Episode 2 – Remote Education

January 2021

Interviewer: Gabrielle Reddington INT

Respondents: Pam Monaghan RES1, Paul Hodgkinson RES2, Diane Pattison RES3

INT: Hello and welcome to our second Governor Podcast. We're the Education Durham Governor Training Group and team and with guests as well today and you're very welcome to our podcast where we're going to be talking about Governors and the very, very topical issue of remote education.

My name is Gabrielle Reddington, I'm one of Education Durham's leadership advisers you may have met me delivering Governor training or visiting your school over the years talking about different things. I've got for you today a fantastic cast for our Governor discussion this morning from all over the service actually because that I know that colleagues in Governor services last time really appreciated hearing from lots of different people. Behind the scenes, we've got our technical whiz Donna recording our podcast for us and making it all happen so we're very grateful. But I'm gonna go round the table and I'm going to start with one of my leadership adviser colleagues who's re-joined us from podcast number one, so I'm really pleased she's here.

RES1: Thank you very much Gabrielle and lovely to be here again this morning talking to Governors on the podcast. So, as Gabrielle said I'm one of the other leadership advisers so, I predominantly work with primary schools and I am in close contact with about 25 primary schools across Durham, thank you.

INT: And Pam of course you're also-- she's being very modest here about her massive, massive amount of work she does Pam is also a Chair of Governors aren't you, Pam? And you've been a Governor for many years like myself around different schools and things so Pam's selling herself short there I think a little bit. Now, if we were doing this and we could give pictures of Governors this morning of

where we are, I'm heading up to what I'm sure is a very snowy landscape for my next colleague who's far, far away but by the miracle of technology we're all here in the same room without ever getting our feet wet because it's a snowy day today, I should have said that shouldn't I? It's the 14th January, it's a snow day if you want to place that in your mind's eye Governors, if you're listening to the podcast. So, over to a colleague of mine who's-- we've worked together a really long time, Paul, could you introduce yourself.

RES2:   Hello yes, my name's Paul Hodgkinson and I've worked in education in Durham for some considerable time and I deal with I suppose with IT and online safety and I also work with the technical team that make the internet provision and provide a lot of the computing equipment and set up for schools. So, I form like an interface if you like between the things and Gabrielle's right, there's about a foot of snow here as I look out the window it's an absolutely gorgeous day if you're not going anywhere.

INT: Fantastic and Paul, you know, you're no stranger to our Governors in Durham are you because you run so much training around online safety and just really useful hints and tips for Governors around that whole angle of safeguarding don't you so I'm sure you're familiar, you'd be a familiar face if Governors could see you I'm sure.

RES2:   I think so yes, it includes data protection as well so I know quite a lot of Governors have done data protection training and I'm afraid it's me that does that.

INT: And I think you're on again soon aren't you in a few weeks' time? And I'm really pleased this morning that one of our senior Governor's Clerks has joined us and these are our experts in Governance in the service and I'm really pleased she's here, Diane, you're very welcome would you like to say hello to our-- whoever's joining us today?

RES3:   Yes, I'm Diane Pattison and I'm one of the senior Governor's Clerks as Gabrielle said. I've worked for Education Durham for many, many, many years, about 20 odd and I'm actually-- as I say I'm a senior Governor's Clerk and I'm also doing the Governor training at the moment as well as a secondment role so as I say a

lot of you will be familiar with me, a lot of you, as I say, I've been to your Governor Body meetings before as well, so yeah.

INT: So, I hope you've got a sense of who's here with you and you know I really thank you to colleagues for taking time in what I know is an incredible busy time and we know it's a really busy time for Governors as well, especially because of the changes that have happened around the expectations about remote education. I thought it might be quite useful if we just sort of got a few of the key terms out of the way that are flying around at the moment because always in education a whole new world of jargon has sprung up hasn't it, in relation to remote education and there might be some changes there and I made a little list this morning of some of the things I've heard my schools talk to me about this week already. So, I thought-- I'm gonna put the panel through their paces Governors and just see who can give us a quick explanation of some of these and I'm gonna-- Governors, you can't see them I'm gonna make them put their hand up if they're gonna tell me what these things are. So, just image we're on University Challenge here. So, I guess the first group of key terms Governors might hear are things like Microsoft Teams, Google Classrooms, Google Hangouts, Zoom Meetings, now, who's gonna jump in on that one and tell us what they all are? Oh, Diane's very excited actually--Diane tell us about that one.

RES3: To be fair Governors should be very familiar with Teams because the vast majority of our meetings-- it's basically-- it's an online platform that we can use for holding meetings with a group of people whereas previously we would have obviously gone into the schools, we can arrange a meeting now using everybody's technology so on your laptops where you've got your webcams we can set up our Governors meetings on the Teams system. There's also, as I say, there's other systems that are out there you know we're legally obliged to say that other things are available such as Zoom which is another version. The Google Hangouts personally I haven't used that but obviously I know that one is available as well.

INT: And of course schools are using these different methods often for delivering live lessons or even assemblies or story times so lots of different ways of using that and so you might hear that Governors talk about them.

Now I'm gonna ask Pam about the next one because I happen to know – because in addition to this, in addition to everything Pam's already doing, she's also got her own home school running at home as well and so I know that the next one, she's no stranger to not just as a teacher and a head teacher, but as a mum as well, videoed lessons and explanations Pam, what do Governors need to know about those?

RES1:   Absolutely, so live lessons-- are we talking about live lessons-- no videoed lessons?

INT: I think the videoed lessons, Pam, yeah.

RES:1   Okay, so, I mean, obviously I've got experience as Gabrielle says, as a mum I've got a year three child at home home learning, the explanations in the videoed lessons are really good for him because it means that I can work at the same time he can sit next to be if need be and access those lessons as and when, so it doesn't depend on or Wi-Fi or our broadband at the time so he can access it as and when he needs to so if needs support then I can support him to access the lesson online, so that might be recorded by may by Whiterose Maths or it might be an Oak Academy lesson or it might even be a lesson that the class teacher themselves have uploaded onto the online platform. Those explanations are real important and my children get a real sense of belonging when they have those videoed lessons when they're accessing those because they like to see or at least hear the class teacher's voice, so that's really valuable that's what those videoed lessons or explanations are.

INT: And certainly with our very young children in school we know schools are using lots of videoed phonics sessions which are recorded so that families can access them you know whenever' s suitable in the day and at the other end if you're a Governor in a secondary school and as a mum with a secondary school child downstairs I have to say that I've found the recordings of explanations of how to apply physics equations at GCSE indispensable. Pam, I can see you've got another example.

RES1:   Yes, my year seven son he is – he often goes on something called Hegarty Maths and that's really valuable to him and there's lots of sort of other online YouTube

explanations and so on and so forth that he's been directed to which he can pause, think and then restart once you've understood that explanation very valuable.

INT: I think the other thing that Governors may hear reference to is that schools are sending out learning packs so if you like literally paper packs it might be a set of exercise books some schools have a set of exercise books for Week A which come back into school and a set of exercise books with worksheets for Week B that swap over, but all these things whether they're on paper, whether they're online, whether they're live, whether they're recorded these are the things that are all part of remote education aren't they and I think that's one of the first things for Governors it's so important that actually there's a huge variety, your head teachers and leaders they're thinking really carefully about what's best for the children and community in school where you serve and it's different for everybody.

The final one I just want to mention and Paul I'm gonna ask you about this one because I think even more of these have become available haven't they, the different apps that schools might direct children to for different types of things.

RES2:

[10:00] Yes, there's lots and lots of different learning apps out there the schools sometimes they're bought ones sometimes they're free ones and they mean that children have got access to almost immediate feedback as well because a lot of these apps will actually look at the child's response and then mark it and provide them with information about the next steps, so there's some really good ones out there for children to use.

INT: There are, sometimes there are so many it's actually making the choice isn't it and I think that's one of the – if we just start to think about what do Governors really need to think about and know about remote education at the moment, I think there's two things that are really important for me is that actually it's about being up to date and making sure that we're looking at what's currently required not what necessarily was done last year in our first lockdown experience or for children during the autumn term who may have been at home isolating or poorly, so we'll talk a little bit about more in a moment, but also for me it's really about Governors understanding what decisions school leaders have made about

the remote education offer and how they've made those decisions because we're not as Governors making those choices ourselves, we're finding out why leaders have done it. Pam, can I come to you just about that very important point about the changing national expectations about remote education, because I think like everything else to do with lockdown and changing rules etc. education is no expectation, so would you just talk us through and talk Governors through what are the DFE expecting schools to do and you know what do Governors need to listen out for do you think?

RES1: Yeah, absolutely and so the DFE published a document called Restricting attendance during the national lockdown last week in fact and within this document it sets out revised expectations for remote education and these are heightened expectations as from previously, so in the previous lockdown there was an expectation that children were engaged in some kind of learning but now the DFE have really sort of outlined very careful what they actually expect and it is absolutely an expectation so there's been an increase in the expectation that schools will provide three hours of teaching for Key stage 1, four hours for Key stage 2 and the equivalent of five hours in Key stage 3 and 4 and so that of course can be made up with both recorded or live teaching as well as time for pupils to complete their activities. Now, remember that those recorded lessons don't necessarily need to be recorded by school staff but staff could look towards resources from Oak Academy, BBC Bitesize we've already mentioned some of those, other sites are available. There's also an expectation for schools to select a digital platform for remote education to be used consistently across the school. Now Education Durham can support schools with this if necessary, but the majority of schools are well on their way with developing the use of a digital platform to communicate with families at home. Another change in expectations is that schools should have a system for checking daily whether pupils are engaging with their work, the expectation previously was that this was a weekly check in but now it's a daily check in. So schools should then work with families to find solutions to the lack of engagement and may be suggest – I would suggest that schools have a graduated approach to this. Finally, there's an expectation that schools identify a named senior leader with an overarching responsibility for the quality and delivery of remote education and schools should ensure that they publish information for the parents about their remote offer on their

website by the 25th January. Again, Education Durham have developed some remote learning guidance and documents to support schools to ensure that they've thought carefully about each of these aspects of the expectations that the DFE have set out.

INT: Thanks Pam. There's a lot of information there isn't there so it was really useful thank you for signposting that DFE document and I know that head teachers will have that Education Durham guidance because I know Pam we've put some hours in on that haven't we over the last few days getting that all together. Diane, I think we'll try and make sure that goes out with our Chair's email as well, I think that would be a really good idea. Oh gosh, Pam you mentioned so many things there, I mean I think for me one of the really big changes here is that move from you know we had to take an emergency response didn't we last March and April to children not being in school, this is a planned a more sustained approach to make sure that children are learning and are continuing to get you know the advantages of the great education our schools provide them so that daily engagement check, it's a bit different from just saying is everybody okay it's actually checking that children are engaged in work and there are sometimes some really technical reasons why they're not, so in a moment Paul I was gonna ask you to talk about the kind of safeguarding angle of this, but Diane I wonder you know I know your governing bodies have been hearing things haven't they from head teachers about just some of the issues that affect families engaging with whatever the notification form is?

RES3: Yeah, I mean one of the things that we've heard quite a bit about obviously Pam mentioned about their lack of engagement and checking up if pupils aren't actually taking part in their online lessons, but the feedback that we've had that you know we do need to appreciate is that sometimes within the home environment you know if parents are working from home you could have may be two pupils in school you know trying to get onto their various school websites, so connectivity is often an issue pupils can't actually get on to the internet to get on to the lessons themselves so that's something that we do have to take account of an appreciate that sometimes you know with the best will in the world it's just not possible for the families to actually access all of the time.

INT: So, I think a really useful thing for Governors to know from school leaders is what checks have school leaders undertaken about children's connectivity, is it to do with them having a laptop, is it to do with the Wi-Fi not being sufficient, do they not have sufficient access to a quiet safe space to work and the guidance that Pam just mentioned actually is very different to last year because one of the things the government have said is that if children don't have those things and a place to work and materials to work with, then actually they should have a place in school their vulnerable, they're vulnerable to not succeeding in school aren't they so that's quite a big change so it's useful for Governors to get that kind of survey information Diane isn't it?

RES3: Yeah, I mean one of the other things as well that a lot of schools are actually doing with regard to connectivity is you know some families might not necessarily have, we mentioned about laptops, tablets that kind of thing so schools have arranged for you know a variety to be made available.

INT: Paul's been dealing with this for months, so Paul I think this would be a really good point for you to come and talk to us a little bit about what Governors might – can expect but then would you also talk about – I think lots of Governors are concerned about safeguarding with more online education happening.

RES2: Yeah, I was briefly going to mention a couple of things. The DFE keep changing on a regular basis what's on their website and they're trying to develop more offers for schools to get equipment sometimes it perhaps doesn't appear as rapidly as schools like but it's constantly changing. They've also provided links so that schools can get extra data so if families are trying to work you know using data on mobile phone then there might be access to free data and Governors might want to just ask with the school as to whether they've checked any of those additional things. Some schools have loaned out equipment as well to help support pupils which is a really good idea, but it is worthwhile again finding out about what strategies the schools have got to make sure the equipment is used safely, again what you'd expect to see probably is you know sort of a learning pack which explains to parents about the ways that their children can be safe when they're using the equipment online and again, Education Durham's provided templates for that information. One more thing I suppose linked with

safety because safeguarding and safety is obviously key to all schools, is thinking about whichever learning platform the school's set up. An awful lot of schools are using learning platforms that have been set up by the County Council or by alternative providers, but it is worth having that oversight into whether 's been set up safely with the relevant security settings to make sure the children's accounts are safe and they can't accidentally drift into areas they're not supposed to. So again, it's worth just reviewing and making sure that the school's confident in whatever system it's using have been set up thinking about the children's safety and the safety of children's data.

INT: Yeah, absolutely and I think that's something the Safeguarding Governors we know they've been really interested in and I know that we've you know provided quite a lot of additional support to schools around that. So, I guess that kind of leads into the next area we wanted to talk about this morning which is about the role of Governors in relation to remote education. One of my schools was talk to me yesterday and just as they have got a staff champion for remote education, they have - they've created a temporary Link Governor for remote education so a Governor with a specific link role just because the governing body there just felt there was quite a lot to sort of get to grips with in a short space of

[20:00] time, so having a dedicated Governor who could really be the point person was useful but also so that senior leader in school knew who the Governor was because I think we are really conscious of just easing whatever time pressures and burdens on our senior leaders in school as we can because it's just an incredibly busy time. So, if we think about that role of the Governors then, I mean Diane is there anything Governors shouldn't be doing in relation to remote education to you think?

RES3: Yeah, I think Governors always – something that we do emphasise is about all monitoring visits to school as well, you know Governors should be involved strategically you're not getting involved in an operational side of things, there's no expectation that you're going to be setting things up or you know actually being involved in the lessons themselves yours is a strategic monitoring role and so we should be looking at how things are being delivered, what impact they're having most importantly so yes we've got the system set up, but what you know the questions that we should be asking around yes we've got it set up what

impact are they actually having and we have developed a few sort of question sheets that – some handy information with questions that Governor can use when they're arranging visits to school. It also emphasis well that you know we talked earlier about you know about trying to lessen the pressure on staff because we are conscious that you know staff have an awful lot on their plate at the moment and so it's just a gentle reminder to Governors that you know we need to follow the agreed visits protocol and make an appointment, you know get in touch with the head teacher and make an appointment that's convenient for them and appreciate that you know it might not immediately be possible to go into school but to you know to go with whatever the head teacher has available.

INT: Absolutely and I mean I think it's the other great thing about the remote connectivity isn't it that obviously that conversation with may be the lead for remote education can take place through Zoom or Teams, I think it takes less time for everybody which does make a contribution to people's work life balance and wellbeing. Pam, you know just getting to that nitty gritty then of holding leaders to account for you know the quality of the remote offer and then you know the quality of the implementation and of course most importantly its actual impact, what kind of things do you think Governors can usefully do?

RES1:   Okay, so I think really in terms of Governors maintaining that strategic overview really they've got to know and understand why the school has chosen to deliver the remote education in a particular way, why has the school chosen to use a blended approach in terms of text books as well as education apps and live teaching, why is it that we've chosen that, what is it about our community and what do the children in our school need. Governors should try and understand the main challenges that families and staff face with remote education it's not all about how you know what challenges the families have, the staff have challenges as well in terms of them may be working from home, they may be home educating their own children, the might have a lack of technology or they might have elderly relatives to be looking after, so in terms of you know what is it – what are those challenges for our school for that remote education. To find this out Governors are going to have to ask questions to leaders and of course you can have those conversations with the head teacher or as we've said the

senior leader who's got the responsibility for the remote education who might actually be doing some more intensive monitoring of the remote education and the Link Governor or maybe it's the curriculum committee or whoever is gonna have that responsibility from the governing body to liaise on remote education can have that overview, and I think it's also very important for Governors to support school leaders to address any challenges for instance agreeing to spend extra additional money on IT hardware to support families. Governors should also ensure that those details of the remote education have been published on the school website by the 25th January, I keep saying that, and if not ask why and not in a very challenging way but it might be that those leaders need support to achieve that, what are the circumstances around why it hasn't been done and can Governors support in any way. Thinking about the impact of remote education, it might be that Governors have to think about on the return to school discussing the impact about the remote education on pupil's progress, can Governors monitor the remote education by asking questions of leaders? They can hold conversations with class teachers and have that overview perhaps of parental feedback.

INT: Yeah, that feedback question is really important isn't it because of - obviously one of the key roles of Governors it's about that stakeholder relationship isn't it and an awareness of the community of which we're in and you know Governors are uniquely placed to know that. Paul, I think you've got -

RES2:   I was just about say really it's worth Governors knowing as well there isn't really as the evidence comes out, there isn't really a right or a wrong way of doing this, it's likely to be about a real mixture of technologies and it's probably important about the culture in the learning rather than the actual lump of kit that you're using. I think the other things as well is the schools remote learning offer it's gonna continue to evolve, the chances are that what school's doing now will be different from what the school's doing in a few weeks' time and so it starts to evaluate that evidence of children learning then probably the approach to what the school will do will change, so don't look for an easy solution I don't think there is an easy solution it's a really difficult problem and what schools are doing is going to keep changing as the systems improve.

INT: Thanks everybody. I mean I think one of the most useful things I've seen, I was joining a meeting earlier this week with one of – a school in one of our neighbouring counties actually and it was very interesting there that the Chair of Governors and head teacher had talked about having an additional section to the Termly Head Teacher's Report to Governors which actually just included the head teacher's monitoring - an account of the head teacher's monitoring of the remote offer so the head teacher had included some evidence of what she'd found when actually observing some of the videos being used by the children that she'd listened in on a live lesson, and that she'd asked senior leaders had they monitored the work that had been handed in and the quality of advice that the children were getting as you would expect you know in a daily life in a school and so it was really useful for Governors to – just to know that there was still a monitoring and quality assurance process going on even though actually in that school only 60 out 1,500 children were actually in the building but everybody you know the senior leaders could assure the Governors of what was going on.

Pam, I'll come to you and then we'll start to bring things to a close.

RES1:   Yeah, I think it's also useful to bring those subject leaders and those heads of departments into those – into that monitoring role to ensure that you've got consistency across your subject and to lessen the burden on head teachers or the person who has the responsibility for remote education.

INT: So, to kind of round things off, I wonder if we could each think of one question that we think is really useful for Governors to ask, if Governors only have an amount of time or a chance to ask one question what do you think would be the most useful one? I'm gonna give you some thinking time you see I'm recalling my teaching skills there I'm giving everybody a bit of thought time as I glance around. I'll give you even more thought time by saying the one I think that I would want to ask in my school as a Governor. My mind always goes first to the children who are perhaps the most at risk and who might find things the hardest, so I would probably ask a question first about you know, what can leaders tell us as Governors about how our looked after children are managing and engaging with this very, you know confusing world of remote education you know especially if they're in-- living in a complex situation and they're not coming into

school many of our looked after children are coming into school. So, my first question would be about you know how are we supporting our looked after children in the remote education period and you know is it working are those children for example making gains with their reading, are they looking like they're gauging their GCSE physics understanding if I think about my own experience yesterday here at home, so that would be my question because that's the way my mind always goes first. Who-- I'm gonna ask-- do I ask for a volunteer? Go on, Paul.

RES2:   I'm gonna cheat because one of my other roles sometimes is doing websites audits so my question would be have you updated the information on the website for the 25th and actually reading through that would be really useful because it would give you an immediate understanding of what the school's remote education offer is.

INT: Paul, do you know what you did there you proved that you've been listening to Pam throughout the podcast as well so that was lovely but I bet you've stolen Pam's one. Diane what do you think Governors could do-- what would be your question do you think that you'd suggest for Governors?

RES3:   There are so many options available. I think one of the things I would if I was a Governor I would like to ask if-- what kind of feedback the school has actually sought from the parents as to whether or not they've found the lessons and you know the things that are available and whether they've found them useful or whether they've had any particular problems because you know the school may

[30:00]   be thinking that yes everything's great we're delivering these lessons but if parents are stuck or you know if they need a little bit more help with Teams for example you know so I think have they done any feedback exercises you know just to see people's opinions.

INT: That's interesting and of course the other side to that is of course how are they gathering children's feedback and children's experiences because that is the thing which we need to know because that's what tells us if they've learnt anything and as teachers that's what we really want to know. Pam, I'm gonna let you have the last question.

RES1: Okay. My question would be around wellbeing, how does-- how do school leaders ensure that they can monitor and gauge the wellbeing of pupils and staff. I think that's really important during this time during this period of lockdown how are they engaging pupils in terms of their wellbeing and their mental health, what provision is in place, what are schools doing to support that and as I say that goes for staff and for pupils.

INT: And Pam, that's so important isn't it because I think in the rush of we must provide three hours or four hours or five hours a day, actually we're thinking about that timing you know what planning is there around for example children and young people getting out in the daylight for some fresh air if they're learning until half past three and then have some homework to submit, etc, etc. I think also as Governors, just sort of perhaps having a look at an example of a timetable and thinking is there time here for a family to make and eat lunch between a lesson here and a provision there you know and I know Paul and I have had this conversation because he and I, we've teenage children and know it's very important that there needs to be dinner made and that they get a chance to eat it.

I am very aware of time and I'm keeping an eye on the wellbeing of the team here doing the podcast today and that they've given lots of their time here. We've probably chatted longer than I expected today actually but I think it's a big topic and I hope Governors that you've been able to fast-forward or pause and finish whatever you're doing whether it's the washing up or whether you've just got your feet up and listening to us on a morning. If you would like to know more following this podcast the DFE website has got some really up to date and useful evidence that you can have a read of and it's always worth visiting the Educational Endowment Foundation website the EEF or the EEF as we like to call it when we're in County Hall because that's the big evidence base and if you're really interested in this area or if you are the link Governor for remote education it's worth having a little read there.

As I mentioned Diane, I think we're gonna be sending out some support notes aren't we with agendas.

RES3: Yeah.

INT: And very soon of course as our new offer for GovernorHub and The Key open up and governing bodies can sign up for that, there's obviously lots of really up to date information on The Key and via GovernorHub as well and Diane I think you've got another good link for us.

RES3: Yes, just-- we're just really excited actually ridiculously excited about the GovernorHub and The Key opportunity that we've managed to get for schools so, just to remind you that we have got a couple of sessions available which Chairs might like to attend just to get a bit more information about those, because one of the offers that we've got is if people sign up by the 31st January you can actually get earlier access to this.

INT: It is, there's free offers and if you're a Governor and you've not-- your Chair knows more about it and also your Clerk can advise.

So, thank you so much to Paul and Pam and Diane and to Donna who bears with us so much with all the technical side of things and we'd be absolutely lost without her doing all those kinds of things.

We will be back in February with a February podcast, if there is something that you would like us to talk about or a Governance topic you'd like us to explore, do drop us an email at Governortraining@durham.gov.uk because we'd really rather that the suggestions for these topics came from you, this one actually did come about because a Governor said, "Could you do one of those about Governor-- about remote education, Gabrielle." So, we did do this one in response to a Governor request so that's the way I'd like them to be.

So, I wish you all well I'm gonna ask everybody to say goodbye.

RES3: Bye.

RES1: Bye.

RES2: Bye.

INT: That was very grim, wasn't it? If I was in a pantomime I'd make you do it all again but they are all waving Governors I promise you, I promise you the panel is waving.

Thank you so much, we look forward to hearing you again soon and as always if you have any questions about Governance, contact your Chair contact your Clerk or us at Governor Training and we hope to see you either at Governor Training or actually even in person as soon as it's safe to do so.

Audio Ends: [00:35:14]