

Effective governance for good schools

Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself

Strong governance is essential for good schools. Yet we know that in too many schools, governing bodies are not effective or confident enough. The key role of governing bodies is to support and challenge headteachers in order to ensure pupils receive the best possible education; governing bodies also need support and challenge. We therefore set out to encourage governors to challenge themselves as the best governing bodies already do.

Together we came up with '20 questions for governing bodies' on which we consulted widely at the very well attended meeting of the All-Party Group on Education Governance and Leadership on 21 May 2012. We wanted to keep the challenges to one page in order to engage as many governing bodies as possible in a simple exercise to reflect on their practice. Governing bodies, especially those which are struggling, can be overwhelmed by too much irrelevant information and we did not want this to become a great big handbook on how to be effective which would be overlooked. Governing bodies have to use their limited time efficiently, and we offer these 20 questions to that end.

These questions should enable every governing body to challenge its own practice and, if the answers derive from a genuine discussion based on the evidence available, decide when and how improvements can be made. There are other resources available to help governing bodies improve.

They are **NOT** attempting to:

- cover every aspect of effective governance,
- give the answers – these can only be obtained from reflecting honestly and fully on current practice in comparison with others,
- replace the good guidance for governing bodies provided by a range of organisations.

While there are some magnificent governing bodies, there are also still some working in isolation without a good understanding of what constitutes effective practice or success. We are therefore suggesting that every school should engage with the '20 questions' and seeking willing organisations to commend them to schools. If your organisation is interested in endorsing and promoting them, please contact education.governance.appg@nga.org.uk.

Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself

Right skills: Do we have the right skills on the governing body?

1. Have we completed a skills audit of our governing body?
2. Do we appoint governors on the basis of their skills, and do we know how to find people with the necessary skills?

Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?

3. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?
4. Do we have a professional clerk and run meetings efficiently?
5. What is our training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?
6. Do we know about good practice from across the country?
7. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing body conducive to effective working?
8. Does every member of the governing body make a regular contribution and do we carry out an annual review of the governing body's performance?

Strategy: Does the school have a clear vision?

9. Have we developed long-term aims for the school with clear priorities in an ambitious school development plan which is regularly monitored and reviewed?
10. Does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing body's activities and agenda setting?

Accountability of the executive: Do we hold the school leaders to account?

11. Do we understand the school's performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?
12. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?
13. Are our financial management systems robust and do we ensure best value for money?

Engagement: Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?

14. How do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff?
15. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?
16. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

Role of chair: Does our chair show strong and effective leadership?

17. Do we carry out a regular 360 review of the chair's performance?
18. Do we engage in good succession planning?
19. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?

Impact: Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?

20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing body's contribution been to this?