Back in 2014, Neil Gunn, Chair of Finance and Premises Committee at Gawsworth Primary School, in Cheshire, was asked to look into potential systems to enable governors and staff to share files with the primary aim of keeping all the information they needed for governance in one place. GVO was selected from a number of options considered. Now, in 2019, Suzie Blackwell, Chair of Governors, looks back on what turned out to be a journey to outstanding governance.

"Since using GVO as a way of improving working practice I can honestly say that GVO has helped our governing body work in a hugely effective and efficient way. It is hard to know where to start!"

Effective and Efficient

"Our use of GVO has evolved over time, and through using the GVO our work as governors is now accessible, transparent and shared. This improvement in process has led to highly effective meetings where we can focus on the main business in the meeting and sign off and ratify any key decisions effectively."

Following a visit to Gawsworth School to attend a governors’ meeting where GVO was in action, Mr Peter Rubery, CEO of The Fallibroome Multi Academy Trust, of which Gawsworth School is a member, commented that he was impressed by the efficiency and effectiveness of the governing board meeting and reflected that it was certainly one of the best examples of a governing board meeting that he had observed.

"Ahead of meetings queries and questions relating to the papers are posted via the comment function in the GVO, which enables everyone to see the questions and also the responses. During meetings there is a high quality of discussion, which is more focused and targeted as all governors come to our meetings fully prepared."

"The GVO is used effectively between meetings to share information, ideas and also sign off on any decisions that might need taking. For example, the Finance committee has recently reviewed and approved a staff insurance quote via the GVO and approved other purchases in a timely manner. Once more, all the information is accessible, visible and this process shows accountability and provides an audit trail. Governor involvement and challenge can be demonstrated, should this be required as evidence for external inspection."

Timely and Transparent

"In addition to improving the quality of meetings, speed of decision making and facilitating open and transparent discussion, we have used GVO to develop a very effective way to review and manage policies. Policies on the GVO are shared with governors, who can review them and post any comments to suggest changes required and also state their formal approval of the policy between meetings."
All governors’ suggestions and approvals are visible, which creates an audit trail and shows governor involvement and accountability.

**GVO has become the central place for policies to be stored, removing duplication and ensuring that there is just one unique version of any document.**

“Governors are kept up to speed on developments within the GVO through the use of notifications meaning that we have good engagement through GVO and that we are all 'live' with our information at any time. I feel that our governors have excellent knowledge and awareness of all the work taking place through having access to the GVO. Using the notification system to share information or ask for feedback/inputs involves all governors and keeps everyone updated. The same is true of the weekly newsletter providing a personalised summary of updates, developments and forthcoming actions and events.”

**Special Projects**

“Aside from the improvements to ongoing governance and collaboration between the team we have used GVO for a number of projects where working parties have been able to carry out their work – specific examples include the recruitment of a new headteacher and academy conversion. **GVO was invaluable in these instances, providing a secure place for all information regarding due diligence, director meetings, financial analysis, timetables, school visits and sign off on decisions to be reached in a (tight!) timescale and giving us an audit trail of these documents that can be referenced/utilised in the future.”

“Now that GVO is at the heart of our governance, we have created an induction pack for new governors joining the team. The induction area contains links to all the relevant documents in the GVO required to help understand the role of governors and also how we operate at Gawsworth. It details information such as committee structure, working documents, training, terms of reference, SSIP, a list of acronyms, and links to external websites such as Ofsted, DoE guidance and the NGA. This has enabled our new governors to learn about governance at their own pace by viewing the system and bringing themselves up to speed. New governors have also posted comments to ask questions. They were able to increase their knowledge quickly and in their own time and felt part of the group and engaged from day one. **All of our new governors wholeheartedly felt that the GVO made becoming a governor much easier. Being able to access all information at any convenient time is invaluable.”**

**External View**

“Security is excellent and communicating and sharing all work via GVO is a secure and effective method of working. **It is far more secure than using email and with GDPR legislation in place, GVO is compliant with this.**

Our GVO is constantly evolving and improving the more we use it and receiving the feedback noted above from our Trust CEO has confirmed to us that GVO is helping us in becoming ever stronger, more efficient and more effective as a governing body.”