

A tribute to Caroline Bullock

Caroline was an institution at Fitzharrys, our longest serving governor by a very long stretch, and a loyal and committed supporter and advocate for the school for more than 45 years. She served for over 45 years a chair of governors, worked with numerous different heads, and more recently returned to the role of chair of governors and then vice chair, after the school joined Abingdon Learning Trust. Despite her long years of service, she was never just a committee governor, content to operate behind the scenes in early evening meetings. She claimed not to be good at what she called, "teacher speak" and was much more interested in the practical difference she could make. Shining through all her interventions was a deep interest in the actual experience of children at the school and how the school could improve it.

Many issues were dear to her heart. She was unfailingly interested in the quality of the site and over her long career spent a huge amount of time seeking funds to improve it. She was a committed environmentalist, berating heads for any tree-felling and supporting many ecological issues in which students got involved. She was a passionate scientist and strong supporter of the school's science department over the years. She strongly pushed the school to establish and then maintain the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme and wouldn't hesitate to encourage teachers if she felt the scheme was flagging. She gave generously of her time – many generations of schoolteachers (and students) have her to thank as an accompanying adult on school trips. She was a people person, at her best when talking to teachers and students, and always with a sharp ear for what they said about the school, which she would bring back to governors' meetings. Staff well-being was at the top of her list of priorities and her regular informal contacts with the school made a real difference to how the school operated.

Most important for Fitzharrys, Caroline had her roots deep in Abingdon society. This is not the place to list the huge number of local organisations in which she was involved, but very little happened in the town that she didn't know about and when issues arose which affected the school, she was always ready to fight its corner. And of course, many long-term Abingdon residents will have known her through her work as a swimming teacher. I first met her myself at the age of seven at the old Bennett House swimming pool, something she never failed to remind me of in the 27 years I have been involved with the school. The same will have applied to many generations of parents who sent their children to the school, and for many years this gave Caroline a unique relationship with the parent body.

She will be remembered not just because of her long service, but because her enthusiasm throughout her association with the school never waned. We will miss her pale blue racing bike parked outside reception; we will miss her impromptu visits to the school; we will miss her regular presence at school events and performances (she particularly enjoyed the staff panto). Caroline was an example to all of us of what a life of voluntary service and dedication to your local community can look like.

Sam Gosling

Chair of Fitzharrys Local Academy Committee

