketisation produces winners and losers. The previous chapter discussed the so-called crisis in UK and American state education in the 1980s. This resulted in policies of marketisation, competition and parental choice to improve standards and reduce inequality. The empirical evidence on the impact of these reforms is patchy (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). It suggests parental choice and competition has had a limited effect on pupil achievement. However, in the United States of America, increased competition among schools has increased inequality (Hoxby, 2000). The reason for this is that middle class families are better able to take advantage of the opportunities of a reformed system. In Bourdieu's (1984) framework the socio-economic capital middle class families possess has enabled them to secure a place in a high achieving, fee paying, or state school (Robertson, 2007). This has resulted in: '*perpetuating and reinforcing class divisions and relations*' (Robertson, 2007, p13).

Conversely, poorer families, lacking social capital have little option but for their children to attend local, 'poorly performing' schools and, through a process of social osmosis, become implicated in their poor performance (Gewirtz et al., 1995). These poorly performing schools are defined purely in terms of relatively poor attainment and their limited links with prestigious universities (Whitty et al., 1998).

Parental attitudes to education appear correlated to social class. Parents with children in relatively poor performing schools are not overly eager to move their children to a better performing school (Bell, 2005). The author argued that standards of attainment were one of several competing factors the parents take into consideration when deciding where their children should be educated. Other factors may include imperfect knowledge of the attainment standards of other schools and the potential loss of kinship and informal support networks moving school may entail. However, working-class parents may have limited scope to advance their child's education through gaining access to a well performing school. Where schools are oversubscribed it is middle class families who are best placed to gain admission for their children. The Education Reform Act (1988) sought to treat parents as consumers, giving them choice over where their children were educated. However, parental working-class decision making in education is

frequently enmired in a history: *'infused by ambivalence, fear and a reluctance to invest too much in an area where failure is still a common working-class experience'* (Reay and Ball, 1997, p 89).

One's past experiences exerts a powerful effect on the present. Families who have a history of negative educational experiences are less likely to believe this can be changed (Reay, 2015). The arguments presented above this support this.

The commitment to neoliberal economics has disproportionately and negatively affected groups and communities already depressed (Thompson and Coghlan, 2015; Newman and Clarke, 2014). It is schools in deprived areas, who are least able to compete in the market for pupils through the lure of high attainment and links with prestigious universities. In this context, educational liberalism has proved generally deleterious to deprived communities. This has forced governors in these schools to make choices which mitigate the worst excesses of a deregulated educational system to protect the socio-economically vulnerable (Olmed and Wilkins, 2017). As the Welsh Government edge towards a skills-based model of governance, it is likely that school governors in deprived communities will face a similar predicament.

## **Summary and conclusion**

The literature review has enabled me to gain a broad understanding of the research which has been conducted in the area of school governance. This has helped me identify areas of research that might be fruitfully explored to gain a meaningful understanding of school governance in deprived areas which contributes to professional practice and theory. This is reflected in the content of the research questions.

Five areas were explored in this chapter. I began by exploring typologies which characterise boards of governance. This identified governing bodies which ranged from democratic and inclusive to those which were autocratic and controlled by the headteacher. Next the literature on leadership and accountability was explored. This discussed studies which had identified factors which contributed to governor

passivity. School management and leadership were found to be discrete entities which played a major role in mediating the conduct of school governance. This functions within a bureaucratic, hierarchical framework where those at its top make the important decisions with others reduced to playing a minor role. This helped identify barriers and enablers which facilitated or impeded governor agency. Finally, the literature on deprivation and the school-community relationship was examined. This showed the benefits of a strong and enduring school-community relationship.

The next chapter will focus on the methodology and methods employed in this research in order to gather data which is able to address the research questions.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology, data collection and analysis**

The two previous chapters reviewed the research literature on policy and school governance. This informed my understanding of this area of study and helped frame the research questions. This chapter discusses the methodology and methods employed to address the thesis title and research questions.

The chapter has two sections. Part 1 deals with the general ideas about the methodology which encompasses the principles and paradigms used to discover what I, the researcher, believe can be known (McGregor and Murnane, 2010). I begin by discussing researcher positionality. This is followed by a discussion of ontology and epistemology; I then justify the choice of an interpretivist approach.

Part 2 deals with methods, the range of approaches, the tools, processes, and rationale for data collection and analysis from which inferences, interpretations and explanations can be made (McGregor and Murnane, 2010). This is followed by a critical discussion of ethics, the moral framework which supports the research process. Finally, the procedures used to collect data are made explicit, as is a discussion on what constitutes sound qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). The chapter will show how the selected methodology and methods enables the participants' voice to be heard and to address the research questions.

### **4.1 Overview of the research process**

The research methodology in this study deals with the procedures used to acquire knowledge about the experiences of the participants, the parent governors. There exists a range of models for conducting social research, each more suitable for research into specific contexts (Bhattacharjee, 2012). By employing an interpretivist mode of enquiry, I attempt to illuminate the complex nature of governance. An interpretivist approach was considered appropriate for this research because it assumed that knowledge of the world and people is gained through interpreting or understanding the meanings that humans attach to their actions (Hull, 2015; Maxwell, 2013). By positing a reality that is inseparable from our knowledge of it, the interpretivist acknowledges that the researcher's mental



'make up' will affect all phases of the research process (Guba and Lincoln, 2000). In this research, a symmetrical participant/research relationship is considered key to gaining an understanding of how the participants execute their governor role.

Methods are the tools used to collect data to address the research questions. A mixed methods approach was used in this research. Mixed methods research involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell, 2014). Mixed methods can be used to gain a better understanding of connections or contradictions between qualitative and quantitative data; they can provide opportunities for participants to have a strong voice and share their experiences across the research (Shorten and Smith, 2017).

In this research a structured questionnaire was used to gather data of a factual nature to gain an understanding of the participants' socio-economic characteristics (Appendix 4). This was complemented by a semi structured questionnaire (Appendix 5) which asked questions I intended raising during the semi-structured interview (Appendix 6), which was the main data collection instrument. (This is discussed in detail in section 4.5 Procedures for collecting data on page 102). Together, these tools enabled me to gain valuable insights into how the participants conducted their governor role. Data were transcribed and analysed using a thematic approach and NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used in the preliminary stages.

Table 4.1 summaries the approach described above. It shows the relationship between the research methodology, methods, data collection and analysis which charts the direction the chapter takes.

**Table 4.1 The relationship between the research methodology, methods, data collection and analysis.**

Methodology	Method	Data analysis
What procedures and principles are best to acquire knowledge about 'the experiences of primary school parent governors in a deprived community?'	What tools, processes, and ways can be used to gather data from which interpretations, inferences, explanations, and predictions can be made within a research study?	What data are collected and how are they analysed?
Methodological choices: Interpretivist.	Mixed methods: structured questionnaire, semi-structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview, research diary.	Transcription of audio-recorded interviews. Thematic analysis based on keywords, terms, ideas, concepts and banded into similar themes. NVivo qualitative analysis software was used in preliminary stages of analysis.

## **Part 1: Methodology**

### **4. 2 Researcher positioning**

In conducting qualitative research, positioning describes the way(s) in which the researcher contextualises their position in relation to the research population. This is sometimes presented in binary terms of 'insider/outsider' (Kanuha, 2000). This assumes it is possible to occupy one position only. Here discussion revolves around the respective strengths and weaknesses of each position. An insider, for example, is presented as being part of the group they wish to study and therefore likely to be familiar with their language, attitudes or other aspect of the culture This may be advantageous in gaining insights almost certainly unavailable to a researcher who lacked these traits (Brannick, and Coghlan, 2007).

Other perspectives on positionality see the researcher as occupying various positions on a continuum which ebb and flow in line with different social contexts (Eppley, 2006). Here three principal positions can be identified. These are 'peripheral association' where the researcher does not participate with the

research subjects; 'active association', where there is limited involvement, and thirdly, 'complete membership' where the researcher's relationship with their subject is comprehensive (Adler and Adler, 1987).

Discussion of researcher positionality often proceeds from the position of the researcher (Shacklock, and Smyth, 1998). That is how they see themselves in relation to their participants, a view Milligan (2016) argued is misplaced. She persuasively makes the case that positioning is a reciprocal process involving all parties.

The interpretivist researcher must reflect on all aspects of their relationship with their participants and put in place safeguards to strengthen academic rigour and trustworthiness (Rabe, 2003). The imbalance in status, authority and knowledge in the researcher-participant relationship can be fraught with difficulty. The researcher, for example, has almost unconstrained power to represent their subjects in the presentation of data.

A trusting and enduring relationship takes a considerable time to establish. The transitory researcher – participant relationship in this study could not achieve this. My aim therefore was to be open with my participants, assure them they could speak with openness, secure that their accounts could not be used to identify them. In practical terms this meant maintaining an ongoing relationship where transcriptions of interviews and quotes used in the findings chapter, alongside my interpretations of their meaning, were shown to them for validation of accuracy. Where I was unsure if I had faithfully represented the views of any participant, I contacted them for clarification.

The nature of qualitative research makes it almost inevitable that the researcher (a) gains some opinion about the participants, and (b) relies on preconceived ideas (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). These can weaken research rigour. These can be difficult obstacles to negotiate. At an early stage of the research I assumed a significant part of my sample would not be in paid employment. In fact, all were. This made me think about the participants in a different way. They were not, in material terms, disadvantaged; rather they were stewards of the interests of a significant body of parents who were. If I had judged this incorrectly there may

have been other areas where I had made similar errors of judgement. To help address this I introduced standardised procedures to ensure my reporting was as free from bias as possible. A tool which has the potential to assist in this process is 'reflexivity'.

Researcher reflexivity is a process which can be used to identify issues which may weaken the integrity of the research (Berger, 2015). To be effective, the researcher must consciously and critically reflect on their beliefs, values and biases (Berger, 2015). To do this I kept a research diary where I recorded my impressions of each interview at the earliest opportunity when my thoughts were fresh (Patnaik, 2013; Burgess, 1981). Examples are given in Appendices 7, 8, 9.

Appendix 7 is a handwritten excerpt from my research diary, recording my overview impressions of my interview with 'Nancy.' Appendix 8 is a handwritten excerpt from the research diary, recording my impressions with 'Nancy' when discussing leadership and accountability. Both accounts were written up within one hour after the interview. Appendix 9 is a typed excerpt from my research diary, recorded later on the same day of the interview. As can be seen here that I record both factual data and my impressions. When conducting thematic analysis I referred to the diary to provide a contemporaneous perspective.

Qualitative research is unable to replicate findings as in the scientific method. This has led to accusations that such research is poor at establishing valid findings. Criteria such as reliability, validity and generalisability, the hallmarks of quantitative research, often find qualitative research falls short (Patnaik, 2013). However an interpretivist approach presents opportunities for the researcher to acknowledge their social, economic and cultural history, and reflect upon how this can affect their research (Patnaik, 2013).

### **4. 3 Ontological and epistemological positioning**

Individuals have views about what is meant by reality. In research, ontology and epistemology are theories of knowledge about thinking about how we know things. Ontology is concerned with the nature of being and what is reality (Burgess et al.,

2006). It is the study of how we determine if things exist or not. It attempts to take things that are abstract and establish that they are, in fact, real.

There are two main ontologies. First, that there is only one reality and this concrete 'thing' exists somewhere which, by using a certain approach can be known. Second, reality is something each person mentally constructs and cannot be known in the same way. This assumes there are multiple realities (Crotty, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994 ). It is the second ontology which I use in this research. That is each parent governor will have their own ideas about the meaning and execution of leadership, participation, accountability and the vast array of concepts which school governance encompasses. It falls to me to access this meaning, to show how this was done and also that there is reason to have confidence in the veracity of my interpretations.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge about how we know things. It asks questions, 'How can I know reality?' In this research it asks questions such as, how do we know that the person I am interviewing as a governor has the same concept of leadership as I do? Scholars are unlikely to have a single concept of leadership and accountability which highlights the need to make definitions and procedures explicit.

There are several epistemological positions. First, that epistemology can be measured using reliable designs and tools. I used this approach using a structured questionnaire to discover the participants' ages, employment status and how long they had been a governor. Second, is the epistemological approach that reality needs to be interpreted to uncover the underlying meaning. I adopted this position using a semi structured interview to gain a meaningful understanding of what the participants thought of their contribution to leadership and accountability. When the researcher is able to recognise and then justify their ontological and epistemological approaches, their own views of the world, they are then able to use this knowledge to choose a methodological approach appropriate to explore their research questions. This is then their research paradigm.

## **Paradigms**

The researcher will have a set of beliefs which guide their conduct (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). An approach to discover the ages and employment status of the parent governor would be different to that used to discover what they thought school leadership meant and the manner in which they executed this role.

Paradigms are therefore specific ways of perceiving the world which shape how the research questions are framed and explored (Cohen et al, 2012; Guba and Lincoln, 2000).

The two dominant paradigms used in the social sciences are positivism and interpretivism (Robson, 2011). Positivism believes that human behaviour can be made sense of, but in terms of the laws of cause and effect. Interpretivists believe that such patterns are created and change through the process of social interaction (Neuman, 2000). I will now discuss the suitability of both approaches to be able to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of primary school parent governors.

### **4. 4 Positivism**

Until the 1960s, the positivist method remained the dominant approach to social research. As the term suggests this research approach seeks certainty. A positivist framework assumes there exists a single, objective reality, independent of the researcher's perceptions and beliefs (Carson et al., 2001; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). By using appropriate methods, this objective reality can be known (Bassegy, 1992). In this approach the researcher is free from concern about how meaning is created (Carson et al., 2001; Guba and Lincoln, 2000). By using a controlled and structured approach, hypotheses can be investigated, confirmed, rejected or modified and value free generalisation made (Carson et al., 2001).

With positivist research several researchers working independently and following the same methodological approach must arrive at the same conclusions (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Although based on the principle of objective certainty, positivist research is conditional. That is, (a) it is verified by a scientific community

at a specific time (Popper, 1968), which (b) is subject to paradigm change when, in light of new research findings, long-held theories are modified or abandoned (Kuhn, 1970).

## **4. 5 Interpretivism**

From the 1960s, qualitative approaches such as interpretivism have been the preferred method of conducting social research (Malterud, 2001; Guba and Lincoln, 2000; Kuhn, 1970). An interpretivist approach contextualises human relationships as constructed through social interaction, making it well placed to explore the experiences of parent governors (Maxwell, 2013). Interpretivists believe knowledge is gained through understanding the subjective constructions of reality and the meanings assigned to them by those being researched (Hull, 2015). By positing a reality that is inseparable from our knowledge, the interpretivist acknowledges that the researcher's mental 'make up' will affect the process of inquiry (Guba and Lincoln, 2000).

As an interpretivist researcher, I possessed insights into the research phenomenon prior to the beginning of the study. At an early stage, I had gained knowledge and insights into the conduct of school governance. I knew the composition of boards of governors, their responsibilities and the legal framework in which they operated. Published research articles provided me with understandings of how they function. This, however, was insufficient to develop a research design (Hudson and Ozone, 1988).

Methodologically, interpretivists adopt a personal and flexible approach, receptive to capturing meanings in human interaction (Black, 2006; Carson, et al., 2001). During the interviewing phase, I was able to follow up areas which I had not anticipated at the commencement of the interview. In this way the interpretivist approach involves adapting frameworks in response to new insights. The researcher-participant relationship is one of equals and mutually interaction (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). There are no experts. Unlike positivism this approach accommodates the proposition that humans can and do change their views and opinions. If I repeated this research with the same participants, using

the same data collection and analysis procedures, it is likely that what I believed I had discovered would, in some way, be different. The participants or I may have had new experiences which led to us thinking differently; my interviewing technique and/or the areas I explored in response to the participants' accounts might be different.

Interpretivist research is unable to make generalisations and predictions. The goal is therefore to understand and interpret the meanings in human behaviour at a specific time (Neuman, 2000; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). To achieve this, it is important to understand the participants' motives, understandings, meanings and perceptions (Neuman, 2000; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Table 4.2 presents an overview of the methodological approaches adopted in positivist and interpretivist research and summarises the arguments presented above.

**Table 4.2 Ontological and epistemological positioning in positivist and interpretivist research**

	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>
Ontology		
Nature of 'being'/ nature of the world reality	Have direct access to real world Single external reality	Access to the real world is created by the individual No single external reality
Epistemology		
Grounds' of knowledge/ relationship between reality and research	Possible to obtain hard, secure objective knowledge Research focus on generalisation and abstraction Thought governed by hypotheses and stated theories	Understood through 'perceived' knowledge Research focuses on the specific and concrete Seeking to understand the specific context

(Adapted from Carson, et al., 2001, p.6)



## **Part 2: Methods**

Methods are the tools, processes and ways the researcher uses to gather data from which inferences and interpretations can be drawn. I will now detail the stages of this research from the pilot study through participant recruitment, ethical considerations, data collection, analysis and issues of research reliability. Collectively, this establishes a framework in which the research findings can be presented.

### **The pilot study**

The pilot study is the initial step designed to explore and evaluate the feasibility of a particular approach which is intended to be used in the larger-scale study (Kim, 2011; Leon et al., 2011). My pilot study was conducted over the period October 2017 to February 2018 and involved four participants. To gather data, I used a semi-structured interview with its contents being shaped by the then research questions. Several significant considerations for the conduct of the main phases of the study emerged. First, the pilot study showed the breadth of the participants' experiences which required the chosen data collection method approach must be able to 'see' the world through the participants' eyes. Second, the pilot study showed that the participants played a limited role in governance. This highlighted the importance of the research questions exploring the enablers and barriers which could promote or impede governor proactivity. Finally, the pilot showed that deprivation did affect how the participants thought about their governor role, but not how they executed it. These findings helped me frame the research questions and informed my methodological approach.

The process of transcribing data showed I was poor at rephrasing questions which the participants had not understood, and demonstrated my tendency to rigidly follow the interview schedule and so miss opportunities to explore other fruitful avenues. In the main study, I was mindful of these deficits and resolved that where the process of transcribing data showed I had failed to explore areas or relevancy, I would conduct a follow up interview or use email correspondence to clarify issues.

## 4.6 Participant recruitment

Participant recruitment was conducted in the following way. First, I contacted the Middletown council director of education, seeking formal approval to contact primary school governors in their local authority (Appendix 10). My email explained I was a research student at the Open University, the research aims, the ethical considerations and participation information (Appendices 11, 12, 13). I explained that the research findings may prove useful in informing the local authority's governing training programme. I received an email wishing me well in my research and requesting an abridged copy of the research findings.

Subsequently, the Governor Training and Support Team Leader (GTSTL) contacted me (Appendix 14). She offered to email all primary school parent governors in the local authority on my behalf, enclosing the participation information, to see if they might be interested in participating in the research. I replied that this would be welcome and requested that only primary school parent governors from schools in Communities First areas were contacted (Appendix 15).

At this time, July 2017, Middleton council had 463 parent governors with approximately 120 in Communities First primary schools. Of the 120 parent governors whom the GTSLT contacted, 17 (ten women and seven men) replied that they were interested in participating in the research and were happy for their contact details to be forwarded to me. Of these 17 participants, there were two cases where two governors were from the same school. When selecting participants, I used an online research randomiser, a tool to generate random names of the participants. This resulted in the ten participants being governors in nine schools. That is two participants were governors in the same school.

Before contacting the participants, out of courtesy I telephoned the respective headteachers to gain permission to do so. In these conversations no mention was made to any characteristic which might identify the name of the participant. All headteachers were happy for me to proceed. I then contacted the participants by telephone, where details of the research were explained and a time period for conducting the interviews was arranged.

Participants were given copies of relevant documentation relating to their role in the research and asked to formally acknowledge they understood the details of the research and their part in it. This documentation included the aims of the research; the participants' role in this and their right to withdraw; the ethical procedures employed; the secure storage of data until the end of the research at which time it would be destroyed, and contact details of my main supervisor, if they had concerns about the research (Appendices 11, 12, 13).

## **The sample**

In research, the sample is a group of people, objects or items that are a representation of the population being researched. The chosen sampling approach requires explanation and justification (Legan and Vandeven, 2003). The sample in this research was self-selecting. They were the seventeen participants who replied to an email sent to the one hundred and twenty parent governors in primary schools in Communities First areas, who expressed interest in being involved in my research. I decided to enrol ten participants for the research. This number was considered of sufficient size to capture the salient facets of the research focus (Spencer et al., 2003). As the interviewing phase proceeded, if I thought this number was too small, I resolved to increase the number of participants. This proved unnecessary.

A relatively small number of participants has the advantage that a significant volume of in depth information can be collected (Plowright, 2011). To achieve this, I used a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling strategy that incorporated an element of convenience sampling.

Non- probabilistic sampling is a technique that enables researchers to select units from a population that they are interested in studying (parent school governors) (Wu Suen et al., 2014). The sample is therefore based on the subjective judgement of the researcher (Etikan, 2017). In this research the participants were identified and selected because they were especially knowledgeable about or 'experienced' with the phenomenon of interest (school governance) (Etikan et al.,

2016). Additionally, the participants had indicated that they were available and willing to talk about their experiences and opinions (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Purposive sampling is where subjects are specially selected with the expectation that each participant will be available to provide unique and rich information of value to the study. The members of my sample, by virtue of being parent governors, all possessed a good level of understanding and knowledge about school governance. Further, the data collected came from participants who shared the same demographic characteristics (Sedgwick, 2013); they were parent governors in schools located in Communities First areas.

I knew that a homogeneous purposive sample was well placed to gather data from individuals who shared a set of characteristics. This approach was amenable to gaining a diverse range of perspectives and a deep understanding of the behaviour patterns of the parent governors. The convenience element of the sampling was a non-probabilistic technique where subjects more readily accessible to the researcher are likely to be included. It draws participants that are close to hand and, for this reason, it is known as 'availability' sampling (Wu Suen et al., 2014).

The weakness of this sampling approach is that it is unlikely to be representative of the population being researched. This means the sample could be biased. Also, because the data collected tend to be more complex than those gathered from a random sample, inferences can be made only to the specific group being researched (Barratt et al., 2015). These methods are not without their problems and may lead to researcher bias. When people know they have been selected for a research project because they have some specialist knowledge, it can initiate changes in their behaviour (Topp et al., 2004). Lastly, the sample relies heavily on the judgement of the researcher, an issue which may affect the interpretation of the data. This is discussed in chapter six.

To summarise, purposive sampling offers significant levels of flexibility. It also requires the researcher to show how the collected data are relevant for the study

and to justify their findings through explicit description of the procedures used, to strengthen claims of research rigour.

#### **4. 7 The participants; interviewing schedule and background data**

The interviews were conducted over the period 14 April 2019 to 4 June 2019. All participants were interviewed at least once - the duration of the initial interviews ranged from 28 to 42 minutes. Lizzy and Niki (pseudonyms) were interviewed a second time and several others were contacted after the interview via email for supplementary data (Appendix 16).

##### **Vignettes**

In preliminary drafts of this thesis the participants were referred to as participant 1, 2 etc. This presented them as homogeneous units rather than real and very different human beings. For this reason, I decided to use pseudonyms. Below are brief participant vignettes. These are short descriptive, anonymised profiles which can be used to produce a description of a concrete situation (Sheehy et al., 2013; Alexander and Becker, 1978). Mindful of not disclosing information which could be used to identify them, the accounts were shown to the participants and met with their approval.

Amie had two children in her school and worked part time in for a local authority. She lived with her partner who worked full time for the National Health Service.

Tony had two children in his school and worked full time for the civil service. He was married and his wife was in full time employment in a care home for the elderly.

Julie was a single parent and had one child in her school. She worked in the private sector and was a university graduate.

Eddie had one child in his school and worked in a school. He was married and his wife worked part time.

Dai had two children in his school and worked for a local authority. He was separated from his partner. He was a university graduate.

Freddy had one child in his school and worked in the private sector. He was separated from his partner.

Lizzy had one child in her school and worked part time in a school. She was married and her husband was in full time employment. Lizzy was a university graduate.

Nancy had two children in her school and worked in the public sector. Her husband was in full time employment. Uniquely she had researched what being a parent governor involved before applying to become a governor. She and Niki were elected unopposed at the same time.

Niki had two children in her school and worked for a local authority. She was married and her husband was in full time employment. Niki resigned her position as a governor after approximately one year.

Owen had one child in the school and was self-employed. He lived with his partner and their three children. He was a university graduate.

Table 4.3 presents the employment status of the participants. Table 4.4 shows the length of time the participants had been a parent school governor in their school.

**Table 4.3 Un/employment status of participants**

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Full time employment	8 participants
Up to 16 hours per week	2 participants
Not in paid employment	0 participants

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**Table 4.4 Length of time the participants had been a parent school governor in their school**

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Less than 1 year	3 participants
Between 1-2 years	4 participants
More than 2 years	3 Participants

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## **Observations**

All participants were white and in paid employment. Seven were elected by other parents; three were 'elected' unopposed. Eight worked full time, two part time (16 hours a week or less). Given the economic demographics of the geographic research site (see Chapter 2, the Policy Context), this was unexpected if not untypical. Seven worked in the public sector, two in the private sector and one was self-employed. Four were university graduates, two going to university several years after leaving school. This is broadly in line with the findings of (a) Balarin et al. (2008) who found most governors were in paid employment and around a third were graduates; and (b) Ranson et al. (2005) who found that governors were generally white, middle aged, middle class, middle income public/ community service workers. The average time they had been in post was two years and three months. This is in line with Holland (2018) who, in their research, found the largest cohort of their study, 38%, had been in post for 1-4 years. The significance of these data is discussed in this and the following chapter.

## **4.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical behaviour in research is the set of moral principles which govern the researcher's actions. It can be presented in binary terms, 'right over wrong' and 'good over bad' (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). In western traditions, ethical thinking brings into relief two principal theories of moral philosophy; deontology and consequentialism.

Deontology is about 'doing your duty', independent of the consequences and which hold that certain actions are 'right' regardless of their consequences because they involve behaving in a particular way. This can mean always keeping promises and telling the truth. It also means adhering to principles of legality, fairness, confidentiality, transparency and that the data are accurate and retained for a limited time only.

Consequentialism is a class of normative ethical theories that holds that the consequences of one's conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. This raises questions such as, 'Why are you carrying out your inquiry?' 'What are the anticipated benefits and for whom?' 'How will benefits be maximised and negative consequences minimised?'

From this perspective, I might have justified my ethical approach on the grounds it may have certain benefits. The participants, for example, knew that the research could potentially inform professional practice, or be of use to other educational researchers. It may have helped me gain privileged knowledge, become a competent, independent researcher, and gain a prestigious academic qualification. Intended outcomes, however, are unknown and such benefits in part or in total may not have materialised. But some things were known *a priori*. The participants voluntarily gave up their time for my benefit. My contacts and sources of information within Middletown council and the Welsh Government were generous with their time and expertise. This alone demanded that they were treated properly.

When ethics become associated with an absolute view, as may occur in a deontological context, once guidelines are established they must be adhered to (Given, 2008). However, decisions which govern ethical behaviour are frequently not just those anticipated before the start of the study, but rather they constitute an ongoing and cyclical process (Beach and Eriksson, 2010). This underlines the need for the whole research process to be embedded in an ethical framework. This may result in the researcher submitting multiple applications to the University



ethics committee to ensure the research behaviour adheres to approved standards of propriety.

In compiling my research application to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the Open University, I adhered to the guidelines provided by the Open University and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018). My application was relatively straightforward as the research participants were adults. Subsequently I gained approval for my research proposals (Appendices 17, 18).

In my research, pre-eminent importance was attached to adhering to the principles of deontological ethical behaviour. This recognised that the rights of the most vulnerable should be established and observed (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). All participants were adults and apparently invulnerable; however, this did not necessarily mean that they were. In my dealings with the participants, this meant the avoidance of harm, being fair, telling the truth and keeping promises (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009). I therefore adhered to the principles of (a) individual autonomy and beneficence and (b) anonymity, which are essential for any research (Oeye et al., 2007). Participants were given detailed, written information about the purpose, duration, and methods used in the research.

The risks and benefits deriving from participation were honestly described and the participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without explanation. There may have been a time after which participant withdrawal may have resulted in their data not being used. However, this was not included in the participant information documentation in case it was thought that I was ungrateful or controlling. Although this would have been an unwelcomed development, such unused data would have been immediately destroyed. In practice no participant withdrew. Participants were also informed that if they had concerns about any aspect of their involvement in the research, they could contact my first supervisor at their Open University email address, which was provided.

Participant anonymity is a complex matter. To assuage fears and assure the participants they could speak openly and candidly, secure in the knowledge their confidence would not even inadvertently be compromised, was a thorny issue, as I

could not categorically give such assurances (Sieber et al., 2012). The reason for this was the limited control I had over the behaviour of others. In a single case, two participants were parent governors in the same school and had independently made reference to the other's experiences during the interviews. Also, the headteachers in the schools where the participants were drawn from would know participants in their school had taken part in the research and might be able to deduce who they were. Thus, the small number of individuals who were privy to this information were made aware of the importance of ethical propriety and respecting participant anonymity. In any written documentation pseudonyms were used. Further, no mention in any report was made of the school, local authority or geographic location which might identify individual participants on characteristics such as age, gender, description of events or the number of years as governor (Sieber, 1992). All research documentation and audio recordings were memory stick encrypted, and kept under lock and key until the end of the research, at which time they were destroyed.

#### **4. 9 Procedures for collecting data**

Data were collected using qualitative and quantitative methods. To gain background data I used a structured questionnaire (Appendix 4) which is a research tool where a series of questions are used to gather information (Kvale, 2007). These questions were of a factual nature. Questions 1-3 sought information such as the age of the participants and the length of time they had been a parent governor in their school, the number of children they had in the school, and their employment status. Questions 4 –17 sought general information using a four-point continuous rating scale to measure the strength of their attitude.<sup>2</sup> The structured questionnaire showed for example, that time constraints were a problem for most participants; as new governors, most participants said they received little support from other governors, and the participants were equally split on the quality and value of the data handling training.

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<sup>2</sup> Both the structured and semi structured questionnaires were physically handed to the participants prior to the semi structured interview and their content discussed to avoid any participant ambiguity.

The semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix 5) comprised open ended questions about the areas I intended discussing in depth during the semi structured interview. Thus questions 1 and 2 explored how the participants thought about their governor role and representation; questions 3-5 explored leadership; questions 6-9 explored accountability; questions 10-11 explored governor support and the participants changing perceptions of governance, and questions 12-15 explored conceptions of community, deprivation and the governor role. I asked the participants to think about the 15 questions and to jot down their thoughts about them and to bring this with them to our interview. Space on the questionnaire allowed them to write in their replies and thoughts. I explained they might find referring to their comments during our interview helpful. This approach was designed to break the ice, be unthreatening and help prepare the participants to provide thoughtful responses and rich data.

The data gathered from the structured and semi structured questionnaires were used as preliminary steps to explore in depth the questions in the semi structured interview, which was the primary research instrument used in this study. The semi structured interview is a data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informants a series of predetermined, but open-ended questions. This approach recognises the mutuality of the participant-researcher relationship in creating meaning (Heslop et al., 2007). Open-ended questions have the advantage of encouraging the participants to express themselves in their own words. This helped me to explore themes which emerged naturally during the discussion. Examples of this are given in the following findings chapter. Because no restrictions were imposed on the participants' answers, there was potential to generate interesting, unanticipated answers (Robson, 2011). This method allowed me to rephrase the questions if I thought they were not understood. It also allowed me to explore areas beyond the pre-prepared interview schedule (DiCicco-Bloom, 2006). Appendix 6 shows the range of questions asked, and Appendix 19 presents a sample of prompts I had prepared to aid me during the interview and which were used with 'Lizzy'.

All respondents were interviewed at least once, and two were interviewed a second time to follow up responses which emerged during the transcription phase but were not explored at the time. Several participants were contacted by email to clarify or elaborate upon points raised during their interview. Permission was gained to audio record the interviews so a 'verbatim transcript' of the interview could be made (Jamshed, 2014).

During the interviews, I began by asking the interviewees about what they wrote on their questionnaires, starting with the more straightforward questions, and then moved on to asking open questions that demanded more thought. I prepared a list of prompts for the interviews. (See Appendix 19 for an example of annotated text). Interviews were transcribed in full within one day to avoid data loss and potential bias (Cohen et al., 2012). Hesitations and repetitions were eliminated to facilitate fluid text and returned for respondent validation (Floyd, 2012). No respondent said that their transcription was inaccurate. Upon return, each transcript was analysed and interpreted using a thematic approach.

I am unable to show that my findings are accurate, verifiable and capable of generating theory. Human behaviour is unpredictable and often inconsistent. In this research in a number of cases the participants expressed apparently inconsistent views. In one interview, for example the participant said that they would like to play a more involved governance role. A few minutes later they said that the responsibilities of governance had tempered their ambitions. This was not a unique occurrence. Was this inconsistent? I believe a better explanation is the participants exhibited traits commonly recognised as human. It is this which illustrates that to gain a meaningful understanding of how the participants in this research executed their governor role by using a qualitative approach.

## Stages leading to data analysis

Qualitative research generates an enormous volume of data. Mine was no different. Here I describe the processes leading to data analysis. I then discuss the use of qualitative analysis software at a preliminary stage to assist this process. This is followed by a discussion of the data analysis generated by the interviews and my observations, researcher reflexivity and issues of reliability.

## Thematic analysis

At the heart of qualitative data analysis is the search for themes, the constructs which researchers identify before, during, and after data collection (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. There is no single way to analyse qualitative data (Lacey and Luff, 2007), but the aim is to be able to gain an understanding of the accounts about the experiences of the participants, the parent governors.

I used thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within descriptive qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This involves constantly re-coding and comparing different segments of data (Fram, 2013). Thematic analysis accommodates the interpretivist approach as it facilitates identification of patterns in the data which can be used to address the research questions.

There are two distinct approaches to thematic analysis, inductive and deductive (Robson, 2011). With an inductive approach the researcher identifies and generates codes from an analysis of the data, taking into account the focus of the research and the research questions rather than fitting them into a pre-existing coding framework (Creswell, 2014; Newby, 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Those who favour the inductive approach argue that this approach minimises the risk that important themes may not be identified because of the researcher's preconceptions in the data collection and analysis (Thomas, 2006).

With deductive analysis *a priori* knowledge informs the identification of codes and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, data are always collected and analysed in a context (Braun and Clarke, 2006). So before the researcher reaches the stage where analysis is possible, much *a priori* knowledge, which has a bearing on the analysing framework, is known (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). My research, for example, was conducted in an area of socio-economic disadvantage and high unemployment. I assumed a significant number of my

participants would share these characteristics. This proved unfounded as all were in paid employment. This forced me to think differently about my research. My research title, for example, was framed to discover how the experiences of parent governors in a deprived South Wales community contributed to our understanding of school governance. At a superficial level, it might be construed that the participants were themselves deprived. Yet several acknowledged that they were comparatively well off. Most lived with a partner who was also in employment. Several said that they were buying their own home, had two motor cars and enjoyed expensive holidays. In this context, the common characteristic of the participants and the parents they represented was that their children attended the same school where there were a high number of pupils who were entitled to free school meals. This meant I was researching how middle-class parents executed their governance of a school where a significant number of pupils were eligible for free school meals and their parents were unemployed. This example highlights the need for the researcher to reflect on their assumptions, the importance of acknowledging them and the steps taken to minimise bias.

Despite widespread use, thematic analysis is poorly understood and defined (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the pilot study, I used the thematic analysis approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as being a suitable one. Nevertheless, before settling on a particular approach, I read a number of articles to expand my understanding of thematic analysis (e.g, Vaismoradi and Snelgrove, 2019; Guest et al., 2014). These approaches were similar to Braun and Clarke (2006). I therefore decided to use the six-step process outlined by them on the basis that it was a respected, widely used framework and acknowledged as being able to achieve rigour.

I transcribed each interview within a day, when my recollections of the event were fresh. I then uploaded each to NVivo qualitative analysis software with their respective audio recording. This gave each participant a unique platform. Consideration was given to having the data transcribed by a third party. However, I decided not to. The main threats to the quality of transcriptions are the recording quality, missing content and 'tidying up' which can distort meaning (King and Horrocks, 2010). The transcriptions contained mumbled, half-finished sentences

and those which changed direction mid-stream. There were slang words and phrases peculiar to the geographic research site. Only the researcher knows what happened during the interviews, what was said and how it was said, and any sub text (Tessier, 2012). They are therefore best placed to 'tidy up' transcriptions in a consistent, faithful way.

### *Stage 1: Becoming familiar with the data*

This process required playing the audio recording repeatedly. To become familiar with the content, as I read each transcript, I simultaneously listened to the recordings. While doing this, I noted down my initial thoughts which were done in conjunction to my research diary which provided a social context and highlighted salient issues. By revisiting the recordings, I was able to get an overall understanding of their content which allowed me to reflect on how participants viewed their governor role.

### *Stage 2: Generation of initial codes*

Generating initial codes involved identifying where, how and what patterns occurred through data reduction. This was done through a line-by-line coding, each line being analysed individually and involved some potential codes being considered weak and rejected. My concern here was that I might unjustifiably reject a code. To guard against this, I created a folder where these rejected data were kept for potential future perusal and checking.

At this stage, and with reference to the research questions, I divided my entire data into potential broad overarching sets. This recognised the interconnectedness of the research questions. These sets were leadership; accountability; training; school-community relationship and social deprivation, and personal qualities. Within these sets there were sixty-eight initial codes (Appendix 20). These potential codes required serious and strenuous revision to generate themes of sufficient number, depth and strength to be able to address the research questions. This was undertaken in the third stage.

### *Stage 3: Search for themes*

When a detailed list of initial codes had been generated, I reviewed the draft of the first four chapters of my thesis to remind me of what I wanted to achieve and how I planned to do this. I then interrogated the data to identify themes which related to the

. Examination of the sixty-eight initial codes (Appendix 20) showed some had a weak claim to be considered a theme. For example, some only appeared a single time and, upon re-examination, were considered weak and rejected. Generally, for inclusion a theme appeared several times across the data set. For example, some appeared multiple times - headteacher (12 references); accountability (11); challenge (9); community links (9); decisions (8), and were positively identified.

Next, initial codes were combined into potential codes which reflected the meaning of an observed pattern. My concern here was that I might combine codes which should remain distinct. For example, 'confidence to speak in meetings' and 'governor passivity' might appear suitable candidates to be combined. However, they were different. 'Passivity' may result in the governor making little contribution at meetings but this may or may not be related to the issue of 'confidence'. Where the meaning was unclear, I contacted the participant for clarification.

### *Stage 4: Review themes*

Here themes were checked to ensure they made sense and code extracts of the participants' transcriptions were identified which spanned the whole data set. Where there seemed to be glaring gaps, I retraced my steps to find what was missing. This led to the generation of a 'MIND thematic map' (Appendix 21) where definitions and names for each theme describing which aspects of data were captured and what was significant about them. Appendix 22 shows a manual coding. The three headings are reproduced below:

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'Theme'	' Description/questions asked'	' Participant's views and location in the text'
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### *Stage 5: Define and name categories*



Next, I generated clear definitions and names for each theme and described which aspects of data were being captured in each, and what was interesting about them. This resulted in eighteen overarching themes accommodated by the categories, participants' perception of leadership; accountability; training; school-community relationship and social deprivation, and personal qualities (Appendix 23).

#### *Stage 6: Production of the final report*

Here I decided which themes made a meaningful contribution to understanding what was going on within the data. At this stage I contacted several participants to verify my interpretations. Findings and what I believe they meant were presented in the following way. First, the themes which emerged from analysis of the qualitative data were identified, labelled and their meaning and significance explained. Second, verbatim quotes from all interviews demonstrate they are important themes which reflect the experiences of all ten participants. As the themes discussed were common and cut across the interviews, there is some overlap. Supplementary data, referred to in the main body of text, is referenced and located in the appendices.

#### Qualitative analysis software

Coding can be done manually or by using a software programme. In the pilot study I coded the interviews manually, using coloured pens to mark significant parts of the text. Since qualitative research generates large amounts of data, I was concerned that manual coding of all interviews might result in human error which would weaken the research (Robson, 2011). I researched the strengths of different qualitative software analysis programmes. I was drawn to NVivo software for several reasons. Firstly, the proprietors, QSR International, state its functions only *assist* the researcher in undertaking an analysis of qualitative data. This recognised NVivo's role was to complement the research by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the analysis process (Houghton et al., 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

To examine the value of NVivo, I compared one manual coding with an NVivo coding of the same text. Appendix 24 shows the manually coded text and Appendix 25 shows the same text coded using NVivo software. The result of this exercise showed there was a good reason to have confidence that the preliminary NVivo coding was reliable. I consequently used NVivo for the following purposes. First, as a central repository to store audio recordings, transcriptions of interviews and notes added from my research diary. The software also enabled me to sort open-ended questions and interviews into one 'platform'; to categorise and classify data, sort themes and attributes, and cross-tabulate data to explore and discover new connections between themes.

NVivo is a powerful tool, but it does not think for the researcher (Gibbs, 2002). It does not replace the wisdom that the researcher brings to the research (Ishak and Bakar, 2012). Further, the interpretivist researcher depends not only on the coded data, but also from the impressions, insights and inferences the researcher gained through social interaction with the participants.

#### **4. 10 Research trustworthiness and credibility**

Qualitative research cannot be replicated as is possible with the scientific method (Robson, 2011). If I conducted this research again using the same procedures and participants it is likely the results would be in some way different. In this way qualitative research is unable to build upon other research to make generalisations (Yin, 2014; Plowright, 2011). Further, in this research, the sample was small and largely self-selecting. While data from such a sample cannot be used to make general claims about an entire population, the use of purposive sampling does enable researchers to justify making generalisation from their sample (Yin, 2014). To be able to do this, it is necessary to show that there are sufficient grounds to believe the research is trustworthy and credible (Maxwell, 2013).

Several steps were taken to demonstrate this. First, by making explicit and justifying the choice of procedures, claims of reliability can be strengthened. I thus strived to show what had been done, why it was done, in what order and with what outcome. Second, reflexivity is able to strengthen claims of trustworthiness by

applying the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Patnaik, 2013). These categories overlap; however, I will describe how this research fits within Patnaik's (2013) framework of trustworthiness. In doing so, I make brief reference to the findings presented in the following chapter.

Credibility refers to the 'vividness' and accuracy of the description of the phenomenon under study. Does it appear authentic? There were many accounts of events which met this criterion. In terms of accuracy, procedures were put into place to make sure my representation of the participants' accounts was faithful. Drafts of the transcriptions were returned to the participants for verification of accuracy. Where I was unsure if I had correctly interpreted an account, I conducted a follow up interview, or contacted the participant. In the findings chapter, frequent reference is made to follow up interviews or email correspondence to clarify my interpretation of the participant's accounts. The account I present in the following chapter of my interview with 'Lizzy' will illustrate this point.

In my first interview with Lizzy I thought the transcription showed that she had felt slighted by her headteacher's attitude towards her. As I was unsure if this was correct, I emailed her to clarify the matter. Her reply confirmed my interpretation:

*... There may have been reasons for what he [headteacher] said, he's a busy man. But I thought there was a sort of disdain that he thought he didn't have to explain himself.*

[Lizzy] email follow up correspondence

There were many accounts which fit the description of being vivid and authentic. Most participants said meetings were conducted in a cordial manner. However, there were incidents which were not so. In my first interview with 'Nancy', she recalled an unpleasant incident involving another governor and the headteacher. The governor had raised a matter which was ruled inadmissible and she was chastised. Her words describe the chilling effect this had on the other governors:

*Someone asked a question and he [the head] said in a firm way it could not be raised. The whole room changed; it went icy cold. She [a governor] didn't ask the question to be awkward. It was badly handled.*

[Nancy] first interview

The following chapter will present other 'vivid' accounts where the participants use distinct and emotive language to describe their experiences.

Transferability can be established by providing evidence that the research findings could be applicable to other contexts. In this research this is done by showing that the findings are similar to that of other research findings. For example, the governing bodies in this research corresponded with the typologies identified by Creese and Earley (1999) and Ranson et al. (2005). In both studies the governors played a minimal leadership and accountability role. In the next two chapters there are many examples where the lack of governor agency is related to the findings of published research.

Dependability refers to the extent to which the findings fit within acceptable limits. That is, does it appear a plausible account? The research findings of this thesis generally sit within that of other studies. In several cases, however, I comment that my findings do not. In one case I note that Connolly and James (2011) suggested that the attitudes and experiences governors bring with them will be central to how they play their role. In the following chapters I argue that my research did not support this. Before taking office all participants spoke of the qualities a 'good' parent governor had. Their replies were all positive. However, in office no participant exhibited this behaviour. I concluded that the socialisation process of becoming a governor in this research was more important in shaping behaviour than the attitudes the participants brought with them.

## **4.8 Summary and conclusion**

This chapter provided a detailed account of the research methodology which underpinned this research. I placed the participant at the centre of this process and justified the methods I had chosen as being about their voice being heard.

I suggested that research positioning is a complex and fluid process and have demonstrated its importance. Issues of the 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher were discussed and it was claimed that positionality depends on both the researcher and participant. Next I discussed ontology, epistemology and research paradigms which I related to the aims of the research. Here I argued for the suitability of an ontological position which assumes that there is no single, external reality and access to the real world created by individuals. I proposed that in this research the epistemological stance was that reality needs to be interpreted to uncover the underlying meaning which can be accommodated within an interpretivist approach.

The collection and analysis of data were discussed. I showed that the sample in this research was, to a significant degree, self-selecting and I reflected on the losses and gains which stemmed from using a non-probabilistic sample. To limit the degree of bias, I emphasised the importance of making explicit the procedures used. Data collection and analysis instruments must be able to address the research questions. I showed that a structured questionnaire was suitable to gain data of a quantitative nature but only a qualitative approach could gain the depth of insights which were required. A discussion of the ethical considerations which underpinned was given, where the procedures to ensure probity were justified. The tenets of thematic analysis were presented, and my approach in this process justified, as were the benefits of using qualitative analysis software. The chapter concluded with a discussion of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Here I showed with examples why there was reason to have faith that the research was trustworthy and credible. The following chapter presents the research findings in relation to the three research questions.

## Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter presents the findings which emerged from the data collection instruments - the questionnaires, interviews, email correspondence and the research diary. In the methodology chapter it was argued that it was important to allow the participants to use their own words to give a meaningful insight into how they executed their governor role. I have made their voices central to this chapter. Where reference is made to the data collection instruments, their location in the appendices are cited. The findings within each theme are presented with a range of anonymised direct quotations. The relationship of the themes to the study's research questions are mapped to ensure that they had been answered.

The first chapter section is devoted to how the participants thought about the role of parent governor *before* taking office. The purpose of this is to establish a benchmark to gauge the changes in how they thought about their role when in office. This benchmark is periodically referred to in the subsequent sections. Each of the three main chapter sections are devoted to addressing the three research questions. To provide context, extracts are given from the policy and literature research chapters.

This research explored how ten parent governors in a deprived South Wales community executed their role. The narratives and quotes cited below are, except in one instance, uncorroborated. I have no reason to think the participants were less than honest. However, while some participants expressed negative views about their headteacher's behaviour no headteacher was interviewed. There may be reasons for them acting in a certain way. Nevertheless, this is the parent governors' view of the world, uninterrupted by the Heads. This issue is discussed in the following chapter.

### 5.1 Perceptions of school governance before taking office

At the time the interviews took place all participants had been in office for some time - the average time was two years and three months. They had completed their governor training. I was eager to establish what they thought a parent

governor's role entailed before they took office. Their responses showed that, at this time few participants had a clear idea what the role of school governor entailed. Some recalled fleeting discussions with an acquaintance who was, or had been a governor, but these were rare. There was an awareness that the composition of the governing body included the headteacher, school staff and parents. They also knew they would attend meetings where decisions were made, but the nature and conduct of the discussions were hazy. This can be gauged from what Tony and Nancy said:

*You may know someone who is a governor and they tell you things, but I didn't know anyone and for the first few meetings I didn't have a clue.*

[Tony] first interview

*I didn't give it much thought really. I knew there were different types of governors, but that's all. At my first meeting I was taken aback by what went on and the responsibility of it all.*

[Nancy] first interview.

Despite this, all participants knew they would be involved in making decisions. The words 'leadership' and 'accountability' were not used, but the participants' responses suggested that they recognised that these were the sort of issues that the governing body dealt with:

*[The] school has a big budget...it's important the money is spent properly and the children get a good education.*

[Freddy] first interview

The qualities which characterise a 'good' governor evoked a range of answers (Appendix 5). All were strongly related to personal qualities such as 'getting involved', 'exercising independent thought', 'asking questions': Eddie spoke of being involved and exercising independence of judgement:

*A good parent governor should make a difference... help run the school, make decisions and ask questions...not being swayed by others.*

[Eddie] first interview

Freddy expressed similar sentiments, stressing the importance of questioning and challenging as a basis for making informed decisions:

*Well they should say what they think. It's important to question things you're not sure about...because if you don't, how can you make good decisions [and] that's the reason you're there.*

[Freddy] first interview

For Dai, the imperative was to conduct governance by taking broader responsibility for the entire school community:

*To make a difference for everyone in the school, not just the children.*

[Dai] first interview

These responses show that the participants had a clear, positive view of what characterised a good governor. When asked how they thought meetings would be conducted, no one used the word 'stakeholder.' Yet their replies articulated the stakeholder principles of inclusivity. Niki and Owen expressed these views:

*I thought meetings would be friendly... everyone chipping in... and decisions made like that.*

[Niki] first interview.

*If you have parents on it [the board of governors] you think they are there to get involved and sort things out.*

[Owen] first interview

Parent governors are elected by other parents or appointed by the governing body to represent the interests of parents (Welsh Government, 2018b). They are representatives, not delegates, with discretion to exercise personal judgement in



decision making. Several participants appeared unaware of this. They believed they primarily represented the interests of other parents and were morally responsible to them. This suggested that, whatever the legalistic definition of their role is, they clearly had their own ethical principles that define this relationship. This is evident from what Nancy and Niki said:

*I thought I represented other parents because they elected me... to pass on their feelings to the governing body, and to keep them [the parents] informed about things.*

[Nancy] first interview

*The parents elected me so obviously I thought I would represent them, to make sure what we decided was what they wanted.*

[Niki] first interview

A small number of participants recognised their primary responsibility to the parent body, but construed their governor role in wider terms which extended beyond the school gates to embrace their local community. Eddie was one:

*We should take a position to keep the parents in the loop and voice their concerns. But more than that, we are a community school so it is important to think about the community...everyone living and working here.*

[Eddie] first interview

## **5.2 Reflection of the participants' expectations of governance**

Prior to taking office the participants had a sketchy idea only of what a parent governor did. They understood that there were meetings where school business was discussed and decisions made. But the content and nature of these were unclear. Notwithstanding, describing the qualities they thought a 'good' governor possessed evoked a range of answers, all of which were positive. This included being at the heart of governance, exercising their independence of judgement, and being involved in discussions where decisions were made on a collegiate basis.

They believed they represented other parents on the basis that they had elected them (this included the three participants who were 'elected' unopposed). To a lesser extent, they saw their role as overseeing the school community, ensuring all members were treated appropriately, and to also act as a conduit of communication between the governing body and the wider community. This supports Holland (2018) who reported that the primary reasons given for becoming a school governor were to make a difference for the children (67% of respondents), and serving their community (60% of respondents). In office, the participants in this study described the execution of their governor role as being limited. I shall argue in the following sections, that the participants were ill prepared for the demands of office and that the execution of their governor role changed over time in response to new experiences.

### **5.3 Section 1: Findings in relation to the main research question**

*How do parent school governors in a deprived community describe their contribution to school leadership and accountability?*

This section has two parts. The first deals with school leadership, the second deals with school accountability. There is some overlap in the presentation of these findings.

#### **Leadership**

Leadership stands at the heart of school governance. In terms of the conduct of behaviour, the headteacher and the governing body are required to work together as equals in exercising leadership (Welsh Government, 2018). Studies of the conduct of governance in a range of educational settings show frequently many governors played a minor role (Connolly et al., 2017; Young, 2017; Farrell, 2014).

Organisationally, some governing bodies are able to be characterised by the limited role that their governors play (Ranson et al. 2005). Earley (2003), reporting on how headteachers described their governing body's role in leadership wrote:

*over one-third [of headteachers] claiming that the governing body played a 'minor role' or 'no role at all' in the strategic leadership of their school (Earley, 2003, p. 361).*

The participants in the present research played a minor leadership role. There were several reasons which contributed to this. These will now be discussed.

### **Management style, authority, status and educational knowledge**

School governing bodies operate within a complex, hierarchical, bureaucratic framework, charged with making important decisions and being responsible for spending large sums of public money. As noted earlier schools are held accountable in several ways, increasingly as commercial based organisations to consumers (Wilkins, 2015a; Levy, 2010; Ranson, 2010; Møller, 2009; Moos, 2005). Within the dominant Welsh stakeholder model of governance decisions are made by members drawn from a range of bodies and interests. This includes the salaried professional headteacher who possesses expert educational knowledge and the parent governor, traditionally valued for their non-expert, lay perspective (Bush, 2011). Governors have to undergo training which stress their legal responsibilities and to improve data handling skills. However, some governors are likely to struggle and depend on the headteacher for guidance, advice and interpretation of data (Dean et al., 2007).

Farrell (2005) reported that frequently headteachers contextualise their governor role as convincing the governing body of the value of their proposals and to accept them. This is in accordance with the Welsh Government's guidance on how they should conduct their headteacher role (Wales Government, 2018a). Such behaviour, however, is capable of being interpreted in different ways. The participants, for example, often appeared to interpret the headteacher's behaviour as an expression of autocratic authority. In some cases this resulted in the participants feeling they were corralled into supporting the headteacher's proposals. Julie and Dai's accounts highlight the difference between being

involved in decision making and being called upon to support their headteachers through formally voting on a proposal:

*...we are sort of led by the head and we go along with what he wants. Sometimes I think, 'OK, I voted for that but it wasn't like it was my decision, it was just that I voted for it'.*

[Julie] first interview

*She sees herself as the only leader, but it's a big job running a school, bigger than one person. We [the governors] don't really make much difference ... she puts things to us in a way that it looks like we are deciding things, but we don't.*

[Dai] first interview

Tony spoke of the manner in which his headteacher stamped their authority on the conduct of meetings:

*We go in [to the meetings] chatting, but when it starts it changes - there's a quiet business air. There are discussions, but the head and the chair lead [them]...the rest listen and nod. She's in charge.*

[Tony] first interview

Freddy drew attention to how nonverbal methods of communication could be a powerful instrument:

*He [the headteacher] does not need to say anything...he knows he is in charge and you just know he wouldn't want to be asked things [or challenged].*

Freddy [first interview]

In a follow up email, I reminded Freddy what he had said, and asked what he meant by this statement. He replied that the headteacher's body language spoke volumes:

*There's body language... he crosses his arms...you don't have to speak, there's ways of getting your message over without saying anything.*

Educational knowledge and organisational authority are closely intertwined. Owen spoke of the power of knowledge:

*He [the headteacher] has the knowledge and that's important. When someone knows more than you do it puts you on your guard.*

[Owen] first interview

Asked to elaborate on this, Owen spoke about the governors who worked in the school. They too, he said, had significant educational knowledge. He observed, however, that they were unfailingly supportive of the headteacher. Owen appeared to recognise that this may have been due to good decision making by the headteacher. However, he thought that the headteacher's superior status as school leader was a contributing factor:

*There are governors who work in the school [teachers and support staff] and they know a lot as well, but they are not going to disagree with him [the headteacher] - he is their boss. He could make things difficult for them. I don't know if they do [support him] because they think he is doing well or not but it doesn't matter because they do.*

[Owen] first interview

The headteacher-chair relationship has been shown to be of crucial importance to the manner in which meetings are conducted (Young, 2017; Farrell and Law, 1999). The chair of governors is formally charged with controlling meetings and ensuring that discussion is inclusive (Welsh Government, 2013). Despite this, several participants felt that this role was, in practice, performed by the headteacher.

### **Headteacher-chair relationship**

The position of chair of governors and their relationship with the headteacher is critical in ensuring the governing body is effective in supporting and challenging the headteacher (Welsh Government, 2018a; Balarin et al., 2008). The chair is charged with securing consensus and is *de facto* the 'chief executive' of the school (Farrell and Law, 1999). For this reason, in Wales the chair must undergo training for this role (Wales Government, 2018a).

While bringing all governors into discussions is formally the chair's responsibility, Young (2014) reported that it was usually performed by the headteacher. Describing the headteacher-chair relationship, several participants thought there was collusion between them. Julie spoke about the chair in her school who liked decisions to be unanimous. Freddy's account described how the headteacher, not the chair, controlled meetings. In both cases it resulted in limiting discussions:

*... the chair likes them [decisions] to be unanimous...I don't always agree with what's put forward but it's difficult to look up and say, 'I'm not too sure about that, how do the others feel?' He's the chair not me so I don't.*

[Julie] first interview

In a follow up correspondence, Julie elaborated on her account. Here she spoke about collusion:

*I can't say for definite but I think the head and chair sort things out before [the meeting] and the chair wants the voting to be unanimous to stop other points of view [being discussed].*

[Julie] email follow up correspondence

*The head will say, 'Right we've discussed that, we'll go on to the next item'. The chair says, 'Yes, item 2.' There's no disagreement and so we do.*

[Freddy] first interview

Amie spoke of the strong personality of her headteacher. She had little doubt that the head and chair colluded. The result of this was that the headteacher was not being challenged:

*She [the headteacher] is a strong personality, she is friendly but there's formality, everyone calls her Mrs XXXX, even the deputy. I don't think she would like it if she was challenged, although in my time no one has. Personally, I think she and the chair sorts things out before meeting.*

[Amie] first interview

### **Loyalty, confidence and the responsibility of office**

As new members, several participants said they would have liked to have been more involved in school leadership (Appendix 4). In office this changed. Three participants said that they had become resigned to playing a minor role. Several reasons were given to account for this. One was personal loyalty to the headteacher. Balarin et al. (2008) reported that governors ranked being supportive of the headteacher higher even than challenging them.

This research found, however, that loyalty was conditional. It was dependent on what the participants thought was the headteacher's record of good management. This was defined in a number of ways, such as the headteacher putting in a long day in school; anecdotal stories about how headteachers in other schools were curt and off hand; recognition of how difficult the job was, and keeping the external overseeing agencies happy. Significantly, no participant spoke about their loyalty being dependent on pupil attainment standards. Dai, Tony and Freddy expressed these sentiments:

*She is a good head, she's hard working, she's in early and doesn't go home until late. I hear stories of heads in other schools and that makes me think we have got a good one... if there is something wrong she'll sort it.*

[Dai] first interview

*I've got no problem with how she runs things because the school is doing well... she's got to keep everyone on board, the governors, the parents, the staff, the council and Cardiff [Welsh Government] ...it's an impossible job and I don't want to add to it.*

[Tony] first interview

*When it comes down to it, I think most of us think we owe him [the headteacher] our support. It is a bloody hard job and as long as we chug along and things are OK, that's fair enough.*

[Freddy] first interview

Mandatory training is designed to instil confidence so governors can question proposals, make informed decisions and perform the critical friend role (Wales Government, 2018a). Dean et al. (2007) reported that governors in deprived areas often lacked the capacity to perform this role. In this research, the participants' lack of confidence was a significant factor in impeding their agency. This suggests that the mandatory training had been unable to improve governor confidence sufficiently to enable them to act in a way prescribed by the Welsh Government. Three participants spoke of how their lack of confidence had negatively impacted on how they conducted their governor role:

*We all know what leadership is ... us being involved, planning for the future, and making decisions, but it's not like that. There are discussions [but] they don't open things up. The head makes a case... we sort of talk about it...but we don't really.* [Lizzy] first interview

Explaining why she went along with this, Lizzy was clear:

*I am not very confident. I would find it hard to challenge anyone, but definitely not the head.*

[Lizzy] first interview

Organisations often become oligarchical where a small number of members dominate proceedings (Michels, 1959). Research into the conduct of school governance has reported similar findings where boards of governors divide into a small active core who were responsible for the decision making, and a larger, acquiescent groups whose contribution was limited (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014; Young, 2014; Dean et al., 2007). Eddie spoke about his reluctance to speak during meetings. He thought that this could be addressed if the chair or



headteacher encouraged governors to express their opinions and ask questions, but neither did so:

*Most governors don't say much...sometimes I look around and see someone who wants to say something but is a bit reluctant...it's obvious, they're fidgeting and trying to make eye contact and then looking down at their papers.*

[Eddie] first interview

He added that he thought the headteacher and chair did not encourage governors to become involved in decision making because they were content with the way things were:

*The head or the chair must see it ... if they said, 'XXXX, what do you think?' the ice would be broken, but they don't, it's more, 'Is that OK with everyone?' and we nod and keep our mouths shut.*

[Eddie] first interview

Julie expressed similar sentiments to Eddie, but was clear who she thought bore most of the responsibility:

*... to get the best out of everyone you've got to encourage them, not put anyone on the spot because that doesn't work...but encourage them. That depends on the head really, but he doesn't do it.*

[Julie] first interview

When asked to explain why she thought it was the headteacher's responsibility to encourage governors to contribute to discussions Julie said it was because the head controlled the meeting.

*The head runs thing so it's definitely up to him.*

Julie [email follow up correspondence]

With leadership comes responsibility and decisions have consequences, some which may be significant. Several participants said that they had not fully appreciated the responsibility of governance prior to taking up office. Their

experiences of governance subsequently affected how a number of the participants thought about school leadership and their part in it.

Governors were found frequently to be self-limiting in their leadership ambitions (Dean et al., 2007). Frequently, governors feel happier offering the headteacher support than contributing to decision making (Earley and Weindling, 2004). Julie was and she spoke of deferring to the headteacher. One instance she gave was when the governors appointed a new teacher. The reason for this was that she was concerned about the consequences of making a poor decision:

*... the one [candidate] who got the job was the one he [the headteacher] wanted. If I had wanted another one [candidate] and it turned out they were a dead loss I wouldn't want to explain to the parents I had made a bad decision and their kids suffered ... [and] you could not blame the head for that.*

[Julie] first interview.

The responsibilities associated with governance extend beyond the school curriculum and what is traditionally considered school matters. This resulted in governors being drawn into decision making they were not prepared for (Dean et al., 2007). Julie spoke of the time governors were required to go on the safeguarding subcommittee. Several members were reluctant to take the position. She believed this was because of the responsibility involved. In her case, it certainly was:

*I said straight out, 'I'm not, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.' It is OK if you don't think about things, but things happen. [Julie] first interview*

### **Governance as an audit-based activity**

The educational system in Wales has undergone great change over the past three decades. A significant development of this change is that school governance has frequently become a short term, audit based, oversight activity (Young, 2017; Rees and Taylor, 2014; James et al., 2010). Research into primary school leadership found the longer term goals of 'looking forward' and 'being strategic'

has been replaced by day to day oversight (James et al., 2014). The participants in this research describe their expression of leadership in a similar way. The participants were asked:

*Can you think of ways you have contributed to school leadership?*  
(Appendix 5)

Eight participants replied that this was limited. Examples which were given included choosing between the options presented to them by the headteacher, seconding proposals and formally voting. While these exercises are a necessary part of school governance, it falls short of:

*Taking a broadly strategic role in the running of the school. Decide aims and set the strategic framework for achieving them* (Wales Government, 2018a).

The effect on school governance when it becomes an audit based activity is stark. Several participants spoke explicitly of their minimal contribution:

*I wouldn't say I've really made much difference. You listen to what's said but you don't say much... and then vote.*

[Dai] first interview

*... we rubber stamp things. There's no, 'Let's talk about what we want to achieve by the end of the year.' It's more we turn up for meetings a few times a year and vote on different options.*

[Dai] email follow up correspondence

Owen expressed the same views in a succinct way:

*Governors are there to tick boxes. It's written down that there's got to be a governing body and they must have parents and staff and that's that.*

[Owen] first interview

The participants' accounts of school leadership showed their minimal contribution. Several factors were identified which contributed to this situation. These included the headteacher's style of management and their superior educational knowledge, status and authority; the close headteacher-chair relationship and personal loyalty to the headteacher; and the transformation of school governance into an audit based activity. In some cases, the participants had abdicated their leadership ambitions in the light of the responsibility of office.

I turn now to the findings regarding school accountability. Some of the issues discussed above will be revisited to help explain the participants' minimal role in this activity.

### **Accountability**

As discussed in the literature review, accountability within educational institutions can take many forms including *market based accountability* (Wilkins, 2015a; Ranson, 2010; Moos, 2005; Glatter, 2003), *managerial accountability* (Adams and Kirst, 1999; Sinclair, 1995), *political accountability* (Adams and Kirst, 1999), and *public accountability* (Moos, 2005).

Accountability is a basic practice in all organisations. In reality, it rests on identifying who is accountable to whom and for what specific aspect. This depends on the evaluation of information, coupled with the authority of those charged with overseeing accountability, to apply sanctions (Ranson, 2004; Webb, 2005). Balarin et al. (2008) found that managing both the support and challenge parts of school accountability required governors to be aware of the necessary procedures. The authors were clear about the consequences if this condition was not met:

[Governors must] *take on exactly what is meant by these terms. If the support and challenge roles are not properly understood they will not be performed appropriately by governing bodies* (Balarin et al., 2008,p.34).

In the 12 years since the authors published this research there has been enormous change in the responsibilities and the legislative framework in which school governance functions. This has resulted in school accountability becoming

more complex, and embedded in a range of competing frameworks and discourses (Baxter, 2016; Day and Klein, 1987).

The participants were asked what meaning they attached to being held to account (Appendix 5). They responded to this in terms of, 'watching over the school budget; making sure that things were done by the book' [Lizzy], 'Finding out if the head has done what they said they would' [Niki]. However, no participant said they actually did these things. Several reasons were offered to explain this. These will now be discussed.

### **Knowledge and confidence**

The expectations and responsibilities of school governance has increased to the extent governors may struggle to execute them, resulting in many governors becoming marginal figures unable to execute their accountability role (Young, 2017; James, et al., 2010; Dean, 2007). Tony said that he did not hold his headteacher to account. Asked why he did not, he was clear:

*I don't know what I'm supposed to hold him [the head] to account for, so how can I?*

[Tony] first interview

Lizzy spoke about the headteacher's extensive range of responsibilities and her limited knowledge compared with his. This proved incapacitating. However, Lizzy, recognising the significant range of headteacher responsibility, was sympathetic. She felt that the exigencies of headship had taken a toll on his well-being:

*He is responsible for a million things I don't even know about. It's when someone mentions something you haven't thought about you think, 'that too?' It's no wonder he looks knackered.*

[Lizzy] first interview.

When asked to elaborate on her comments Lizzy said:

*I said I feel sorry for him, and I do...the workload and the rest. But to hold him accountable you have got to know what he's responsible for, and I don't.*

[Lizzy] email follow up correspondence

No participant said that they held the headteacher to account. Two linked the exercise of school leadership and decision making to that of accountability. These participants said that their minimal contribution to making decisions had led them to see that school accountability operated beyond their authority. Freddy said:

*I don't think I can be held responsible because I have not had much to do with [making] decisions anyway.*

[Freddy] first interview

This response showed that when governors are divorced from the process of leadership their peripheral status can weaken the principles of collective responsibility for decisions taken by the governing body and thereby undermine the principles of stakeholder governance. In Freddy's case, it resulted in his contribution to governance being little more than attending meetings.

The transformation of school governance has made accessing data and the competence to interpret it vital (Young, 2017; Rees and Taylor, 2014; James et al., 2010). Members may however, experience difficulties in obtaining the information they need to secure accountability (Earley and Weindling, 2004). Two ways of accessing data were identified by the participants in this study. The first was that which was given to all governors in conjunction with meetings. The other method was to actively seek it out. This could be sought from the headteacher or the local authority. All governors, as part of their governor training, were advised that the Governor Training and Support Team were able to provide information and data. This facility was seldom used. This is discussed below in relation to the first sub question.

Dai spoke about the problem of accessing information in terms of time constraints and also that he did not want to be thought of as overzealous:

*If you want information, something not dished out to everyone, you've got to be determined, and not many are. We've got our own lives to lead... if you did your [governor] job as you should, people would think you're obsessed.*

[Dai] first interview

Dai's use of the word 'obsessed' appeared strange. I asked Dai if he could explain why he used it. It appeared that he contextualised his governor role in passive terms. Seeking out data (being obsessed) would indicate that he was dissatisfied, and wanted to play a more informed, active role. This appeared not to be in accordance with his self-perception of how a parent governor executed their role.

Julie expressed similar views but she stressed that before you can ask for information you have to know what you want:

*You can ask the head. But you've got to ask for it and before that you've got to know what you want and you don't always know that.*

[Julie] first interview

Owen and Amie spoke of the difficulties in securing accountability, specifically in relation to the headteacher's annual appraisal. The governing regulations for this cover thirteen sections and 2755 words (Wales NASUWT, 2017). Both participants said that to be able to appraise the headteacher was a huge task which they felt that they were ill equipped for. This resulted in the task becoming divorced from proper evaluation:

*You should find out if he's done everything that he said he would, and that's impossible. You don't have the information. You can ask for it and then you get the reputation as a fussy sod. But if you do get it, it's hard to use it to appraise them... things are never in black and white, it's not, 'Next year all Year 6 will be level four or above in maths' it's more, 'Next year I hope to see an improvement in maths results for Year 6.' There's a world of difference.*

[Owen] first interview

*.. it's always the same, yes, she's done a good job. There is no proper discussion, that would be like crossing the line, so everyone agrees she's done a good job.*

[Amie] first interview

The possession of educational knowledge is vital for school governance to function smoothly (Young, 2017; James, et al., 2010). The headteacher's superior educational knowledge and professional status constituted a powerful source of authority (Harris, 2014). Research into how parent governors in inner city schools conducted their role, reported their reluctance to become active participants. Winston (2013) concluded this may be due to a number of factors including their lack of knowledge about the educational system.

Several participants spoke of the consequences of their relative lack of educational knowledge vis-à-vis the headteacher. This disparity, in conjunction with the participants' lack of confidence, contributed to a professional/amateur dichotomy. Nancy's account showed that a combination of deference and lack of educational knowledge put her on the back foot which impeded securing headteacher accountability:

*.. it wouldn't be right saying [to the head] 'I'd like you to explain to us why you want to do that because I'm not sure.' It would be like you thought they weren't up to it.*

[Nancy] first interview

Likewise, Tony said his lack of educational knowledge compared with the headteacher contributed to his lack of engagement. He recalled one incident where he raised the issue of class size. He thought there was a limit and it had been exceeded:

*A parent was concerned because her daughter was in a class of forty-one in the nursery. I asked the head [about it]. He said because there were two learning support teachers in the class besides the teacher, that was alright. I thought that couldn't be right but it was.*

[Tony] first interview



Tony added that his lack of involvement in meetings was to do with his lack of educational knowledge:

*... things are being discussed...the head talks a bit then the chair says, 'Is that alright with everyone?' I look at my papers and it's about some policy, and I don't know much about it, so I nod.*

[Tony] first interview

Several participants said that their governor training stressed the importance of securing accountability. However, a 'good' school was frequently judged on pupil attainment and the report issued by Estyn, the Wales schools' inspectorate (Rees and Taylor, 2014). In this context several of the participants appeared to have delegated the oversight of school standards to the Schools' Inspectorate. Following an inspection, the governing body is required to draw up an action plan to address the school's shortcomings (Estyn, 2017). The participants said that this was done solely by the headteacher.

*There were things they [the inspectors] criticised us for...he [the headteacher] didn't say how we were going to address them, he said he would sort it out and he did.*

[Freddy] first interview

Eddie made similar comments. He too felt the headteacher possessed the necessary skills and knowledge and was best placed to write the report:

*We had an action plan to write up... we [the governors] didn't have any input...[but] I thought that was fair enough because before you can sort things you have to know what caused them and the head is best placed to do that.*

[Eddie] first interview

Freddy and Eddie's comments highlight the importance of educational knowledge in securing accountability. The governing body as a collective entity is accountable to their local education authority, parents and inspection authorities (Farrell and

Law, 1999). However, it appeared that the participants in this research believed that it was the headteacher who was accountable to the Schools' Inspectorate because they possessed the necessary educational knowledge to address deficits of performance.

## **Summary and conclusion**

This section presents the findings regarding the main research question:

*How do parent school governors in a deprived community describe their contribution to school leadership and accountability?*

### **Leadership**

Before taking office, all participants construed the role of governor in positive terms. In office their execution of governance exhibited none of these attributes. Most participants said that they knew what leadership meant. In practice their role was tenuous, divorced from the guidance issued by the Welsh Government which stressed the importance of adhering to stakeholder principles. The setting of long-term strategic goals was conspicuous by its absence. Rather, school leadership was construed in narrow, passive, overseeing terms and casting their vote. Several reasons help explain this. This included the headteacher's management style; the headteacher and chair working together to control meetings; the drive for unanimous approval of decisions; the participants' lack of knowledge and confidence; loyalty to the headteacher; concern with making a bad decision and its consequences and lack of positive role models.

### **Accountability**

All participants acknowledged the importance of accountability and challenging the headteacher. None did this. Several reasons help account for this including the headteacher's management style; collusion between the headteacher and chair; the participants' lack of confidence and their limited educational knowledge; loyalty to the headteacher, and concerns about making a poor decision. Additionally, the issue of accessing data and being able to interpret it was an inhibiting factor.

The time needed to become familiar with procedures and the conduct of meetings added to this compliance. Some participants felt that because they had not been involved in decision making, they had no reason to secure accountability. School accountability was contextualised as an audit-based activity gauged by pupil attainment standards and the school inspection report. In this context some participants delegated accountability to external agencies such as the local authority and school inspection. For some participants, the limited role they played was a source of unresolved tension. The reason for this was an awareness that their role should be active, and stand at the heart of governance by:

*taking a broadly strategic role in the running of the school, deciding aims and setting the strategic framework for getting there (Wales Government, 2018a).*

A discussion of this research question is presented in the following chapter under, 'Summary of main findings: a response to the research questions'. The following section builds upon the findings presented here to explore the factors which promoted and/or impeded parent school governors' ability and capacity for agency.

## **5.4 Section 2: Findings in relation to sub research question 1**

The previous section presented the findings in relation to how the parent governors in this research described their contribution to school leadership and accountability. It was shown they describe playing a limited role in both, and several reasons were identified which helped explain their acquiescence. This section builds upon this to identify and explore the factors which impeded or enabled the participants' ability to play a purposeful role in school leadership and accountability. This presents the findings in relation to the sub research question:

*What do these parent governors believe is the value and effect of the 'enablers' and 'barriers' they have experienced to prepare them to play a purposeful role in school governance?*

To gain an understanding of the value and effect that the participants in this research attached to factors which promoted or impeded their ability to play a purposeful role in school governance, thematic analysis identified a range of 'enablers' and 'barriers.' The definitions of these were given earlier. Several barriers were identified. No distinct enablers were identified; however, several were potentially able to be either an enabler or barrier. Collectively the participants in this research were ill prepared for their governor role. I shall now discuss what they identified as barriers followed by what they identified as potential enablers or barriers.

## **Barriers**

This research found the participants experienced a range of barriers which limited their ability to play a full governor role. These barriers were particularly significant for new governors because they were associated with longer-term patterns of passive behaviour.

### **Being made welcome and valued**

A crucial factor in governor retention and their active involvement in school governance is a welcoming attitude from the headteacher (Punter and Adams, 2008). Most participants described meetings as being conducted in a friendly way, albeit where the headteachers dominated procedures. However, there appeared to be an undercurrent where the participants felt that the headteacher did not value them and the contribution they brought to governance. Lizzy spoke of an incident involving her and another governor and the headteacher. She felt this showed that the headteacher did not accord them the respect befitting their governor status:

*Me and another governor asked if we could look around the school and perhaps go into the classrooms and speak with the children to get an idea of the set up and the learning environment... she [the other governor] wanted to do some gardening with the younger children or knitting... he said, 'No.' He was polite and said something about it not being a good time, whatever that meant. He didn't give a reason and so we didn't.*

Lizzy's concern appeared to be that the headteacher felt that there was no reason to qualify his decision. I put this point to her in a follow up email. She replied:

*Of course, there may have been reasons for what he said, he's a busy man. But I thought there was a sort of disdain that he thought he didn't have to explain himself.*

[Lizzy] email follow up correspondence

A small number of participants spoke of incidents which were unpleasant. Niki and Nancy were new parent governors in the same school. They independently spoke of two incidents which had deep, negative and lasting consequences. My concern in choosing to present these accounts is that they appeared untypical. Patnaik (2013) advised to consider the presentation of findings in relation to their credibility, as to whether they sit with other data. Although Niki and Nancy's accounts were atypical, they were independently expressed which adds a corroborating element. In the first account, Niki spoke about her first meeting and the allocation of governors to sub committees:

*In my first meeting governors were given responsibility for areas [subcommittees]. Well everyone there was given one by the head, except me. I didn't know what was happening and didn't feel I could ask. But what made it worse was someone who wasn't at the meeting was given responsibility for something. After the meeting another parent governor said how bad she felt for me. That was good because if she hadn't, I would have thought there was some problem with me, which I honestly don't think there is.*

[Niki] first interview

Describing the same incident Nancy said:

*Everyone noticed, there was a lot of throat clearing, it was awful. It knocked her confidence you could see her sinking into her chair. I know her well and she could have brought a lot to the governing body... but she won't now. It did affect me.*

[Nancy] first interview

There may have been legitimate reasons to explain the headteacher's behaviour. Nancy's words that, 'everyone noticed' suggest at best the situation was poorly handled. At worst it showed, as Lizzy said, 'disdain' for a new governor. The second incident concerned Niki who, in another meeting, asked a question which was ruled to be inadmissible:

*I brought up something a parent had concerns about. It was about the [test] results for one of the classes. I was told this was not the place to bring up things like that. Then someone said, 'Didn't your training tell you that you can't bring up things like that?' To be truthful I am not sure but by this time I felt so embarrassed I felt my face going red. At the end of the meeting one governor who had been a governor for ages said, 'I can see we are going to have a trouble maker here.' It was said as a joke but I thought he wouldn't say that if they didn't think it.*

[Niki] first interview.

Describing the same incident, Nancy independently said:

*Someone asked a question and he [the head] said in a firm way it could not be raised. The whole room changed; it went icy cold. She [the governor] didn't ask the question to be awkward. It was badly handled.*

[Nancy] first interview

This second incident could be interpreted in a number of ways. It is likely that the matter in question – test results for one year group - should not have been raised at that specific time. However, discussion of school results at an appropriate time are part of the governor's agenda. This suggests the incident might have been better handled with reference to future discussions. Nancy's observation that 'the whole room changed, it went icy cold' suggests that the headteacher's response showed little respect for Niki. Two outcomes of the incidents described above are noteworthy. First, it made Nancy (and possibly other governors) apprehensive about contributing to meetings. She said:

*It did affect me.*

[Nancy] first interview

This suggests the existence of an undercurrent of tension which underpinned the governor-headteacher relationship. Symptomatic of this were governors who were wary, even inadvertently, of upsetting the headteacher. In her interview, Niki cited these incidents as being the reason she resigned several months after taking office.

The issue of governors not being accorded due respect or being made welcome is a powerful disincentive. Tony and Dai, as new governors in different schools, were not introduced in their first meeting. At face value this might be explained as an oversight. Irrespective of this, it exerted a significant restraining effect:

*Nobody introduced me... everything was hard to understand anyway so I sat there like a lemon looking at the papers and pretending. I'm not saying if I'd been introduced I would have said a lot, but not knowing names can hold you back especially when you're new...you can't say, 'XXXXXX said something and I think that would be a good idea' if you don't know XXXX's name.*

[Tony] first interview.

*I sat there wondering who was who. The school staff had name tags, but the others didn't. If you don't know names it's hard to speak up and get involved.*

[Dai] first interview

These incidents appear to have had a lasting effect. Tony and Dai's reluctance to get involved in discussions endured. While it is likely there were other contributory reasons, this was one which need not have occurred.

### **Inclusivity and confidence**

Discussing governor inclusivity, Young (2014) argued that there was a need for an enabler; someone who is both able and committed to drawing all members into discussions and who has the authority to do so. She found this role was usually performed by the headteacher (Young, 2014). On this basis, much depends on how the headteacher perceives their role. A headteacher resistant to opening up discussions is a significant barrier to overcome (Earley, 2000). Several

participants spoke of the headteacher's autocratic management style. Owen's and Freddy's accounts show this:

*Something came up about how we compared with other schools. He [the headteacher] sort of suggested that the school was excellent, his body language was, 'Don't question me about it' and nobody did.*

[Owen] first interview

*We discussed test results and someone asked a question that deserved a good reply but he [the headteacher] just said a few words about nothing really and then moved on.*

[Freddy] first interview

Several participants spoke of the formality of meetings and the use of educational language which contributed to restricting discussions and superimposed the authority of the headteacher:

*There's the agenda and we follow it... I wish it was a bit more relaxed and everyone put in their two pence's worth...but that doesn't happen. She's [the headteacher] in charge and [she] uses the agenda to get through without much discussion.*

[Tony] first interview

Amie said the use of educational terms could be daunting and off putting:

*The acronyms are used willy nilly, I don't have any specialist knowledge and it has become a bit of an issue. Sometimes I'll ask can it be explained to me, but I don't ask every time because I'd be asking every few minutes.*

[Amie] first interview

Niki was familiar with the conduct of meetings from her work. However, she said that governor meetings proceeded apace, driven by the agenda:

*I'm used to open meetings at work...but it wasn't like that, it was like eyes down second house [reference to bingo] item 12.*



Niki's comments appear understandable. She was concerned that meetings were conducted in a way which limited discussion. However, as will be shown, time constraints were a concern for several governors. If the agenda was followed in a more relaxed manner, as Niki appeared to want, it is likely the length of meetings would increase.

School governance is a multifaceted phenomenon, incorporating both the formal conduct of meetings and the less visible, informal aspects of decision making (James et al., 2010). Much uncertainty exists about the informal aspects of school governance which appear poorly researched but important.

The power differentials in school governance are manifested not only in the formal conduct of meetings. Governors may be reluctant to raise matters if they feel they lacked knowledge and feared they would appear ill-informed (Earley and Weindling, 2004). For this reason it is understandable that they would embrace the informal contexts of governance. Dai had been reluctant to raise a particular issue in meetings because he was unsure if this was allowed. This and other matters, however, had been resolved by him speaking to the headteacher informally:

*I have taken things up [with the headteacher] on a one to one basis. I found it good, better than in meetings because you don't know if certain things can be brought up.*

[Dai] first interview

Dai's motivation to conduct governance informally appeared to include his lack of confidence. For Amie this certainly was the case:

*I speak to the head before or after meetings if I can catch him on his own. It's the informality...in meetings things are minuted and you can lose your train of thought.*

[Amie] first interview

Dai and Amie's accounts provide insights into the power, knowledge and confidence dynamics which underpin the informal dimensions of school governance. Social organisations will have an informal context which can present opportunities to resolve matters. However, chance encounters as a primary means to execute the school governor's role, as in Dai and Amie's accounts have inherent deficiencies.

### **Time constraints**

Preparing for and attending governor meetings can be a time-consuming business. The time commitment involved in executing governance represents a barrier to volunteering or of continuing in office (Ellis, 2003). Principal reasons which affect governor recruitment and retention are the length of meetings, the volume of paperwork and time constraints (Ofsted, 2007). More recent research confirms these findings (Holland, 2018). Significantly, the majority of governors and trustees do not get paid time off work to attend meetings (Holland, 2018; Earley, 2013).

The time necessary to carry out their governor role was a problem for the majority of the participants (Appendix 4). Four of these were employed by the local authority which allow paid time for the purpose of attending attend meetings. Lizzy worked for the local authority and as such she was entitled to time off without loss of pay. This, however, was not without problems:

*I work part time so if I ask for time off you get the impression they think, why couldn't it be on a day off? That's fair enough but I don't arrange meetings. If they crop up when I'm working, I can't do anything about it. I don't ask now and miss the start.*

[Lizzy] first interview

Julie worked in the private sector and to attend meetings meant relying on parental support, or using her holiday entitlement:

*I don't get time off to attend meetings so I have to take some of my holiday entitlement. With my work I have to travel abroad sometimes and that is difficult not just for governor meetings but childcare as well.*

[Julie] first interview

Owen was self-employed and attending meetings resulted in the loss of income:

*Meetings can go on for two hours plus. You lose track of what's going on then see you're halfway through [the agenda] and it's going to go on and on. All the time I think I could be earning money. You get time off if you work for the council, but I lose money.*

[Owen] first meeting

So far the findings in relation to the barriers to inclusion have been presented. I now turn to those aspects of school governance which can perform an enabler or barrier role.

## **Potential enablers or barriers**

### **Support for new governors**

School governors may learn how to perform their role from experienced governors during meetings. In this context a lack of positive role models can be a significant handicap (Winston, 2013). Seven of the ten participants in this research said that, as new governors, they received little support from other governors (Appendix 4). Being unfamiliar with the proceedings of meetings and in some cases not knowing the names of other governors resulted in feelings of isolation. The three participants who did receive support from other governors reported that it was beneficial, creating an apprenticeship for learning, albeit one which was insufficient to enable them to become active members in discussions. These pairings were serendipitous, random events. In all instances they originated from an experienced governor offering their help to a new member. Nancy and Tony both received help from an experienced governor and gained from the relationship:

*I had so much to learn, I was floundering. At the end of the meeting XXX who had been a governor for a while said, 'When I was new, I found it hard to follow things, if you like I'll give you my telephone number and we'll keep in touch.' That turned out to be a blessing.*

[Nancy] first interview

Tony spoke about the importance of the personal chemistry in a successful buddy relationship:

*If he was a know all it wouldn't work, but he wasn't like that, he's great and just wanted to help... it was really useful. We sit together and chat about things before the meeting starts and when it's going on.*

[Tony] first interview

What appeared to make these pairings work was the empathy shown by the experienced governor. The offers of help appeared genuine and stemmed from the awareness that most new members required time to settle in. It is inevitable that governors, whether experienced or not, will develop informal relationships with their peers. However, while clearly beneficial for Nancy and Tony, there is criticism of this, as a preparation for governance. First, for those who engaged in a buddy scheme, the quality of support is likely to be variable. While some might receive good quality guidance and support, which appears the case with Nancy and Tony, others might not. Second, the chance element of the pairings were unsatisfactory. The majority of the participants in this study were not offered such support. Consequently, although the buddy scheme clearly had potential benefits for new members, to be able perform an enabling function required a formal, structured programme of induction.

Local authority governor support services offer advice which governing bodies and their members can use to good effect which Wilkins (2015) considers crucial and empowering. This includes guidance on monitoring, school performance, financial matters, effective support and challenge to the headteacher. While governors, as part of their training, were advised that the Middleton Council's Governor Training and Support Team was able to provide information and data. Dai spoke about the problem of accessing information in terms of the time and effort required. He found the time necessary to attend meetings could be difficult. The extra time necessary to access data added to this problem:

*We've got our own lives to lead...*

[Dai] first interview

Julie expressed similar views but stressed that before you can ask for information you have to know what you want:

*... you've got to ask for it and before that, you've got to know what you want.*

[Julie] first interview

Niki did contact the council support team and found this beneficial: This suggests that sources of support are available, that they have considerable potential for governor support and, at present, appear underutilised:

*There was something I wanted to find out and so I phoned her [the support team member] and she was great. I contacted her another time and mentioned it to others [governors]. But I don't think anyone did.*

[Niki] first interview

Middleton council arranges in-service governor training courses. Several participants spoke of the time constraints of being a governor and attending meetings. The lack of time appeared to extend to and affect the participants' ability to attend in service training:

*The Council put on courses [for governors] but it is a time thing... making meetings can be a struggle, attending more training at the moment is out of the question.*

[Nancy] first interview

Support from the Governor Support Team and the provision of in service training have clear benefits. At present, they appear underutilised. The time necessary to execute their governor role and engage in in-service governor training is

significant. Several participants presented this in terms of a juggling act, involving family and work commitments, where school governance is the least important.

### **Mandatory governor training**

The Welsh Government envisaged mandatory governor training alongside local authority support as being key in improving the quality of school governance and improving pupil performance (Wales, 2018; Farrell, 2014). Specifically, the data handling training part of governor training was designed to enable governors to question and challenge the headteacher (Welsh Government, 2018b). The ten participants were equally split on the quality and value of the data training (Appendix 4). Irrespective of the quality of the data handling training there are likely to be some individuals who struggle to fully avail themselves of its benefits. Lizzy commented on the course:

*The woman who took it [the data handling course] was good and explained things well. But it's a lot to take in two hours. We discussed things like test results and what it means...*

[Lizzy] first interview

Tony raised the recurring theme of how lack of confidence can affect the governor role:

*It [the training] gave me basic knowledge, so I knew what's going on [in meetings] but even if you know what's going on you cannot force people to speak.*

[Tony] first interview

Tony's comments appeared inconsistent. He spoke about the training giving him, 'basic knowledge' adding that, 'even if you know what's going on you cannot force people to speak.' It appeared here that Tony was referring to himself.

These responses highlight a number of aspects. In Lizzy's case she felt that although the delivery of the training was good, she gained little from the data

handling element. This made her more, not less, dependent on her headteacher for the interpretation of data:

*...the head takes us through things...I scribble something, but if the head or chair says it [data], it means something; I look up and nod.*

[Lizzy] second interview

In Tony's case, although he felt it helped him to better understand data, it did little to instil the confidence necessary to participate in discussions. Thus, for both participants, it had no effect on doing what it was designed to achieve, that is to challenge the headteacher.

## **Summary and conclusion**

This section presents the findings to sub research question 1:

*What do these parent governors believe is the value and effect of the 'enablers' and 'barriers' they have experienced to prepare them to play a purposeful role in school governance?*

This section has examined the effect of the 'enablers' and 'barriers' governors experienced to prepare them to play a purposeful role in school governance. Several barriers were identified. These included the participants not being made welcome and treated with the respect they thought they were due; the participants' lack of confidence; the use of specialist language and knowledge in discussions; the headteacher's management style and their relationship with the chair, and time constraints. Collectively they constituted a powerful barrier to inclusivity.

There were no distinct enablers. However, there was clear potential for some to perform a positive role and therefore be an enabler. These were buddy support; the informal aspects of governance, mandatory governor training, and local authority support.

The reason the first two of these were classified 'potential' barrier or enabler is because they were dependent on random encounters and, by their nature, must

be of variable quality, free from formal oversight and evaluation. While the quality of the mandatory training programme was considered generally good, it did not result in any governor playing a significant role. In some cases, it made them more dependent on the headteacher. Local authority support had significant potential to promote governor agency. However, in this research it is constituted as a source of untapped potential.

A discussion of this research question is presented in the following chapter under 'Summary of main findings: a response to the research questions'. Attention will now focus on how, and to what extent, socio-economic deprivation affects how the participants perform their governor role.

### **5.5 Section 3: Findings in relation to sub research question 2**

The previous two sections presented the findings on how the parent governors in this research described their contribution to school leadership and accountability, and the enablers and barriers they experienced to prepare them for this role. This section builds on this and presents the findings in relation to the third research question:

*In what ways and to what extent does socio-economic deprivation affect how parent governors, in a deprived community perceive and execute their role?*

To address this question first I explored what the concept of community meant to the participants. Mapped onto this were their views on socio-economic disadvantage in their school and local community. This facilitated an analysis of how these factors contributed to how they executed their governor role.

#### **Perceptions of community**

The participants were asked what the local community meant to them (Appendix 5). This evoked a range of responses, all positive and which resonated with definitions given by Wilkins (2010) and (Clarke, 2009). Physically, this included distinct geographical boundaries and terraced housing; socially it included



significant face to face contact, extended family relationships and a collective sense of belonging. Their community appeared to contribute to how they constructed their identity. Tony said where he lived was very important to how he thought about himself and his identity:

*Where you come from is important. I don't mean being Welsh...but that is too. It's, 'I live in XXX [name of community] I'm an XXX boy'.*

. [Tony] first interview ...

Freddy's description of community was expressed in a number of ways, but he indicated that the housing stock and how it mediates social relationships was important. Densely packed terraced houses, he said, offered the opportunity to engage with neighbours, built and strengthened social relations which promoted a sense of neighbourliness:

*When you stand on your doorstep you can see forty houses all in a line... [when you] walk to the shops you pass people you know and say 'Morning, you alright?' Walk past them and not say 'Hello' causes offence...valley people pull together, there's a connection between people.*

[Freddy] first interview.

Several participants spoke of their concept of community in terms of a shared sense of belonging and being prepared to help others. Julie, a single parent, depended heavily on her parents who lived locally for child support. In their absence, she explained, there were other sources of help she could call on in the form of neighbours and friends:

*[Governor] meetings start at 3:30 and that can be a problem. My parents help [with child care] a lot but if there is a problem one of my friends will pitch in and pick her up and feed her. Then I repay the kindness by doing something for them.*

[Julie] first interview

Julie's words, '*Then I repay the kindness by doing something for them*' was a recurring theme. It suggested that there was convention of moral obligation and reciprocity which stemmed from the close-knit community and social cohesion.

Niki spoke about community in terms of helping others who were in need. She expressed this in terms of having knowledge of families living in the area and being concerned about them:

*I know most of the families with children in the school. I grew up with many of them. You see them with their children in the park after school and bump into them at the shops. If someone is going through a bad time you try to help.*

[Niki] first interview

In her second interview, Niki elaborated on '*If someone is going through a bad time you try to help.*' Several examples were given. The one given below seemed particularly poignant. The father of one of the children in the school died and his partner was struggling financially. Her friends used the local community centre to put on a fund-raising afternoon with children's games, face painting and raffles. Niki described how this evolved in organic terms:

*It just happened. Her friends got together and that was that. In a way it was a good day. Sian [pseudonym] and the kids were there and everyone talked about XXX [her partner].*

[Niki] second interview

What seemed significant about this account is that there appeared no sense of embarrassment expressed or felt by the concerned parties, the organisers or 'Sian'. It was as if it were something not particularly unusual, a norm which underpinned the social fabric of valley life with significant potential to strengthen the school-community relationship (Shatkin and Gershberg, 2007; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ball, 1991).

Nancy drew a comparison between the social relationships which characterised her community and her sister who lived in Cardiff, about twenty miles away. She drew attention to the differences in social relationships, support networks and the social capital this engendered:

*... she doesn't know her neighbours. I know most of the families who live locally, I went to school with lots of them and my parents and theirs know each other...there's a connection.*

[Nancy] first interview

The research site, the South Wales valleys, are recognised as among the poorest in Europe (Adamson, 2008). All participants recognised that poverty and deprivation was widespread. Dai spoke of the deprivation but he still found much that was positive in the rich social fabric of valley life:

*The newspapers paint a black picture [of the valleys] and they are right, there is a lot of poverty, unemployment and people on the sick, but I wouldn't live anywhere else. We help each other and that's important.*

[Dai] first interview

This selection of comments and responses shows that the participants in this research had clear views about how they defined their community and the importance they attached to the rich network of social relationships it contained. This included a strong attachment to their immediate geographical area which was used to construct their identity, significant knowledge and interaction with others, and concern for their wellbeing. An unwritten sense of moral reciprocity appeared a characteristic of the social relationships where favours and kindnesses were returned.

The next section builds upon this one to explore how the participants thought about disadvantage within their school and local community.

## **Socio-economic disadvantage within the school and local community**

To explore this topic four overarching themes were identified. These were unemployment; poverty; free school meals/breakfast club, and Communities First status.

From 2001 to 2018 the Welsh Government's anti-poverty policies were delivered through the Communities First programme which introduced measures to help the 100 most deprived electoral divisions in Wales. Despite this, little progress has been made in the reduction of the level of poverty (Clapham, 2014).

The respondents were asked what they knew about Community First (Appendix 5). Their replies showed that they had a comprehensive understanding of the criteria used to determine Community First status, the provision of supplementary services such as Flying Start, Families First, and the Pupil Deprivation Grant. They also knew that their enhanced school budget reflected their Community First status.

The depth of poverty within their catchment area was known by all participants. They knew the approximate number of children who were entitled to free school meals in their school and the number of pupils who attended the breakfast club (Appendix 4). In July 2019, 20% of pupils aged 5-15 were known to be eligible for free school meals in Middleton council. This was the fifth highest of the twenty-two local authorities in Wales (Wales Assembly Government, 2019b). However, in the research site the figure was considerably higher, ranging between 30 – 40%. This reflects the socio-economic disadvantage which is characteristic of Community First communities and the schools located within their geographic boundaries.

Dean et al. (2007) reported that the membership of governing bodies in deprived areas often did not reflect the families using local schools. My research supported this. The research took place in an area of significant deprivation however, there were pockets of relative affluence. All my participants were in paid employment, enjoying, they said, a good standard of living. All participants however, showed considerable sympathy to those members of their community who were in less

fortunate circumstances than themselves. Niki reflected on this disparity and on her work role which involved directing those in need to food bank provision:

*There's a foodbank in the high street, an old chapel. In my work I've given out tickets so families can get food. Some parents are poor with money [budgeting] but you cannot blame them because they don't have much anyway.*

[Niki] first interview

Poverty is ordinarily considered the main indicator of social exclusion. However, it embraces all factors which prevent individuals from participating in civil society (Noya and Clarence, 2008; Atkinson, 1998). Wright and Boese (2015) argued that the process whereby a small number of individuals gain social advancement maintains inequality by legitimising the status quo, and suggest that the poor are responsible for their own misfortune. Julie refuted this sentiment:

*Some [people] say, 'They've got Sky TV and the parents smoke. I say, 'Yes, but would you swap with them?' I don't think so, and anyway the kids don't smoke and they are the ones who suffer...I've done alright but it could have been different.*

[Julie] first interview

Asked to elaborate on this statement, Julie spoke about friends with whom she had attended school but who were now unemployed or in poorly paid employment. She said that although she had, 'done well' she recognised it could have been different.

Giving the children in their school a 'good start' were sentiments expressed by several participants. Freddy used the term in an economic sense where pupils could do well in school, gain examination success and then find a well-paid job:

*Give them a good start and it can set them up for life.*

[Freddy] first interview

Amie spoke about how poverty permeates all aspects of life of the poorest members of her community. She identified substandard housing as contributing to illness and indirectly, because of missed schooling, children falling behind educationally. This then impacted upon the demands made on the board of governors.

*More families are renting a house that's damp and cold. You can smell it and see the black mould on the walls. The children are back and forth the doctors and puffing on asthma pumps and off school for weeks on end. It's no wonder they fall behind [educationally] and need support.*

[Amie] first interview

All participants were asked:

*In what ways has deprivation affected how you conduct your parent governor role? (Appendix 5).*

A range of answers were given. No participant said that in governing body meetings they actively strived to secure provision for pupils entitled to free school, free uniform and additional learner support. This is consistent with findings presented earlier when the findings of the first two research questions were presented. However, a number of points were made. First, poverty was so widespread, and addressing it went beyond the remit of their school. In this context it required action from the Welsh Government and local authority. The governing body's role was to make sure that those entitled to help received it. Dai said:

*The governors want to make sure the children who aren't well off are supported. But mainly it's down to the council and the Welsh Assembly. They should do more, but it's a money thing. We are a Communities First school; we get extra money; it helps but it does not make up for everything.*

[Dai] first interview

In July 2019, the Wales Assembly Government (2019) introduced the Holiday Hunger Play works Pilot (HHPP). This extended the provision of food in areas

with high levels of deprivation where the risk of hunger was greatest (Welsh Government, 2019a). In February 2020, the Welsh Government (2020) announced that the scheme would be rolled out over Wales from Easter 2020 to February half term 2021.

Eddie spoke of his concern about school holiday hunger but acknowledged that the support his school were able to offer came via the Welsh Government. His school had benefited from the HPPP programme:

*We have a lot of kids on free school meals and lots of children come to the breakfast club. I worry about the weekends and the holidays, especially the summer...but we have had money off the Welsh government [for school holiday meals provision] and it's been good and helped lots of families.*

[Eddie] first interview

Several participants spoke about the Welsh Government's emphasis on test results which they felt was unfair because of the specific problems their school faced:

*Some of our children start school not toilet trained and with poor language. We have teaching assistants and they are timetabled to go into classes and work with a group of children. But when there are accidents they have to go and change them. Sometimes it happens a few times a day. Then it's the children who they should work with who miss out.*

[Amie] first interview

This selection of comments and replies show that the participants had a clear idea of the scale of poverty in their schools and communities. Holiday food poverty was a concern many spoke about. All knew the basis on which Community First status was determined and how it affected their school budget. Several participants spoke of the disadvantages many of their pupils started school with. There was a concern to ensure all children had a 'good start' so they were able to secure a well-paid job. The scale of poverty and deprivation in their community was such that the participants expressed the view that it required local authority or Welsh

Government intervention. The governing body's role in this was to ensure that families and children accessed the support that they were entitled to.

## **The school-community relationship**

Findings presented earlier show all participants were aware of and concerned with the levels of socio-economic deprivation within their school and communities. The participants saw their governor role as overseeing Welsh Government policies to tackle deprivation such as the provision of free school meals and breakfast clubs, school uniform grant and additional pupil support.

To explore the school-community relationship four overarching themes were identified. These were shared history/values; links between the school and community; extended family networks, and Welsh Government/local authority initiatives to support disadvantaged families.

A strong school/community relationship is able to build social capital within schools (Preston, 2013; Shatkin and Gershberg, 2007; Ball, 1991). The Welsh Government recognises the importance of strengthening the school-community relationship:

*Schools and governing bodies do not exist in isolation from their wider community (Wales, 2018a, chapter 2).*

Several participants recognised that a strong school-community relationship was mutually beneficial. Eddie spoke of how his school governing body had encouraged community groups to use the school premises. This, he said, had enabled others to see the stimulating learning environment and evidence of the high quality of the pupil's work which helped spread the word about the good work the school did:

*[The school premises] is used by the Brownies and the slimming club, they come into the school and look around and see lovely displays on the walls and they know that is because of the staff and the children's hard work [and] they talk to people.*

[Eddie] first interview



Many parents with children in the school were in paid employment and the grandparents and the extended families played a significant child care role. Lizzy and Eddie spoke of how their schools had built links with the extended families and organisations, which had had a positive effect on the school and community relationship:

*We are a community school and most of the children live less than half a mile from the school and the families know each other. A lot of grandparents bring their grandkids to school and pick them up and feed them... they come to concerts and fetes and coffee mornings. It's then they see what goes on and how hard the teachers work.*

[Lizzy] first interview.

*The children's choir visits the Old Age Day centre every few weeks and, in the Spring, they plant bulbs and the parents and grandparents help. Then there's the litter pick. When you list all the school does it adds up.*

[Eddie] first interview

The Welsh Government and the local authority had prioritised school-based support for pupils from economically disadvantaged families. The individual governing body was required to ensure this provision was taken up. No governor formally championed their local community in meetings. However, several participants spoke of the effective take up of free school meals and free school uniform in their school and that the headteacher, as overseer of this process, played a central role. Eddie said:

*The children [in the school] get what they should [free school breakfast, dinner, uniform and supplementary learning support]. That's down to the head really.*

[Eddie] first interview

An unexpected finding of the research was that several participants spoke about the value of developing a good school-community relationship through the network

of informal social relationships. Five participants, for example, spoke of the school staff who lived within the school catchment area and the advantages which accrued to this. Owen lived close to his school. He knew most of the families in the catchment area and had established a good relationship with them. He felt this contributed to a strong school-community relationship:

*I live by the school and see children pass. I know most of their parents and they know it. Sometimes, if they're messing about, I'll say, 'I'll tell you father what you're doing', and that's enough. It's nothing to do with being a governor, it's more building links with the school and it works.*

[Owen] first interview

Nancy said:

*A lot of local people work in the school...teachers, teaching assistants, dinner supervisors, cleaners, and that is good because there's an overlap [between school and community].*

[Nancy] first interview

Freddy said that the benefits of establishing a good early parent/school relationship were enduring. His son's teacher lived near to him:

*... we're neighbours, we talk a lot. There's this really good relationship between the staff and the parents, especially in the infants. Get that right and it's there until the child goes to the Comp, it's valuable in all sorts of ways, behaviour is one.*

[Freddy] first interview

## **Summary and conclusion**

This section presented the findings to sub research question 2:

*In what ways and to what extent does socio-economic deprivation affect how parent governors in a deprived community perceive and execute their role?*

The term 'local community' evoked a range of responses. This centred on a sense of belonging and social cohesion. The depth of poverty in their community and school, was recognised by all participants. The consequences of poverty in their school included pupils starting school with delayed social skills. Participants spoke about how, through Welsh Government support, they might be able to break the intergenerational nature of poverty.

The scale of poverty was recognised by all the participants. Most participants saw their role as overseeing Welsh Government policies designed to support disadvantaged pupils.

A good community school relationship was important for all participants, who recognised this as being able to benefit both parties. Several spoke about how their governing body developed links between the school and community by involving extended family networks and community groups in the life of the school. A further discussion of this research question is presented in the following chapter under 'Summary of main findings: a response to the research questions.'

## Chapter 6: Discussion and conclusions

In this final chapter I discuss the major themes the thesis explored and draw conclusions. I begin by restating the research aims, showing their relevance for the conduct of contemporary school governance, specifically as it is conducted in a deprived locality. I then discuss each of the three research questions, emphasising their significance for my overall research project. I support them with references from the policy and literature review chapters, alongside brief quotes. In doing this I show their coherence and how their overarching themes are able to address the thesis title:

*Primary school parent governors in a deprived South Wales community: how do their experiences contribute to our understanding of school governance?*

Following this, I make explicit the contribution the thesis offers to knowledge about school governance, theory and professional practice. This is followed by an exposition of the thesis's theoretical underpinning. I then reflect upon the challenges I faced in the completion of this study, which support suggestions for further research. The research has limitations. These are then identified and discussed. The penultimate section reflects on my personal and professional experiences over the period that I worked on this thesis. Finally, I briefly discuss the impact of the Covid19 pandemic of Spring 2020 and its implications for the major themes identified and explored in the study.

### 6.1 Restatement of the thesis aims within a changing landscape

The Welsh Government requires school governing bodies to operate on a stakeholder basis; this model of governance comprises those with an interest in the success of the school. Individual stakeholders are peers and decisions are made collegiately which recognises the respective strengths of each member. Studies have frequently found, however, that it is the headteacher who is the dominant member of their board of governors, with other governors playing a limited role (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014). This research took place in the context of a programme of Welsh Government reform designed to raise standards

and improve Wales' performance on the PISA. The overall aim of this research is to understand how ten primary school parent governors, whose schools were located in a deprived South Wales valley community, described their experiences and perceptions of governance.

Since I began working on this research, certain developments, which relate to the focus of this thesis, are noteworthy. First, The Welsh Government published the findings of a consultation process on the reconstitution of school governance, and their proposed response (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019). Two important developments are particularly significant. First, the Welsh Government has committed to a policy whereby governors are recruited on the basis of the skills they possess. Second, the Welsh Government has decided to continue allowing the headteacher to opt to be a member of their governing body. The findings chapter showed that the headteacher's membership of the board of governors constitutes a source of ongoing tension due to the ambiguity of their school leadership and governor roles.

The second development relates to the 2019 publication of PISA results. Despite making progress, Wales remained the worst performing nation of the UK. This has, again, shone the spotlight on the performance of Welsh education. To support the governor voice and their independence of action the Welsh Government invests faith in the support offered by the Headteacher, Challenge Advisors and the local authority. Twelve years ago the Welsh Government similarly identified these sources of support to promote governor agency in 2012 (Egan, 2017). This failed to achieve the goal of placing the governor voice at the heart of governance. In this respect the Welsh Government appear naively optimistic to believe it will now prove effective.

The third development relates to the Covid19 pandemic of 2020. This has had a major effect on state education in all four home UK nations. As will be shown later in this chapter, it has been pupils in poorer, working class areas, such as those in this research who have been most affected. Consequently, the Welsh Government, Middleton Council and individual governing bodies have been charged with supporting schools, particularly those in deprived areas, to deliver a

quality standard of education at a time the educational system is in the throes of chaos.

## 6.2 Discussion of the main research question

*How do parent school governors in a deprived community describe their contribution to school leadership and accountability?*

Policy plays a key role in the conduct of school governance (James, et al., 2013). Those charged with making policy however, may pay insufficient attention to its implementation (Ball, 2012) which may thwart what its architects intended (Hill, and Irving, 2008). The Welsh Government expects governors to make a strategic contribution to leadership and accountability. In doing this they are obliged to work together as equals (Wales Government, 2018a). This research found that the Welsh Government's expectation that school governance should be inclusive was unmet.

In terms of typologies, the boards of governors in this research operated in modes which mainly resonated with Creese and Earley's (1999) 'abdicators' where the participants, in decision making deferred to the professional authority of a respected headteacher, *and* Ranson et al.'s (2005) 'deliberative forum' where an autocratic headteacher determined and led discussions and parent governors, especially did not challenge or question their authority. In two cases Ranson's (2005) 'sounding board' characterised the governing body's behaviour. Here the headteacher brought policies to the board to be endorsed. Several factors contributed to this situation of governor passivity. These included the headteacher's management style, their superior educational knowledge, status and authority; the close headteacher-chair relationship and personal loyalty to the headteacher; and the transformation of school governance into an audit based activity.

The Education Acts 1980 and 1988 transformed governance, schools were given control over their budgets and independence from local authority control. However, the transfer of power and responsibilities strengthened the headteacher's executive and non-executive roles (Farrell, 2005; Earley, 2000). The headteacher

is a member of the board of governors while simultaneously being responsible for the day to day running of the school. The headteacher's governor role positions them to dominate in terms of policy formulation and its implementation. The headteacher, uniquely can perform their unique 'governor'-'chief executive' role which in practice can be arbitrary and blurred. In this context the headteacher is able to fulfil an advisory *and* educating role and to dominate governor meetings (Sundell and Lapuente, 2012), which Connolly (2017) notes has resulted in governors struggling to execute their responsibilities. For the participants in this research, the headteacher's ambiguous role was a source of unresolved tension which contributed to the participants' passive, reactive conduct.

Some educational knowledge is essential for governing bodies to work in an efficient manner (James, et al. 2010). Governors have been shown to depend on the headteacher due to their depth of understanding of their educational knowledge (Yolles, 2019). This applied to the participants in this research. Frequently their relative lack of educational matters proved debilitating. Educational knowledge is about the rules and conduct of governance; managerial knowledge enables policy to be implemented (Young, 2017). In the context of frequent change which government demand Young (2017) argued that managerial knowledge has assumed the greater importance which has strengthen the position of the headteacher vis-à-vis their governors (Young, 2017; James, et al., 2010). However, in this research reluctance to become active school leaders was never due solely to their lack of knowledge. Rather it was located in the imbalance in status, and confidence inherent in the headteacher/professional - governor/amateur relationship which contributed to the parent governors in this research frequently being reduced to virtual spectators.

As part of their role, headteachers must formulate aims and objectives, policies and targets for the governing body adopt (Wales Government, 2018a). This involves the headteacher persuading governors of the value of their proposals (Farrell, 2005). There exists a fine line between what is perceived as acts of persuasion and acts of coercion. The participants in this research frequently interpreted the headteacher's behaviour as seeking to impose their will on them, and that they were expected to endorse these proposals. This, however, needs to

be seen in a wider context. This includes the capacity of limited social capital and confidence to stifle governor agency (Winston, 2013), and reluctance to challenge their headteacher preferring instead to offer them their support (Dean, et al., 2007). In this research, no participant exercised the 'support and challenge' role or acted as their headteacher's 'critical friend'.

The attitudes and expectations governors bring with them to office has been shown to affect how they executed their duties (Connolly and James, 2011; Dean et al., 2007). I do not dismiss this view. However, before taking office the participants in this research expected to play a significant leadership and accountability role. In office their role was limited, suggesting the socialisation process of becoming a governor was sufficiently powerful to override these earlier aspirations. Dominant members of an organisation have been shown to actively seek to preserve patterns of behaviour they believe worth preserving (Yolles, 2019). This appears a more plausible explanation why governors in this research who, as new members had positive expectations of office, but became resigned to playing a limited role which became institutionalised.

Governors' responsibilities can prove formidable (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014). This research found evidence where two participants described experiences, centering on their lack of confidence and knowledge, which resulted in them playing a limited role. Although clearly significant incidents, it must be recognised that they occurred during a process of longer term governor acquiescence and deference to the headteacher which sapped their confidence. It is indeterminable whether these governors would have acted as they did if, as new members they had been encouraged to develop their management skills and become confident, proactive members.

The dominant narrative over the last four decades is that schools have been made responsible for raising standards of attainment. This has resulted in leadership and accountability being narrowed and redefined in terms of oversight of short term quantitative data (Rees and Taylor, 2014; Møller (2009). This involves scrutinising information and ensuring targets have been met (Young, 2017; James et al.,



2010). This falls short of wider democratic empowerment as specified by the guidelines issued by the Welsh Government (2018b).

The business model of school governance is commonly used in academies in England. In Wales the testing regime seeks to shield schools from competition and promote cooperation (Hargreaves, 2010). However, the drive to improve standards *is* market driven where schools do compete for pupils (Egan, 2017). In this research the participants were of the opinion that the parents they represented prioritised the happiness and wellbeing of their children over a regime of testing which they felt could have a negative effect on their children's health. Three participants said they knew of no case where parents had moved their child to another school to improve their attainment. However, several of the participants said that for their headteacher, their schools' standards of attainment were very important. This shows on the matter of school standards of attainment, there were quite distinct differences of attitudes of the participants and the headteacher.

Møller (2009) argues policy makers who prescribed pupil attainment targets are accountable to individual schools, their governing body, pupils and their parents for an allocation of resources so these targets could be met. Several participants acknowledged that the Welsh Government and their local authority had provided extra funding and support for their schools to, among other things help pupils achieve prescribed standards. These participants however, felt the extra school support was insufficient to secure the desired ends. Yet on this account there was no criticism of the Welsh Government who are primarily responsible for school funding. A possible explanation for this might be inferred from two participants who spoke about the Welsh Government's limited financial budget and the competing demands made on it.

Adams and Kirst's (1999) 'political accountability', rests on members capacity to vote to ratify decisions. The participants' conducted their leadership role in terms of voting to support the headteacher and seconding proposals. However, no participants held the headteacher to account or exercise the challenge - support-mechanism. This was due to a combination of factors. These included the headteacher's style of management and their superior educational knowledge,

status and authority; the close headteacher-chair relationship and personal loyalty to the headteacher; and the transformation of school governance into an audit based activity.

Governor passivity meant their expression of leadership was ratifying decisions and choosing between options presented to them. Reasons for this centred on the imbalance in status, knowledge and confidence inherent in the headteacher as professional – governor as amateur relationship

Michels (1959), found organisation become oligarchies with in a small number of knowledgeable, professional overseeing decision making powers. Research into educational school governance supports this view (Connolly et al., 2017; Farrell, 2014). Specifically, Young (2014) reported widespread oligarchy where an established core consisting of the headteacher, chair and a small number of active governors made the important decisions; the peripheral governors endorsed them.

The Welsh Government's recent restructuring of school governance remains committed to stakeholder principles while retaining the existing system where headteachers can elect to be a governor (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019). Dean et al. (2007) contended that stakeholder governance is able to be efficient while strengthening organisational pluralism. This view is not contested. However, for schools in this research, the evidence suggests that the headteacher's membership of their board of governors is incompatible with stakeholder governance. To function in an inclusive, democratic manner all parties must commit to its underlying principles and be prepared to accommodate differentials in status, power, knowledge and authority. There was no evidence that the governing bodies in this research conducted governance in such a manner.

The role of chair of governors and their relationship with the headteacher is crucial in ensuring the governing body is effective in supporting and challenging the headteacher (Farrell and Law, 1999). Formally, the chair acts as the school's chief executive, charged with overseeing governor inclusivity (Farrell and Law, 1999).

This, however, frequently falls to the headteacher (Young, 2014). Young (2014) reported that for meetings to be inclusive required someone who possessed the skills, authority and commitment to achieve this. Much therefore depends on the headteacher (Earley, 2000). In this research, the headteacher effectively controlled meetings but showed little appetite to involve other governors. This process appeared frequently to involve collusion between the headteacher and the chair. This was particularly the case for Julie.

To function in a competent manner, school governance requires expert educational knowledge. A deficit runs the risk that the school may slip into decline (James, et al. 2010). Ordinarily, in their role of governor, it is the headteacher who possesses the most educational knowledge. Uniquely their governor role is part of their full-time job. This demands they are conversant with educational policy and the frequently revised body of regulations which adds to the complexity of school governance (Earley, 2013). Dean et al. (2017) noted that some of the governors they researched said their headteachers limited their access to information in order to minimise the opportunities for effective challenge. No participant in this research expressed this view. However, access to information was a concern expressed by two participants who said that while they were free to ask the headteacher for information, they did not because they were unsure precisely what information they needed.

Young (2017) drew the distinction between 'educational' and 'managerial' knowledge. She argued increasingly managerial knowledge – implementing new policy and arrangements within the school - has become more important. This has devalued educational knowledge and contributed to weakening the positive connotations associated with lay knowledge (Young, 2017). In this research this contributed to participants becoming marginal figures believing that they lacked the competence to make decisions and/or the fear of the consequences of bad decision making. In this context their role in governance was little more than turning up to meetings and supporting the headteacher.

In summary, the participants in this research played a limited role in school leadership and accountability. The main reason for this was the headteacher's

membership of their board of governors which, through superior knowledge, status, authority and confidence enabled them to dominate other governors. The primary role of governors was to vote on different options presented to them. The following section will discuss the enablers and barriers which promoted or impeded governor agency.

### **6.3 Discussion of sub research question 1**

*What do parent governors believe is the value or effect of the 'enablers' and 'barriers' they have experienced to prepare them to play a purposeful role in school governance?*

The Welsh Government expects governors to: '*Take a broadly strategic role in the running of the school, deciding aims and setting the strategic framework for getting there*' (Wales Government, 2018a). To function efficiently the conduct of school governance requires expert educational knowledge. Several barriers were found to compromise the participants' ability to play a purposeful school governance role. In practice these were interrelated and overlapped. Those which were discussed in the previous section 'Discussion of the main research question' will not be revisited.

In Wales, school governance is regulated by documentation which extends over three hundred pages (Wales, 2018). These are subject to frequent revision. Ordinarily, in their role of governor, the headteacher possesses the most educational knowledge. Uniquely their governor role is part of their full-time job. This demands they are conversant with educational policy and the frequently revised body of regulations which adds to the complexity of school governance. The participants in this study acknowledged their limited educational knowledge vis-à-vis the headteacher. In some cases the participants felt that their headteacher used this to their advantage in terms of promoting professional closure.

Time constraints have been shown to be a significant impediment for governor recruitment and retention (Holland, 2018; Ofsted, 2007; Ellis, 2003). For the

participants in this research issues of time were, to some degree a concern for all. The time needed to attend meetings was frequently presented in terms of a juggling act involving family and work commitments. Inevitably, the role of governor was considered relatively unimportant. Six participants said that at some time they had relied on family or friends for childcare so they could attend governors meetings. Four of the participants worked for the local authority and as such are entitled to time off without loss of pay to attend governors meetings. This however, was not always a straightforward matter. In some cases governors meeting took place mid-afternoon so the participants missed all or part of a meeting. The cause of this appeared to be there was so little slack in the system that the participants' colleagues were unable to cover for them. The majority of governors and trustees do not get paid time off work to attend meetings (Holland, 2018; Earley, 2013). The one participant in the study who worked in the private sector had to use her holiday entitlement to be able to attend meetings. The one self-employed participant said before taking office he had no idea of the time commitment of being a governor, and attending meetings meant loss of income. Significantly, he said that he would not seek re-election at the end of his term and the financial aspect was important in this decision.

Over the last three decades school governance has frequently become a short term, audit based, oversight activity (Young, 2017; Rees and Taylor, 2014; James et al., 2010). In this context being able to access and interpret data has become essential. The Welsh Government state that the mandatory training is designed to instil confidence so that governors are able to play a significant role (Wales Government, 2018a). Governor training may have little benefit in preparing governors to take a strategic role in governance (Young, 2016). The quality of training is clearly important (Selwyn, 2016; Farrell, 2014a; McCrone, et al., 2011). In this research the participants were equally split on the value of training. Yet, even those who reported that it helped them understand data it was insufficient transform them into active participants and made them more dependent on the headteacher or interpretation of data. For the participants in this study, lack of confidence was a major barrier to inclusivity. It affected all aspects of how they perceived and executed their governor role. In some cases, the participants conducted their governor role by speaking to their headteacher informally before

or after meetings. This appeared to show that power, knowledge and confidence permeated both the formal and inform dimensions of governance and contributed to the participants being a marginal figure.

Buddy support where new governors were supported by an experienced member was used by a small number of participants. They reported this was beneficial and had distinct potential in assisting participant development. The weakness of buddy support as used in this research was its ad hoc, serendipitous nature. It was unstructured and unamenable to evaluation.

Governors not being welcomed and not valued was a distinct impediment to contributing to discussions (Punhhter and Adams, 2008). This was a common experience faced by participants in the study. Examples of this included not being introduced at their first meeting, and other incidents which the participants interpreted as rudeness by the headteacher.

In summary, the participants encountered several barriers which served to prevent them playing a significant leadership and accountability role. These were interrelated to the extent they were inseparable. Such were the responsibilities of office that in a small number of case the participants self-limited their leadership ambitions. The following section will discuss the effect socio-economic deprivation had on how the participants executed their governor role.

## **6.4 Discussion of sub research question 2**

*In what ways and to what extent does socio-economic deprivation affect how parent governors in a deprived community perceive and execute their role?*

The meaning of 'community' evoked a range of responses from the participants; all were positive and resonated with definitions given by Wilkins (2010) and (Clarke, 2009). This included a sense of belonging, social cohesion which helped create a distinct identity. An unwritten sense of moral obligation and reciprocity underpinned social relationships. The ethical conduct of social relationships appeared to stem from the close-knit community and social cohesion. All

participants lived in a nuclear family structure. However, family and kinship ties remained strong. Parents mostly lived sufficiently close to the participants to be able to help with daily childcare. The participants spoke of favours being returned in terms of the provision of support. Eight participants in total reported that they had relied on family or friends to take or collect their children to school or to enable them to attend governors meetings.

The multifarious, negative effect of socio-economic deprivation at school and community level were a cause of concern for all participants. All were aware of, and sympathetic to, the scale of the disadvantage in their school. Two participants, while acknowledging that they had, 'done OK' nevertheless recognised, with reference to their friends from school, that it 'could have been different' and that they themselves could have been unemployed or dependent on benefits.

The consequences of poverty in their school were expressed in several ways, including pupils starting school with delayed social skills. A number of participants spoke of how their school, in tandem with the local authority and Welsh Government, were committed to providing a good educational start to compensate for these disadvantages. A small number of participants said that they thought this could help to help break the intergenerational nature of poverty. However there was an awareness that the extent of poverty and deprivation in their school and community were such that it required external agencies – the Welsh Government and the local authority - had prioritised school-based support for pupils from economically disadvantaged families. Most participants saw their governor role as overseeing Welsh Government policies to tackle deprivation, such as free school meals, breakfast clubs and the Pupil Deprivation Grant and that the headteacher oversaw this at school level.

A strong school-community relationship has many benefits, including supporting family wellbeing, and improving attendance rates and behaviour (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ball, 1991). In Wales, close ties with their community was reported as key to a school's success, with governors being instrumental in this process (Ranson et al., 2005). A good community school relationship was important for all participants who recognised this as being beneficial to both parties. Several spoke

about how their governing body sought to develop and strengthen the informal elements of governance to embrace extended families and local organisations. The significant number of school staff who lived in the catchment area presented an opportunity to develop an enduring network. In some cases it appeared that the governor role and community member became as one.

Parental and community participation in school governance is able to benefit both parties, acting as a catalyst for collective action around community-development issues (Putnam, 2015; Shatkin and Gershberg, 2007). Benefits which stem from this relationship include supporting family wellbeing, establishing domestic conditions conducive for achievement, improvement of attendance rates and behaviour, and supporting local services for children and families (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ball, 1991). In Wales, close ties with their community were reported as key to a school's success, with governors being instrumental in this process (Ranson et al., 2005).

The need to take collective responsibility for the conduct of the school appears to have narrowed governor vision and weakened school-community representation (James et al., 2014). The participants in this study were clearly concerned to build a strong school-community relationship. Several said that their headteachers were also eager to build such a relationship and actively pursued this goal. Here the participants appeared content to delegate this responsibility to their headteacher.

The commitment to neoliberal economics has disproportionately and negatively affected groups and communities already depressed (Thompson and Coghlan, 2015; Newman and Clarke, 2014). It is schools in deprived areas, who are least able to compete in the market for pupils through the lure of high attainment and links with prestigious universities. In this context, educational liberalism has proved generally deleterious to deprived communities. This has forced governors in these schools to make choices which mitigate the worst excesses of a deregulated educational system to protect the socio-economically vulnerable (Olmed and Wilkins, 2017). As the Welsh Government edge towards a skills-based model of



governance, it is likely that school governors in deprived communities will face a similar predicament.

A strong school-community relationship has many benefits, including supporting family wellbeing, and improving attendance rates and behaviour (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Ball, 1991). In Wales, close ties with their community was reported as key to a school's success, with governors being instrumental in this process (Ranson et al., 2005). A good community school relationship was important for all participants who recognised this as being beneficial to both parties. Several spoke about how their governing body sought to develop and strengthen the informal elements of governance to embrace extended families and local organisations. The significant number of school staff who lived in the catchment area presented an opportunity to develop an enduring network. In some cases it appeared that the governor role and community member became as one.

## **6.5 Contribution of the findings to knowledge and theory**

In this thesis I have argued that school governance is relatively under researched and not properly understood. A search of the literature revealed few studies which explored how parent governors in deprived areas perceived and executed their role. This study used a small sample and claims must be treated cautiously. However, this research makes a distinct contribution to our understanding of the conduct of parental governance in a deprived community.

To provide context to be able to gauge how the participants' perceptions and execution of school governance changed over time, I explored how they thought about their governor role prior to taking office. Before taking office, the participants had little idea of what the role of school governor involved. They expected to play a substantial leadership and accountability role where meetings would be inclusive and decisions made in a collegial manner. These expectations were unmet. A review of the research literature failed to find other studies which gauged the change in governor perceptions of school governance over time.

In office the participants became resigned to playing a limited role. The early phase of governance appeared crucial in this process because it was associated with long term patterns of passive behaviour from which the participants were unable to extricate themselves. In this respect the socialisation process of becoming a governor appeared particularly significant.

Participant acquiescence was embedded in a wide framework. The main factors in this process was a combination of the headteachers' autocratic management style, their status and authority. The headteachers superior educational and management knowledge contributed to the participants' passivity. The frequently revised regulations and fresh school initiatives made the participants dependent on the headteacher for guidance and expert knowledge. This contributed to a process of professional closure.

A number of participants said that their acquiescence was conditional upon their school continuing to perform well. This was divorced from pupil standards of attainment which, in this context, appeared relatively unimportant. Of greater significance was the recognition of the difficulty of the headteacher's job and the need to 'keep' the Welsh Government and local authority 'happy'. It is unclear whether the participants who expressed these views would withdraw their support for the headteacher if these conditions were not met.

The participants were interviewed when they had completed their mandatory training. The training was a positive experience in that it informed the participants' understanding of the expectations and responsibilities associated with school governance. This knowledge, however, was insufficient for the participants to play an active governor role *per se*. This created a source of tension which stemmed from the participants being aware of the inclusive role they should play, while at the same time recognising that their behaviour fell far short of this.

The governing bodies in this research operated on the basis of oligarchy. There were core and peripheral members. The core members consisted of the headteacher and the chair. In some cases the participants believed there was

collusion between the core members to limit wider discussions. This proved a powerful barrier to governor inclusivity as in Julie's case.

Social action within organisations is designed to achieve certain outcomes. There may be, however, unintended consequences. Latent functions are the unintended consequences which may prove dysfunctional for the organisation (Merton, 1936). This research identified two latent, unintended consequences. First, two of the participants abdicated responsibility for the decisions their governing body had made because they played no part in the decision making process. It is however, the board of governors and not individual governors who are responsible for securing evaluation and accountability (Earley and Weindling, 2004). The Welsh Government requires that governing bodies operate on stakeholder principles. If governors take no responsibility for the decision their board of governors makes, as in Freddy's case, stakeholder governance is both devalued and dysfunctional.

Second, data handling competence is vital if the headteacher is to be made accountable for their actions. Four participants, commenting on the data handling element of their governor training, said that it did not help them develop these skills (Appendix 4). In two cases, this made them more, not less dependent on the headteacher for interpretation of data as in Lizzy's case.

Previous research on training programmes has found that governors had been provided with lists of questions that might be used to determine if their school was complying with national policies (Young, 2016). Freddy and Lizzy's accounts show that governor data handling training can reduce governor confidence and further reduce their capacity to play a purposeful leadership and accountability role. This constitutes an original contribution to our understanding of school governance.

All participants were eager to build a good school-community relationship. This involved the extended family networks and local organisations in the life of the school. An unexpected finding of the research was that several participants developed a good school-community relationship through the network of informal social relationships. The significant number of school staff living within the catchment area helped to develop social capital and strengthen the school-

community relationship. In a small number of cases participants appeared to see their governor role as extending beyond the school gates. Here their governor and community roles became blurred and overlapped. Owen said that this contributed to a strong school-community relationship.

Many school governors in deprived areas take into account the needs of all the young people in their locality (Baxter, 2015). Yet few governors challenged the headteacher to promote and strengthen community relationships (McCrone et al., 2011). Previous studies of governance have not identified or explored cases where governors living within the school catchment area see their governor and community roles become blurred and overlapping. This represents a fresh insight into the conduct of school governance in deprived communities.

Sixteen years ago, Crouch's (2004) sociological study found evidence that political representation in the UK was in danger of entering into what he called a 'post democratic society'. This was characterised by the channels of democratic participation remaining open; democratic elections are held, individuals can put themselves forward for office, others can vote to express their choices. However, Crouch (2004) argued that the institutions of democracy had become a façade where control was exerted by an elite.

In Crouch's (2004) depiction of post democratic society, voters retain the right to not vote in elections. In this research into the conduct of school governance, as with Crouch (2004), the avenues of democratic participation are open; the parent governors were able to initiate discussions, or contribute to them, ask questions, request information and challenge the headteacher. However, there were roadblocks which prevented this. In the context of the present research, governing bodies *must* have parent representation and these members *must* vote to formalise decision making. They, therefore, function in what might be called a 'coercive democracy.' They are, at the same time, an integral part of school governance while occupying the hinterland of irrelevancy. This then raises the question as to why they would continue being a governor. On the basis of how they contextualised their governor role, three schema were identified.

First, was the view that a passive parent governor role was an adjunct to that of the dominant headteacher. Justification for playing this role was based on the school being well run and the headteacher bore most responsibility for this. This was embedded in a framework of superior/ inferior educational knowledge. The headteacher possessed the former, the participants the latter. Here the participants continued their tenure of governorship on the basis of the legal requirement to have parent representation on boards of governance and decisions requiring formal ratification. This group I describe as 'compliant participants.'

Second, some participants recognised the disconnection between theory and practice. That is, they knew that they should play a central role in governance but did not, and resolved to extricate themselves at the earliest time. Only one of the ten participants resigned. This was due to a fractious relationship with their headteacher. However, others felt they would carry on until their term expired and then not to seek re-election. This group recognised that they played little part in decision making and accordingly believed there was no moral imperative for them to oversee accountability. This group were content to play a minor role and, as Dean et al. (2007) found, were capable of putting limits on themselves. Connolly and James (2011) argued that the attitudes and experiences governors bring with them will be central to how they play their role. This research does not dismiss this view but the participants' expectations of governance before taking office suggest their experiences of office, particularly their early ones, primarily shaped their attitude towards the execution of governance. I describe this group as, 'resigned participants'.

Third, some participants felt that they retained the potential to play an active role. This was justified on the basis that with the passage of time, acquisition of greater knowledge, confidence and experience might facilitate this. These were the new members. I describe these as, 'optimistic participants'.

These insights help explain why participants continue in office while knowing they play a minimal role in a coercive democracy. I believe this represents a theoretical contribution to the execution of school governance in a deprived community. I develop this in the next section.

## **6.6 Theoretical underpinning**

Research is based on theory (Flynn et al., 1990). The theoretical underpinning in this research is a structure which the researcher considers best explains the progression of the phenomena under study (Camp, 2001). As this thesis enters its final phase, it represents a starting point which could inform fresh research. Here I sketch out the theoretical underpinning which could be used by other researchers. I aim to develop an overarching framework which uses the participants' experiences to identify the most important building blocks which help explain their passive behaviour. Four concepts are identified and made explicit. These are professional closure, Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field, poverty and economic exclusion, and governance in a neoliberal state.

### **Professional closure**

Social organisations often exhibit bureaucratic characteristics with control invested in a small number of well informed and knowledgeable individuals (Weber, 1968; Michels, 1959). This can enable the organisation's key figures to dominate (Harrits, 2014; Foucault, 1972; Weber, 1968). Governors are required to attend three meetings each year. The headteacher's governor role is part of their full-time job and as school leader they are on the school premises each day. The headteacher has considerable education knowledge, power and authority at their disposal which can be a strong basis to exert their dominance and weaken the governor agency (Young, 2017; Harris, 2014). The participants in this research were subservient to the headteacher. Professional closure describes how the dominant members of an organisation can exert their authority and limit the agency of other members (Weber, 1968). It helps explain the conduct of the boards of governance in this research.

Weber's (1961) analysis of organisational behaviour was based on the drive for efficiency which he argued depended on the separation of roles. When applied to this research the decision-makers (governors) know about the values and objectives of school governance, while the expert (headteacher) possesses

knowledge of the organisation's regulations and also the skills to implement policy. Applying Machiavellian theory (Sundell and Lapuente, 2012) to this contemporary school governance, when the adviser (headteacher) has the same knowledge as the rulers (school governors) they are positioned to fulfil an advisory *and* educational role and act in a dominant manner.

Bourdieu (1987) recognised that the combination of expert knowledge and superior professional status could be used to exert significant force and control. Bourdieu's theory of social capital helps to explain why the parent governors in this research played a limited school governance role. Bourdieu emphasised the significance of structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources. This research found significant disparity in the professional/amateur status, knowledge, authority and confidence in the headteacher-governor relationship. All participants in this research were in paid employment and four of the ten had been to university. Yet, despite this, all were passive governors.

Bourdieu (1987) showed that individuals are able to accrue social capital through achieving positions of power and status such as headteacher. This can help us understand the power relations in everyday contexts (Power, 1999). For the headteacher to dominate, it is necessary that all parties recognise the validity of the established norms, values and attitudes which imbue them with the mechanisms with which they are able to control the behaviour of others. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of habitus includes the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and predilections that the individual accumulates through their life experiences. It can help explain why the participants in this study were subservient and conformed to established and robust patterns of behaviour, resulting in their passivity.

### **Poverty and economic exclusion**

In 1845, Disraeli (1845) drew attention to a Victorian Britain divided by economic inequality and social injustice consisting of:

*two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if*

*they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets...the rich and the poor* (Disraeli, 1845, p.60).

Poverty in contemporary Britain is more nuanced. Yet the relative gulf between individuals and communities positioned at the extremes of the socio-economic divide remain as unbridgeable as they did one hundred and seventy years ago.

Poverty and deprivation in the South Wales valleys is chronic and ingrained (Adamson and Bromiley, 2013). The likelihood that this might change was, in December 2017, dashed by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body of the Department for Education). All members resigned in protest at what they saw as a lack of progress towards creating a fairer nation. The chairperson's resignation letter to the prime minister was stark, commenting that the Government was incapable of delivering an equal society:

*Whole communities and parts of Britain are being left behind economically and hollowed out socially. The growing sense that we have become an 'us' and 'them' society is deeply corrosive of our cohesion as a nation* (Austin, 2017).

The issue of poverty and social exclusion is central for this study. The governors in this research are charged with oversight of education where they must compete for pupils in an imperfect market while simultaneously protecting the interests of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families and their children (Ball, 2018; Burgess et al., 2015). This, it was shown, significantly affects how they executed their governor role. Dai, acknowledged the extra funding his school received from the Welsh Government because of their Community First status, but felt it was insufficient to address the entire range of problems his school experienced,

### **Governance in a neoliberal state**

Over the past four decades, UK state educational provision has been shaped by the economic ideology of neoliberalism. Its defining characteristics when applied to education is that schools are run as businesses subject to competition and the market (Connell, 2013; Thody, 1994). Significantly, its application to contemporary education and school governance has abandoned the notion of fairness and



replaced it with efficiency as embodied in standards of pupil attainment (Sen, 2010). That is, schools have adopted a capitalist business model of education. The parent governors in this research serve deprived schools in deprived communities. As noted above, they are required to compete for pupils while being unable to use the lure of high standards of attainment. Simultaneously, they must ensure that their pupils are not further disadvantaged and that they receive the support that they are entitled to, to mitigate against the worst effects of deprivation.

To summarise, the theoretical underpinning places the parent governors at the heart of this framework. Despite having the opportunity to play a major role, they did not. Several factors appeared significant in the passivity. This section draws together the building blocks which create the theoretical underpinning.

Professional closure describes the mechanics whereby the headteacher controlled meetings. Bourdieu's social capital is accrued by individuals through achieving positions of power and status. The behaviour of the participants suggests their past experiences were able to show that they recognised and conformed to pre-existing patterns of behaviour in everyday contexts. Poverty and school governance in a neoliberal state drew attention to the difficulties the participants in this research encountered as they executed their governor role.

## **6.7 Suggestions for professional practice**

Significant benefits accrue to a board of governors which is capable (Ranson, 2011; Balarin et al., 2008; Dean et al., 2007; Ranson et al., 2005). In Wales, individual governing bodies have been made responsible for raising standards and improving accountability (Wilkins and Gobby, 2020; Farrell, 2014). However, increasingly, school effectiveness has become defined in terms of attainment standards (Rees and Taylor, 2014). For over a decade, the Wales's PISA measures have been used to present Welsh education as underachieving (Farrell, 2014). Evidence suggests that Welsh education is in a better state than is ordinarily acknowledged. Rees and Taylor (2014) argued that PISA has significant limitations, and that 65% of Welsh parents were 'very satisfied' with primary education.

The suggestions for professional practice which follow stem from the premise that the Welsh Government requires parent governors to be at the heart of school governance. Presently, Welsh school governance is in the throes of major restructuring, specifically making 'skills' the fundamental consideration for new governors. This thesis is capable of informing the restructuring process by making explicit how the parent governors in this research execute their role, highlighting the barriers which impede inclusivity. The director of education at Middleton council has requested an abridged copy of the completed thesis with the potential for it to inform their governor training programme. The Welsh Government has also shown an interest in the research. It is this request which might help inform the professional practice of school governance.

### **Prospective parent governors**

Prior to taking office the majority of participants had little idea what the parent governor role entailed. In office some of the participants appeared to express reservations that they had put themselves forward for office. These sentiments can be inferred from Owen's words.

This is a reprehensible state of affairs. First, it is wasteful of the governor's time. Second, it undermines the stakeholder conduct of school governance. In part, this situation arises from prospective governors having little idea about the conduct of meetings. To address this matter it is suggested that, when vacancies arise, prospective parent governors are able to attend a governor's meeting as an observer and to speak to governors informally to discuss the role. This would enable them to gain a sense of what governance involves. While some prospective governors would decide not to proceed, those who did would have insights into governance, otherwise unavailable.

### **Induction programme for new governors**

New governors were found to be particularly vulnerable to being marginalised. Nancy, speaking about attending her first meeting was overwhelmed by the responsibilities of office. The significance of the early experiences of governance is its association with long-term patterns of behaviour. Several factors were

identified which contributed to this situation. One such factor was that participants were unfamiliar with the procedures of governance. To address this, it is suggested that new governors have a formal, structured induction programme. This would include being formally introduced to other governors, and given a named Governor Training and Support Team contact to provide support and guidance.

The majority of participants said that they did not feel supported by the local authority (Appendix 4). However, while all participants were alerted to the support of the Governor Training and Support team, only two had contacted them. Their experiences were positive. Niki was one of these and she mentioned this to other governors. However, she believed no one had accessed this source of support.

This suggests that the Governor Training and Support team is a valuable and underutilised resource capable of playing a greater role in governor development. This resource should be developed. The measures outlined above would provide new governors with a basis to develop their governance skills in a structured manner.

### **The role of the headteacher**

The Welsh Government's restructuring of school governance remains committed to stakeholder principles while retaining the existing system where headteachers can elect to be a governor (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019). Their unique 'governor' and 'chief executive' role is one of ambiguity and latent unresolved tension. To address this matter, it is suggested that the mandatory governor training programme clearly delineate the role and powers of the headteacher as chief executive and as governor. It must also emphasise the Welsh Government's commitment to the principles of stakeholder governance

Governors are nominally supported by professions to develop their leadership and accountability role - the headteacher, Challenge Adviser, and Estyn (Welsh Government Consultation – Summary, 2019). The evidence suggests that, to date, this support is haphazard, unstructured and ineffective. It is suggested that the

relationship between these three sources of governor support are coordinated, formalised and subject to evaluation. At a time of major school governance restructuring in Wales, this could constitute a meaningful source of governor support.

### **Online training**

The time necessary to discharge their governor role was a problem for the majority of the research participants. At present governors are able to undertake their mandatory training online. Middleton council recognise that to play an informed governor role requires updating skills. To accommodate this, they arrange training courses. Nancy recognised the benefits that extra training would provide but presently, the time necessary proved prohibitive.

To reconcile these concerns, it is suggested that governors' in service training is conducted online. This would enable governors to access it at a time of their convenience and from home. As of Spring 2020, the Open University in Wales, in conjunction with the Welsh Government, started a programme to support school governors in Wales. This welcomed development coincided with the outbreak of Covid19 which has had a disrupting effect of all aspects of education, including school governance. To date, the effectiveness of the Open University programme is difficult to evaluate. However, the experience that the Open University has in the delivery of on line teaching is likely to be of significant value. It is therefore cautiously suggested that the Middleton Council Governor Training and Support team coordinate their work with the Open University to support governors and to help them play a significant governor role.

### **Dissemination**

This thesis is the result of four years of research and provides a detailed account of how primary school parent governors in a deprived South Wales community perceive and execute their role. The suggestions for professional practice discussed immediately above have the potential to improve governor agency: they are practical and can mostly be implemented through the existing governor mandatory training programme.

My immediate plan for dissemination is in the Welsh context. I have an ongoing professional relationship with the director of education in Middleton Council. At the beginning of this study, she showed an interest in my research, facilitated the recruitment of participants and requested an abridged copy of the completed thesis which might be used to inform the Council's mandatory governor training programme (Appendix 26).

There are many schools in Wales which serve a deprived community. For the governing bodies in these areas the findings of my research may have a particular relevance and be able to inform practice. The Welsh Government is currently in the process of restructuring school governance. Over the duration of this research I have received guidance and advice from the civil servants in the education department who, in response to my email of February 2021, asked that I forward an abridged copy of the complete thesis.

Finally, it is my intention to submit an article for consideration for publication to The University of Wales Journal of Education, an Open Access journal for researchers and policy makers. The journal explores a range of themes and subjects including educational inclusivity, poverty and deprivation and standards of attainment which accommodates the subject matter of my research.

## **6.8 Reflection: facing up to challenges of conducting research**

In the introductory chapter I discussed the challenges I anticipated I might encounter in the completion of this thesis and, through the process of researcher reflexivity, how I hoped to deal with them.

The fundamental question that the qualitative researcher must answer is on what basis can I and others have faith in the decisions I have made and the interpretations I have gained? The interpretivist researcher makes decisions at every corner. In this research I sought to make explicit my decisions and to justify them. Justifying my choice of methodology was relatively straightforward. There were decisions, however, which were more difficult to justify. When I worked on

the research findings the issue of which themes were sufficiently significant to be considered worthy of inclusion, discussion and interpreting was troublesome. Had I made a mistake by rejecting some at an early stage or included others which should not have been included? The consequences of doing this might have significantly affected the interpretations that I gained from the thematic analysis. I countered this by continually reflecting on this matter and retracing my steps if I felt that I had made a mistake.

A related issue was the difference between what the participant said and the meaning I extracted from it. A verbatim transcription does not capture facial expressions, tone of voice or other nonverbal communication clues. Reviewing audio transcriptions did not always clarify matters. In several cases I contacted the participants to clarify matters. In a broader context I used the criteria to determine the level of research trustworthiness through reflexivity which is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis (Patnaik, 2013).

For those researchers who wish to generate theory, qualitative research is problematic for the reasons of predictability and replication (Collins and Stockton, 2018). For those, like myself, this is less troublesome because I accept that my research is a snapshot at a specific time only. As I have demonstrated above, I have provided a framework for other researchers in the area to use by connecting my data analysis to my literature review and providing a theoretical underpinning for similar research. I have also made several important points to enhance governor practise. However, to be able to do so demands strict methodological procedures which must be employed and made explicit (Patnaik, 2013).

## **6.9 Limitations of the research**

This research has a number of limitations. Central to any research is the sample. Often the size of the sample in qualitative research is given insufficient attention. A sample too small cannot support any claims made; too large and it may impede the depth of understanding which is the main reason for using a qualitative approach (Sandelowski, 1995).

As described in Chapter 4, the sample was largely self-selecting – 17/120 parent governors of Community First primary schools, who came forward in response to a request from the local authority school governance support team. The weakness of this approach was that the sample was not randomly selected. My sample consisted of ten parent governors out of one hundred and twenty, who were available and willing to talk about their experiences and opinions (Palinkas et al., 2015)..This had the advantage of being amenable to gaining a diverse range of perspectives and a deep understanding of the behaviour patterns of the parent governors. To strengthen claims of research rigour I provided explicit description of the procedures used.

The Welsh Government sees governor involvement and effectiveness as mutually inclusive (Wales Government, 2018a). That is stakeholder model was well able to achieve high standards of accountability and pupil attainment. The driving force throughout this research has been the degree of adherence to stakeholder governance as prescribed by the Welsh Government. The participants' responses suggest that a 'good' or 'bad' school is judged on pupil attainment and the quality of the schools' inspection report. In this respect arguably it may be that the stakeholder governance is not the most effective way of achieving these benchmarks.

The view that participation is always good is not unchallenged (Bell et al., 2012). In this research 'good' practices of governance were framed in terms of inclusive governance as 'superior' to exclusive governance. The merits of alternative approaches are frequently overlooked. Thus, Derrida (Stocker, 2006) noted the tendency to ignore the merits of what are thought to be 'inferior' qualities. While it is often assumed that motivation is a strong basis for participation, Sternberg (2005) concluded that the entitlement aspect of stakeholder governance, where categories of governor must feature, can contribute to weakening the organisation. This might be by (a) 'looking out for number one', (b) standing in the way of progress, and (c) fear of failure. This research found no evidence of the first two of these although Ranson et al. (2005) reported that a small number of parents become governors for personal or parochial reasons. However, I did gain some evidence to support the third motivation, that is, fear of making bad decisions.

The limitations of the stakeholder and skills model of governance were discussed in the literature review chapter. There the tensions between the boards of governors and, in an educational context, the headteacher and accountability matter were discussed. The internal accountabilities demanded of schools by central government, the local authority, parents and the community must be simultaneously accommodated while maintaining organisational efficiency (Simkins, 2003). Regardless of their constituency, governors are appointed or elected to govern the school in the best interest of pupils (National Governance Association, 2019a). However, the members of the board of governors are likely to be pulled in different directions and there will be friction between members who have different priorities and alliances which can be a source of ongoing tension:

*The search for modes of organisation that retain the core professional values while meeting external demands for effective and efficient management will be a key challenge of the coming years (Simkins, 2003, p. 230).*

The findings of this research support Simkins's (2003) observations that the competing demands of school governance are difficult to accommodate. In this context alternative models such as Carver's Policy Governance (Carver, 2001) appear attractive. For a system where governors make decisions while empowering the headteacher to achieve them within defined areas with clear lines of accountability is clearly attractive. The Welsh Government's proposed restructuring of school governance attempts to synthesise the stakeholder and skills models. Research suggest that the pluralism of stakeholder governance and the selective nature of the skills based model are incompatible (Olmedo and Wilkins, 2017; Connolly et al., 2017). When schools are perceived as best governed by members who possess certain skills, the lay parent governor has little to offer (Connell, 2013; Thody, 1994). In this context an alternative model of school governance may seem attractive. The weaknesses of Policy Governance as discussed in the literature review chapter however, are not insignificant.

Having discussed the limitations of this study, I shall now identify and discuss areas where further research could profitably build upon this research.



## 6.10 Suggestions for further research

The scope of this research was narrow and a comprehensive understanding of how parent governors contribute to school governance is still lacking. There are several research areas which could build upon the findings in this research to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

First, a more comprehensive study would include a larger random sample. This could explore the demographic characteristics of parent governors in Community First schools. All the research participants in this study were in some form of paid employment and four were university graduates. Given the socio-economic demographics of the geographic research site (see Chapter 2, The Policy Context), this was unexpected and untypical, albeit consistent with other findings (Balarin et al., 2008; Ranson et al., 2005). This raises the question of how representative were the participants of the population of parent governors in Community First schools in Middleton Council, and what conclusions can be drawn from this. Is it likely that those who volunteered to take part were among the most articulate and confident of the 120 approached. Research to explore this could identify the factors which promoted or impeded individuals from putting themselves forward for office. If the majority of parent governors were in paid employment this would suggest that parents who were unemployed or on benefits were significantly less likely to (a) put their name forward for office, or (b) if they did, were less likely to be elected.

The barriers to achieve this aim, however, are significant. The local education authority alone has knowledge of its school governors, their status (elected, co-opted, nominated), their terms of office and their contact details. A researcher conducting new lines of inquiry could only proceed with local authority support. As a researcher I believed the co-operation I received from local authority ended up with a relatively small number of participants. However, another researcher, operating in the same way as you, would not necessarily achieve a larger sample? Also see my suggested wording in the next sentence. While a larger sample would increase the number of participants, it might not significantly increase the

socio-economic diversity of the sample, though it could widen the range of experience of the participants involved.

This research confirmed that the headteacher was the dominant governor. Several factors contribute to this. First, they occupied a unique position in terms of policy formulation and its implementation. In line with previous research the degree of governance inclusivity appears to depend on how the headteacher perceives and executes their role in terms of promoting inclusivity (Young, 2014; Earley, 2000). This thesis does not engage with multifaceted data. It is an exploration of how parent governors perceived and executed their governor role. Frequent mention was made to the headteacher and less so to the chair of governors. However, their views were not solicited. The findings in this research depict the headteacher through the prism of the participants' accounts. I have no reason to think the participants were less than honest. However, while several expressed negative views about how they interpreted the headteacher's behaviour, no headteacher was interviewed. As Earley and Weindling (2004) note even the most 'governor friendly' head may have good reason to reject a governors' request for increased involvement. Much uncertainty still exists about the relationship between governors and the headteacher. Research into the headteacher's perceptions of governance in relation to other governors could provide valuable insights into how they perceived and conducted their role. In this context, issues which appear particularly worthy of investigation are those of power, status, knowledge and confidence which were found to impede governor involvement.

Stemming from this, is the role and importance of the chair in school governance and their relationship with the headteacher. The accounts presented in this research paid little attention to other categories of governor. The majority of participants said it was the headteacher who controlled the meeting, not the chair who is formally charged with this responsibility. However, ordinarily the chair plays a major role in the conduct of school governance (Balarin et al., 2008; Farrell and Law, 1999). Research, specifically into how chairs in state schools in Wales conducted their role, would shed light on certain aspects of school governance. Thus it could provide valuable insights into how they perceived their role in relation to other governors and specifically the headteacher. In Wales, chairs must

undergo training. What they thought of this in terms of fulfilling their duties in line with the specific aims of the training programme would be informative.

In a broader context a case study where a specific school was the research focus and where the headteacher, parent, staff and local authority governors were involved would provide valuable insights into the perceptions and execution of school governance from different perspectives. A possible drawback to such an approach is the issue of anonymity and the degree of candour the participants might be prepared to exhibit, being aware that such research would be deposited in the public domain. This issue, however, is not necessarily insurmountable as I Young's (2014) research suggested.

Finally, the informal aspects of school governance appear poorly researched yet the findings of this research highlight their importance. It was shown that some governors appeared to conduct governance on an informal basis such as speaking to the headteacher before or after meetings. This suggests that issues of power, control, status and authority permeate all aspects of school governance. Research which explored these informal issues of decision making would add to our understanding of these important matters.

### **6.11 Personal reflections on my experiences over the duration of the research**

The four years I have spent working on this research has been a veritable roller coaster ride. During this time there were hesitations, stumbles, frustrations and more than anything else, the misapprehension that much of my work was not good enough. This was interspersed with moments of pleasure and satisfaction, realising I had learned much, and the thought I might be able to complete a worthy thesis.

What I most valued about conducting this research was its reinforcement of my belief that a qualitative research method yields important and valuable insights o quantitative researchers. Also, while ensuring my representation of the participants and their story was anchored in the something the researcher and participants

recognise as true, I strove to ensure my portrayal of them was rooted in their words and that my interpretation could be defended and justified as an honest re-creation.

The completion of this thesis reinforced certain attitudes and views I held and challenged quite fundamentally other views that I held and opened up areas of significance that I had no appreciation of. During the research, I also became more aware of the structural inequalities in society that stood in the way of pupils from poor families being able to break free of the constraints which held them in check.

At the beginning of this thesis I set out the personal and professional goals I hoped to achieve by successfully completing the thesis. On a personal basis I said that I hoped it would equip me with a valuable set of research skills and that gaining an EdD degree would be a great personal achievement. I believe that over the last four years I have grown in confidence as a researcher. The skills that I have gained are extensive. Advances in computer software to aid academic writing and the research process have been breath taking. Word processing, reference management software tools, and qualitative data analysis software are three skills I have gained some competence in. My interviewing skills improved enormously

I see my educational journey in terms of claiming my authenticity. This does not require exceptional effort or achievement. Rather it entails a shift in attention and engagement, a reclaiming of oneself, from the way we ordinarily fall into our everyday ways of being (Heidegger, 1978).

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the conduct of school governance in a deprived community, specifically the parental contribution in this process. School governors perform a crucial role in the exercise of civic participation and representative democracy. This thesis makes suggestions so that their voice is able to be at the heart of school governance.

## **6.12 Coda: Covid19 and its implications for this thesis**

This thesis was written at a time, Spring through Autumn 2020, of national emergency as the Covid19 virus resulted in the closure of UK state schools. Several issues which emerged from the pandemic have relevance for themes central to this research. This includes poverty, educational inequality, implementation of policy and the demands placed on individual members of boards of governors.

The findings of this research into how socio-economic deprivation affected the parent governors' perceptions and execution of governance found that the scale of poverty within their schools was so great that it required Welsh Government intervention. In July 2019, the Wales Assembly Government (2019) introduced the Holiday Hunger Play works Pilot (HHPP). This extended the provision of food in areas with high levels of deprivation where the risk of hunger was greatest (Welsh Government, 2019a). In February 2020, the Welsh Government (2020) announced that the scheme would be rolled out over Wales from Easter 2020 to February half term 2021

The Welsh Government was the first country in the UK to guarantee ongoing funding for children to continue to receive free school meals during the coronavirus pandemic (Welsh Government, 2020c). It announced that those pupils entitled to free school meals would be entitled to them throughout the summer holidays. Eligible children would continue to receive free school meals, money, or vouchers for food until the end of August, or when schools reopened. This eligibility was the equivalent of £19.50 a week under the £33 million scheme.

A recurring theme in this thesis was that pupils from poor families have, over a prolonged period, not been well served by the educational system (Egan, 2017; Ball, 2013). The participants in this study were powerless to change this in their governor role. The educational impact of the Covid19 pandemic showed how educationally, in times of crisis, it was the pupils and schools in the most deprived areas which suffered greatest. Forced to work from home, the vulnerability of pupils from disadvantaged homes was laid bare. England's Ofsted's Chief

Inspector, Amanda Spielman, commented that it would be the poorest and lowest achieving children who would suffer the most (Forrest, 2020). The same applied to pupils in Wales (Anon, 2020).

The Sutton Trust reported that 30% of pupils from poorer homes lacked access to electronic learning, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). By early May 2020, 51% of primary pupils and 57% of secondary pupils in private schools had accessed online lessons every day; more than double their counterparts in state schools. However, for state schools there is also a disparity with children from middle class homes much more likely to have taken part (30%) at least once a day compared with 16% of working-class children (Cullinane and Montacute, 2020). The parent governors in this research will have a disproportionately high number of pupils in their schools who have had no teaching for several months.

There is little doubt that governors of schools located in deprived areas face additional pressures compared with those in more prosperous areas. However, the link between poverty and pupil attainment is not deterministic and schools in deprived areas have much to offer and can achieve high standards of pupil attainment (Balarin et al., 2008). Research conducted for the Department for Education by the National Federation for Educational Research (Department of Education, 2015) involving disadvantaged pupils in English schools found that schools can be agents of change, capable of breaking the link between disadvantage and performance (Roberts, 2018). A wealth of research supports this finding and several factors appear key in raising standards and aspirations in schools located in deprived areas. Of paramount importance is a capable governing body (Ranson, 2011; Balarin et al., 2008; Dean et al., 2007; Ranson et al., 2005). Specifically is the quality of leadership where headteachers and school governors have expectations of high pupil attainment, a commitment to good teaching, pupil attendance and behaviour (Roberts, 2018; House of Commons Library, 2017; Hopkins, 2013; Oswald and Engelbrecht, 2013; Harris, 2002). Further, clarity about lines of accountability, roles and responsibilities is an essential part of effective governance (Ofsted, 2016). The Welsh Government, recognising that the quality of school leadership is crucial to create an environment

conducive to learning has, since 2005 made it a statutory requirement for school leaders who are, or are aspiring to be, a headteacher to hold the National Professional Qualification for Headship. Further, the Welsh Government's proposed changes to the restructuring of school governance recognises there is capacity for improvement in all schools.

Alongside the quality of leadership, parental and community participation in the life of schools in disadvantaged areas has been shown to have many benefits including improving attendance and behaviour, and establishing the domestic conditions which are essential for achievement (James et al., 2006; Henderson and Mapp, 2002). the majority of parents want a say in their child's school, and schools can gain much from parental input, support and engagement with their child's school (House of Commons Library, 2017). Recognising this, the Welsh Government champions the school-community relationship as a means to promote engagement and attainment (Wales, 2018a). The Welsh Government takes into account the effect socio-economic disadvantage may have on attainment standards and schools are judged in part on their capacity for improvement. In this context the schools in this study received additional resources to compensate for the additional pressures they face.

The post 1945 history of education in England and Wales has been one where inequalities of class and race remain entrenched (Ball, 2016; Ball, 2013; Reay and Ball, 1997). Governors of schools located in deprived areas throughout the UK will, like the governors in this research, have to compete for pupils while simultaneously protecting the interests of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families and their children (Ball, 2018; Olmedo and Wilkins, 2016; Burgess et al., 2015). The recognition that such a situation exists but is not deterministic is reason for cautious optimism.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Biographical details

One's formative years are not deterministic in how individuals construct their identity. However, it does have a strong bearing on how I construct my social, economic and political identity. This may be inferred from the values and institutions I hold dear. These are associated with working-class improvement and the belief that these institutions have improved the quality of life for a majority of people, including myself. This includes trade unionism, the Cooperative movement, state education, the National Health Service, progressive taxation and the state ownership of what were called the public corporations. What follows is a brief account of my early life. This provides an insight into the circumstances which have helped shape both my 'view of the world' and my role of social researcher.

I was born in 1950 in Rhondda, South Wales, twenty miles from the capital city of Cardiff. The coal mining industry, the reason for the 18th and 19th century mass inward migration of labour, was in terminal decline through the process of structural unemployment. Unemployment, by national standards, was high. Poverty was everywhere and to some extent became normalised. However, my childhood was blighted because my father had been a prisoner of war whose mental health was ever fragile. Adam Smith (1776) wrote:

*A man must always live by his work, and his wages must at least be sufficient to maintain him (p.85-86).*

However, for considerable periods of time my father was unable to work and our family's impoverishment was exacerbated. Our rented accommodation consisted of two damp, cockroach infested cellar rooms. Educationally I attended the local primary school and at the age of 11 failed the eleven plus examination. Those who passed the examination were ushered to the grammar school. My education continued at a Secondary Modern, a co-educational school for pupils aged 11 to 15. Long lasting friendships were fractured. Aged fifteen I left school with no examinations.

For several years I worked in low paid jobs, factories, shops, building sites, driving. Aged 22, married with a young family, my wife and I were able to buy a cheap terraced house which, with a council grant, was renovated. At this time my enduring love affair with education began. I worked as a local authority refuse collector and later a bulldozer driver on a council landfill site. Over the previous two years I had studied evening classes at a local college of Further education. Desperate to 'better' myself, optimistically I wrote to the council personnel officer, requesting the same day release study facilities as were enjoyed by its clerical staff. To my amazement and eternal gratitude, they agreed to my request. Four days each week I drove a bulldozer on a landfill site; the fifth day I studied for an Ordinary National Certificate in Public Administration and was awarded the prize for best student. This was due to effort and resolve.

At age 26, I started as a full time B.A. (Hons) Humanities student at the Polytechnic of Glamorgan (now university of South Wales). Following this, I gained a Postgraduate Certificate in Education from the South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education (now Cardiff Metropolitan University) where I was awarded a distinction in practical teaching.

I began my teaching career in 1980. However, the Education Act 1980 was introduced at a time of falling school rolls and stringent economic constraints (Stillman, 1986). After three years of supply teaching, being unable to secure a full-time post, I returned to study, gaining an M.Sc. (Econ) degree at Cardiff University. I then taught for 20 years in two primary schools. Towards the end of this period, suffering severe and chronic depression and anxiety, I retired on medical advice.

Around this time my love affair with the Open University began. Because of mental ill health, I was unable to attend face to face tuition. However, study with the Open University accommodated this problem. To date, I have studied for thirteen consecutive years with the O.U. Over this period, I have successfully completed two undergraduate courses in politics, one in philosophy and one in religious studies; five modules in the M.Ed. programme, and, over the last four years, studied for an Ed.D. I hereby declare my enormous debt to the O.U.

## **Appendix 2. A longitudinal overview on the inspection reports for XXX Primary school, 2005, 2011, 2017**

May 2005 -

XXXXXXXXX Primary School is a community primary school.

The area is economically deprived, with 78% of pupils qualifying for free school meals, a figure much higher than the national average.

The Welsh Assembly Government has designated the locality as a Community First area.

Around 56% of pupils have special educational needs (SEN), which is high in comparison with national averages.

**May 2011-**

The area has high unemployment and 77% of families within the school are from homes where no adult works.

Seventy-six percent of pupils receive free school meals which is significantly above the local and national averages.

Fifty-seven percent of pupils are considered to have some degree of additional learning needs (ALN).

**October 2017 –**

Approximately 70% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is much higher than the average for Wales.

The school identifies that around 68% of pupils have additional learning needs. This is significantly higher than the national average of 25%.

Around 12% of these pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

### Appendix 3. Key words and terms used in the literature review

<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Accountability</b>	<b>Governor training</b>	<b>School-community - deprivation</b>	<b>Personal qualities</b>
Leadership meaning representation	Definition of--parents-local authority- WAG-inspectorate	Knowledge of governor responsibilities	WAG legislation-school-community relationship	Reasons for becoming a governor
Headteacher's role	Hold the head to account? How?	Training, useful – how School standards Mentoring	Community spirit-values/history Community First-Community use of school premises-Community/ school extended families	Qualities needed good listener-independent mind-speak your mind- common sense-Deference
Chairperson-their role dominant governors	Educational knowledge and accountability		Socio-economic disadvantage-Poverty in the community-unemployment-free school meals-breakfast club	Good school-definition
Participant leadership?	Judged by pupil attainment PISA rankings			
Definition of a good school. - PISA rankings	School budget			

## Appendix 4. Structured questionnaire, presenting the broad demographic characteristics of the participants

Parent school governor-what's your perspective?

\*Questions 4 to 17 inclusive give the number of participants who expressed the specific response.

Dear parent governor, thank you for taking part in my research. As you know I am a student with the Open University, and I am interested in what parent governors think about being a governor. Before we meet again perhaps you could look at the questions below and put a circle around the answer which best describes you. Please bring this questionnaire with you to our meeting. In any report, names of participants will be anonymised.

Thank you, XXXXXX  
Telephone - XXXXXXXX  
Email-XXXX

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your age	e.g. 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 45-50, 51 +
1. Number of children you have or are guardian to who attend your school.	
2. Length of time you have been parent school governor in your present school.	_____Years    ____months
3. Employment	(a) In full time employment, (b) In part time employment (16 hours or less a week), (c) not in paid employment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4. I have enough time to be a governor.	1	2	5	2
5. I enjoy being a school governor.	4	3	3	0
6. As a new governor, I received help and support from other governors.	0	3	4	3
7. I know what school leadership means.	3	4	2	1
8. I know what school accountability means.	2	5	2	1
9. My school governor training helped me to be effective.	2	3	3	2
10. I feel well supported by the Local Authority Government and Support team.	2	2	4	2
11. In governor meetings, I raise issues which are not on the agenda.	2	2	4	2
12. I feel confident speaking to the Headteacher about issues other parents have raised with me.	2	3	3	2
13. I spend time in school other than during governor meetings.	0	3	3	4
14. I know about Community First	9	1	0	0
15. I know roughly how many pupils are eligible for Free School Meals.	5	5	0	0
16. I discuss school matters with other parents through social media.	2	3	3	2
17. I discuss school matters with other parents at the school gates.	6	3	1	0

## Appendix 5. Semi structured questionnaire

Parent governor-what's *your* perspective?

Dear parent governor, thank you for taking part in my research. As you know I am a student with the Open University, researching what parent governors think about being a governor. Before we meet again perhaps you could look at the questions below and jot down things that occur to you. Please bring this questionnaire with you to our meeting. In any report, names of participants will be made anonymous.

Thank you, XXXXX

Telephone - XXXXXX

(Please note greater space was given for the participants to jot down their thoughts in the questionnaire distributed).

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. Being a school governor is an important job. What do you think being a good governor means and involves?
2. The headteacher has to make many decisions about the school. What does school leadership mean to you?
3. There are different ways to contribute to school leadership. Can you think of ways you have contributed?
4. (a) Would you like to become more involved in making decisions about the schools? (b) If so, what changes would help you do so?
5. As a parent governor, how would you pass on the views and concerns of other parents?
6. The governors are responsible for the decisions it makes about the school. What does being held accountable for these decisions mean to you?
7. There are different ways governors are made to account for their decisions about school. Can you think of ways in which you have contributed to school accountability?



8. In what ways has the training and support you received to become a governor been useful in making decisions about your school? Can you tell me about it?
9. (a) Has the training and support affected how you think about whom you represent? (b) If so, can you tell me about it?
10. (a) Has how you think about being a governor and what the role involves changed since you were first appointed? (b) If so, can you tell me about it?
11. The term 'local community' can mean different things. Can you tell me what the term 'local community' mean to you?
12. Your school is in a Community First area, can you tell what do you know about Community First?
13. Your school is in a deprived area. What does this mean to you?
14. In what ways has deprivation affected how you conduct your parent governor role? Can you tell me about it?

## **Appendix 6. Template for Semi Structured Interview Main Study – 14 April 2019 to 4 June 2019.**

Welcome the participants - thank them for their participation – remind them it is likely to last no longer than 40 minutes - remind them their views, experiences etc. they express will be treated in strict confidence - ask in general terms about the questionnaires they completed prior to the interview.

1. What do you think being a good governor means and involves?
2. As a parent governor, how would you pass on the views and concerns of other parents?
3. What does school leadership mean to you?
4. There are different ways to contribute to school leadership. Can you think of ways you have contributed.
5. Would you like to become more involved in making decisions about the schools? If so, what changes would help you do so?
6. The governors are responsible for the decisions it makes about the school. What does being held accountable for these decisions mean to you?
7. There are different ways governors are made to account for their decisions about school. Can you think of ways in which you have contributed to school accountability?
8. The governors are responsible for the decisions it makes about the school. What does being held accountable for these decisions mean to you?
9. In what ways has the training and support you received to become a governor been useful in making decisions about your school? Can you tell me about it?
10. Has governor training and support affected how you think about whom you represent? If so, can you tell me about it?
11. Has how you think about being a governor and what the role involves changed since you were first appointed? If so, can you tell me about it?
12. Can you tell me what the term 'local community' mean to you?
13. The term 'local community' can mean different things. What does it mean to you Your school is in a deprived area. What does this mean to you?
14. Your school is in a Community First area, can you tell what do you know about Community First?

15. In what ways has deprivation affected how you conduct your parent governor role? Can you tell me about it?

Appendix 7. Excerpt from research diary re interview with 'Nancy'-  
overview

Interview with ~~XXXX~~ "NANCY" Date - 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021  
OUBK 18w Duration of meeting 28 mins

Met Nancy at 10 am. in her house. Immediate impression was that she was very thoughtful. She thought before she answered questions.

She lives with her husband and two children. They both worked full time. Before deciding to become a P.G. she researched what was involved - on-line. She was elected at the same time as another P.G. - both unopposed.

Nancy was not very confident - she admitted. This she said had held her back. She hadn't really contributed to meet up. She said that she hoped, with time, that this would change.

Speaking of what she lived, & her identity was central through this. She was concerned about the poverty in the area and thought that was the biggest issue facing the school. She was able to pick her children up from school each day and this helped her talk to other parents about school matters.

Leadership & Accessibility - Nancy had a good idea what was involved with these aspects - thanks to her TRAINER. But even so she said she hadn't contributed to either. She knew a lot about Community Firsts - her sister worked in a P.E. school - Nancy was very concerned with how school attainment had become so important. She was worried about the mental health of the children & some of the parents.

She received a lot of help from her parents - they played a big part of their grandkids lives. She was also a member of the school P.T.A. She said that she got more pleasure out of this v.s. a v.i. being a governor.

Nancy thought that she wasn't treated with the respect &

**Appendix 8. Excerpt from research diary re interview with 'Nancy' - leadership and accountability**

NANCY

Interview with ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Date: 25th May 2019  
Duration: 28 mins.

<u>Topic</u>	<u>NOTES</u>
<u>Leadership + Accountability</u>	How defined - changed over time - in light of TRAINING. May be limited ROLE? CONFIDENCE   Knowledge
<u>HEADTEACHER</u>	Strong willed - knows their stuff - doesn't like to be questioned.
<u>Chair.</u>	largely passive // works in tandem with the Head teacher. // spends a lot of time in school
<u>Examples of LEADERSHIP ACC.</u>	Voting // seconding. NOT REALLY involved. // Time constraints FAMILY WORK
<u>Relationship with PARENTS.</u>	Social media   School gates // reluctant to take up issues on their behalf.
<u>Summary.</u>	Nancy wants to play a more involved governance role. She doesn't at the moment. Lack of confidence and feels she lacks knowledge. Better work time this may change. Relationship with the Headteacher 'critical'. But thanks to Chair + H. sorts things out BEFOREHAND listen to AUDIO + questions about incident + EMAIL.

## Appendix 9. Excerpt from research diary – ‘Nancy’

‘Nancy’ was very thoughtful. She worked part time (her husband full time) and had two children in the school where she was a parent governor. Before she decided to apply to be a parent governor, she researched what it entailed on line. This was unique. She was elected a parent governor by default as she was the only candidate. Not a naturally confident person, Nancy realised that she would need to develop her governor skills. An active member of the school parent teacher association she said at present she felt she made a bigger contribution in this role rather than her governor role. As a new governor she was buddied by an experienced governor and she felt this had been beneficial. She said the informal aspects of governance – the alliances, pecking order had taken time to learn. She was concerned about the time involved in school governance but received considerable help from her parents in child care and they frequently took and collected her children and helped with home tasks. When interviewed, her children were being cared for by her parents. Nancy identified with the area in which she lived. It contributed to her identity. She thought of herself as a XXX girl. She spoke of the benefits of living in a close community where, family and friends could be relied to help in picking up children etc. Her sister lived in Cardiff, about XXX miles away and Nancy said she did not have this community spirit which she thought was a disadvantage.

## **Appendix 10. My email to the director of education requesting permission to contact parent governors**

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017

To XXXXXXXXXXXX

Director, Education & Lifelong Learning

From

Tel XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Email XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Dear Ms. XXXXXX

I write to you concerning my Doctor of Education research with the Open University. I am researching parent-school governors in XXXX primary schools to discover their experiences and perceptions of this vital role. I hope to discover why they became parent governors, what they get out of their roles, and what they contribute to school governance.

I wish to speak to twelve to fourteen parent-school governors who would be prepared to do this, in early 2018. Their participation, of course, would be entirely voluntary and a commitment would be given to adhering to the highest ethical standards. Thus, the research findings will make no mention of the specific local authority where the research has taken place, nor the participants or the schools. Before I begin my research, I must gain approval from the Open University Ethics committee. This involves detailed and robust scrutiny of the proposed research to ensure it conforms to the highest ethical standards. Please find attached copies of participant information I intend to use (Appendices 2-4).

As the Welsh Education Minister has intimated that the number of parent-school governors is to be increased, my research findings may be particularly relevant for RCT governor training and support purposes. At its completion, I would, of course, present a copy of the research to the XXXXX and be prepared to discuss its findings.

It would be unethical for me to contact parent-school governors without permission from XXXX and consequently I respectfully ask for this permission. I would, of course, be happy to speak to you regarding any aspect of my research.

Yours faithfully,

Allan Meredith

## Appendix 11. Initial letter approaching participants to take part in the research

Open University Faculty of Wellbeing and Education

DATE

Dear Parent School Governor,

I enclose further details of my EdD research on Primary school parent governors. I am undertaking this research at the Open University, under the supervision of Dr. David Plowright, who can be contacted at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

You expressed an interest in being involved in this study and, consequently, I include a participant information sheet which gives you a fuller description and information regarding the purpose of the research and your involvement in it. If having read this information you are happy to take part in the research I would be most grateful if you could sign the attached consent form and return it to me (a stamped address envelope is enclosed). I will then contact you via telephone or email to arrange an acceptable time and venue where the interview can take place. I would like to conduct two interviews with you. The dates and location can be agreed. Each interview is likely to last 30-40 minutes.

The areas to be discussed are detailed in the enclosed attachment. I believe the research study has the potential to add to the state of knowledge about school parent governors, especially as there has been relatively little research conducted in this area. In practical terms, it has the potential to understand the perceptions and experiences of school parent governors which RCT Council have told me may be useful in their governor training and support programme. Your assistance in participating in my research is appreciated. If you require further information, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

XXXXXX

Telephone XXXXX Email- XXXXXXXXXXX



## Appendix 12. Participant consent form

Open University, Faculty of Wellbeing and Education

Title of Study: The perceptions and experiences of primary school parent governors in socio/economic deprived communities

Researcher: XXXXXXXXXXXX

Please tick either the YES or NO below

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. YES NO

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, and that this will not affect my legal rights.

YES NO

I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymized and remain confidential. YES NO

I understand the need for confidentiality, and that I will not discuss the content of my interviews with any other person being interviewed. YES NO

I confirm that I agree to be interviewed and understand that this interview will be tape-recorded. This will be kept until the research is complete and then destroyed. You will be told when research is complete. Only I will have access to the transcripts, which will be encrypted and kept under lock and key and only I have access to them. YES NO

I understand that 'direct quotations' made during my interview may be used in research reports, but that these will be anonymized and not traceable to myself or my school. YES NO

I agree to take part in the above study. YES NO

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Researcher: XXXXXX

Date:

Signature:

**PEASE RETURN THIS LETTER USING THE STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE**

On completion, 1 copy of this form for the participant and 1 copy for the researcher.

If you agree with each of the points below, please **circle** YES and sign and date at the bottom of the letter.

The research has been explained to me. YES NO

I understand what taking part in the research involves. YES NO

I understand that my real name won't be used in any writing. YES NO

I understand that I should not discuss what has been discussed in my interviews with any other participant involved. YES NO

I understand that I am free to change my mind about taking part at any time.  
YES NO

I am happy to take part in this research. YES NO

Please note if you have any concerns about how the research project is being conducted you can contact Dr. David Plowright at david.plowright@open.ac.uk However, please note, participants can withdraw from the research project at any time without explanation.

Name -----Date-----

## Appendix 13. Participant information

The Open University  
Faculty of Wellbeing and Education

Title of Study- Primary school parent governors in socio-economic deprived communities: an interpretivist investigation into their perceptions and experiences of accountability and local authority training.

Researcher – XXXXXXXX

The Open University: Faculty of Wellbeing and Education

Dear Parent governor,

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. If there are things unclear or issues which require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. It is very important that you take time and consider what your part would be in the research project before you decide whether you wish to participate.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

To discover the experiences and perceptions of parent-school governors.

2. Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. After reading this information sheet you are asked to decide if you wish to take part in the study. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

3. What will happen to me if I take part?

If you wish to take part, then I would be grateful if you could complete the consent form and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided. I will then contact you to arrange a suitable day, time and venue for the interview to take place which is likely to take about one hour.

4. Are there any risks/benefits involved?

No risks are envisaged by participation in this study. The interview will allow you to talk about your perceptions and experiences of being a parent-school governor and contribute to the state of knowledge about this important role.

5. Will my taking part in the study be kept anonymous?

Names of participants, schools, local authority or any other relevant information will not be reported in any research publications. Similarly, direct quotations when used in research reports will not be traceable to individuals or schools. Data stored on the investigator's computers will be password protected. Written files will be kept in locked cabinets. Tape recordings of interviews will be stored in locked cabinets and destroyed at the end of the research. This date is not yet foreseen but is likely to be in 2021. You will be kept informed of this.

Contact Details of the Researcher:

**Appendix 14. Email from School Organisation and Governance offering to contact participants on my behalf**

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

5<sup>th</sup> July 2017

8:36 AM (3 hours ago)

Dear XXXXXX

As the School Organisation and Governance Team Leader in XXXXX I have been asked to respond to your request below.

I can contact governors on your behalf to see if they have any interest. If you are happy for me to do so I will email all parent governors in XXXX primary school Community First area and forward your e-mail for them to consider your request.

Please confirm that you are happy for me to continue.

Thank you

XXXXXX

**Appendix 15. My reply to School Organisation and Governance asking  
they contact parent governors from Community First schools**

Email XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

5<sup>th</sup> July 2017

11:37 AM (16 minutes ago)

to XXXX

From XXXXXXXXXXXX

To XXXXXXXXXXXX

Hi XXXX, thank you for your speedy reply which is appreciated.

Yes, if you can contact primary school parent governors in Community First areas  
that would be brilliant.

Again, I am grateful for your support.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXX

## Appendix 16. Participants and data about the interviews

Participants (pseudonyms)	Date of interview	Duration
Amie	22 April 2019	35 minutes
Tony	May 3 2019	32 minutes
Julie	June 4 2019	41 minutes
Eddie	April 16 2019	29 minutes
Dai	May 10 2019	33 minutes
Freddy	May 12 2019	40 minutes
Lizzy	April 14 2019	29 minutes
Nancy	May 25 2019/2 May 2019	36 minutes/23 minutes
Niki	May 4 2019/7 May 2019	28 minutes/22 minutes
Owen	1 June 2019	40 minutes

## Appendix 17. Email from O.U. Ethics Approval

8<sup>th</sup> August 2017

3:28 PM (18 hours ago)

to me

Thank you for submitting a data protection questionnaire. I cannot see any data protection issues with the survey, but please can you anonymize the data as soon as possible and ensure you schedule a future deletion date for the raw data.

Regards

XXX

XXXXXX

Information Rights Assistant

Academic Policy and Governance

Providing expert, professional services

Charles Pinfold Building Room 216, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

| XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX



## Appendix 18. Email from Research Governance and Ethics Team approving my research application

Research-REC-Review

9:05 AM (6 hours ago)

Hello XXXX

Following on from XXXXXXXX email below please find attached your HREC favourable opinion memo for your records.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date you have stated in your application, (please confirm when this is, your document says October 2000!) you are required to provide the Committee with a final report to reflect how the project has progressed, and importantly whether any ethics issues arose and how they were dealt with. A copy of the final report template can be found on the research ethics website - [http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/human-research-ethics-full-review-process-and-proforma#final\\_report](http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/human-research/human-research-ethics-full-review-process-and-proforma#final_report).

Good luck with your research project.

Kind regards

XXXXX

Appendix 19. Semi structured interview - 'Lizzy' - prompts

14/12/19 'LIZZY'

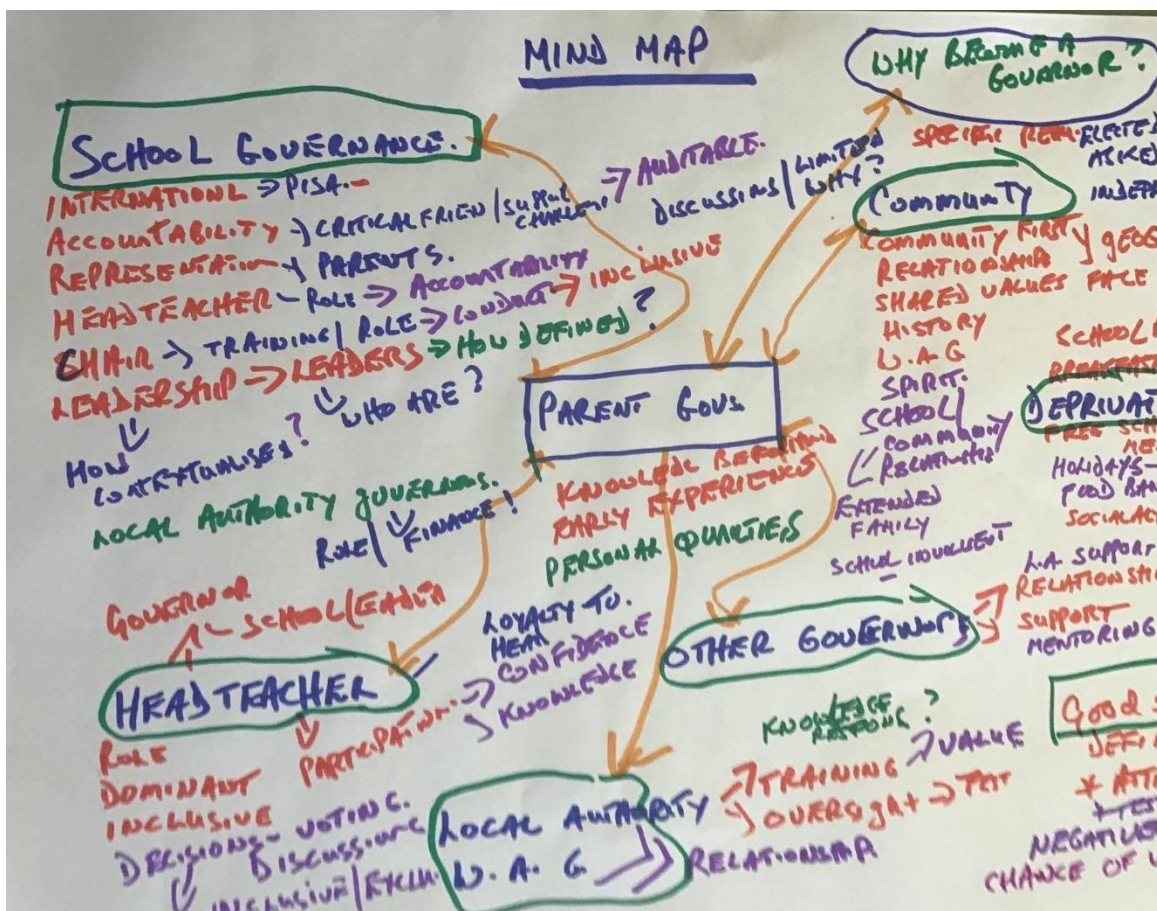
Interview framework	Prompts and areas which may be explored
<b>Personal qualities</b>	
1. What do you think being a good governor means and involves? <i>Participate = Head of 2 groups.</i> <b>Question Sheet with field notes</b> <i>Involved. Why? It's of it. Haldeney. Would for Carbon off T. of off. Not really.</i>	<b>Relationships with:</b> School children School staff Other parents The local authority Wales Assembly Government Inspectorate <b>Personal qualities:</b> Diligence Supportive of others Wanting to be involved in decision making = * Being collaborative <i>spent regularly - oversight. oversight. oversight. = give such bit. NoX</i>
<b>Leadership and accountability</b>	
2. Leadership in your school is important. What does school leadership mean to you? <i>getting involved! Discussion = Have you been involved? what. Budget oversight!</i>	<b>Formal:</b> Related to their training (decision making) Head teacher = autocratic = Chair 2 too more. Collaborative School examinations Inspectorate Local authority <b>Informal:</b> Related to other parents' expectations  <i>7 = * why? and self- I Rams - Robots? - Useful in disarray?</i>

## Appendix 20. Generation of initial codes

Leadership	Accountabil- ity	Training	School- community relationship	Personal qualities
Chairperson- what do they do? -----	To local authority To WAG -----	Governors' legal position- awareness -----	WAG legislation to promote the school- community relationship -----	Altruism Good listener -----
Chairperson- involving governors in discussions. -----	Inspectorate ----- Definition of ----- Standards and pupil attainment -----	Governor training and their relationships -----	Volunteering ----- WAG Community First areas (Part of the Tackling Poverty Action Programme- TPAP) WAG and school budget -----	Benefits of being governor- status ----- Motivation to become a governor -----
Dominant governors? -----	Head teacher held to account -----	Governor training- usefulness- in what ways -----	-----	Independent mind -----
Headteacher -----	-----	-----	-----	-----
What participants think it means? -----	Their role in securing accountability -----	Governors training and raising school standards -----	Community/school involvement of extended family -----	Common Sense -----
How do participant think they contribute to school leadership? -----	Other parents ----- Knowledge ----- Passivity Assertion -----	----- Induction Training Mentoring- Shown the ropes ----- On the job training -----	----- Community spirit ----- Community use of school premises ----- School concerts -----	Confidence to speak at meetings ----- Passivity ----- Deference to Head -----
Mechanisms Examples -----	Other governors	-----	-----	-----
Making decisions Voting -----	-----	Understanding data Disadvantages Evaluation of -----	Headteacher asked parent to become a governor Shared values -----	Disadvantages of being a governor -----
Conflict at governor meetings	-----	-----	Concerned with poverty in the community	Good school- what does it mean?

<p>-----</p> <p>Disagreement</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Informal discussions</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Representation</p> <p>-----</p>			<p>-----</p> <p>Free school means- breakfast club</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Unemployment</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Socio-economic disadvantage</p> <p>-----</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Neighbours helping</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Not working and had the time</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Voluntary schoolwork</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Shared history</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Speaking at governor meetings</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Thought they could do a 'good job as a parent governor</p>
---	--	--	---	--

Appendix 21. 'Mind Map' where the parent governor is placed at the centre and associated ideas and themes placed around.



## Appendix 22. Manual coding under three headings

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description/ questions asked</i>	<i>Participants' views and location in the text e.g. (Page 2, Line 12 expressed as P2, L12)</i>
<p><i>Accountability</i> As a parent governor should you should be held accountable if so to whom?</p> <p>Headteacher (being held to account)</p>	<p>What participants think accountability means</p> <p>Who should be held to account, are they?</p> <p>Is/how can the head be made accountable?</p>	<p>e.g. staffing, finance, school results. Participant all governors should be, but in practice, it is the head who she sees as the person who is held to account because 'they make the important decision and have most knowledge' (<u>P8, L2</u>)</p> <p>Participant recognised the governors had the power to ask the head question about decisions they have made and sometimes this happens (the local authority governor was named) but this was a rare event (<u>P8, L21</u>)</p> <p>The participant said that she thought the local authority and the Wales Government held the head to account, but this was usually a 'box-ticking exercise' (<u>P10, L20</u>)</p>
<p><i>Leadership</i> What participants think it means Do participant contribute to school leadership? Good school- what does it mean?</p>	<p>A person who guides or directs the school over the short and long-term</p>	<p>Participant defined leadership in terms of responsibility staffing, school standards, implementing policies said -- Having a vision for the school (<u>P4, L. 13</u>)</p> <p>Participant construed this in terms of voting and ratifying decisions (<u>P.4, L20</u>) could not cite example other than this</p> <p>Construed in terms of 'good' school results, good school inspection report and the children are happy (<u>P2, L19</u>)</p> <p>Construed in terms of pupil happiness and to a letter extent pupil attainment (<u>P. 3, L14</u>)</p>
<p>School-comm relationship - socio economic disadvantage Community spirit</p>	<p>A feeling of shared values and the promotion of group interests</p>	<p>The participant spoke of people helping each other, especially in difficult times. A sense of belonging. (<u>P17, L7</u>)</p>
<p>Community First meaning of - understanding the needs of- importance of-</p>	<p>Community First status is a WAG name for areas which have a high level of poverty, unemployment. The WAG provides finance to tackle these issues.</p>	<p>Participant knew a great deal about 'Community First'. This included extra funding for Community First schools, services funded by the WAG to ameliorate the effects of deprivation (<u>P14, L7</u>) She expressed concern the WAG had announced it was discontinuing C.F. fearing</p>

		this would harm the entire community ( <u>P16, L21</u> )
Free breakfast club	Free school breakfast club financed by the WAG	Participant identified the take up of free breakfasts as an indicator of social deprivation ( <u>P19, L15</u> )
Hunger during school holidays	An indicator of poverty in the local community – linked to unemployment	The participant spoke of pupils going hungry during school holiday because they miss the school breakfast club and free school meals ( <u>P17, L. 14</u> )
<i>Personal qualities</i>		
Confidence to speak at meetings	A feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities:	The participant said that her governor training had encouraged governors to get involved with decision making. However, this had not made any difference to her involvement ( <u>P.11, L16</u> ) ( <u>P15, L20</u> )
Conflict at governor meetings	Extent and resolution of conflict in governor meetings	The participant said differences of opinions were rare and settled by the head and the Chairperson ( <u>P13, L.13</u> ) * These were perceived as the dominant governors if there are how do they show this?
<i>Training</i> Code A. 5 Governor training-effect on participants conduct at meetings	The perceived effects governors have about their training on their conduct at meetings	The participant felt the induction training had been useful by helping her understand school data. She did not think this had helped her to become more active and involved in meetings ( <u>P10, L9</u> ) ( <u>P11, L15</u> )
Governors' legal position-awareness	The legal position of governing bodies. This is discussed and made clear in the WAG induction training	The participant said her training had made her aware of the governors' legal positions but had had no effect on the way she conducted her governor role ( <u>P11, L14</u> )
Governor training and their relationship with other governors	The effect governor training has had on the participants' relationships with other governors	The participant said training made little effect on their relationship with other governors ( <u>P11, L25</u> ) she said she understood her training has stressed becoming involved with decision making she said she wasn't that type ( <u>P12, L21</u> )

### Appendix 23. Define and name categories

<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Accountability</b>	<b>Governor training</b>	<b>School-community - deprivation</b>	<b>Personal qualities</b>
Leadership means- involves- representation	Definition of To parents-local authority- WAG- inspectorate	Knowledge of governor responsibilities	WAG legislation to promote the school-community relationship	Reasons for becoming a governor
Headteacher's role	Do participants believe they hold the head to account? If so in what ways?	Training, how useful and in what ways Training and raising school standards Formal and informal mentoring	Community spirit- Shared values/history Community First-knowledge of Community use of school premises- volunteering- concerts Community/school involvement - extended families	Qualities needed to be a good governor- good listener- independent mind- prepared to speak your mind- common sense- could do a good job  Deference/ Assertiveness-
Chairperson- their role and how they conduct it (inclusive- dominant governors)	Educational knowledge and securing accountability		Socio-economic disadvantage- Concern with poverty in the community- unemployment- free school meals-breakfast club	Good school- what does it mean?
Participant contributing to leadership?	Judged by pupil attainment			
Definition of a good school.	School budget			



## Appendix 24. Sample of manually coded text

Appendix 10 Sample of manual coding to compare with Nvivo coding to ascertain reliability of the former

Participant 9. May 25, Duration of interview 36 minutes. Interviewer normal, Participant **bold**.

Codes

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #C00000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Inclusivity     | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #0000FF; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Autocratic management | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #4B0082; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Confidence     |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFD700; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Power dynamic   | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFFF00; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Leadership            | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #333333; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Accountability |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #483D8B; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Decision Making | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #008000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Knowledge             | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFA500; border: 1px solid black;"></span>                |

Code stripe	Transcription	Observations
	<p><b>Q. Can you tell me about leadership?</b></p> <p>Well leadership is not just about the headteacher its all of us [governors], its about being inclusive and making sure that everyone is involved. Everyone should be included, there shouldn't be us and them and we shouldn't be led with a stick. The head doesn't delegate, he sees himself and the only leader. But I think a good leader does delegate responsibility... It's a big job running a school, its bigger than one person. The truth is the governors don't really have much of a say... the [Head] makes the decisions and puts it to the governors in a way that it looks like we are doing it.</p> <p>When we were put on sub committees, he didn't ask us what were our strengths, he told us, you are going on the science committee, your doing literacy... there wasn't any discussion and everyone said yes. Some governors who we not at the meeting were put on committees without being asked. But there was a parent governor who was there and she was not given a committee. Everyone noticed I think and there was a lot of throat clearing it was awful. It must have knocked her confidence you could see her sinking into her chair... she resigned after that which is a pity. I know her and she could bring a lot to the governing body, but she won't now. It did affect me that. I thought if I'm not sure about something I'm keeping my mouth closed. I wouldn't want to be treated like that. One governor brought up the reading results. They were not as good as expected. He [Headteacher] didn't answer her, he ignored her, she got no answers. She sat there waiting, but I think because he knows more than us thought he didn't have to answer questions like that... I haven't really contributed to discussions. It's a confidence thing. I have a good job and I've been to university but I'm reluctant in meetings because I saw what happened to XXX.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>✓</p> <p>check with P.5.</p> <p>✓</p> <p>make a note!</p> <p>✓</p> <p>Diary</p> <p>✓</p> <p>?</p> <p>✓</p>

## Appendix 25. Same text coded using NVivo software

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. On the left, a table shows 'Codes' and 'References' with values 7 and 10 respectively. The main window shows a text document titled 'Participant 8' with the following content:

Q. Can you tell me about leadership?

Well leadership is not just about the headteacher its all of us [governors], its about being inclusive and making sure that everyone is involved. Everyone should be included, there shouldn't be us and them and we shouldn't be led with a stick. The head doesn't delegate, he sees himself and the only leader. But I think a good leader does delegate responsibility. It's a big job running a school, its bigger than one person. The truth is the governors don't really have much of a say... The [Head] makes the decisions and puts it to the governors in a way that it looks like we are doing it. |

When we were put on sub committees, he didn't ask us what were our strengths, he told us, you are going on the science committee, your doing literacy. There wasn't any discussion and everyone said yes. Some governors who we not at the meeting were put on committees without being asked. But there was a parent governor who was there and she was not given a committee. Everyone noticed I think and there was a lot of throat clearing it was awful. It must have knocked her confidence, you could see her sinking into her chair. She resigned after that which is a pity. I know her and she could bring a lot to the governing body, but she won't now. It did affect me that. I thought if I'm not sure about something I'm keeping my mouth closed. I wouldn't want to be treated like that. One governor brought up the reading results. They were not as good as expected. He [Headteacher] didn't answer her, he ignored her, she got no answers. She sat there waiting, but I think because he knows more than us thought he didn't have to answer questions like that. I haven't really contributed to discussions. It's a confidence thing. I have a good job and I've been to university but I'm reluctant in meetings because I saw what happened to

On the right side, a vertical bar shows coding density with various codes applied to the text:

- Inclusivity
- Leadership
- Decision making
- Autocratic management
- Confidence
- Power dynamic
- Knowledge

## **Appendix 26 Email from the director of 'Middleton Council'**

16<sup>th</sup> August 2017

Allan

Thank you for taking the time to email us.

I know and appreciate that I have an excellent team and I am pleased that they were able to help you.

I would be pleased to receive an abridged version of your research when it is available. As you know school governance and governor training is a major concern of the Welsh Assembly Government in the drive to promote school accountability. The governor training programme has been going for a few years and we, as an authority, are ever seeking to improve the quality of the service. In this context, academic research conducted in XXXX offers us the opportunity to get an understanding of how governors really feel re XXX governor training and issues of accountability etc. Please keep in touch with XXXX as she is, in the first instance, best placed to deal with any issues which you may wish to discuss. Finally, when completed, the authority would certainly be interested in receiving an abridged copy of your thesis for reasons mentioned above.

Thanks

XXXXXX