Dear Parents/Carers,

As another term draws to a close, Derek Thompson, one of our governors, would like to share his experiences with you:

**What does it feel like to be a school governor?**

In February 2015 I was employed as a part-time Neighbourhood Coordinator with Great Places Housing Association; I had previously worked full time for around 40 years and was looking forward to enjoying more time to relax and pursue various hobbies. I realised after a short while that I would like to fill part of the extra time I had on my hands with some activity ‘of value’ to the community. The timing of an invitation from Athelstan Primary School to my employer, Great Places Housing Association, to nominate someone to join their board of governors was perfect, as a lifelong resident in Handsworth and former pupil of Athelstan Primary School, I put myself forward for this opportunity. Following a meeting with Sarah Horsfield, Chair of Governors, and Deb Halliday, Headteacher, I was asked to join the board of governors from September 2016.

I had not expected the education system to be too different from the demands of social housing, after all, they were both in the public sector but boy, was I wrong! I couldn’t believe that ‘Education’ had so many rules, policies, procedures, legal requirements and targets to get to grips with, AND like most public sector environments, these keep changing! Learning the ‘language of education provision’ was challenging in itself, in addition, the need to learn the school’s own acronyms and initiatives added to the challenge. With the support of the senior leadership team, staff and governors, I quickly got up to speed, I am thankful for their patience in answering my questions and explaining terminology, even when I knew I had asked it before. I will keep asking by the way!

Initially I felt a little overwhelmed as a new governor, it was hard to feel part of some discussions because the subject matter and ‘language’ was foreign to me. I had to rely on the patience of staff, governors and pupils to keep answering my questions, I was made to feel welcome from the start. I received excellent training and support throughout my first year 2016/7, there was such a lot to learn in a short time and I was keen to make a positive contribution as quickly as possible.
My first school year as a governor ended with an inspection visit from Ofsted. Our school had been expecting this to take place and there was definitely a tension in the air up to the inspection visit and the outcome being shared. Athelstan had been gearing up for this visit for some time and as everyone knows, the outcome was extremely important to the whole school. I was happy to support more experienced governors, Jules and Rochelle, in representing the Board of Governors at the meeting with the Ofsted inspectors and we were able to demonstrate the hard work and improvements the school had made since the previous disappointing classification. As we all know the Ofsted Inspectors designated Athelstan as a ‘good’ school which was a fantastic achievement for everyone, some of us thought that ‘outstanding’ may have been deserved but at least we now have something to work towards next time.

Over the last two and a half years I have developed my skills and knowledge as a governor; it is an ongoing learning process that still provides a challenge. I gave up my part-time job at Great Places in September 2017, this enabled me to give more attention to the duties of being a school governor. I look forward to diarised school events, whether this is to carry out monitoring of a particular area of school provision, attending a meeting or representing Governors/Athelstan Primary School at out of school events.

Being a governor at Athelstan Primary School is a pleasurable experience. The level of professionalism is excellent, in addition, pupils are polite, helpful and a credit to the school.

Now that I no longer work, I am often asked how I fill my time and whether I find it boring not having something to do every week, my answer is definitely no! I have plenty of time to fulfil my governor responsibilities and the best bit is that it doesn’t feel like work.

Being a governor at Athelstan Primary School is a very important part of my life, it is both challenging and hugely rewarding. I feel that I am making a positive difference to the lives of pupils and staff, it all boils down to being ‘a critical friend’ of the school. It is also fun, I look forward to being in school and the interaction with staff and pupils, there is a friendly respectful atmosphere, which is a credit to everyone involved.

My friends and former work colleagues often told me that I did not smile very often in the past, being a governor at Athelstan has changed that!

Derek Thompson
Co-opted Governor

As always, if you have any questions for the governing body, please email enquiries@athelstan.sheffield.sch.uk

On behalf of the governing body, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Sarah Horsfield
Chair of Governors