

Episode 1 – Remote Monitoring

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Respondents: Pam Monaghan RES1, Kerry Newton RES2, Lynne Fenwick RES3, Philip Chater RES4

INT: Good morning and welcome to our Governor podcast. We're very excited to be with you this morning to talk about remote monitoring for Governors and the time of recording is the 30th November.

So, we've been in this strange period for school Governors for quite some months now and as we look towards Christmas and into the New Year we just thought we'd share with you some of the ideas that our fabulous Governors around the county have come up with to carry on those really important roles that Governors have in school about monitoring and seeing how things are going and I'm absolutely delighted that we've got a gathering of incredibly experienced Governors and experts with us this morning. We've got members of our Clerking and support team and two of our leadership advisers and I don't know how many years of experience with Governors we could add up between us but I think it's quite a lot, so I hope if you're listening to our podcast you're gonna have a few minutes to just hear about what your other Governor colleagues around the country have been doing, so whatever you're doing whether you're having a cup of tea or you're doing the washing up or even driving home we hope you find this useful.

So, let's go round and just – around our virtual table and hear who we've got today. So, I'm gonna start with Pam, Pam Monaghan. Hello.

RES1: Good morning, good morning Gabrielle thank you for that. As Gabrielle's introduced I'm Pam Monaghan an experienced head teacher but obviously now I'm a school leadership adviser and I also sit on the governing body in two

schools one an academy and one a main terms school where I'm a Chair of Governors.

INT: Thanks Pam. Pam of course playing down the amount of work she's doing there with governance all the time and I'm gonna ask one of my other colleagues Kerry Newton just to introduce herself this morning.

RES2: Morning Gabrielle and morning everybody who's listening. So, my name's Kerry Newton I've been a head teacher of primary schools for what seems like approximately 100 years and I'm now a school leadership adviser for Durham so I work with lots of schools and lots of governing bodies across the county.

INT: Thanks Kerry and Kerry is always bringing a smile to our face to our leadership adviser meetings because of all her interesting journeys around not just Durham but actually other counties as well Kerry aren't you with other schools? I'm going to go now to our two Governance Clerk colleagues who are with us this morning and I'm really pleased you're here with us. So, Lynne and Philip I'll go to you first Lynn do you want to introduce yourself to our listeners?

RES3: Yes thank you Gabrielle. I'm Lynne Fenwick I am a Governance Clerk, I've done this job for three and a half years now I work with eighteen schools across County Durham including two nursery schools and one special school the rest are primaries and before that I was a Governor in a primary school for eighteen years and worked in a primary school as Finance Officer for fifteen years so quite a lot of primary experience.

INT: Thanks for that Lynne that's just such a lot of different backgrounds that our governance teams have in Durham it's great for our Governors to hear that. And Philip last but not least.

RES4: Morning Gabrielle. Yes, I do the same job as Lynne I Clerk about sixteen school and I'm also a Governor myself at a special school where I'm Vice Chair and Chair of Finance Committee.

INT: Fantastic [00:03:38] [recording cut off] Governors listening in to this podcast I hope you can hear that you've got a massive range of experience to share with you this morning and I'm gonna start with Philip and Lynne and I just think it

would be really interesting for Governors in different parts of the county just to hear how it's been for other Governors during you know trying to operate our governance remotely, so what do you think Governors have found tricky about monitoring their schools during this very strange time we've had over the last few months?

RES4: I think one of the big issues of that the Governors are a bit worried about staff time and workload at the moment you know staff have an increase in the amount of contact time with the children and Governors have been aware of sort of interrupting and encroaching upon their time their valuable time of staff, but I think some of the staff Governors and feel that's a part of the problem from Governors and I think they'd be quite happy to feedback so I think that's something that Governors shouldn't be worried about.

INT: I think that's such an important point Philip because so many of our teachers are working longer periods covering lunch duties and break duties far more than they would of usually done and obviously trying to operate remote learning as well so a really good point for Governors to be concerned about. Lynne, I saw you were nodding there is that something you found with your governing bodies as well?

RES3: Yes absolutely, I think the staff wellbeing is at the forefront of discussion at every Governor Body meeting I've attended this term, Governors are so aware of the workload on teachers and it's not just the physical workload it's the mental stress as well because obviously we're all you know to some extent afraid of the virus and you know having to do more than you would normally do physically and you know in a limited environment a restricted environment and then always have that threat of the virus hanging over you, I think Governors are so aware of that and are reluctant to put any additional workload onto teachers at this time.

INT: Yeah, I think that safety issue I mean is all important isn't it and of course Governors have been so involved in overseeing those safety arrangements with the risk assessments and I think we're gonna try and talk about that a little bit later on. Thanks for that Philip and Lynne. I wonder if I can turn to Pam and maybe Kerry as well and what you've seen about your Chairs of Governors really

working bodies and head teachers to try and support remote monitoring activity. Pam it's probably worth coming to you first because you're one of those Chairs of Governors.

RES1: I am. I think my – what I would say with one of my main roles across this pandemic has been in terms of as a Chair of Governors it was to support the head teacher so to be that person to be that sounding board for the head teacher or even just for the head teacher to offload because sometimes being a head teacher is a very lonely job and I think Chairs of Governors need to be very mindful of the head teacher's wellbeing whilst the head teacher is mindful of everyone else's wellbeing. Another important part for Chairs of Governors to think about is how you've supported other Governors to have the confidence with the technology because all of the Governor Meetings have gone remotely now so it's in terms of running those meetings to ensure that everybody feels that they are able to contribute and that they're not worried about what the background looks like or how they might sound or how they might look on Teams or on Zoom and to have that confidence to access technology, so some of that has been done through phone calls or maybe through emails prior to meetings to ensure look we all know that you might all be at home don't worry if the dog barks, don't worry if a small child comes behind you or – sort of setting that scene and setting that tone. Also though it's been mindful that Governors are aware of the confidentiality if they are remote into a meeting from home and so just to make sure that the Governors are aware of that confidentiality in terms of where are they having their meeting are they in the kitchen where lots of people are walking passed and can hear the discussion because obviously Governor Body Meetings continue to be confidential particularly at this time um, Kerry?

RES2: I think that's really important Pam and I think what's been really important throughout this pandemic is the support that Governors and Chairs in particular have supplied to our heads I mean I speak to lots of heads who will just say I've got through this because I've got a great staff and a great set of Governors, It's been a lot of new learning for everybody most of our experience as teachers and heads has not prepared us for what's come over the last few months so I think just having that little bit of flexibility around we're all learning something new,

we're all just trying to keep everybody safe and manage it as best we can none of us are experts in the fields of infection control unfortunately or health and safety but I think by working together that's when we get really good outcomes and I know the heads I've spoken to have really appreciated the time and the support and just those kind words that Governors have given them at times.

INT: Yeah thanks for that Kerry and Lynne I think you had a thought there?

RES3 Yes, I would like to just say that you know we were dropped into this and I'm a real technophobe so virtual meetings the thought of it horrified me but sort of finding my feet with virtual meetings and things, the governing bodies that I've worked with have been so supportive and so tolerant when things have gone wrong, when we've had ditches and you know and I remember that feeling of absolute panic if the screen froze or somebody's microphone you know - sometimes people sounded like they were that Chairman from the Wheeltappers and Shunters can you remember that? Well his microphone used to breakup [laughing] and I actually Clerk for the special school where Philip is a Governor and it was during one of our meetings that Zoom timed out and that had me running around the house like a headless chicken but we all got back on and I just want to reiterate that as a Clerk I just felt so supported by my Governors that I work with I don't know have you found that as well Philip?

[10:00] RES4: I have yeah and I think we all know that it's not ideal you know we'd much prefer to be in school face to face but you know we cannae do that at the moment and it's definitely better than doing nothing I think you know we've got these wonderful opportunities I do think we wouldn't have been able to do this five years ago and I think you know we need to embrace it and -

INT: Yeah I think you're absolutely right Philip because I think that there's an opportunity here isn't there as well that we can be excited about and that can actually enable sometimes more of our Governors to be involved than when they had to get from you know being at work to the school for six o'clock for a meeting or during the day and I know as leadership advisers we've seen lots more Governors involved in various activities as well. I think it's important however just that we – let's move on a little bit because I think when schools originally partially closed because let's remember they never fully closed that

Governors did have to absolutely focus on that health and safety and the safe operation at the school that Kerry mentioned, but we know that strategic purpose of governance that oversight that monitoring that is still there and especially around some issues around safeguarding our most vulnerable children at SEND that's really important that continues and I think Governors have been incredibly creative with some of the things they've done, so shall we just move on and have a discussion about some of the things we've seen our Governors doing in different areas and I know one of the areas Pam and I have discussed a lot is how our Governors have really shown some very innovative ways of carrying on monitoring safeguarding obviously the most important thing our Governors do, but perhaps the hardest to do if you can't go and walk around a school Pam so some really important things Governors have done here?

RES1: Absolutely, so in terms of not being able to be in school obviously when the children are there, we have to look at alternative ways to monitor that safeguarding so it might be that safeguarding Governors have had an overview of risk assessment I know we're gonna move on to health and safety in a moment, but in terms of the Single Central Record if Governors have been – if a usual monitoring role is to check the Single Central Record that can be done by a screen share with safety measures in place. I know of Governors as well who have met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss safeguarding and to discuss those vulnerable groups and to provide a little bit of support for that designated safeguarding lead in terms of what have the vulnerable groups – how have the vulnerable groups returned back to school, have schools seen an increase in safeguarding and that link between the Link Governor and the designated lead has strengthened I think in some cases.

INT: Yeah, I think this is really important and I think certainly I've seen in a couple of my schools is working with the head teacher the Chair of Governors has organised a short survey of staff and that's included questions about different areas of school like because you don't need a separate survey for everything but actually Lead Governor for safeguarding has asked a question that they'd like to know about the staff for example maybe tell us about the training you had about keeping children safe in September and maybe a question there to the staff

about that workload of wellbeing that Philip and Lynne were mentioning and Kerry, I'm sure this is something your school have been involved in as well?

RES2: Yes that's right Gabrielle and I think the other thing that we do offer from Durham is we do offer safeguarding audits so it can be that a school might invite us in and we would complete a safeguarding audit and then obviously Governors would have sight of that and any actions that we needed to take and Governors would be able to track that strategically to make sure that the right things were happening to keep the children and staff completely safe in school.

INT: Yeah absolutely and that's the kind of thing that often leadership advisers have chatted to the head teacher about isn't it in that autumn visit and head teachers have often fed back to Governors may be at full governing body. Pam I'll take one more from you and then I think we'll move on to health and safety.

RES1: Yes it's not a monitoring discussion but it's – Governors have had the opportunity to do online training as well themselves so they've been able to do Level 1 training online they've been able to do some safeguarding and preventer training so that's been sort of an opportunity that some Governors have been able to take because they can sit at home and do that online rather than having to go somewhere for a whole morning.

INT: That's an interesting one actually Pam because certainly at this autumn's half termly training for child protection and safeguarding for Governors we had much higher attendance than we often get and lots of Governors remarked on the fact that they could dip into an online training session you know that was just running for an hour and a half one morning because they didn't have to leave the workplace and also they were able to access that as a recording from our training team, so yeah good – that's all useful isn't it in supporting Governors' monitoring.

Let's think about health and safety and oh my goodness me have we ever seen such long risk assessments in our lives? You know certainly Pam, Kerry and I have got some quite significant experience under our belts in schools but I think none of us had ever completed anything approaching the risk assessments which we now routinely flick through the 30-40 pages of the risk assessments don't we? I

think my longest ever risk assessment was taking 250 children to Lightwater Valley but it pales in comparison especially to some of our special schools and their risk assessments. Lynne I think this is where I'll come to you first - monitoring health and safety in the COVID era, what are our Governors doing Lynne?

RES3: Well, lengthy risk assessment meetings as you've mentioned yeah that was Clerk's delight I have to say. Some of my schools before the schools reopened the Health and Safety Governor actually did visit school following all of the appropriate measures and just had a walk around the school so they could see what was in place signage and hand washing facilities you know the availability of hand sanitiser so they could just feedback that reassurance to the governing body that you know they've gone into school, they'd walked round, they'd followed the arrows or the footprints or whatever it was that you know the school had provided and you know could just sort of rest assured that they thought those – you know the children would be able to follow that guidance. The other thing that I've asked Governors to do – because quite often governing bodies haven't carried out any form of monitoring and I think that's changing this term and I think it's becoming more organised this term, but what I've asked Governors to do during their meetings is that any Governors who drop-off and pickup children I've asked them to you know talk a little bit about how those drop-off and pickup procedures are working and although that's – you know you could argue that that's bordering on operational because the actual arrangements are operational and not strategic, I think it's really useful that Governors can you know be assured that the measures in place are working and it's not causing any problems so it may not be the Health and Safety Governor that's making that report but you know the Governors are still receiving that information that you know that this health and safety aspect is robust and fit for purpose maybe?

INT: Yeah, I think that's interesting and I think that you know we are in unusual times aren't we. Kerry?

RES2: Yeah, I'm just thinking that we've seen our risk assessments change as time's moved on people have put things in place and found that it's been more

effective doing it in different ways so I think a really key point for Governors is just to check in with heads you know have there been any changes to the risk assessment, why did you feel the need to change it, how effective that's been because it's all that monitoring of that adherence to the risk assessment that is so important otherwise they do become bits of paper and they're not they're there to really protect our staff and our children, so I think just checking in with the head about you know have we had to make any changes and why was this change made I think that just helps the head teacher to reflect on how things are going and how things are moving as we're finding different ways of making this work in schools.

INT: Yeah, I think that sort of dynamic process has been really important hasn't it and you know I'm gonna come back to that the usefulness of a teacher survey because as we said you could have different questions, another question could just be to see staff's understanding of the things that are in place around risk assessment and health and safety and of course if you are doing a survey with the children or joining them for a school council meeting, which is another thing I know Governors' have done remotely, there can be a question there just talking about children's understanding of for example the importance of handwashing and just what their experience on a day to day basis around school. I will share one that's my favourite actually around this and it's a Health and Safety Governor who can go into school but has had a virtual tour once a month by iPad with the head teacher escorting Chair of Governors virtually around the school with the iPad just showing them the various mitigations that are in place and especially the new temporary sinks which have been such an important feature for so many of our schools.

[20:00]

I'm conscious of time colleagues and I know you've given up your time this morning for me for this. I wonder if we could move on to something which is really you know one of those constant things that Governors are keeping an eye on and that's the finance and we know that schools are having particular costs at this time, so I wonder if before we go much further Philip you could just fill us in on you know without those really long finance committee meetings how are Governors keeping an eye on public money in school?

RES4: I Gabrielle yeah - well the thing is we have a – the finance committees have been meeting at – it's been business as usual for them probably created a shortened agenda to sort of focus on areas of this term and that has helped the Governors. We've also encouraged this term governing bodies to appoint a Governor to review the Universal Catch-up Fund and that's often been that the Pupil Premium Governor and we haven't come up with a set of questions that the Governors can ask of schools of what's happening and the good thing is that they're doing that with the head teacher and the school business manager where they always have a good relationship so they're not having to deal with someone that they haven't dealt with in the past so -

INT: Philip, if Governors haven't seen those questions where would they get hold of those that you mentioned does that mean in one of our – has that been in one of our meeting packs?

RES4: It has yes it's been in a number of the briefing papers and we've also – we can send those questions out directly to the Governors -

INT: So, if a Governor's not heard those they can just get in touch with their Clerk and we could reissue those yeah – because we've had – there's been so much paper flying around this term even though it's been virtual I think Governors quite rightly sometimes feel they've had a lot of information flying in their direction. So, lots of different things here and some of these monitoring activities the kind that could be multipurpose can't they and cover different areas school life. Shall we just draw to a close just by really thinking about that real substance of education something that I know we all feel really passionately about and our teachers put in so much time last year working on their curriculum and the quality of education and they've worked really hard to get children back on track and get their fantastic curriculum running again. Kerry, I wonder if I can just start with you this time. What are we seeing happening about monitoring the quality of education when you can't really as easily get those curriculum reports from subject leaders and co-ordinators and phase leaders?

RES2: I think this one's a really interesting one and I actually think this one is a way that we just – the key questions we need to focus on are what do we need to know

and how can we find this out safely, so for lots of our schools there's been children returning to school who've had real gaps in the learning appearing because they have found remote access to learning difficult. Strangely with my school this seems to be more with the younger children we're finding more of an impact so some of the things we've talked about are things like you know what's the school doing about that so a really good way to check on that I would suggest is to meet virtually with the children and ask them. I find children are incredibly honest they tell me everything I need to know usually very quickly and all the things I don't need to know I find out as well, but just to meet with them and ask them what they've been learning, which subjects they've been learning about so we can make sure that we are offering that full curriculum, what do they now know that they might not have known before they came back to school in September, what've they been practising because for some of our children there's been a lot of practise of key skills that might have lost the sharpness of the times when schools were closed to some children so I think just by having that meeting with children, children tell you very very quickly the answers to those questions and also I just have to point out to Governors that children love doing that to you [laughter] that child do something similar turn up with a clipboard because they prepared their report in advance for me, so it's a really lovely way to reconnect with the school I think Governors are part of schools because they're just so interested in children doing well and making that progress and this is a great way to reconnect with the children but also to be really checking in on are the children remembering what the school want them to remember that's all really supportive information for the school as well.

INT: It isn't it and of course obviously setting up – Governors setting up that safe conversation making sure that if there is gonna be that virtual conversation with children that all safeguarding protocols are in place and that all the relevant details have been followed and it's also of course as soon as you get children it's a great opportunity to ask them about oh and who's helping you when you're stuck and who can you talk to in school if you're worried about things, those are great question for Governors to ask children it will tell you a multitude of things about the work of your school.

Pam I'm gonna come to you and then I think we're gonna be rounding off.

RES1: I was just also to add that Governors can also ask those questions has anybody had to isolate this half term or this term and what was it like being at home, what lessons did you do at home that you maybe – was different to school or the same as school, so you could look to see whether that consistency's there in terms of the remote education but also there's a vital role for parent Governors if they've had to have their children isolating what has the remote education offer been like they will be able to tell you first-hand what it's like to be at home with children and to be able to access the remote education that the school's offering.

INT: That's a really good point there Pam actually you know your parent Governors have that unique perspective don't they which can be really helpful and as always it's about not getting involved in the operational it's about looking at what are leaders doing to ensure this provision and the quality of this provision.

Goodness me I think we could probably talk a lot longer but we're gonna have to call it a day because I know that we need to move on to some other areas and I know lots of you have actually got Governors meetings today and know Lynne and Philip are absolutely in the middle of all those full governing body meetings and finance committee meetings at this time of term so I'm really grateful that you were able to join us today.

So, I'm gonna round off just by highlighting a couple things the Governors Service are producing some guidance and just some pointers and some suggested questions for different areas of governance and just a reminder about some of the things you can do remotely to keep asking those questions as well as being supportive because we need to find that balance don't we as Governors when we're working with our schools. As always in the spring term the Blue Papers and further advice to Governors will be available and the Governor training continues online face to face and also with recorded videos that school governing bodies can even arrange to watch together and discuss on Zoom at the same time, so there's lots of opportunities there.

So, can I on your behalf Governors thank the colleagues who've joined us this morning? So to Philip and Lynne thank you so much for telling us about your governing bodies and everything you're doing. Pam and Kerry thanks so much

as always bringing your leadership adviser sort of extra oversight to us today it's been really useful.

So Governors I hope you found this a useful podcast, I'm gonna let everybody say goodbye.

RES3 Thank you.

RES2: Bye

INT: They've all gone very shy Governors but they're waving at you really.
So, we wish you well keep on governing we're so proud of our Governors in County Durham there are so many of you keep on doing the great job that you're doing and we hope to be back with you again soon. Bye-bye.

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