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VIEWPOINTS

We must value our multicultural society, says **Liz Cross**, governance expert at The Connectives

Business can learn from award-winning school

WHEN St Mary's Church of England Primary School in Moss Side was announced Primary School of the Year in the Times Education Supplement (TES) awards, I couldn't have been happier for everyone involved.

The school went from OFSTED special measures 15 years ago to 'Outstanding' in 2009 and now to being recognised nationally in the TES awards last month. This win was due largely to the inspirational leaders, staff, parents, pupils and community and in part to the longevity and diversity of its governing body.

Perhaps that wouldn't have been the case if some of the new proposals on governance were in place – where governing bodies are being told they need to be smaller; made up of 'professionals' like accountants and lawyers; and none serving more than six to nine years.

At St Mary's, the evidence is that a diverse, focused and visionary leadership team, supported by a number of long serving leaders, staff and governors, together with new people, has enabled it to deliver an ambitious and sustained improvement where excellence is the norm.

And I speak with some experience. Having been governor on the school's board for over 26 years, I know the scale of our ambition and the desire we had to deliver an aspirational vision, could not have been realised in a short time nor without everyone feeling really invested.

Our vision was big and our desire to make it a reality for the benefit of pupils, their parents and the community could not have been set, or delivered in any real part, if we didn't feel we would and could see it through.

This is just one of a number of 'counter-intuitive ways of thinking and working' that I would commend to those in the business world who want to deliver exceptional results. For

seismic change to happen, boards have to be ambitious for their people and customers, tenacious in pursuit of their goals and embracing of the diversity that means something really special can be created for many.

It's not like we haven't had a regular turnover of governors, many new people have come in and made a difference. What we've also had, however, is a sharp focus on getting people for the right reason, committed to the vision and with the skills we need, whether they were formally recognised in education, industry or elsewhere.

What we all had in common was a belief that Moss Side is a remarkable community, which has had a long battle to challenge the stereotypes others have maintained. We wanted everyone to appreciate the richness of our community and the potential and talent within it.

We knew we needed to be bold if we were going to ensure children, parents and community were top of the list for schools, employers and others who wanted to find talent, energy and aspiration. So we tested assumptions, gathered evidence of impact and kept opening ourselves up to many to take a look at what we do and how we do it; ideas I know the best business leaders employ too.

Through its success, St Mary's illustrates to others in the field and those in businesses, how transformation can be helped by putting the customer/pupil/parent/stakeholder at the heart of all we do and seeing diversity as the magic ingredient.

Whatever sector you work in, I would advocate embracing counter intuitive wisdom; grasping the value diversity brings to ensure you reflect the customers you serve; creating ambitious goals and visions; achieving more than others believed possible.



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*undisclosed

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