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Creating expert publics: A governmentality approach to school governance under neoliberalism

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8

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Introduction

Since 2010 successive governments in England have embarked on an ambitious project to accelerate policy reforms designed to extricate state-funded schools from the politics and bureaucracy of local government and transform them into academies and free schools, otherwise known as ‘state-funded independent schools’ (DfE 2016a). A corollary of this is that governors – those responsible for holding senior school leaders to account for the educational and financial performance of schools – have acquired new freedoms and flexibilities, namely budgetary and legal powers to operate outside the remit of local government control (DfE 2015). Concurrently and somewhat paradoxically, this shift towards school autonomy has given rise to greater steering from government and non-government agencies who now regard school governance to be integral to school leadership, school management and public accountability in general (Ofsted 2015), so much so that they intervene in placing limits on meanings and practices of ‘good governance’ (DfE 2015) and seek to render the contribution of governors amenable to the scrutiny of external regulators (Ofsted 2015).

These policy shifts not only highlight the false distinction between regulation and deregulation so endemic to the marketisation of state education (Aalbers 2016), but point to the ways in which government and non-government agencies are implicated in how governors are active in their own self-government. These reforms to school governance can therefore be described as the function of ‘introducing additional freedom through additional control and intervention’ (Foucault 2008, p. 67) or

'governmentality': the 'invention and assemblage of particular apparatuses and devices for exercising power and intervening upon particular problems' (Rose 1999, p. 19). For Foucault (1991, p. 100), the art of government – or governmentality – concerns perfecting means for optimising the welfare, education, health, security and efficiency of a population, and so the population emerges as 'a datum, as a field of intervention and as an objective of governmental techniques'. By way of Foucault, Rose (1999), Dean (1999), Lemke (2007) and others (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991) have extended and adapted these perspectives to explore how neoliberal mentalities of government act upon citizens to ensure they internalise responsibility for certain social risks and externalities – illness, security, unemployment and poverty for example – as a matter of ethical and moral obligation. This chapter can be situated broadly within the field of governmentality studies of education (Ball 2013; Christie and Sidhu 2006; Peters 2003; Pongratz 2006), but its key focus and contribution is the application of a Foucauldian analytic approach as a methodological framing for producing new and original insights concerning school governance, specifically how governors are implicated in the 'business' of state transformation and imposing market discipline on schools and each other.

Taking evidence from a three-year study of school governance in England conducted between 2012 and 2015 (ESRC Grant Ref. ES/K001299/1), the focus and originality of this contribution is to determine why and how governors are being primed as expert publics, and to document the techniques or rationalities (moral, juridical, constitutional, fiscal or organisational) by which governors are summoned and activated in governmental fields of power. This includes paying close attention to the operation of 'regimes of truth' (Garland 1999, p. 29), specifically how certain attitudes, judgements or behaviours are elevated to the status of 'truths' or self-evident claims, and how the market in general

functions as a partage between true and false statements about what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' governance.

Such a methodological approach is intended to make a distinctive contribution to the school governance literature by interlinking the everyday spaces and practices occupied by governors with the generation of new scalar hierarchies and accountability infrastructures that consolidate forms of state power. Hitherto studies on school governance have maintained a formal rational or instrumental focus on measuring the effectiveness of governors in affecting strategy, school improvement and holding others to account (Balarin et al. 2008; Dean et al. 2007), with particular reference to the impact of chairs (Hill and James 2015), external advisors (Earley et al. 2016), socio-economic factors (James et al. 2011) and head teachers and inspection reports (Baxter 2016) on governing body performance. This chapter is not concerned with whether current reforms to school governance are good or bad, whether certain accountability measures are corrosive of the autonomy required by schools to self-innovate, or whether certain governors are more adept compared to others at discharging their duties in holding others to account. Rather, the focus here is to trace the assumptions and exclusions shaping dominant discourses of school governance – as well as their connection with economic rationalities and the reordering of public priorities – and to document their punitive effects on shaping the moral conduct of governors as custodians of public interest. These interventions in discussions about school governance are important precisely because they force us to confront the new modalities of power, hierarchy and expertise through which governors are called upon to make

new accommodations within and adjustments to neoliberal practice.

Analytics of governmentality

During the 1970s Foucault presented a series of lectures at the Collège de France in which he outlined his theory of governmentality, taken to mean the 'rationalisation of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty' (Foucault 2008, p. 4). Here governmentality denotes the study of points of contact, convergence and co-determination between the ground logics or deeper frames of everyday practice and discourse, and the crystallisation of broader and more persistent societal configurations, including the state itself, which Foucault (2004, p. 77) characterised as 'nothing else than the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities'. As Lemke (2007, p. 44) shows, Foucault veered away from any systematic representation of the development of the political-administrative structures and practices of the state, and instead developed a historical or 'genealogical' analysis of 'the multiple and diverse relations between the institutionalization of a state apparatus and historical forms of subjectivation'.

Foucault specifically linked government to the development of 'techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour' (Foucault 1997, p. 82), namely those activities that undertake 'to conduct individuals throughout their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what

they do and for what happens to them' (Foucault 1997, p. 68). Governmentality or the 'conduct of the conduct' (Rose 1999, p. 19) thus entails the 'administration of life itself' (McKee 2009, p. 466). Hence Foucault (2008, p. 67) characterises governmentality as 'the function of producing, breathing life into, and increasing freedom, of introducing additional freedom through additional control and intervention'. By operationalising a governmentality approach, the focus of this chapter concerns *how* governors are captured in governmental fields of power and *why* such mobilisations are important to the kinds of rapid, accelerated deregulation shaping the school system in general. Deregulation signifies a system of minimal state intervention in which agents are liberated from certain constraints, namely government-mandated rules and restrictions, and who in turn acquire 'freedoms' to self-government. But self-government and the will to self-determination is always already prefigured by 'regimes of truth' (Garland 1999, p. 29) which shape and guide such behavior. From a governmentality perspective, 'to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed. To govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and utilize it for one's own objectives' (Rose 1999, p. 4). On this understanding it is crucial to examine how governors are empowered to pursue certain freedoms, but also to explain how those freedoms are acted upon and utilised for the purpose for sustaining more encompassing forms of state power or statecraft.

School governance

School governance in England encompasses a field of activity and intervention directed at bringing

certain professional practices and technical judgements to bear upon the actions of senior school leaders (those responsible for the day-to-day operation of schools). In effect these practices and judgements are designed to bring about improvements to service delivery by making senior school leaders accountable for outcomes relating to the educational and financial performance of the school. The actual doing of school governance consists of staff, parent and community volunteers or 'governors' (collectively known as the 'governing body' for a school) utilising specific judgements and their own claims to knowledge to support and challenge senior school leaders on key decisions relating to strategy and performance. Since the 1980s, state-funded schools in England have relied upon a stakeholder or representative model of governance that includes the election and appointment of different constituents to the governing body, namely parents, staff, local councillors and members of the wider community.

Over the last six years, however, successive governments have discredited the model of stakeholder governance in favour of a skills-based model of governance, with significant implications for the composition and overall function of governing bodies. This has been undergirded by strong government opposition to the bureau-professional role of local authorities in the management of schools, now considered to be inefficient, unresponsive and unaccountable (GOV.UK 2016). (Local authorities refer to provincial or 'county' government agencies comprised of elected local councillors and civil servants with powers to intervene in the running of schools). There have been important strategic and tactical dimensions to these claims, including the legitimisation of new spaces and

arguments for alternative, non-government providers of state-funded education, preferably professional groups and expert administrators who can recalibrate schools as manageable entities with demonstrable gains that can be measured and audited to the satisfaction of external regulators and funders. These tactics in governing are crucial to the contemporary policy moment and to consolidating forms of state power in general since they work to locate schools within 'a regime of visibility' and 'a grid of codeability' (Rose 1988, p. 187), in effect making schools more amenable to the statistical mapping, administration and scrutiny of government and non-government authorities. While a sizable proportion of state-funded schools from the primary school sector still remain wedded to the bureau-professionalism of local authorities (called 'maintained' schools), the majority of state-funded school setups in the secondary school sector are academies and free schools (DfE 2016a), many of which are managed by powerful bureaucracies and professional groups drawn from the private sector.

Academies and free schools (legally the same thing) are different to 'maintained' schools in that they possess freedoms to determine their own budget spending, curriculum (subject to the national curriculum), admissions (subject to the admissions code), staff pay and conditions, and length of school day and term. But school autonomy must be earned before freedom can be granted. A requirement for schools looking to convert to academy status is that their governing bodies demonstrate sufficient 'professionalism' and conduct themselves in a way that is amenable to the governance of external regulators and funders (Wilkins 2016). As Mckee (2009, p. 468-469) argues,

governmentality 'emphasizes that individuals not only are subject to domination by external actors but are also active in their own government'. This partly explains why the 'hollowing out' of local authorities has not resulted in less bureaucracy on the ground or less regulation from above, nor has it diminished elements of hierarchy in the way that some schools are run. The paradox of neoliberal deregulation is that decentralising reforms often entail the generation of new hierarchies and tight, centralised accountability consolidate forms of state power (Lingard, Martino, and Rezai-Rashti 2013; Ozga 2009).

Neoliberal deregulation

Understood from a governmentality perspective, neoliberalism can be characterised as a mobile assemblage of technologies and strategies utilised for the purpose of managing populations so that, in the absence of direct government control, individuals and organisations may govern themselves (Ong 2006). Some of the most ambitious and far-reaching reforms to affect education in England have occurred in the last six years under similar arrangements. The scale and pace of these reforms have been unprecedented, even when compared to the rate of expansion of equivalent market-based reforms to education in the USA (National Alliance 2016) and Sweden (Weale 2015). Key to the success of these reforms has been to conscript non-government actors and entities – private companies, quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (quangos) and even citizens – to internalise responsibility for the kinds of risks, insecurities and inequities formerly managed by the state; that is,

‘routinely engaging in preventing harms that had been previously treated as ‘externalities’’ (Shamir 2008, p. 2). The creation of academies as administratively self-governing entities for example means that the state is relieved of the requirement to regulate and deliver such services, and instead the state assumes the role of market facilitator or ‘market-maker, as initiator of opportunities, as re-modeller and moderniser’ (Ball 2007, p. 82).

Yet while these reforms can be described as anti-statism and anti-welfare – that is, against the vision of a ‘strong state’ – they are not straightforwardly anti-state since they necessitate forms and means of active politics or soft government that work to supplement and support market orientations and attitudes where they do not exist (Wilkins 2016). From a governmentality perspective, neoliberal deregulation signals both the retreat of state power (‘roll back’) but also its expansion and explosion (‘roll out’) through the creation of possibilities vis-à-vis the market apparatus for acting upon subjects ‘so that the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed’ (Foucault 1982, p. 790). In this configuration ‘government itself becomes a sort of enterprise whose task it is to universalize competition and invent market-shaped systems of action for individuals, groups and institutions’ (Lemke 2001, p. 197). These contradictory, albeit complimentary forces lay at the heart of recent reforms to school governance.

Apart from marketisation, a key driver of development to school governance has been widespread ‘disintermediation’, namely ‘the withdrawal of power and influence from intermediate or ‘meso-level’

educational authorities that operate between local schools and national entities' (Lubienski 2014, p. 424). Disintermediation has been particularly pronounced in England since the Conservative-led Coalition government came to power in 2010. Local authorities have experienced huge budget cuts to their spending (BBC 2013; Riley-Smith 2016) and related to this, a diminished capacity to intervene in the running of state-funded schools. A caveat to these arrangements is a requirement for schools to exercise 'good governance' (DfE 2015). This includes a strict focus on risk-based approaches to regulation, namely rigorous and continuous internal auditing, strategic planning, performance management and compliance checking. Good governance serves not only to prepare schools for the kinds of devolved risk that accompany self-government but also bureaucratic overload – or what I call bureaucratic decentralism.

Bureaucratic decentralism

From a governmentality perspective, bureaucratic decentralism constitutes a technology of governance or mode of insertion by which governors are captured and 'responsibilised' (Clarke 2005) through governmental fields of power as bureaucratic operatives and ancillaries to the market. Bureaucratic decentralism occurs when bureaucracy is devolved from government to non-government agents and organisations; in this case, from the site of local authorities to the site of service providers, school leaders and governors. This means that schools are not only subject to bureaucracy from outside but transformed and activated from the inside-out as producers of

bureaucracy. 'Instead of disappearing, bureaucracy has changed its form', Fisher claims (2009, p. 20). 'And this new, decentralized form has allowed it to proliferate'. The suggestion here is that state education in England is not living through a 'post-bureaucratic school system' (Gove 2009). On the contrary, self-government by schools entails a sharper focus on business management theories and practices or 'corporate accountability' (Ranson 2010).

Bureaucratic decentralism therefore occurs when schools experience an admixture of state independence and market dependence. State independence ensures that schools are 'liberated' from elements of hierarchical, top-down rule and the constraints and regulations imposed by external authorities; in this case, the politics and bureaucracy of local authorities. At the same time, the state continues to intervene in schools, albeit indirectly through forcing schools to submit to the regularities and vagaries of the market. Liberalisation is therefore enabled and controlled by 'an enforcement mechanism designed to control the operation of the system's constituent institutions, instruments and markets' (Spotton 1999, p. 971). Consider that the reforms to school governance have been accompanied by a rhetoric of derision aimed at so-called 'amateurish' governance (Wilshaw quoted in Cross 2014) and stakeholder models of governance shaped by proportional representation and wider community involvement (Wilkins 2016). This includes calls for the removal of parent governors (Dfe 2016b) and their replacement by 'business people' or experts (GOV.UK 2013), specifically people with the 'right skills' (GOV.UK 2015) who can open up the internal operation of schools to greater political and public scrutiny. As I will go onto show in further detail, the work of governors has been

more or less successfully integrated into a set of strategies and techniques that suggest some form of capture by political power from the centre vis-à-vis the prerogatives and discipline of the market apparatus. These insights are helpful for demonstrating the significance of the analytics of governmentality for it draws attention to the interdependence between practices or mentalities of government and the forms and formation of the self, between 'political objectives and person conduct' (Rose 1999, p. 149)

Governing through professionalisation

In 2013 the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Lord Nash, addressed the Independent Academies Association (IAA) by saying

People should be appointed on a clear prospectus and because of their skills and expertise as governors; not simply because they represent particular interest groups...Running a school is in many ways like running a business, so we need more business people coming forward to become governors. (GOV.UK 2013)

Later in 2014, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the Chief Inspector of Schools in England and Head of Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills), said 'the role of governors must be

re-examined' and 'there's a need for professional governance to move beyond the current 'amateurish' approach to overseeing schools' (Wilshaw quoted in Cross 2014). Demands for the professionalisation of governors can be viewed as a tactic employed by government and non-government (supportive and regulative) agencies to ensure that the 'right' kinds of people populate and steer the internal management of schools, and that any appeal to proportional representation or wider community involvement in school governance is exhausted through pragmatic demands for market-responsive, market-ready actors who can make schools intelligible as businesses.

This is not simply a call for more professionals to enter the world of school governance (see School Governors One-Stop Shop (SGOSS) slogan 'make schools your business') but also for existing governors to be recalibrated as professionals. From a governmentality perspective, the professionalisation of governors points to 'how techniques of the self might interact with techniques of governing' (Dean 2015, p. 365). The requirement for governors to behave professionally can be considered a strategy for entrenching technocratic decision-making within the day-to-day practices of school governance and activating governors as economic-rational actors: 'autonomous, self-determined and self-sustaining subjects' (Shamir 2016, p. 7). But a condition of successful self-government is not the existence of professionals alone but the stock of 'technical/administrative knowledge' (Apple 1993, p. 309) they are able to successfully mobilise in the governing of schools.

I think as we move towards a more responsible, professional era of management

responsibility then what you'll be looking for will be more diverse. You'll be looking not just for people who are rooted in the community but I think you'll be looking for people with skills to offer. (Gordon, Company Secretary, Millard)

A chance to bring professionalism and a development, wider developments in education, to the community, and put them before them so they can either have an understanding of them, or work with them, or help us to shape them...We have to manage our own destiny. We haven't got the local authority behind us providing a backup of any form anyway, whether it's audit or financial. (Dennis, Chair of Governors, Millard)

Technical/administrative knowledge in legal, audit, ICT, finance, business management and strategy is particularly sought-after cultural capital in these contexts. This is because of the risk and (limited) liability that accompanies self-government in an increasingly deregulated school system. The removal of the safety net of local authorities and the empowerment of schools as separate legal entities with devolved powers to administratively self-govern means that school governance has become increasingly preoccupied with New Public Management techniques and related cost-benefit, risk-management and sustainability principles. The everyday work of governors entails, for example, the ritual undertaking of evidentiary meetings, budget control, collective bargaining, training and upskilling, consensus building, compliance monitoring, income generation, strategic planning, school-to-school brokering, future-proofing and rebounding, competitive tendering and implementing

systems of control in general. This includes performance monitoring senior school leaders with explicit links to the 'goal-governed steering of outputs and outcomes, accompanied by the monitoring of targets' (Ozga 2009, p. 149).

A close inspection of the content and logic of the everyday work of governors opens up possibilities for explaining how mundane activities and performances come to sustain the 'technocratic embedding of routines of neoliberal governance' (Peck and Tickell 2002, p. 384) within the day-to-day administration of schools. As already pointed out, governmentality denotes the study of points of convergence and co-determination between everyday practice and discourse and the sedimentation of broader and more persistent societal configurations. Audit and compliance rituals for example enable governing bodies to comfortably affirm themselves as agents of professional authority and expert publics of 'deliverology' (Butt and Gunter 2007), namely as collective bodies 'fit for purpose' in the pursuit of improved outcomes through better target setting and performance monitoring. These techniques of professionalisation also aim to ensure that internally managed processes specific to the operation of schools are not beyond the scope of ordinary governments, and which can be audited and verified by different external authorities as a 'navigable space of commensurability, equivalence and comparative performance' (Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2013, p. 542). As Rose (1999, p. 156) indicates, 'Professionals must now act in such a way that the action might be, at some future moment, defensible in terms of the criteria and evidentiary requirements of another profession and body of expert knowledge, that of the law'.

The above suggests the governmentalisation of school governance – that is, a means or site ‘for the population and its optimization (in terms of wealth, health, happiness, prosperity, efficiency) and the forms of knowledge and technical means appropriate to it’ (Dean 1999, p. 20). But these achievements are far beyond the practical means of governments. Hence the concrete, practical work of governors is so crucial to emerging forms of statecraft at this time – a time when deregulation of state education and the decommissioning of local authorities as overseers of schools has provoked concerns of a regulatory gap. Moreover, ‘good governance’ demands neutral expert administration or de-politicisation, and the ‘pursuit of the disenchantment of politics by economics’ (Davies 2014, p. 4).

Governing through de-politicisation

Central to the reforms of school governance since 2010 has been a rigid focus on economic management and the tempering or mitigation of risk. This includes the fashioning of schools as de-politicised spaces and businesses that assume the economic enterprise form; that is, organisations which adopt responsibility for the kinds of ‘externalities’ or risks formerly absorbed and managed by state entities and actors. Increasingly, government definitions of ‘good governance’ are formulated in a way that undermine democracy within school governance. Proportional representation on the governing body (such as role of elected members of local authority governors and parent governors) is permissible only where it contributes to the smooth oversight of the educational and financial

performance of the school (see GOV.UK 2013, 2015, 2016). In other words, the democratic function of school governance is permitted but only conditionally so and only in circumstances where the governing body is sufficiently 'professionalised' and populated with the 'right people' in possession of the 'right skills': 'what makes your contribution so important isn't the particular group you represent, it's the skills, expertise and wisdom you bring to the running of a school' (GOV.UK 2015). As Kristol (2004, p. 176) argues, 'if you want self-government, you are only entitled to it if that 'self' is worthy of governing'.

One of the problems with the whole approach to having amateur, part-time unpaid governing body and council. Well, councillors aren't particularly underpaid now, I'm paid, but governors certainly are. One of the problems with them is that they don't know the right questions to ask. And if you don't know the right questions then of course the wool can be pulled. (Craig, LEA governor, Moorhead)

I think the most difficult governors are parent governors...They've got a child at the school, they want the best for that child, and it's very difficult for them to sort out what's right for the whole school and what's right for little Johnny...So I would say that parent governors is, I think, the most difficult one to keep control. Community governors come because we take them from what expertise they can bring. (Audrey, Chair of Governors, Ballard's Wood)

De-politicisation of the governing body is one example of the governmentalisation of school governance since it points to a set of strategies and techniques by which the discrete actions of governors are integrated into general mechanisms that sustain the public ambitions of governments. De-politicisation of school governance means eliminating the opacity of political discourse through the alleviation of sectional interests and partisanship, the aggregation of voices, the diminution of dissensus, and the replacement of 'amateurs' with 'professionals'. This helps to explain why governments since 2010 have been particularly keen for multi-academy trusts (MATs) – private sponsors contracted by central government to run publicly-funded schools – to oversee the delivery and regulation of public education: they use 'professionals to hold individual school-level heads to account' (DfE 2016b, p. 50). Moreover, professionals as market-ready, market-responsive actors are more likely to recalibrate the internal management of schools through the imaginary of the market and therefore, given the regulation of the market by the state (Aalbers 2016), assist in bringing the gaze of government to bear upon the actions of governors more effectively.

Hence governors have been spotlighted as integral to organisational preparedness, answerability, ad hoc adaption and response, primarily to assuage any fears of a 'missing middle' (Hill 2012) or regulatory gap and to open up the internal management of schools to greater scrutiny from external authorities. From a governmentality approach, the prioritising of governors as accountants, lawyers and managers who can subject senior school leaders to constant processes of target-setting, measurement, comparison and evaluation highlights the significance of the imaginary of the market

as a disciplinary tool in shaping the conduct of governors. At the heart of these reforms is a logic or rationality of government specifically aimed at ‘the epistemological dissolution of the distinction between economy and society’ (Shamir 2008, p. 14) or what Foucault calls the ‘introduction of economy into political practice’ (1991, p. 92). De-politicisation therefore can be understood as integral to the governmentalisation of school governance since it facilitates conditions for rescaling the local, that is, eliminating the vagaries and specificity of political discourse and democratic consultation that might otherwise obstruct the smooth, efficient oversight of the school as a business.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have moved beyond a conventional formal rational, instrumental approach to school governance, namely one that seeks to redress problems of inefficiency in the way that some governors conduct themselves (Balarin et al. 2008; Earley et al. 2016), and instead adopted a governmentality approach that seeks ‘an open and critical relation to strategies for governing’ (Rose, 1999, p. 19), namely one that is attentive to the presuppositions, assumptions and exclusions undergirding the identification of ‘problems’ surrounding school governance (problems surrounding ‘amateur’, ‘unprofessional’ or ‘unskilled’ governors for example). Such an innovative and novel approach to school governance serves to document the operation and effects of ‘regimes of truth’ (Garland 1999, p, 29) so as to demonstrate how governors are acted upon and transformed as objects and subjects

of government.

It is no coincidence that the acceleration in reforms to state education in England since 2010 – notably, the expansion of the academies programme coupled increased school autonomy and shrinking local government support/oversight – has coincided with greater steering of school governance from the centre, albeit steering conducted through the paradigm of the market. Increasingly, governors are expected to hold themselves and others to account on the basis of corporate and performance conceptions of accountability (Ranson 2010) for example. As already evidenced in the chapter, governors are conscripted to a service agent role under the duty to carry out checks and balances or compliance monitoring as well as utilise data (specifically, financial data, pupil attainment scores and staff performance data) to enhance accountability to the funders, regulators and parents as consumers (DfE 2015). Moreover, governors now find themselves subject to a whole barrage of external and internal monitoring, including self-evaluation, skills audit, inspection and even ‘competency frameworks’ (DfE 2016b).

These new policy logics and technologies are integral to the development of new scalar relations from the local through to the national and are generative of new infrastructures of accountability that, in effect, work to facilitate the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Rose 1999, p. 19). A governmentality approach to school governance is therefore imperative to the contemporary policy moment since it provides important analytical and conceptual strategies for tracing the techniques and rationalities by which

the discrete actions of governors are integrated into general mechanisms that sustain the public ambitions of governments. This is not to deny the contingent, performative nature of school governance, which demands close attention to how policy enactments in schools unfold contextually through the interaction of locally situated actors (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). Nor does it presuppose *a priori* coherence of policy enactments across different institutional settings and sites. It is important to be sensitive to critiques of a governmentality approach, namely that such accounts fail to highlight the 'messy actualities' of particular neo-liberal projects as geo-political constructs (Larner 2000, p. 14) and sometimes result in somewhat 'reified and homogenous accounts of modern power' which falsely portray 'forms of power/knowledge as monolithic, with state practices fitting seamlessly with practices of self-creation' (Bevir 2010, p. 425). However, the pressure for schools to 'professionalise' and de-politicise their governing body – in effect, prioritise only those directives and requirements that make themselves answerable as competitive, customer-oriented, 'high-reliability', cost-effective, sufficiently business-driven organisations (Wilkins 2015, 2016) – means that the imagery of the market both constrains and delimits the kinds of agency possible in the field of school governance.

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