

# What governing boards should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing boards



**T**his joint paper aims to improve the effectiveness of school governance; underpinning it is an expectation that governing boards and school leaders will jointly develop effective working practices which are mutually supportive and respectful of each other's roles and responsibilities.

The use of the term governing board in this document refers to governing bodies in maintained schools and trust boards in academies. In multi academy trusts, boards may choose to delegate some of their responsibilities to a regional or academy-level committee, often termed a local governing body. The use of the term headteacher includes executive headteachers where they are the lead accountable to the governing board.

It is the view of our organisations that all governing

boards and headteachers should meet the expectations set out in this document and that this should be evidenced through the adoption of a code of conduct.

Since this document's second edition in 2012 much has changed in the structure of the school system in England, and in particular the greater levels of autonomy of schools increases the need for effective accountability. School governance is under the spotlight now more than ever, with increased scrutiny from Ofsted and greater expectations from the government. Effective governance is essential for the health and success of any organisation. In any sector, when an organisation fails there has often been a failure of governance so that if we wish to prevent any school failing its pupils, we need to ensure that governance is strong.

Effective governing boards are prepared and equipped to take their responsibilities seriously.

## **Governing boards must have:**

- the right people round the table
- an understanding of their role and responsibilities
- a good chair
- professional clerking
- good relationships based on trust
- a knowledge of the school – the data, the staff, the children, the parents, and the community
- a commitment to asking challenging questions
- the confidence to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people

## **School leaders in return must have:**

- an understanding of governance, including acknowledging the role of the school's accountable body
- a willingness to provide

information in the most appropriate way in order that the governing board can carry out its role

- a willingness to be challenged
- reasonable time to devote to ensuring professional relationships are established with governors and trustees
- the skills and understanding to develop effective working relationships with the governing board

## 1. The respective roles of governance and management

Governance is strategic and management is operational. This distinction between governance and management needs to be clearly understood by all, so that governors and trustees are not asked to, and do not try to, involve themselves in day to day management. Governors and trustees are there to govern, not to carry out other work within a school on a pro-bono basis. School leaders must not be micro-managed. The governing board should concentrate on matters related to strategy and school improvement, delegating to school leaders those tasks which are operational (for example, drafting policies, making judgments about teaching quality, and recruiting and deploying staff below senior leadership level).

The governing board, in partnership with the school leadership, should determine and articulate a clear vision as to where they want the school or schools to be in three to five years' time. This should lead to the identification of the key

strategic priorities that will drive the agenda of governing board meetings. The headteacher will be responsible for ensuring the strategy is delivered.

## 2. Developing and supporting the governing board

### Skills audit:

we recommend that all governing boards carry out a skills audit of governors and trustees to identify skills gaps and development needs, and how these can be filled through recruitment and training of governors. NGA has a skills audit and matrix for schools to use.

### Recruitment:

when seeking to fill vacancies on the governing board, the role and level of commitment and responsibility should be outlined along with any particular skills that the governing board is seeking. Such vacancies should be advertised as widely as possible locally and a transparent process for recruitment and selection, including interviewing prospective candidates, should be adopted.

### Induction:

there should be a clear expectation for all new governors and trustees (including staff governors and trustees) to undertake both school-based and professional induction training paid for by the school or trust. This expectation should be set out in writing in advance of a governor or trustee appointment, and agreed to as part of the code of conduct signed by each governor.

### Continuous professional development (CPD):

governors and trustees must be willing to participate in ongoing relevant training, both internal and external, and there must be an appropriate budget commitment set aside for this. Governors and trustees need to continuously seek to update their knowledge, including through identifying good practice in other schools and meeting governors and trustees from other schools. This can also encourage collaboration between schools or groups of schools to improve outcomes for children.

### Expenses:

governors and trustees' out of pocket expenses should be reimbursed as per an agreed policy.

### Reviews of performance:

a governing board should regularly evaluate its own impact, and also implement a process for reviewing the contribution of individual governors and trustees and identifying any development needs.

### Succession planning:

it is good practice to develop recruitment and development plans to replace board members over time and for no one to serve for more than two four-year terms in one school.

### Seven principles of public life:

governors and senior leaders must carry out their roles in accordance with the seven principles of public life as set out by Lord Nolan: to act selflessly, with integrity, objectively and be accountable, open and honest and demonstrate leadership skills.

### 3. Effective ways of working

#### Clerking:

the clerk to the governing board must be properly qualified and remunerated, and capable of servicing and advising the governing board with independence. They should be employed to carry out this role with a separate job description and a specific contract, with sufficient time to manage the business of the governing board, and with CPD to ensure that their skills and knowledge remain up to date.  
[www.ascl.org.uk](http://www.ascl.org.uk) [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)  
[www.naht.org.uk](http://www.naht.org.uk)

#### Chairing:

the headteacher and the chair of the governing board should communicate regularly at mutually convenient times, while understanding that the chair is unable to take decisions on behalf of the governing board (except in very limited situations). The chair should seek external support when necessary and be encouraged and prepared to join the National College for Teaching and Leadership's development programme for chairs of governing boards, paid for by the school or trust. It is considered good practice for a chair to serve no more than six years in the role on one governing board (under normal circumstances).

#### Code of conduct:

we recommend that each governing board adopts a code of conduct setting out the expectations placed on governors and trustees and signed by all governors and trustees. This code should set out any expectations

on confidentiality of sensitive or personal information and include a commitment to the seven principles of public life. NGA has a model code for schools to adapt. Governors and trustees should do their best to avoid conflicts of interest, and must declare any which exist. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is not considered good practice to govern on more than two boards.

#### Size and composition:

within a broad regulatory framework, governing boards are free to determine their own size and composition. In considering changes to their structure, governing boards need to consider how effective they are currently and whether the priorities they have determined for the school require additional skills/ experience on the board.

#### Meetings:

it is the joint responsibility of school leaders and the governing board to ensure that meetings are well planned, at appropriate intervals, with manageable agendas that are appropriate to the remit and driven by school improvement priorities. Papers must be provided seven days in advance of meetings. The headteacher is present or is represented at full governing board meetings. Governing boards must have regard to the work-life balance of school leaders when arranging meeting times, and school leaders should have regard to governors and trustees' work and other commitments.

#### Delegation:

the role of the governing board is often to ensure that areas for which they are responsible are

being delivered effectively, rather than delivering it themselves. Governing boards have considerable freedom to delegate work to committees or to the headteacher and need to ensure that they make effective use of this. Governing boards should be mindful of the need to retain a strategic focus and delegate where appropriate to the headteacher e.g. staff recruitment (governors should not be part of interview panels except for senior leadership posts), policy development.

#### Policies:

governing boards should only decide the principles guiding school or group of schools' policies and should delegate drafting of the remainder of policies and all procedures to school leaders. Governing boards must ensure school leaders have the expertise or access to the relevant external expertise to carry out these responsibilities.

#### Appraisal of the headteacher:

the governing body of a maintained school is required to carry out the performance appraisal of the headteacher and must appoint an external adviser to support it in doing so. Although not mandatory, it is also good practice for academies to have in place headteacher appraisal processes. The headteacher's objectives should be closely related to the agreed strategic priorities. A discussion on development needs must be part of the appraisal process.

#### Duty of care:

the governing board must remember that it has a duty of care to the headteacher, including

ensuring that the head has a reasonable work-life balance. The governing board's role is to build a productive, respectful and supportive relationship with the headteacher while using appropriate challenge to hold them to account for their own and the school's or group of schools' performance.

#### 4. Understanding the school and engaging with stakeholders

The governing board monitors the work of the school and it is vital that it receives the information required to carry out that role promptly; the governing board is primarily reliant on school leaders to provide this, but should also seek external advice and verification where possible.

##### **School self-evaluation:**

governing boards must be involved in all stages of the strategic planning cycle, the review of the previous year and the setting of the priorities for the coming year to reflect the challenges and opportunities that the school or group of schools faces. It can be very useful for a governing board and senior leaders to hold an annual joint strategic planning session so that the vision, ethos and strategy for the coming three to five year period are developed together.

##### **Attainment data:**

the RAISEonline summary report of the previous year's attainment should be discussed by governors and trustees alongside the school's own current data, and access to the full RAISEonline report should be given to at least

one governor. All governors and trustees should look at their school's or group of schools' Fischer Family Trust (FFT) Governor Dashboard, as well as the Ofsted data dashboard. NGA provides briefings for governors and trustees on understanding RAISEonline and the FFT Governor Dashboard.

##### **Current information:**

senior leaders should provide the information necessary to monitor progress against annual development priorities, targets and budgets: this will include information on the progress of groups of students, quality of teaching, staff performance and financial information.

##### **Surveying pupils, staff and parents:**

the governing board has to understand the needs of these three groups, and must make every effort to obtain their views. This can be done in a number of ways including parent and student councils, written surveys or focus groups.

##### **Visiting the school:**

visits during the school day provide important opportunities for governors and trustees to better understand the school and the learning environment and to undertake their monitoring role. Visits should always have a focus which should be linked to the strategic priorities, and governors need to be clear about their role (i.e. they are not inspectors). School leaders should welcome governors and trustees to visit schools. Visits should be arranged in accordance with an agreed protocol which is communicated in advance to governors and

trustees and school staff involved in visits. All parties need to be sensitive to the pressures of the school calendar, and governors and trustees' other commitments.

##### **Feedback from Ofsted:**

recognising that Ofsted inspections take place at very short notice, governors and trustees should make every effort to be available at the school for these.

As many governors and trustees as possible should take part in discussions with Ofsted inspectors. School leaders will support governors and trustees' requests that these sessions are held at the beginning or end of the working day to enable governors and trustees to attend.

As many governors as possible should attend the feedback sessions at the end of an inspection.

##### **Reporting to the community:**

the governing board must ensure it reports to interested parties and the wider community. This can be done in large part through the school's website, but other forms of communication should be considered. Governors should consider producing an annual report for parents.

##### **Local authority liaison:**

maintained schools should comply with requirements set out in *The School Staffing (England) Regulations 2009* to notify the local authority and to take account of its advice in respect of the performance, selection and dismissal of the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

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