

New Zealand based UK school governor uses technology to span the miles

Angie Lund, previously a Learning & Development Officer at Wokingham Borough Council, shares her experience of being a UK school governor based in New Zealand.

With 11,500 miles between her hometown of Wokingham and new location of Tauranga, New Zealand, Angie Lund shares the challenges and opportunities presented by being a remote school governor.

How did your role as a remote school governor happen?

The decision to become a remote school governor came about because the Chair of Governors wanted me to maintain the role after I emigrated to New Zealand with my

family. We've been working on a very strong development plan for the school with lots of accompanying HR related issues such as staff restructuring, new job descriptions, policies and procedures and I wanted to see this plan to fruition.

Initially, we were unsure how the situation would pan out as the role of remote school governing was new to us all! However, during the past three months it has worked very effectively for all concerned. The Headmaster and his Business Manager are confident that they can communicate with me on any issue and I could support them even though I was on the other side of the world.

What challenges are you experiencing in your role as a remote school governor?

One of the biggest challenges initially has been some mis-information got

out there. At one point, one of the other governors thought that I'd left the board and stopped copying me in on emails.

Another challenge I have is that I can't just physically visit the school if they need me. We all need to be very organised.

How is technology helping you overcome these challenges?

Technology is at the heart of my role of a remote school governor. Email and Skype are the two main tools I use, with the phone being used occasionally. My Head has had a few people issues while I've been away and we've had Skype video calls discussing what to do and I've emailed responses, advice and guidance to him.

How do you see Modern Governor helping in your role as a remote school governor?

As all school governors are volunteers,

“Modern Governor enables the learner to learn at their own pace. It's a great way of managing the learning and integrating it into our busy lives, because for governors it's all about finding the time”.

Modern Governor is an excellent way of learning about the responsibilities of a governor. Modern Governor enables the learner to learn at their own pace. It's a great way of managing the learning and integrating it into our busy lives, because for governors it's about finding the time.

Your school is independent. Are there any governing differences between local authority schools and independent schools?

Most of the governing responsibilities are the same for independent and state schools but independent school governors miss out on so many opportunities because they don't have access to the kind of learning available through the local authority system.

As Modern Governor is designed to help school governors develop their skills through e-learning at a time, place and pace that suits their needs, it would be a great tool and huge asset to the independent sector.

When communicating with your school governor colleagues, what tips do you have when up against different time zones?

The time difference was workable as New Zealand is 11 hours in front, so when it was 9am in the UK it was 8pm that night in New Zealand.

My advice when communicating with governors based in other countries is to be clear about what expectations you have about your remote governor:

- how do you want them to communicate?
- what's the best time to call using Skype or the phone?
- how often do you expect them to touch base?
- do they need to vote or can they give their vote to another governor as a proxy?

For us, when we needed to discuss something we emailed whoever needed to be involved in the discussion and set up a time when I'd be available. Ultimately, this made things easier for everyone and we

were making the most productive use of everyone's time.

How do you see your role as a remote school governor developing in the remainder of 2010/2011?

Due to the success to date, I'd like to continue as a remote governor. I may stay on the board in an advisory capacity but with no voting rights to make things easier or I may stay on as a full member which will mean that we will Skype the meetings which is very easy to do in reality.

“Independent school governors miss out on so many opportunities because they don't have access to Modern Governor through the local authority system”.

What next?

Contact elaine@moderngovernor.com or call 0207 101 9383 to hear more about Modern Governor and how we can help you support the learning needs of your school governors.