Book Review Symposium: Andrew Wilkins (2016) *Modernising School Governance: Corporate Planning and Expert Handling in State Education.* Series: Routledge Research in Education Policy and Politics. London and New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-138-78747-6 (hardback, also available in paperback and e-book)

Denise Mifsud
Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta
Richard Riddell
Bath Spa University, Bath, UK
Ian Dewes
Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK

Denise Mifsud, *Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta*

Modernising School Governance: Corporate Planning and Expert Handling in State Education focuses on the shifting role of governors in the English state education system, more specifically on how these have been shaped by post-2010 market-based reforms. In the Foreword, Stephen Ball describes school governance as ‘‘a fraught and a desolate political field’’, with Wilkins’ book serving to demonstrate ‘‘both the irrelevance and the centrality of governors within our current political context’’, considered to be ‘‘part of a general depoliticisation of education’’. According to Ball, ‘‘What Wilkins’ book does is both map the political terrain within which school governing is located and explore the tensions and limits that define this terrain’’.

Wilkins carries this out in an excellent manner, by crafting a book based on evidence gathered via a three-year research project conducted between 2012 and 2015, thus enabling him to combine theory and data, including testimonials from various stakeholders, in addition to anchoring his writing within a Foucauldian interpretive framework. The main text of the book is presented in six chapters, besides the unmissable introduction and conclusion. The Table of Contents reveals titles and corresponding subtitles that are interlaced with Foucauldian terminology and at times imbued with sarcasm – thus revealing clear attempts on the part of Wilkins to apply Foucault's trident of scepticism, critique and problematisation to this recent neoliberal and performative approach to 'strong' school governance.

The Introduction immediately sets the scene for this manuscript, situating its timeliness as ''an opportune time to be writing a book about school governance in England'' (p. 1) due to the fluctuating education reform landscape between 2010 and 2015. Wilkins provides a definition of governors as ''a band of volunteers who are expected to provide "appropriate" challenge and support to senior school leaders'' (p. 2). Wilkins makes a bold statement regarding his position, as he voices not-so-subtle criticism of these reforms in England as ''undermining notions of democratic accountability'', with school governance failing ''to properly materialise in practice … while attractive in theory'' (p. 2).

Furthermore, Wilkins problematises the widely-held and mistaken notion of democratic accountability and consumer responsiveness being synonymous. He very aptly draws the reader's attention to how these market-driven demands have introduced ''a hidden politics of exclusion'' (p. 4) disregarding democratic consultation. Wilkins' book thus ''documents and analyses how these anxieties have manifested themselves'' (p. 7), ending the Introduction with a very apt chapter synopsis that encourages any reader to go through the rest of the book.

Chapter 1, *A Genealogical Enquiry*, provides the trajectory of school governance in England against a background where it has been ‘‘significantly reworked to better complement strategies of depoliticisation, decentralisation and disintermediation’’ (p. 10). Wilkins provides an explanation of what a genealogical enquiry entails, according to Foucauldian theory, and its purpose for this particular topic; ‘‘I am not interested in making statements about what school governance is or ought to be’’ (p. 12). Chapter 1 provides a very thorough history of governors and their role in England up to the very recent education reform, which serves to clarify the author’s stance as history repeating itself in education reform; of the same rationality being utilised, but with a diverse technology of government to shape schools both ‘outside-in’ and ‘inside-out’. Wilkins subsequently encapsulates school governance in simple terms as ‘‘a patchwork of norms, objectives, principles and strategies’’ for accountability purposes to enhance ‘‘public trust and confidence’’ (p. 30).

The author’s stance towards current school governance also emerges via the sarcasm inherent in the subtitles and the progression in the choice of terminology which veers towards greater accountability and centralisation. Therefore, one can state that Chapter 1 sets the plateau within which the research is anchored, with the remaining chapters ‘‘closely observing and evidencing which ‘truths’ or rationalities function as a partage between true and false statements and which shape school governance as a doctrine, discourse and practice’’ (p. 30).

Chapter 2, *Rituals in Truth-Making*, reveals Wilkins’ critique of this academisation and mode of school governance, especially through the purposefully selected subtitles that point to the erosion of democracy – a term which ‘‘has become something of a dirty or unfashionable word’’ (p. 32). Wilkins describes policy discourse and social reality, more specifically, as

anchored within the Foucauldian notion of discourse. An interesting notion Wilkins focuses on, is how education policy discourse executes a pivotal role in the making and remaking of governors, moving on to the stifling control exercised by central government and other intermediary bodies such as Ofsted, that act as ‘‘calculative, disciplinary technologies’’, with Ofsted, in particular, functioning as ‘‘a permanent, enduring presence in the field of school governance … to ensnare the conditions and possibilities framing the conduct of governors’’ (p. 48-49).

As the title of Chapter 3 suggests, *Situated Neo-Liberalism*, the main focus is on the notions of neoliberalism and Foucauldian governmentality, for as Wilkins states, ‘‘school governance cannot be decontextualised and separated out from an understanding of the complex political, cultural and economic realities underpinning national, supranational and global developments’’ (p. 50). Wilkins very aptly clarifies the concept of neoliberalism, rightly arguing that it ‘‘cannot be reduced to a blanket policy or static core’’ (p. 51). He proceeds to give very thorough analytics of Foucauldian notions of government, namely the analytics of government, political rationality and mentality, and governmentality, in order to situate school governance within the neoliberal landscape, thus attempting to explicate the interconnections between the whole and the part.

Chapter 4, *Expert Publics*, moves closer to the field explored by Wilkins, as it goes into details of the actual responsibilities carried out by the governors and how much autonomy is still allowed by the state. This is located within the Foucauldian interpretive framework of governmentality and current political discourse within the English state government and local government bureaucracy. The Ofsted Framework for Inspection is depicted as stretching its disciplinary gaze on school governors. What does the governing of schools at present actually demand? The subtitles indicate the ever-growing panoptical

gaze by the state as we are taken from ‘‘sprawling authority’’, to ‘‘pedagogies of surveillance’’ through to ‘‘technocratic governance’’.

The title of Chapter 5, *Business Ontology*, immediately points to the market-oriented approach of school governance under the watchful eye of the state in order to appoint ‘‘governors who are better assessors and appraisers, and who are therefore more effective at utilising their freedoms and responsibilities to bring the gaze of government to bear upon the actions of senior school leaders’’ (p. 95). Wilkins problematises the reculturation of governance as it is undergoing revision ‘‘to cope with the demands of devolved management and risk together with government-centric pressures following the creation of tight, centralised accountability’’ (p. 96).

In his outline of school governors, Wilkins makes a distinction between those who are ‘‘effective-as-non-political-objective-detached’’ and ‘‘ineffective-as-political-partial-biased’’ where they channel accountability towards central government. This chapter then moves on to discuss the impact of professionalism on school governance and how governors have been subjected into compliance by the various ‘‘dividing practices’’ and ‘‘auditable truths’’. The various, somewhat stark, definitions of ‘strong governance’ set the milieu for us, the readers, to problematise the role of governors, hereby labelled as ‘‘compliance officers’’ and ‘‘state volunteers’’.

The Final Chapter, *Repopulating the Middle*, delves more deeply into the issue of accountability, competition and collaboration. Wilkins deals with local government bureaucracy and discusses the various cluster models the newly formed academics have partnered into, in order to safeguard their desired ‘autonomy’. One has to note that ‘‘the evidencing of what governors do is sometimes just as important as the governing itself’’ (p. 131) – this leads us to

‘‘streamlined accountability’’. Is it possible for competition and collaboration to co-exist? In England, we have a strong case where ‘‘differences between schools therefore continue to be imagined and constructed for the purpose of preserving market positionality’’ (p. 143).

The Conclusion wraps up this monograph in a very artful manner. Wilkins does not mince words but gives a stark picture of current school governance and how the macro changes and the English state education system have affected the day-to-day practices of governors. These have become ‘‘guardians of the state’’ (p. 145) in a system that propagates ‘‘a ruthless depoliticisation which disguises anti-democratic measures’’ (p. 147). Wilkins, besides problematising the state of school governance which if viewed as democratic would be ‘‘both romantic and misguided’’ (p. 148), provides possible solutions in a scenario proffering a reformed role of school governors, whereby ‘‘checks and balances can be performed by someone else’’ (p. 148). By ‘‘playing devil’s advocate’’ (p. 150) throughout, Wilkins effectively does what he promises in the Introduction of this monograph.

This book, whose readability and accessibility are enhanced by a very direct writing style; subtitles running throughout each chapter; vivid testimonials by various stakeholders; a comprehensive reference list, in addition to a very detailed index, is a must-read for academics interested in school governance and how neoliberalism manages to give a false idea of self-governance directed by state mechanisms.

Another unique feature of this book is Wilkins’ ability to outline Foucault’s theory of governmentality and apply it to his study of school governance, a demonstration of the utility of Foucauldian theory for present-day research. This is a wonderfully provocative book that deserves to be read and critically

appreciated by academics and practitioners alike. Wilkins undoubtedly lives up to the description of the book given on the first page and deserves to be applauded for the bold stance adopted. This monograph should thus adorn the library shelves of higher education institutions, as well as scholarly individuals with a keen interest in educational leadership, school governance, neoliberalism and the application of Foucauldian theory.

Richard Riddell, *Bath Spa University, Bath, UK*

This extremely timely study is centred on empirical research into the work of the unpaid volunteers involved in the governance of English schools, or school governors, as they have become more uniformly known over the past thirty years. Its empirical data is complemented and bookended by a careful consideration of the governmentalities, discursive formations and technologies that frame and position school governors in the current articulations of a marketised system of state schooling, often characterised as 'high autonomy – high accountability' (i.e. Greany and Earley, 2017). 'System' here is best considered a loose term, and more cultural and sociological than bureaucratic, as the book argues, demonstrating how the ''steering at a distance'' technologies in effect ensure governors are ''self-policing'' in accordance with ''business ontology'' (Chapter 5).

The book is located at the important historical juncture between five years of intensive school reform of school governance brought about by the UK Coalition Government (2010-2015) and, I would argue, a further period we are in now, where the consolidation of these reforms is leading to something quite systemically different. This different system-in-development is characterised by disappearing autonomy at school level and dramatically increased granular

surveillance. It is not certain that these outcomes were necessarily anticipated or intended by policy-makers – this is certainly not 'high autonomy' – but their story continues, and it is important that books such as this one continue to tell it.

This first phase of reform saw an acceleration and transformation of the 'academisation' process commenced under the first term of the previous Labour Governments (1997-2010), whereby more and more state schools previously loosely overseen by local governments (Councils) in the UK are now funded directly by central government on the basis of a formal funding agreement with the minister, detailing school responsibilities. This book documents this process (Chapter 1) and does so by employing a Foucauldian genealogical approach.

This approach certainly begins to document and explain the technologies and governmentalities the book wishes to demonstrate as they unfold. But I would argue that this approach could be seen to miss some of the ''messy real world of education politics'' as Whitty puts it (2016, p. 18), where motivations are complex, multi-faceted and contradictory and, as Marx himself might have argued (1979), the significance of the new and emerging is still represented in the language of the old, masking its significance to the observer. Such a wider archaeological study might, however, well require a further book.

But the incomplete second phase of reforms, in which we are now situated (and yes, imbricated – we do not stand aside from these processes as academics), provide a good example of history moving fast, with school ecologies transforming, arguably to a greater degree than before, with academies (as schools increasingly actually refer to themselves as) being or becoming part of multi-academy trusts (MATs), previously more often referred to as 'chains'.

These MATs are legally constituted as private companies registered at Companies House in London with a list of Directors, as the book points out. Further, to be clear about exactly what they are, MATs have a group of 'members' - as few as three in number - analogous to the shareholders of a private company who are deemed to have 'founded' the MAT. They appoint and remove trustees from the Board (DfE, 2017).

The book's findings and arguments apply exponentially at this level and confirm my own current research and indeed recent experience. In this developing story, the process of MAT consolidation appears to be accelerating, although the published data as always lags behind in such periods. According to 2017 data (DfE, 2017a), 4,140 of the then 5,758 open academies (about 72%) were in MATs responsible for more than one school. This is quite different from even quite recent findings (i.e. Simkins, 2015).

It needs to be said that this 5,758 number is only about 27% of the 21,525 state schools open, but this masks the fact that MATs have been repeatedly presented as the preferred political and governmental solution to ''repopulating the middle'' as the book documents (Chapter 6) and, indeed as a consequence, strategic surveillance. Nevertheless, to be clear, against the reported background of little UK Government legislative time or even interest for anything but overseeing the Brexit process, it does seem likely that currently English state schools will continue to operate, on the one hand, within a 'mixed economy' of academies (in MATs or otherwise), and on the other hand, as local government funded or 'maintained' schools, as they are now termed. There is clearly much more work to do on this to inform our developing understanding.

The significance of the empirical work reported in the book, however, is that such a mixed economy is nevertheless constituted as a system, right now in

England, albeit as an unstable and dynamic one. School governors make reportedly similar comments about their governance roles and how they see them, whether they are responsible for maintained schools or academies. The trends identified in Andrew's book, particularly the technicisation of school governance – an emphasis on ''the appropriate expertise and technical knowledge necessary'' (p. 107) as part of the development of ''professional governance'' (p. 105), do, indeed represent a move steadily to what he correctly identifies as a more ''strategic'' role (p. 48). The new variously named bodies of school governance (i.e. I am now personally referred to as an 'Academy Councillor') operate within ''compulsory visibility'', borrowing Foucault's phrase, ''overseeing financial and educational performance'' as critical friends of senior leaders.

Echoing Andrew's, my own current research documents governance discourse as increasingly populated with such performative phrases as ''holding to account'', ''give assurances that'' and ''what are you going to do about (x)'', as opposed to older terms such as ''giving support'' (c.f. James et al, 2010, p. 3), ''helping to achieve'', ''how might the children benefit'' or even (just) ''how can we help?''.

Even against the background of the ever-present overrepresentation of the managerial and professional classes in school governance, pointed out in Chapter 2, the twin and related processes of MAT consolidation, often now without any local body at all at school level, and technicisation, have hence begun to diminish the number of 'amateur' and unpaid volunteers. A recent estimate in the UK-based Times Education Supplement (TES, 2018) calculates the loss at 68,000 governors from a total of about 200,000 at one time.

These changes in the numbers of the engaged volunteers, accompany the much deeper change, discussed later in Andrew's book as a move away from ''stakeholder government'' (explicitly disavowed by the UK government in 2015) to what is argued (Chapter 7) to be (disguisedly) ''anti-democratic'' (p. 147), and one where governors exercise roles that can be characterised as ''narrow, instrumental, utilitarian, pragmatic, administrative and bureaucratic''. The depoliticisation of education described here, or ''destatalisation'' as Jessop (2002) referred to, in more general terms, allows for less opportunity for the ''political capacities of local citizens to engage'' (Chapter 7, p. 148), in the development of strategic visions for schools, serving the local community as well as the wider society, despite DfE's insistence on the latter (DfE, 2017b).

Yet, the very remoteness of increasing numbers of MAT Boards from the disagreeable business of dealing with parents and children, described in these very terms on some of their websites, make the technicisation of governance more likely, while the responsibilisation of governors engenders the 'self-policing' (doing the work of the state), so well documented in this book and referred to earlier. The book correctly identifies this overall unstable formation as the logic of the market, whereby the quasi-market of the expression of parental preferences for school places, considered in Chapter 2, supposedly reflects the wider one of economic markets, (probably) by design this time at least.

The book's central strength is that it moves from a theoretical analysis of social, educational and economic change, and the fungibility of governance models between the private and (supposedly and fragilely) public sectors, to how that diminishing number of those still involved in school governance describe their roles and explain their actions. The direct quotations drawn on from Chapter 4 onwards are valuable and original illustrations of the practical processes of

positioning and self-positioning, demonstrate the powerful and limiting roles of discourse and adumbrate the very narrowly defined and delimited current education doxa in England. For all these reasons, the book should be a core text for students of education policy at master's and PhD levels, but I would consider aspects of it for third year undergraduates in a variety of disciplines.

And yet, these powerful illustrations and well-articulated theorisations may not be the whole story. Just as the new is not completely emergent from the old in how we think about and articulate it, so that holds true for the individuals involved as well. There are the beginnings of a discussion of this in a section titled *Dividing Practices* in Chapter 5: the ''hidden giving'' documented, not that long ago, by James et al (2010) has not yet completely disappeared – however hard the systemic push for it – and governor participation and recruitment continues to draw on these deeper civic wells, even from those recruited for their 'technical' expertise. Think about it: why would a banker wish to be involved in his/her local school, for example? It does not take much imagination to develop an answer beyond notions of corporate social responsibility.

The answers to these wider questions about motivation from the interviewees before – or even as - they become entrapped in these discursive practices could illustrate the wider pool of democratic motivations, evinced, for example, in recent demonstrations in the UK (February 2018) of public sympathy for rough sleepers. This is beyond the scope of Andrew's current book, without doubt, though this sort of data from the same interviewees would prove illuminating. It is in listening to these articulations at the interstices of agency and structure, that I, myself, have encountered for over forty years now, in a variety of roles including academic; that the researcher can identify the changes that are occurring, albeit in (merely) the social world, as the book correctly identifies.

But this is doxa changing in the researcher's gaze: the sites of struggle in these interstices are where educationalists, teachers, researchers, school governors and others who are active in the current polity and retain a social justice perspective can perform wider critical pedagogical roles than just commentary.

But this raises the wider issues about equity. A performative focus on a narrow range of outcomes for students, accompanied by the narrowing discourses and technologies that engender the self-policing, so well documented here, has been a constant emphasis in UK government policy documents in the 2010s (c.f. DfE, 2016). But it also enables an informed examination – for those that wish it - of the contribution made by the different experiences of schooling itself that continue to lead to the wide range of inequitable outcomes for students, especially those from a range of minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. The culture of English schooling in itself (performativity more generally, including that engendered by the quasi-market one) privileges certain backgrounds, again managerial and professional, and disadvantages others. And educational disadvantage itself is of course situated socially, culturally and economically beyond the school.

But enough is known now about how schools can address those aspects of inequity that are amenable to school action – acting internally and in concert with the wider community, enabled by governance - where they erupt and have tangible outcomes. This appears to this author at least as another interstice that warrants attention from a social justice perspective, particularly by those who enter these punishing governmentalities initially as hidden givers. It does not follow that action at school, and community level requires or even relies on these same governmentalities. The broader democratic governance that the book begins to advocate by default in the last Chapter is possible: these particular

matters are beyond the book's focus, of course, and so should not be taken as critical of it. But they do follow from the book's arguments.

So, the book has many strengths, all of which make it recommended reading, but there is one particular thing to which I would also like to draw attention. This is the Chapter on what is referred to as *Situated Neoliberalism* (Chapter 3). This identifies correctly, as does slipping into the easy use of this term, that too often our academic analyses fall short of providing a helpful and usable understanding of the complex, discordant, unstable and shifting social and economic formations that manifest in different and similar ways across the globe.

The practical focus, as neoliberalism is lived (Ball, 2012), can be argued to be the best way to develop understanding. As Ball puts it: (2012, page xiii)

> The neoliberalism I describe is often mundane and certainly not of a piece… I do not find it easy to condemn as a matter of course programmes and initiatives that offer access to education to children who otherwise have no opportunity to attend school.

This highlights the dilemma explored in the previous paragraphs. The focus in Andrew's book, besides aiding grounded understanding, helps prevent university students (and ourselves) of settling into an easy and simplistic characterisation of contemporary capitalism that therefore, very easy to condemn. This is a Chapter that could stand by itself and is an additional contribution to the literature.

Finally, it is really important that the book is now available in paperback. Publishers must pursue the extraordinarily expensive hardback monograph versions – such as the one I have received myself – with narrow objectives in

mind. The ideas in this book deserve wider circulation, because they enable those immersed in the wider education system – such as myself – to understand the nature of the roles they are being asked to perform so that they can change them.

References

Ball, S (2012). *Glocal Education Inc. New Policy Networks and the Neoliberal Imaginary*. Abingdon: Routledge.

DfE (2016). *Educational Excellence Everywhere.* London: DfE

DfE (2017a) *Experimental Statistics: Multi-Academy Trust Performance Measures: England, 2015 to 2016.* Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584075/SFR02_2017.pdf

DfE (2017b) *Governance Handbook for Academies, Multi-Academy Trusts and Maintained Schools*. London: DfE.

Earley, P and Greany, T (Eds) (2017). *School Leadership and Education System Reform*. London: Bloomsbury.

James, C, Brammer, S, Connolly, M, Fertig, M, James, J and Jones, J (2010). *The 'Hidden Givers': A Study of School Governing Bodies in England*. Reading: CfBT Education Trust.

Jessop, B (2002). *The Future of the Capitalist State*. Cambridge: Polity

Marx, K (1979 [1852]). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Collected Works Volume 11*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Riddell, R (2016). *Equity, Trust and the Self-Improving Schools System* London: UCL IoE Press.

Simkins, T (2015). School Restructuring in England: New School Configurations and New Challenges. *Management in Education* 29 (1) pp. 4-8.

TES (2018). *Insight: Governance*. Available at www.tes.co.uk

Whitty, G with Anders, J, Hayton, A, Tang, S and Wisby, E (2016). *Research and Policy in Education* London: UCL IoE Press

Ian Dewes, *Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK, and Headteacher*

Academisation of the English school system and the hollowing out of local authorities' education services have followed on from the reforms of the Thatcher governments of the 1980's, creating what Sir Tim Brighouse called the "age of markets and managerialism" (Pring and Roberts, 2016, p.153). These changes have been relatively well documented by academics, as well as receiving a good degree of interest from others, not always positive.

Andrew Wilkins' book *Modernising School Governance: Corporate Planning and Expert Handling in State Education* not only adds academic rigour to the consternation caused by these reforms, but by focusing on the role of those involved in the governance of schools, a rare light is cast on some of the most important people in our education system.

Wilkins draws extensively on Michel Foucault throughout the book. Foucault's theory of governmentality, where individuals are led into certain practices in order to achieve a "convenient end" (Foucault 1991, p.102) that is, an end which is convenient for the government, is used to explain how the aforementioned unhappiness with recent government policy has not led to widespread resistance. Wilkins is persuasive in describing how governmentality can be seen in contemporary school governance. With the increasing dominance of the professional classes seen among school governors the values of the market are constantly reproduced (p. 2) and many governors are said to "grudgingly or cynically follow rules they disagree with" (p. 34).

The influence of Foucault can be seen further in the book with reference towards the historical developments and changes in school governance, or to use the Foucauldian term, the "genealogy" of governance. Illuminating

historical references (for instance, on the social class of governors in Victorian times, p. 15) enhances the reader's understanding of how school governance has become what it is today. For all the references to Foucault, it should be noted that Wilkins does recognise the criticisms that have been made of the French philosopher's work. The work of Barnett and McKee (p. 66) is drawn upon to illustrate how governmentality does not adequately describe ways of resistance to neoliberal norms – a particularly important point considering the grass roots anti-academy movement seen in recent years.

Some of the strongest parts of the book see Wilkins explain some of the nuance of recent school reforms. The removal of some local authority powers is not "depoliticisation", where schools are freed from bureaucracy, but more "repoliticisation", where central government's influence is more keenly felt (p. 6). Terms such as "decentralised centralism" and "decontrolled control" (p. 55) are used to demonstrate the paradox or such reforms. The work of Stephen Ball (who also writes the book's foreword) is referenced at numerous points, for example, he is cited in explaining that reforms are not deregulation, but reregulation (p. 36). These parts of the book help the reader to cut through the rhetoric surrounding reforms and help to develop a better understanding of the impact of these changes.

The reader is left in no doubt about Wilkins' sceptism for contemporary policy. This book builds on his previously published work charting the influence and impact of neoliberalism on education. A theme which Wilkins has been particularly focused on, is the role of democracy. Wilkins is critical of the downplaying of democracy in schools and governance (p. 2). If a form of democracy does exist, Wilkins concludes that it is one reserved for the skilled and committed (p. 118).

Over the years that I have been a governor I have seen the increasing value placed on recruiting governors with the right skillset, rather than local stakeholders being represented. The stakeholder versus skillset approach to governor recruitment is not a new area of discussion, but Wilkins describes it well, although the trope that business skills dominate at the expense of democracy is made regularly throughout the book. On this point there seems to be schism between academic writing on governance and my experience of those involved in school governance who are less likely to see democratic process as a core function of schools. Perhaps this is governmentality in action.

A standout feature of the book is Wilkins' three-year study of governance 'on the ground'. Over a hundred interviews were conducted with governors, school leaders and parents. Chapter 4 focuses on the influence of performativity on the work of governors and Chapter 5 looks at the tensions caused by the competing democratic and technical functions of governance. This elevates the book from simply being the theoretical musings of an academic to a work which is closely connected with its subject.

As a governor and a trustee, I am delighted that this often-overlooked sector is being given the academic focus it deserves. It builds upon the ideas employed in recent books by Nigel Gann (*Improving School Governance*) and Jacqueline Baxter (*School Governance: Policy, Politics and Practice*). As someone who has drawn on Foucault's work during my own research into school governance, I have found the book invaluable; my copy is festooned with post-it notes marking salient sections. Yet as a school governor too, I found it interesting and useful. While being perhaps more suited to an academic audience, I hope that at least some of the 300,000 governors we have in this country read a copy of it. That is not to say it is an easy read; I think it contains ideas which are challenging to those who govern. It paints at times a bleak picture where

governors have become "purveyors of performativity" (p. 31) and dissension is discouraged because the accountability measures are so sharp (pp. 87-88).

Wilkins gives examples of how websites and resources, familiar to many school governors, are simply encouraging them to act in certain ways (p. 76). In doing so, they are pawns in the neoliberal government's games and take the role of "self-regulating subjects" (p. 7). Many governors will find this a difficult conclusion to reach; but I hope this doesn't deter them from persisting with the book. Wilkins leaves the reader in no doubt as to the irony considering the rhetoric of recent reforms being about schools' and school leader's autonomy.

References

Baxter, J. (2016). *School Governance: Policy, Politics and Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In: Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, pp. 87-104.

Gann, N. (2016). *Improving School Governance: How Better Governors Make Better Schools.* Routledge: Oxford.

Pring, R. and Roberts, M. (eds.) (2016). *A Generation of Radical Educational Change.* Routledge: Oxford.

Reviewer Details

Denise Mifsud, Ministry of Education and Employment, Malta

Richard Riddell, Bath Spa University, Bath, UK

Ian Dewes, Birmingham City University, Birmingham, UK, and Headteache