

GOVERNING BODIES AND EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION



DEPARTMENT FOR
EDUCATION

Written by Professor Michael Barber,
University of Keele and Dr Louise Stoll,
Professor Peter Mortimore, and Josh Hillman,
Institute of Education, University of London.

Produced jointly by the Department for Education,
the Office for Standards in Education and the Banking
Information Service, with support from Barclays
Bank, Co-operative Bank, Ernst and Young, Esso,
Forte, IBM, ICI, ICL, Midland Bank, Nestlé UK Ltd,
TSB Bank, Post Office, J Sainsbury, University of
Luton (Management Faculty), Vauxhall Motors Ltd
and Whitbread.

The role of governing bodies is to help schools provide the best possible education for their pupils. This booklet aims to help governing bodies carry out that role. It briefly discusses:

- 1 what makes an effective school**
- 2 the role of the governing body
in raising standards**
- 3 monitoring the school's
effectiveness**
- 4 development planning**
- 5 action planning**
- 6 what makes an effective
governing body.**

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL

1. Extensive research and school inspection evidence has shown that effective schools generally share certain characteristics. These are summarised in panel 1.

FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

- 1. Professional leadership**
The headteacher is the professional leader of the school. He or she is purposeful, fully involved in what goes on in the classroom, and helps make sure that staff have opportunities to show leadership and to take part in making decisions.
- 2. Shared vision and goals**
Staff work together with a common sense of purpose and clear targets.
- 3. A learning environment**
The school provides a climate in which pupils are able and willing to learn. The atmosphere is orderly and purposeful, and the working environment is attractive.
- 4. Concentration on teaching and learning**
The school's activities have one central purpose - helping pupils to learn and to achieve.
- 5. Explicit high expectations**
The school has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. These are communicated clearly to all pupils, and lessons are intellectually challenging.
- 6. Positive reinforcement**
Discipline is clear and fair. Staff make sure that pupils know how they are doing, and take particular care to praise them for good work.
- 7. Monitoring progress**
Staff systematically monitor and evaluate the achievements of pupils, and of the school as a whole.
- 8. Pupil rights and responsibilities**
The school promotes pupils' self-esteem. It encourages them to take responsibility, particularly for their own work.
- 9. Purposeful teaching**
The quality of teaching is high, particularly because: lessons are efficiently organised; they have a clear purpose and are well structured; and the teaching takes account of the fact that different pupils learn in different ways.
- 10. A learning organisation**
The school presents learning as something which is for the adults working there, as well as for pupils. The school provides training and development for all its staff, including school-based staff development.
- 11. Home-school partnership**
Relations between home and school are supportive and co-operative. Parents get actively involved in their children's work and in the life of the school.

Panel 1

ROLE OF THE GOVERNING BODY IN RAISING STANDARDS AND IMPROVING SCHOOLS

2. What part should the governing body play in making its school more effective?
3. The strength of the governing body lies in the collective knowledge, experience and expertise of its members. The governing body answers to parents, the local community, and in some cases the local education authority or church, for the performance of the school. Some key aspects of the legal status of governing bodies are set out in the Annex at the end of this booklet.
4. The governing body has three main roles, set out in panel 2.

MAIN ROLES OF THE GOVERNING BODY

1. To provide a strategic view

The governing body has important powers and duties but limited time and resources. So it should focus on where it can add most value - that is, in helping to decide the school's strategy for improvement so that its pupils learn most effectively and achieve the highest standards.

The governing body should help to set, and keep under review, the broad framework within which the headteacher and staff should run the school. In all its work, the governing body should focus on the key issues of raising standards of achievement, establishing high expectations and promoting effective teaching and learning.

2. To act as critical friend

The governing body also provides the headteacher and staff with support, advice and information, drawing on its members' knowledge and experience. In these ways the governing body acts as a critical friend to the school.

Critical in the sense of its responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the school's effectiveness, asking challenging questions, and pressing for improvement. A friend because it exists to promote the interests of the school and its pupils.

3. To ensure accountability

The governing body is responsible for ensuring good quality education in the school. The headteacher and staff report to the governing body on the school's performance. It is not the role of governors simply to rubber-stamp every decision of the headteacher.

The governing body has a right to discuss, question and refine proposals - while always respecting the professional roles of the headteacher and other staff, and their responsibilities for the management of the school. In its turn the governing body answers for its actions, above all to parents and the wider local community for the school's overall performance.

Panel 2

MONITORING THE SCHOOL'S EFFECTIVENESS

5. A school's review of its own progress and achievement should be part of its annual planning and review cycle. The starting point for working out how a school can do better is to know how well it is performing now. An important role for the governing body is to monitor the work of the school. Governors cannot hope to, and should not try to, keep track of everything the school does. They need to decide which are the key indicators they should monitor and evaluate, who will provide the information, and when. Those indicators should focus on the school's effectiveness in helping pupils to progress and achieve the highest standards they can.

6. Different indicators will suit different schools. But panel 3 suggests some questions which most governing bodies are likely to ask when monitoring their school's performance.

MONITORING AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE: SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. **How is our school currently performing?**
Governors could draw on the following indicators about pupils and their achievements, which can be readily quantified:

- National curriculum assessments and tests and/or secondary examination results
- Pupil attendance
- Pupil exclusions
- Pupil involvement in extra-curricular activities
- Number of applications for admission
- Destinations of school leavers.

Indicators which are harder to quantify, but which may be assessed through judgemental evidence or small surveys, include pupils' behaviour and attitudes, staff morale and commitment, and the views and involvement of parents and the community. Many governing bodies use the criteria in the *OFSTED Framework for the Inspection of Schools* as a useful tool for self evaluation.

Although they are not direct indicators of the school's effectiveness, governors should also monitor information on the school's curriculum, staffing and budget.

2. **Are some parts of the school more effective than others? If so, why?**
It is not enough to consider the effectiveness of the school as a whole. Some parts of the school might be more effective than others. If so, it is important to try to work out why. Governing bodies should look at the

performance of different year groups, different departments in secondary schools, or different curriculum areas in primary schools.

3. **Are some groups of pupils doing better than others? If so, why?**
Governing bodies should monitor whether the school is more or less effective for different types of pupils, for example depending on gender, ethnic background and level of ability.

4. **How does the school's achievement now compare with its previous achievement?**
Looking at changes in school achievement over time can give a measure of whether the school is improving, how consistent that improvement has been, and whether the improvement varies between different areas of the curriculum or groups of pupils.

5. **How does the school's performance compare with that of other schools?**
Examination and test results show actual levels of attainment in schools, and governors should compare their school's results with national and local results. However, differences between schools may not tell governors how effective their own school is because exam results partly reflect what pupils had already achieved when they entered the school and the influence of their home backgrounds. Governing bodies should ask what the school has contributed to pupil performance, focusing on the progress made by the pupils in comparison to other similar schools.

DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

7. Knowing the school's current performance provides a basis for improvement. The most important way in which the governing body can carry out its strategy-setting role is through the school development plan. This should set out targets for development over the next few years and how the school will meet them. It should be based on wide consultation and focus on raising standards of achievement and on the quality of pupils' learning. The role of the governing body in this process is to provide overall direction and constructive criticism, and to review the plan regularly. Panel 4 suggests some questions which need to be asked in drawing up plans.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN DRAWING UP DEVELOPMENT PLANS

- 1 Where are we trying to get to?**
The plan should summarise the overall vision for the sort of school which the governing body wants to see by the end of the period covered by the plan.
- 2 Where are we now?**
The plan should summarise the school's current strengths and weaknesses, as shown by the monitoring information discussed above.
- 3 How can we get from where we are now to where we want to be?**
The plan should set out objectives and targets for improving the school's performance in line with the overall vision; and state clearly the action which will need to be taken in order to achieve those improvements.

The best targets are ones for which particular groups and individuals (both teachers and pupils) in the school can take responsibility, for example, measurably higher performance in a subject, age group or class.

By getting agreement to realistic but challenging targets, the governing body can help raise expectations and achievements throughout the school.
- 4 What are the key priorities?**
There are likely to be many more objectives and targets which the school would ideally like to meet than will be realistically achievable. So the plan should state the priorities - which objectives matter most, and what actions should the school focus on.
- 5 Have we got the resources to do it?**
Some objectives and actions will not need more money, others will. Given budget constraints, the governing body must consider whether the resources are likely to be available to meet all their objectives; and if not, whether there are other ways of achieving them.
- 6 Who is responsible for doing what, and by when?**
The plan should say which members of staff are expected to take what action to achieve the priority targets set; and give a deadline by which the action should be taken.
- 7 How will we know if we have achieved our goals?**
The plan should say what information the governing body will need in order to evaluate progress, when that information is to be provided, and by whom.

Panel 4

ACTION PLANNING

8. Every school is inspected every four years by independent inspectors registered by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). Inspections give the governing body an expert outsider's assessment of how the school is doing. The process can be stressful, but the governors should regard it as a major opportunity to introduce necessary changes in order to improve the school.

9. The governors play a crucial part before, during, and after the inspection.

- **Before the inspection**

The governing body should consider with the headteacher how well the school matches up to the standards and expectations set out in OFSTED's *Framework for the Inspection of Schools*. It should also decide what it wants the inspectors to know about the school's context.

- **During the inspection**

The inspectors will ask the governors' views on the school. In addition, they will evaluate the work of the governing body itself, looking at its strategy and policies, and its effectiveness in implementing them.

- **After the inspection**

The governing body will receive the inspection report and, in consultation with staff, must produce an action plan within 40 days to deal with the main issues raised by the report. For each issue identified by the inspectors, the action plan should outline:

- what steps will be taken;*
- a timetable for action;*
- who will be responsible for ensuring the action takes place;*
- the resource implications;*
- how it will be monitored.*

10. The action plan is likely to be incorporated into the development plan when that plan is next reviewed. The development plan may already cover some key issues identified by the inspection, but priorities may need changing to reflect new targets and measures in the action plan. The action plan will be a public document and the school must report on progress at the annual parents' meeting.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE GOVERNING BODY

11. The governing body must work effectively itself to fulfil its demanding role. Panel 5 sets out the main features of an effective governing body.

FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNING BODIES

1. Working as a team

Building an effective team requires regular attendance and energetic commitment from all governors. It means making use of what each governor has to offer, sharing the workload, give-and-take on individual issues, respect for colleagues and their differing opinions, and loyalty to final decisions.

2. Good relationship with the headteacher

It is essential to establish a good working relationship between the governing body and the headteacher. Each party must have a clear understanding of their respective roles.

In broad terms, the governing body is responsible for deciding the framework for the conduct and development of the school. But within that framework, the governing body should respect the position of the headteacher as the professional leader of the school and as the person responsible for the day to day management and administration of the school.

3. Effective time management and delegation

Governing bodies have a lot to do, and limited time. They should identify the priority issues in which they need to be directly involved - including decisions which in law must be taken by the full governing body - and delegate the rest to committees, working groups or individuals. It is important to set clear terms of reference for such delegation, so that everyone knows what they are expected to do, and how and when they should report back to the full governing body.

4. Effective meetings

To make best use of time at meetings, the governing body will need:

- Carefully planned agendas which focus on the most important items;
- A clerk who can organise meetings and papers efficiently, and ideally provide information and procedural advice;
- Purposeful chairing, bringing out the best in all governors, keeping a brisk pace, and ensuring that decisions are properly taken and clearly understood;
- Clear minutes setting out points for action;
- Participation by appropriate outsiders - to give advice (eg an LEA officer or consultant), to make a presentation (eg the teacher responsible for an issue), or to act as an observer (eg a senior pupil).

5. Knowing the school

Governors should get to know their school through visits organised in close co-operation with the headteacher, to talk to pupils and staff and possibly sit in on lessons.

6. Training and development

To help their schools most effectively, governing bodies need to take their own development seriously. They should consider their training and support needs carefully, and be prepared to allocate funds for external courses, visits to other schools, or training for the whole governing body.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

12. Many governing bodies are already doing much or all of what is suggested here, and doing it very well. But governing bodies may find it a useful way of reviewing the current position to look at each of the panels and asking the following questions:

- **Panel 1: Features of Effective Schools**

How does our school measure up against these 11 features?

- **Panel 2: Main Roles of the Governing Body**

Which of these three roles is most important for our governing body? How well are we carrying them out?

- **Panel 3: Monitoring and Evaluating Performance: Some Questions to Ask**

Are these the right questions to ask for our school? What key information do we need to monitor our school's performance? Who will provide it, and when? What will we do with it?

- **Panel 4: Questions to Ask in Drawing Up Development Plans**

Are these the right questions to ask for our school? Did we ask them in preparing the last development plan? What do we need to do so that we can answer them when we next review the development plan?

- **Panel 5: Features of Effective Governing Bodies**

How does our governing body measure up against these features? Are there any other features which are important for effectiveness? What action can we take to improve the effectiveness of our governing body?

ANNEX

THE LEGAL STATUS OF GOVERNING BODIES

The interpretation of the law is for the courts. Each case will turn on its own facts. But this Annex summarises some key points relating to the legal status of governing bodies.

1. Governing bodies are set up by law as corporate bodies. As such, a governing body acts as a single person with an identity separate from its members. Responsibility for the actions and decisions of the governing body lies with the whole governing body rather than individual members.
2. Provided governors act within the scope of their functions and procedures, in accordance with the law and their instruments and articles of government, honestly and without ulterior motive, and reasonably with care and common sense, then individual governors will not in practice be held liable if things go wrong as a result of the governing body's decisions.
3. Governing bodies must act as a group. Individual governors cannot act on behalf of the governing body unless authorised to do so or, in special cases, where emergency action is needed.
4. The size and composition of governing bodies is laid down in the law. Individual governors are appointed or elected by specified bodies or groups but they are not delegates who must vote according to the wishes of those groups.

© Crown copyright 1995

Produced by the Department for Education
Designed by Graphic Impressions • London

Extracts from this document may be reproduced for non-commercial
educational purposes on condition that the source is acknowledged.

170/0030/109/1B95A