

governance models in schools

Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme

LGaresearch report



Available in the Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme

Safeguarding children peer review programme: learning and recommendations

Kerry Martin and Jennifer Jeffes

ISBN 978 1 906792 81 7, free download

Hidden talents: exploiting the link between engagement of young people and the economy

George Bramley, Liz Phillips and Shona Macleod

ISBN 978 1 906792 79 4, free download

Safeguarding children: literature review

Kerry Martin, Jennifer Jeffes and Shona Macleod

ISBN 978 1 906792 72 5, free download

Local authorities' experiences of improving parental confidence in the special educational needs process

Richard White, Shona Macleod, Jennifer Jeffes and Mary Atkinson

ISBN 978 1 906792 53 4, free download

The impact of the Baby Peter case on applications for care orders

Shona Macleod, Ruth Hart, Jennifer Jeffes and Anne Wilkin

ISBN 978 1 906792 56 5, free download

Safeguarding post-Laming: initial scoping study

Mary Atkinson

ISBN 978 1 906792 49 7, free download

Supporting local authorities to develop their research capacity

Clare Southcott and Claire Easton

ISBN 978 1 906792 47 3, free download

The Sustainable Communities Act: analysis of proposals submitted by councils

Monica Hetherington, Gill Featherstone, Gill Bielby and Rowena Passy

ISBN 978 1 906792 42 8, free download

Provision of mental health services for care leavers: transition to adult services

Emily Lamont, Jennie Harland, Mary Atkinson and Richard White

ISBN 978 1 906792 38 1, free download

Collaborative good practice between LAs and the FE sector

Tami McCrone, Clare Southcott and Kelly Evans

ISBN 978 1 906792 37 4, free download

governance models in schools

Tami McCrone
Clare Southcott
Nalia George

How to cite this publication:

McCrone, T., Southcott, C. and George, N. (2011).
Governance Models in Schools. Slough: NFER.

Published in April 2011
by the National Foundation for Educational Research,
The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ

www.nfer.ac.uk
© National Foundation for Educational Research 2011
Registered Charity No. 313392

ISBN 978-1-906792-83-1



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Contents

Executive Summary	v
Background	v
Key findings	v
Implications for policy and practice	vi
Methodology	vii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background and aims	2
1.2 Research methods	2
1.3 Structure of the report	3
2 Current approaches to governance	4
2.1 Current models of governance	4
2.2 Key tasks and responsibilities of governing bodies	5
2.3 Recruitment of governors	8
2.4 Clerks	8
3 Impact and effectiveness of school governance	10
3.1 Impact of the governing body on school improvement	10
3.2 School responsibility to the local community	11
3.3 Accountability to the local community	11
3.4 Key features of effective governance	12
3.5 How governing bodies assess and evaluate their effectiveness	15
4 Governor services, support and training	17
4.1 Effectiveness, take-up and access to training	17
4.2 Effectiveness of support and information, advice and guidance	19
4.3 Improvements to training and support	21
4.4 Sustainability of governor support services	21
5 Changing contexts and future developments	23
5.1 Perceptions on changes to school governance in the light of greater school autonomy	23
5.2 Perceived impact of spending cuts	25
5.3 Appropriateness of current models of governance across different school contexts and key transferable components	25
5.4 How effectiveness could be improved	26

6	Conclusions and implications	29
6.1	Conclusions	29
6.2	Implications for policy and practice	30
	Appendix A Representativeness of the survey sample	32
	References	35

Executive summary

Background

The Schools White Paper entitled *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010) sets out a number of changes to the education system, including giving schools greater autonomy and the freedom to make day-to-day decisions. The white paper also states that responsibility for school improvement will now primarily lie with headteachers, teachers and governors and, as a result, schools will be held to account by parents and the community for their performance. Other changes set out in the white paper include an increase in the number of schools gaining academy status as well as the introduction of free schools. Together, these developments place a greater focus on governing bodies to support schools to fulfil their statutory duties.

Overall, the roles and responsibilities of governors have changed and developed in recent years. In addition to and in light of these changes and policy developments, the appropriateness of the current governance arrangements, and the suitability of current models of governance for the future, are being examined. Information about the roles and responsibilities of governors can be found at the Governornet website: <http://www.governornet.co.uk>.

The Local Government Group (LG Group) commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to review the current model of accountabilities in school governance and consider alternative models that may be appropriate for the schools of the future. The evaluation comprised three main strands: a rapid review of literature, online surveys of governors and coordinators of governor services and qualitative case-study telephone interviews with a range of stakeholders.

Key findings

Key principles and components of effective governance are more significant to the governance of schools than the type of model followed. The evidence indicates that an effective governing body can have a valuable impact on school improvement. The majority of governors felt that their governing bodies were effective and coordinators were also positive about the overall effectiveness of governing bodies.

The research evidence indicates that the stakeholder model is viewed as the most appropriate model of school governance, although this model was recognised as needing some improvements to ensure flexibility and fitness for purpose in the context of greater school autonomy.

The evidence shows that governors are currently principally fulfilling monitoring and supporting roles. Additionally, a minority of governors and coordinators felt that governing bodies were challenging headteachers or the senior leadership team, representing the views of the local community, providing strategic direction, and carrying out self-evaluations.

Governors perceived the most important elements for ensuring effective governance to be a productive working relationship between the governing body and the senior leadership team, and an effective chair of governors and clerk to support the governing body.

Key to effective governance was perceived to be governors having a clear understanding of their role (and its limits) and an understanding of the strategic responsibilities of governing bodies. Critical to achieving strategic focus is the quality of the relationships between the headteacher, the chair of governors and the clerk. Governors cited size of the governing body as the least relevant element of an effective governing body.

Further ways identified by respondents to the survey for improving the effectiveness of school governance were better selection and recruitment processes, mandatory induction training (although it is appreciated that current funding pressures may affect the feasibility of this), and better understanding of data.

The majority of governors reported that the governing body took into account how to support all children and young people in the local community. However, coordinators were less confident that governors were doing this.

Other key attributes for governors of the future were, firstly, having an interest in and commitment to the school. Secondly, the ability to recognise, particularly in the more autonomous schools of the future, what type of external guidance might be needed and to access the required support and/or training, if needed. Thirdly, the willingness to develop the skills and knowledge needed in order to provide strategic challenge, for example, by understanding how to interpret data.

The evidence suggests that further training to ensure all partners, including headteachers, understand the strategic responsibilities of governing bodies is needed. All parties would then be aware of the value of governing bodies challenging headteachers and the senior leadership team as part of a more strategic approach to governance.

The majority of governors who had accessed training and, in particular, face-to-face training, felt that it was useful. In addition, the clerk was considered to be a key source of support. Governors reported that they would welcome further support particularly in relation to new developments in education, governance self-evaluation, specific issues (relevant to their role on the governing body), and the statutory requirements and legal responsibilities of governing bodies.

Coordinators identified key barriers to governors attending training as a lack of time, lack of support from employers, an unwillingness to travel and variable encouragement from schools.

Looking ahead, although governors and coordinators were unclear about the full impact of budget cuts, there was an expectation that there would be a decrease in local authority governor support services for schools. This potential change, along with greater

school autonomy, was expected to result in schools seeking governor support services outside of their local authority from independent providers and consultants, resulting in greater competition amongst local authorities and other providers.

Implications for policy and practice

The recruitment of governors with the appropriate personal attributes, for example, interest, commitment and skills, is considered more important for effective governance than the type of governance model that is adopted.

Suggested improvements to school governance, in order to meet the principles of effective governance, include a better selection and recruitment process for governors and greater clarity of governor roles and responsibilities. This would contribute to governors having further capacity to play an even more critical role in school improvement than at present.

The skills and knowledge needed for governors to provide strategic challenge need to be further developed and supported, for example, by improving understanding of how to interpret data. Only by acquiring this knowledge, and embracing the need to provide strategic challenge, will all governors fulfil this necessary commitment and play their part in ensuring that the more autonomous schools of the future improve in terms of young people's attainment and wellbeing and their accountability to their local community. Making some elements of training compulsory should be considered, such as ways to provide strategic focus and how to interpret data.

To suit the different audiences, the delivery of training needs to be flexible to meet styles of learning and lifestyles, for example, face-to-face training at different times of day and web-based training or, in the case of headteachers, through current headteachers' training. It is possible that headteachers could acquire further appreciation of the importance of governors' strategic input through greater emphasis being placed on this in their current training. All parties would then be aware of the value of governing bodies challenging headteachers and the senior leadership team as part of a more strategic approach to governance.

Networking opportunities should be further considered as they represent effective ways of sharing and disseminating good practice and information. Furthermore, with reduced funding for local authority governance support services, it is worth considering ways for neighbouring schools in a locality to reduce duplication of effort, replicate and share effective practice, and think of creative ways to do so.

It is likely that schools will have to reconsider the way they access governance support services as it is expected that local authorities' governance support services will change. Furthermore, it is probable that there will be a transition period before other suppliers of governance support services emerge. So the need for governors, clerks and headteachers, in particular, to work creatively and proactively in partnership to ensure that effective, strategic governance is realised should be prioritised.

Methodology

This executive summary presents key findings from online questionnaire surveys of governors and coordinators of local authority governance services, carried out between October and December 2010. In total, 1591 governors (out of a potential 300,000 respondents) and 62 coordinators (out of a potential 150 respondents, according to the National Co-ordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS)) completed the surveys. The surveys were informed by three exploratory interviews with experts in the field and a rapid review of recent literature on governance models carried out between August and September 2010.

Additionally, 24 case-study telephone interviews were conducted with coordinators, chairs of governors and governors in order to provide more in-depth detail to complement the survey data.

1 Introduction

The Importance of Teaching—The Schools White Paper 2010 (DfE, 2010, p.71) recognises the contribution that school governors make to the education system:

School governors are the unsung heroes of our education system. They are one of the biggest volunteer forces in the country, working in their spare time to promote school improvement and to support headteachers and teachers in their work.

The Importance of Teaching sets out a number of changes to the education system, including giving greater autonomy to schools and providing the freedom to make day-to-day decisions thus, in turn, 'removing unnecessary duties and burdens, and allowing all schools to choose for themselves how best to develop' (DfE, 2010, p.12). It also states that responsibility for school improvement will now primarily lie with headteachers, teachers and governors and, as a result, schools will be held to account by parents and the community for their performance. The rationale for this is that, as the white paper states (DfE, 2010, p.4), international evidence has shown that 'countries which give the most autonomy to headteachers and teachers are the ones that do best'. Such accountability will require greater transparency, through, for example, providing access to a range of information.

Other changes set out in the white paper include an increase in the number of schools gaining academy status as well as the introduction of free schools. Together, these developments place a greater focus on governing bodies to support schools to fulfil their statutory duties.

Overall, the roles and responsibilities of governors have changed and developed in recent years. A survey of 1400 governors undertaken in 2009 by the National Governors' Association (NGA) found that around half considered that the additional responsibilities for governors over the previous two years had been excessive.

In addition to and in light of these policy developments, the appropriateness of the current governance arrangements is being questioned. Issues include, for example, the optimum size of a governing body and the level of training for governors which has been reported to be varied and could be enhanced (Ministerial Working Group on School Governance, 2010).

A further important issue is the relationship between the school senior leadership team and the governing body. A minority of governors surveyed (seven per cent) did not agree that the governing body supports and challenges the school leadership team and 11 per cent did not agree that, if there was a difference of opinion, the headteacher would recognise the authority of the governing body (NGA, 2009). Moreover, the distinction between the strategic role of the governing body and the operational management of the school was found by the Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (2010) to be blurred in some cases.

Given the current climate of greater autonomy for schools, the developing education context and the relationship between the governing body and the senior leadership team, it is timely to examine more closely the role of the governing body. Ranson and Crouch (2009) suggest three possible governance models.

- A business model in which schools are seen as a business and require a governing body with experience of running a business to support the leadership team.
- An executive and stakeholder scrutiny model, which is a hybrid model incorporating an executive group who are accountable to a wider stakeholder group.
- A community governance model, through which governors 'become leaders and enablers of community development' (p.6) through schools working together in an area with families.

Additionally, all these developments should be considered in light of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review and the resultant reduction in public spending.

1.1 Background and aims

In light of these ongoing developments in school policy, and their implications for governance, the LG Group commissioned the NFER to review the current model of accountabilities in school governance and consider alternative models that may be fit for purpose for the school of the future. Specifically, the research had a number of aims.

- Provide the LG Group with an overview of current governance models, incorporating an international perspective, and including an assessment of the issues, challenges and benefits.
- Examine the links between effective governance and schools' accountability to the local community and to achieving their statutory duties.
- Establish what governors currently value about local authority governors' services and how these services could be developed in light of greater school autonomy.
- Suggest possible improvements to the current models of school governance so that they are 'fit for purpose' in the current climate of greater school autonomy.

1.2 Research methods

The evaluation comprised three main strands: a rapid review of literature, online surveys of governors and coordinators of governor services (coordinators) and qualitative case-study telephone interviews with a range of stakeholders (National Co-ordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS), coordinators, governors and chairs of governors). Exploratory interviews were also undertaken with three representatives from national government organisations (the NGA, NCOGS and the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)), to inform the development of the surveys.

Rapid review of literature

The aim of the review was to provide an assessment of the different models of governance that have been adopted nationally and internationally, and, where possible, an assessment of the effectiveness of each model in relation to their role of governance in school improvement. Parameters for the literature review are detailed in Appendix A.

The review was also used to inform the development of the online surveys and case-study instruments. An interim report presenting emerging findings from the literature and exploratory case studies was submitted to the LG Group at an earlier stage. Therefore, this report only draws on the literature where appropriate. It is worth noting, however, that little evidence emerged regarding models of governance at an international level. The focus of research tended to be on effective governance rather than the models that were in place.

Case-study telephone interviews

Case-study telephone interviews were undertaken with one NCOGS (or an alternative coordinator, where appropriate) in each NCOGS region. In consultation with the LG Group, two coordinators were selected from London (providing a total of nine coordinator interviews). Interviewees were asked to reflect on the governing bodies that they support in their responses to questions. Where NCOGS were unable to participate in the research, alternative contacts were suggested. NCOGS interviewees were asked to assist with the sampling of governors and provide contact details of up to seven chairs of governors across a range of schools in their local authority. The sample was then selected from those contacts supplied by NCOGS to ensure that interviews covered a range of school phases and types. One school was selected in each region (with the exception of London where two schools were selected) and the sample included:

- four primary schools including one in a federation
- four secondary schools including one converting academy and one in a federation
- one special school (also in a federation).

Chairs of governors were also asked to recommend and provide contact details of an additional governor who the research team could approach to request their participation in the research. In total, interviews were carried out with nine chairs of governors and six other governors including: one staff, one foundation, one community, one partnership and two parent governors.

A total of 24 telephone interviews were conducted between October 2010 and January 2011.

Online surveys

NCOGS were also asked to help distribute the online surveys. This involved a cascade approach whereby they were asked to forward details of the survey to their regional groups. Regional coordinators assisted in forwarding details of the survey onto chairs of governors in their area. In total 1591 governors (out of a potential 300,000 respondents) and 62 coordinators (out of a potential 150 respondents), according to NCOGS, completed the survey. Further details about the representativeness of the survey sample and analysis of data are in Appendix A.

1.3 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 explores current models of governance in the UK and internationally, and considers the key tasks and responsibilities of governing bodies in the UK.

Chapter 3 examines the impact of the school governing body and considers the features that are key to effective governance.

Chapter 4 discusses the training and support received by governors and the extent to which it was considered effective.

Chapter 5 explores views on how school governance might change in light of greater autonomy in the future, including the appropriateness of current models and ways to improve the effectiveness of school governance.

Chapter 6 concludes the report and identifies any implications, particularly in light of schools having greater autonomy.

Each chapter draws on data from the surveys and telephone interviews, and refers to the evidence from the literature, where appropriate.

2 Current approaches to governance

Key findings

- The research found that the model of governance in use was less important than the recruitment of governors with the appropriate personal attributes, for example, interest, commitment and skills.
- Coordinators were not as confident as governors that governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Governing bodies were most *often* reported to fulfil monitoring and supporting roles.
- Additionally, only two-fifths of governors felt their governing body *often* fulfilled the role of challenging the decisions of the headteacher or the senior leadership team, or representing the views of the local community.
- The quality of leadership and relationships between the headteacher, the chair and the clerk were recognised to be important to achieving strategic focus.

This chapter outlines the current approaches to governance both in terms of the models in use, perceptions of ‘stakeholder’ and ‘business’ models and the nature of the responsibility of the governing body, particularly in terms of highlighting the emphasis on strategic and operational roles. It also examines the key tasks and responsibilities of governing bodies. It is worth considering that the Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) sets out how governors in the future will need to have higher expectations, in terms of challenging schools’ leadership teams, when viewing the evidence presented in this chapter.

2.1 Current models of governance

Stakeholder and business models

Evidence from the literature reviewed for this research outlined that governing bodies typically represent a range of interests, including parents and community groups, the school and the local authority (DCSF, 2008; James *et al.*, 2010a). The review identified two overarching models of school governance in use in England.

- The stakeholder model is in use across maintained primary and secondary schools, in individual schools and federation governance. The majority of members of the governing body are elected to ensure accountability and wide representation (Ranson and Crouch, 2009; Chapman *et al.*, 2010; DCSF, 2010; James *et al.*, 2010a).

The stakeholder model is widely in use across maintained primary and secondary schools.

- The business model is commonly used in academies and the headteacher and the governing body are responsible for governance. Academy sponsors tend to recruit most of the governing body, even where the local authority is a co-sponsor. Governors’ responsibilities are similar to those in maintained schools, although governors are also responsible for recruiting academy staff (DCSF, 2008; Ranson and Crouch, 2009). The business model was noted to be more prevalent in federations and academies, where governing bodies may include sponsors and a larger business *and* community representation than maintained schools (Ranson and Crouch, 2009; Chapman *et al.*, 2010).

All the case-study interviewees confirmed that the stakeholder model of school governance was the prevailing model currently in use. Stakeholders such as the local community, the local authority and teachers were all considered to be important. Additionally, parent governors were considered to be essential,

although issues were reported in terms of both recruiting enough parent governors and finding parent governors with appropriate skills to contribute to the governing body.

One of the key issues appears to be not so much the model of governance in use but the recruitment of governors with the appropriate personal attributes such as interest, commitment and skills. Interviewees from five case studies felt that the model of governance was not important (see section 5.3 for further discussion on appropriateness of models and perceptions on future developments). Rather, it was the mix of people and skills that mattered. For example, one coordinator explained: 'The model of governance is irrelevant – it all depends on the people in the partnership.'

Another coordinator felt that it was not so much business skills that were necessary, but more an individual's commitment and ability to think strategically:

I don't think that business skills necessarily contribute to that [the fundamentals of governance i.e. transparency, accountability and strategic planning]. It's about the ability of the individual to take that strategic view and to be open to accountability.

Coordinator

Coordinators from three case-study areas made observations about the limitations of the business model of governance. For example, one said:

I don't think you need business skills to [ensure transparency, accountability and strategic vision] ... sometimes people bringing their business skills think they are being governors and they are not [...] although sometimes people who work at a strategic level can be useful.

Coordinator

In line with the findings from the review and the case studies, that one of the challenges associated with the stakeholder model was recruiting governors with the appropriate skill set, the survey of governors revealed that although three-fifths of governors (61 per cent) *strongly agreed or agreed* that 'there are enough people with appropriate business skills on [their] governing bodies', nearly one-fifth (18 per cent) did not agree. Observations from two case-study coordinators highlighted the role of induction training to increase

awareness of the roles and responsibilities of governors, regardless of the nature of the governance model (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of training). In addition, three-quarters of governors also *strongly agreed or agreed* that 'there are enough people on [their] governing body to represent the local community', whereas slightly more than one in ten (13 per cent) *disagreed or strongly disagreed*.

Thirty-five per cent (22 respondents) of coordinators considered that there were enough people with appropriate skills on governing bodies. Additionally, 58 per cent (36 respondents) felt there were enough people on governing bodies to represent the local community.

These findings highlight that, although there is broad agreement that governing bodies have sufficient local representation and, in the case of the governors' survey, appropriate business skills, there is scope to increase the number of governors with business skills and who represent the local community.

Federations

Case-study interviewees were asked about their experience of governance in federations of schools. Five coordinators offered views on this subject although they pointed out that experience was limited to the length of time federations had been in operation.

Although based on a small sub-sample, the five coordinators were positive about the benefits of federations and two were positive about how governance was working in their federations. A further two coordinators observed that, although it was challenging for governing bodies to be less insular and consider other schools' priorities, it was beneficial for schools to think about the 'bigger picture'.

2.2 Key tasks and responsibilities of governing bodies

Roles and responsibilities of governors

In England (and the Netherlands) the majority of decision making is devolved to school level in contrast to other countries across Europe (OECD Indicators, 2008). The roles and responsibilities of governing

bodies are statutory, and among other duties, governors are responsible for training, recruitment, salary setting, performance review and dismissal of ineffective headteachers and senior leadership staff (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Caldwell *et al.*, 2008; James *et al.*, 2010a).

Nine out of ten governors surveyed felt they were clear about their roles and responsibilities. In contrast, coordinators were less confident that governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities (three per cent: two coordinators strongly agreed and 61 per cent: 38 coordinators agreed).

Further analysis revealed that governors in those schools where governance was rated by Ofsted as 'outstanding' were significantly more likely to *strongly* agree that governors were 'clear about their roles and responsibilities as a governor'.

Whether governors carry out more of a strategic or operational role

Table 2.1 outlines what the governors surveyed felt were the responsibilities that their governing bodies fulfilled (in addition to their statutory duties). It illustrates that governors most often reported that their governing bodies fulfilled monitoring and supporting roles:

- monitoring the school's progress against the school development/improvement plan (83 per cent of governors felt their governing bodies *often* fulfilled this role)
- monitoring the performance of the headteacher (79 per cent of governors felt their governing bodies *often* fulfilled this role)
- actively supporting the senior leadership team (76 per cent of governors felt their governing bodies *often* fulfilled this role).

Surveyed coordinators concurred with the finding that governing bodies principally fulfilled monitoring and supporting roles. The two roles carried out by *most governing bodies* in the view of the coordinators were: monitoring the performance of the headteacher (69 per cent: 43 coordinators) and monitoring the school's

progress against the schools development plan (61 per cent: 38 coordinators).

Additionally, only two-fifths of governors felt their governing body often fulfilled the role of challenging the decisions of the headteacher or senior leadership team (42 per cent) or representing the views of the local community (43 per cent). Moreover, only 13 per cent (eight) of coordinators felt that most governing bodies 'provide strategic direction to the senior leadership team' and only 16 per cent (ten) of coordinators believed that *most governing bodies* 'are actively involved in self-evaluation of the governing body'.

Further analysis revealed that governors in those schools where governance was rated by Ofsted as 'outstanding' were significantly more likely to say they were *often*:

- actively involved in self-evaluation of the governing body
- providing strategic direction alongside the senior leadership team
- ensuring the school helps to support all children and young people in the local community.

There was evidence across six case-study areas that some coordinators and governors felt that governing bodies act in both a strategic and operational way dependent on the task involved. For example, one chair of governors believed that the governing body's financial role was more strategic whereas their curriculum sub-committee fulfilled more of an operational role. However, two coordinators, in particular, believed that governing bodies should be more strategic and one described using clerks to 'drive' forward and highlight the importance of governors' strategic role.

Importantly, while acknowledging the need for more of a strategic focus, some interviewees from across eight case-study areas reported that whether a governing body acted in more of a strategic or operational way was dependent on the quality of relationships. For example, the relationship between the headteacher and the chair of governors was considered important. One coordinator explained that the strategic focus was not dependent on the phase or size of school, but

Table 2.1 Governors' perceptions of responsibilities in addition to statutory duties

Extent to which the governing body fulfils the following:	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't know	No response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
determines the school's ethos	59	31	7	1	2	1
monitors the school's progress against the school development/ improvement plan	83	14	2	0	1	1
scrutinises the school development/ improvement plan during preparation	63	27	6	1	2	1
challenges the decisions of the headteacher or senior leadership team	42	45	10	2	1	0
monitors the performance of the headteacher	79	16	2	1	1	1
is actively involved in self-evaluation of the governing body	50	34	10	2	2	1
represents the views of the local community	43	44	8	1	3	1
is aware of the views of the parents and pupils	71	25	3	0	1	1
is actively involved in supporting the senior leadership team	76	19	3	1	1	1
provides strategic direction alongside the senior leadership team	56	34	7	1	1	1
takes into account national education policies when providing strategic direction	58	33	5	1	2	1
takes into account local authority policies when providing strategic direction	60	32	5	1	2	1
ensures the school helps to support all children and young people in the local community	70	22	5	1	1	1

N = 1591

A series of single response questions.

Due to rounding, row percentages may not sum to 100.

A total of 1585 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.

Source: NFER (Governance Models in Schools: Governor Survey, 2010)

rather on 'the quality of the people at the helm'. Another coordinator confirmed this: 'The mix [of strategic and operational roles] is determined by the headteacher and the chair as they set the direction of the school.'

Headteachers like their governing bodies being supportive but not all headteachers welcome the challenge that governing bodies should be bringing so if that isn't initiated by the governing body, it won't necessarily be initiated or supported by the headteacher.

Moreover, a further coordinator emphasised the importance of the headteacher:

Coordinator

There are good and bad governing bodies and there's no correlation with the strategic and operational focus. The roles make no difference to the way in which governing bodies conduct themselves [...] the relationship with the headteacher is pivotal.

Coordinator

There was recognition by four coordinators that primary schools tend to be less strategic and this can be associated with the perceived need that primary headteachers need greater support. This is especially the case if they have a considerable teaching commitment.

It was also reported that headteachers can 'steer' the governing body. For example, one coordinator explained:

It was reported across several case studies that as well as the importance of relationships between the key people, a widespread full understanding of the role of

the governing body was also essential. For example, one coordinator explained:

The knowledge and understanding of the nature of the work of governing bodies, that the chair and the headteacher and the clerk have, tend to determine whether they are more strategic or operational [in their approach].

Coordinator

These findings reflect governors' and coordinators' views and suggest that as well as the importance of the relationships between the headteacher, the chair of governors and the clerk, training in the role of the governing body should be considered, not only for governors but also for headteachers. The emphasis on the strategic role is in line with observations in recent literature that identify the key function of governing bodies across all types of school provision to be strategic, and to involve the scrutiny of the headteacher and senior leadership team, raising school improvement and financial management (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; DCSF, 2008; Ranson and Crouch, 2009; Chapman *et al.*, 2010; Ministerial Working Group, 2010; DfE 2010; James *et al.*, 2010a).

2.3 Recruitment of governors

Coordinators believed that the attributes of commitment and interest were key considerations when recruiting or electing governors. They believed the following characteristics were *very important*:

- the level of commitment (92 per cent: 57 coordinators)
- having strong links with the community in which the school is based (26 per cent: 16 coordinators).

In addition, 42 per cent (26 coordinators) believed that the level of specialist knowledge was *not important*.

2.4 Clerks

The majority (81 per cent) of governors surveyed believed that 'clerks informed governors of their legal duties'. Additionally, the majority (82 per cent) felt that the 'clerk informed them of training opportunities'.

Further analysis revealed that governors in those schools where governance was rated by Ofsted as 'outstanding' were significantly more likely to strongly agree or agree that 'clerks informed governors of their legal duties' and 'clerks informed them of training opportunities'.

Case study 1:

Importance of the clerk to a governing body's strategic input

In a school where Ofsted rated the governing body as 'outstanding' the coordinator believed that the extent of the strategic role of the governing body depended a lot on the local authority clerking input. He observed that where schools bought into the clerking service (and in that area about 70 per cent have done so) and used the trained clerks, then the governing bodies were encouraged to take a more strategic role because of the way that the clerk helped to set the business agenda for the year.

Historically, each clerk has had a portfolio of schools that they support. They took minutes and put a standard agenda together each half term to ensure the statutory duties of the governing body were covered. They took the standard agenda to the agenda-setting meetings and the school [the headteacher and the chair of governors] populated it with anything else they needed to include. The clerk acted as an advisor on the law and worked with the chair to ensure meetings were run in accordance with the law. They kept the chair on track if they strayed away from what the law says. For example, a clerk could advise on the way votes were taken. The clerk ensured records of the meetings were kept up to date. The coordinator emphasised that, in his view, schools are less strategic where they do not have a trained clerk.

Coordinators concurred with governors' views on clerks' contributions. The majority (77 per cent: 48 coordinators) surveyed believed that 'clerks informed governors of their legal duties'. Additionally, the majority (76 per cent: 47 coordinators) felt that 'the clerk informed them of training opportunities'.

The importance of the clerk's contribution to the governing body's strategic input was further emphasised by the case-study interviews as three coordinators specifically observed the value of their role (Chapter 3 discusses the impact of clerks). Case study 1 illustrates this and emphasises the importance of having fully trained clerks in the future.

3 Impact and effectiveness of school governance

Key findings

- The evidence suggests that an effective governing body can have a valuable impact on school improvement.
- The majority of governors reported that the governing body took into account how to support all children and young people in the local community. However, coordinators were less confident that governors were doing this.
- The key features of effective governance were highlighted as a productive working relationship between the governing body and the senior leadership team, an effective chair of governors, an effective clerk and governors having a clear understanding of their roles. Governors cited size of the governing body as the least relevant element of an effective governing body.
- The majority of governors felt that their governing bodies were effective and coordinators were also positive about the overall effectiveness of governing bodies.

This chapter presents the views of governors and coordinators of governors' services on the impact and effectiveness of school governance. It reports on the impact of the school governing body on school improvement and school accountability to the local community, the key features of effective governance, and how governing bodies are currently assessing and evaluating their effectiveness.

3.1 Impact of the governing body on school improvement

The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) outlines the shift towards greater school autonomy in respect to school improvement and school accountability to the local community. These requirements place a greater focus

on governing bodies to support schools in fulfilling their statutory duties.

Just over three-quarters (77 per cent) of governors either strongly agreed or agreed that there was evidence that their 'governing body has an impact on school improvement'. Moreover, the majority of coordinators also strongly agreed or agreed with this statement (76 per cent; 47 respondents). Further analysis revealed that governors on governing bodies which were rated as 'outstanding' were statistically significantly more likely to strongly agree that there is evidence that their governing body has an impact on school improvement (52 per cent), compared to those judged as 'good' or 'satisfactory' (34 and 25 per cent respectively).

Interviewees in all nine case-study areas were in agreement that governing bodies could have a significant impact on school improvement. Coordinators felt that while the actions of many governing bodies or the quality of governance can have an impact on school improvement, it was variable across the schools they support. Impact could be evidenced by, for example, the extent to which governing bodies were involved in drawing up and monitoring school development plans. The extent to which governing bodies adequately examined and addressed school priorities, consulted the local community and used the school improvement partners effectively were also key criteria. Interviewees highlighted the challenges faced by governing bodies in ensuring they had an impact on school improvement. One coordinator, for example, noted:

If the headteacher is weak and if the senior leadership team is poor and the quality of the teaching is poor, you can have the best governing body in the world but I'm not sure they are going to actually impact on standards. Unless they go down the road of putting pressure on the headteacher to shape up or ship out.

Coordinator

The review evidence supports this view and highlights the close relationship between the quality of governing bodies and school performance where governing bodies are effective and challenging in their scrutiny and monitoring role, and schools are better placed to achieve their statutory duties (Balarin *et al.*, 2008). Where schools were graded as 'inadequate' during Ofsted inspections, senior leaders were reported to have not been effectively challenged and held to account by governing bodies (DCSF, 2008). James *et al.* (2010b) found that the 'lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence for a school; it is a substantial disadvantage', emphasising the significance of the role of the governing body.

3.2 School responsibility to the local community

The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) states that in the future: 'Parents, governors and the public will have access to much more information about every school and how it performs.'

In the context of extended services, provision for 14–19 year olds and the raising of the participation age, governing bodies will need to ensure that schools are effectively engaging local communities. The literature review suggests that, at present, the extent to which schools are engaging local communities is hard to assess. Evidence suggests that governors see themselves as more accountable to the schools and/or Ofsted rather than the surrounding community (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Ranson and Crouch, 2009).

Survey data revealed that a large proportion of governors *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that their governing bodies ensured that their schools 'respond to the needs of the local area'. Over three-quarters (78 per cent) of governors also reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that their governing bodies took into account 'how the school can help to support all children and young people in the local community'.

Although coordinators represent a relatively smaller sample in the NFER survey compared to governors, their views differed slightly and were somewhat more reflective of the review evidence. Most respondents were *not sure* whether governing bodies ensured that schools 'respond to the needs of the local area' (53 per cent; 33 respondents) and just under a third *agreed*

with this statement (31 per cent; 19 respondents). Similar proportions of coordinators were either *not sure* or *agreed* that governing bodies ensured that schools helped to 'support all children and young people in the local community' (37 per cent; 23 respondents and 44 per cent; 27 respondents respectively).

Further analysis showed that respondents on governing bodies rated as 'outstanding' for their effectiveness in 'challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met' were statistically significantly more likely to *strongly agree* that their governing body 'ensures that the school responds to the needs of the local area' (38 per cent) compared to governing bodies judged as 'good' or 'satisfactory' (30 and 19 per cent respectively).

Similarly, a larger proportion of governors on 'outstanding' governing bodies reported they strongly agreed their governing body 'considers how the school can help to support all children and young people in the local community, (44 per cent), compared to those on 'good' or 'satisfactory' governing bodies (38 and 29 per cent respectively).

3.3 Accountability to the local community

The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) states that in the future: 'We will help governing bodies to benefit from the skills of their local community in holding schools to account.'

Interviewees across six case-study areas felt that their schools were accountable to the local community by, for example, having community representation on the governing body, partnership links with local agencies such as the police and the local primary care trust, provision of extended services and supporting schools to work in clusters of schools.

In contrast, coordinators and governors across five of the case-study areas felt that community involvement and accountability were limited to parent evenings, newsletters and the publication of examination results, with the governing bodies tending to leave this area of responsibility to the school senior leadership team.

3.4 Key features of effective governance

Most important elements of effective governance

The literature review identified the following key features of effective governance:

- clearly defined roles and responsibilities (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Caldwell *et al.*, 2008)
- strong leadership (DCSF, 2008; Caldwell *et al.*, 2008)
- a chair of governors who can effectively lead and manage the governing body (James *et al.*, 2010a; James *et al.*, 2010b)
- good communication between the headteacher and governing body (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; DCSF, 2008)
- the headteacher being supported (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; DCSF, 2008)
- a shared and common vision for the school (Balarin *et al.*, 2008; James *et al.*, 2010)
- the regular monitoring of performance data, school improvement plans and targets (Caldwell *et al.*, 2008; Balarin *et al.*, 2008).

The review findings share some similarities with the key features of governance identified by respondents, as shown in Table 3.1.

The most frequently cited important elements by governors and coordinators were:

- a productive working relationship between the governing body and the senior leadership team
- an effective chair of governors
- an effective clerk to support the governing body
- governors having a clear understanding of their role and its limits.

These are explored further below.

Nearly three-quarters of governors (73 per cent) reported that a productive relationship with the senior leadership team was the most important element of an effective governing body. While coordinators also saw this as important, this was felt to be the third most important element (45 per cent; 28 respondents).

The case-study interviewees also highlighted the relationship between the governing body and the senior leadership team as the most crucial aspect of governance. Interviewees across three case-study areas felt that governing bodies were most at ease with

Table 3.1 The most important elements of an effective governing body

Which three of the following are the most important elements of an effective governing body?	%
Having a productive working relationship between the governing body and senior leadership team	73
Having an effective chair of governors	52
Having a clerk who effectively supports the governing body	36
Governors having a clear understanding of their role and its limits	34
Having expert governors with specialist skills	28
Ensuring all governors are well trained	25
Governors having access to and a good understanding of relevant data	19
Ensuring all governors are well supported	12
Including governors from the community in which the school is based	10
That the size of the governing body is appropriate to the size of the school	6
No response	1
Total	100

More than one answer could be given so percentages may sum to more than 100.

A total of 1572 respondents answered at least one item in this question.

Source: NFER (Governance Models in Schools: Governor Survey, 2010)

supporting the senior leadership team and less comfortable with challenging and acting as critical friends, as discussed in Chapter 2. The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) recognises that further support is needed to enable governing bodies to more effectively challenge senior leadership teams by asking the right questions based partly on better access to data.

Governors saw an effective chair as the second most important element of effective governance (52 per cent), as did coordinators (63 per cent; 39 respondents). Case-study interviewees also highlighted the importance of good chairing. For example, one interviewee remarked:

A good chair needs to be able to hold the school to account ... they need to be good managers of time, meetings need to be effectively chaired, agendas need to be looked at carefully, discussion needs to be open so that everybody is included and not just one or two people with big voices dominating the meeting.

This is supported by recent research from James *et al.* (2010b), which found that the 'chair of the governing body and the chair's relationship with the headteacher are very significant in enabling high quality governance'.

Just over a third of governors (36 per cent) highlighted the clerk as the third most important feature of an effective governing body. In contrast to governors, nearly three-quarters of coordinators (74 per cent; 46 respondents) viewed the clerk as the most important element.

All case-study coordinators reported that the clerk was 'absolutely vital' to effective governance and rated the importance of the clerk as five on a scale of one to five with five denoting a very effective governing body. For example, one coordinator described the role of the clerk as 'essential':

It is not a role of simply taking notes at meetings, I think it's a much bigger and broader role than that. [Clerks] need to be able to advise on legal aspects. They need to be able to ensure the items on the agenda are very much to facilitate strategic conversations and be part of that triad of the headteacher and the chair, and have an equal part in setting up agendas and ensuring the principles of good governance are taken into account at all times.

Coordinator

Coordinators in two case-study areas reported that they felt that governing bodies that did not make use of local authority clerking services and instead used internal school staff or independent services were not always 'as effective in their impact'. *The Importance of Teaching* makes clear its plans to 'encourage schools to appoint trained clerks' (DfE, 2010, p.71), and the quality of services bought in by schools will be particularly pertinent in the light of greater school autonomy.

Having clarity of their roles and their remit was the fourth most important element of an effective governing body reported by governors. Coordinators saw this as slightly less of a priority, with 37 per cent (23 respondents) selecting this as the fifth most important aspect of effective governance. Case-study interviewees reported that greater clarity over governor roles would also help to ensure governors were being 'more strategic and less operational'.

Perceptions on the least important elements of effective governance

Governors and coordinators highlighted two of the least important elements of an effective governing body as:

- the size of the governing body
- governors being representative of the local community.

The size of the governing body

Schools are currently able to specify the size of their governing bodies, ranging from nine to 20 governors (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). Governors felt that the size of the governing body in relation to the size of the school was the least important element of an effective governing body (six per cent); coordinators selected it as the second least important element (three per cent; two respondents); and the literature reviewed generally supported these findings. It is interesting to note that the Schools White Paper, which states that 'many of the most successful schools have smaller governing bodies' (DfE, 2010, p.71) aims to introduce a model of smaller governing bodies, reasoning that 'smaller governing bodies with the right skills are able to be more decisive, supporting the headteacher and championing high standards'.

Interviewees across seven of the nine case-study areas reported that the size of the governing body was 'irrelevant', highlighting other attributes, such as the importance of the commitment and skills of governors and the needs of individual schools, as important. In addition, the NGA Annual Survey (NGA, 2009) found that while over 30 per cent of governors felt that smaller governing bodies were more effective, a higher proportion opposed this view (38 per cent).

Governors being representative of the local community

According to coordinators, the least popular element of an effective governing body was governors who represented the community. This was not chosen by any respondents. Governors reported this as the second least important element (10 per cent).

Perceptions on the effectiveness of governing bodies

Figure 3.1 illustrates that governors were overwhelmingly positive in their views on the effectiveness of governance in their schools. Almost all governors (93 per cent) reported that overall, governance in their schools was either very or fairly effective. This reflects similar findings in the NGA Annual Survey (NGA, 2009), where governors were reported to be confident about carrying out their role effectively.

Further analysis revealed statistically significant differences in views based on governor type and school type.

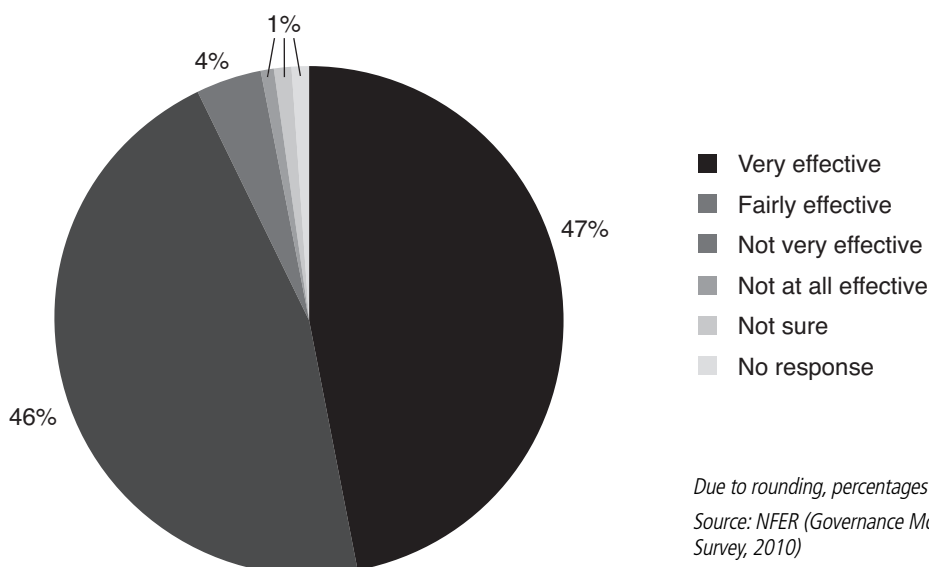
- A larger proportion of sponsor governors (69 per cent) felt that governance in their school was *very effective*, compared to staff or parent governors (41 and 42 per cent respectively).
- A greater proportion of respondents in academies (69 per cent) compared to community schools (45 per cent) felt that governance in their school was *very effective*.

This suggests those schools with greater autonomy, such as academies, and those with sponsor governors are more likely to view school governance as effective compared to their counterparts.

Encouragingly, a large majority of governors either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that their governing body provides an effective forum for discussion of school strategy and policy (87 per cent) and their chair of governors was effective in ensuring the governing body fulfilled their role (82 per cent).

Governors on governing bodies judged to be 'outstanding' were statistically significantly more likely to *strongly agree* that their 'governing body provides an effective forum for discussion of school strategy and policy' (61 per cent), compared to governing bodies rated as 'good' or 'satisfactory' (41 and 27 per cent respectively). Further analysis also showed that a

Figure 3.1 Governors' perceptions on the effectiveness of school governance



Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Source: NFER (Governance Models in Schools: Governor Survey, 2010)

Table 3.2 Key features supporting governors' effectiveness ratings

Rating	Key features
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open discussions, debate and relationship with the senior leadership team. Proactive information sharing between the senior leadership team and the governing body.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong governing body with features of five, but interviewees felt there was 'always room for improvement'.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Governing body needs to provide more evidence of impact and effectiveness. Internal issues, for example, building work has impacted on pupils and parents receiving the most effective provision.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted have recommended governing body needs to challenge more. Relationship between the senior leadership team and governing body needs to be strengthened. Current imbalance between role responsibilities and governors' time commitments.
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No governing body was given this rating.

statistically significantly larger proportion of governors on 'outstanding' governing bodies *strongly agreed* (59 per cent) that their 'chair of governors is effective in ensuring the governing body fulfils its role well', compared to respondents on 'good' (43 per cent) and 'satisfactory' (35 per cent) governing bodies.

The views of coordinators were slightly less evenly matched with those of governors, although still positive in respect to the effectiveness of governing bodies. The

large majority (68 per cent; 42 respondents) agreed that governing bodies provide an effective forum for discussions of school strategy, although a small number were unsure (18 per cent; 11 respondents). The majority (61 per cent; 38 respondents) of coordinators also agreed that chairs of governors were effective in ensuring governing bodies fulfilled their roles.

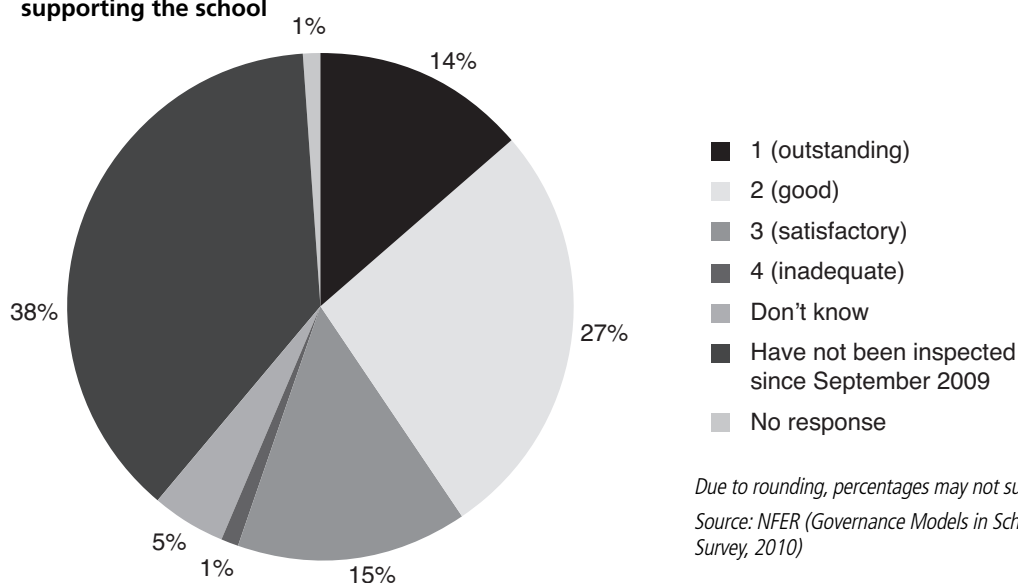
Most case-study interviewees concurred with the survey findings and reported that their governing bodies were effective, with a score of four on a scale of one to five, with five denoting a very effective governing body, being the most frequently cited rating. Table 3.2 provides further details on how governors validated their ratings.

3.5 How governing bodies assess and evaluate their effectiveness

The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) confirms that schools will now no longer be required to complete the self-evaluation form, which had been required to support Ofsted inspections. Currently, the revised Ofsted inspection framework of September 2009 includes specific criteria in relation to the governing body and judges governing bodies on their effectiveness 'in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met' (Ofsted, 2011).

Figure 3.2 shows that, as might be expected under a new framework, more than a third (38 per cent) of

Figure 3.2 Ofsted ratings in relation to the governing bodies' effectiveness in challenging and supporting the school



Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

Source: NFER (Governance Models in Schools: Governor Survey, 2010)

governors said their schools have not been inspected by Ofsted since September 2009. Of those that have been inspected, just over a quarter (27 per cent) received a 'good' judgement for the governing body's effectiveness in challenging and supporting the school. Similar proportions of governors had received 'outstanding' or 'satisfactory' judgements (14 and 15 per cent respectively).

Further analysis showed that respondents on governing bodies judged as 'outstanding' were

statistically significantly more likely to report that all the key elements of their role were *already effective*, compared to governing bodies judged as 'good' or 'satisfactory'.

Survey data revealed that three-quarters (75 per cent) of governing bodies had assessed their effectiveness with reference to the Ofsted criteria. Just over a third (35 per cent) used a skills audit, while 17 per cent used the Governor Mark (the National Quality Mark for School Governance).

4 Governor services, support and training

Key findings

- The majority of governors who had accessed training and, in particular, face-to-face training felt that it was useful. Moreover, the clerk was considered a key source of support amongst most governors in order to help them fulfil their role.
- Overall, there appeared to be some scope for improvement with regard to raising awareness of training opportunities and encouraging attendance amongst governors across schools to ensure they have the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake the role effectively.
- There was some evidence amongst survey respondents that governors would welcome further information, advice and guidance, particularly in relation to new developments in education, self-evaluation, specific issues and statutory requirements, and legal responsibilities.
- In the light of budget cuts, the most effective way of sustaining training and support for governors and clerks, related to sharing and dissemination of good practice and information, is through networking opportunities.

This chapter explores take-up of training, support and information, advice and guidance amongst governors and, where appropriate, the extent to which they felt these have been effective. It then explores suggestions for improving training and support. Finally, ways in which governor support services could be sustained in light of budget cuts are discussed.

4.1 Effectiveness, take-up and access to training

- The majority of governors (80 per cent) had made use of face-to-face training offered through the governor support services. This compares with 32 per cent of respondents who had accessed web-based training. In both cases, the majority of respondents felt that the training had been *quite useful* or *very useful* (94 per cent and 87 per cent). Further analysis of access and usefulness of training revealed statistically significant differences in the views held amongst respondents by school phase. Proportionally, more primary teachers than secondary teachers had undertaken web-based training (34 per cent compared with 28 per cent).
- Of those governors who had accessed web-based training, a greater proportion of secondary school respondents (15 per cent) than their primary counterparts (seven per cent) felt that it was *not useful* or *not at all useful*.

Three-fifths of governors felt that the training they receive in their role as governor from the local authority governor support services was *effective* or *very effective* and over a quarter (29 per cent) reported that it had been satisfactory. Seven per cent of respondents reported that they had not received any training. This suggests there is scope to further promote and encourage training amongst governors. The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) recognises that, in some instances, governing bodies have not received the necessary training to carry out their role effectively.

Case-study coordinators cited inductions and online training most frequently as the service that governors found most valuable. In one local authority, the decision had been made to reduce the amount of county-wide training and an alternative approach adopted which involved more partner sessions. For example, if a school in a partnership decided that they wanted some training, this would be offered to all schools in the partnership to allow governors the opportunity to network and identify and share concerns

and experiences. An interviewee explained that governors valued the combination of training and dissemination of good practice. He reasoned:

It's one thing to offer the advice around good practice; it's then another matter to actually get them to understand how to do it in their school ... you might want to provide them with models of good practice, it's then helping them and training them and supporting them into actually developing their governing body practices into that model of good practice ...

Attendance at training

According to the views of coordinators across five case-study areas, the extent to which governors were encouraged to attend training varied across institutions. One coordinator felt that it was dependent on the attitudes of leaders (such as the chair of governors and the headteacher) on the governing body. In two cases, it was reported that training and development featured as an item on the governing body agenda as a way of promoting and raising awareness of opportunities.

A few governors across two case-study areas reported that training and support is cascaded back to other governors in the school through the governor meetings. However, in a further area, comments indicated that no cascading took place; rather, the chair of governors described it as a process of individual contact between individual governors and trainers.

Barriers to attending training

The majority of coordinators identified a lack of time as the main barrier to governors attending training (85 per cent, 53 individuals). Case-study interviewees reported logistical issues such as employment and child care commitments as reasons for why time was limited. Opportunities to access training online or holding face-to-face training at different times of the day were suggested as ways to overcome these challenges.

Other frequently cited barriers amongst survey respondents included a lack of support from employers in terms of, for example, paid time off to attend training (63 per cent, 39 individuals) and an unwillingness to travel (60 per cent, 37 individuals).

In response to the latter comment, one case-study coordinator reasoned: 'Governors can be reluctant to come home from work having commuted and then go out again and have to go to training.'

Another theme that emerged from the case-study data was the reluctance amongst governors to use the school budget to pay for their continuing professional development needs. One coordinator, for example, reasoned that governors were cautious of taking funds away from the pupils. This suggests that the value of training needs to be highlighted to governors.

Should training be compulsory?

The general consensus held amongst most coordinators was that some training should be compulsory. Coordinators across four areas reported particular elements of governor training that should be made compulsory, including induction training to ensure that governors are better placed to fulfil their role effectively. Moreover, two coordinators reported that other areas should be compulsory for specific governors. For example, a governor on a finance committee should attend some financial training.

A further three coordinators identified particular governors for whom training should be made compulsory including chairs of governors, new governors and clerks. One interviewee asserted: 'It's such an important role [...] it should be given the resources that it merits.'

The main benefit of such a requirement identified amongst coordinators was that it would provide volunteers with a good level of knowledge and understanding in order to carry out their role effectively. For example, one coordinator expressed her frustration at governors having the option not to undertake training:

You would never expect a magistrate to start passing sentence on people if they hadn't had the training, so why should we have people managing sometimes multi-million pound budgets and affecting the education of our young people without having had the training to do it?

Coordinator

However, there was some recognition amongst interviewees that given the voluntary nature of the role, if training were to become compulsory, there could be less interest in becoming a governor. For example, one coordinator remarked: 'You get a certain amount of resistance as soon as you tell someone they have to do something.' Moreover, coordinators across three areas concurrently highlighted the need to consider the cost associated with compulsory training.

The coordinator survey findings revealed that the more frequently cited services provided by local authority governor services included:

- face-to-face training (100 per cent, 62 individuals)
- directing governors to relevant documents (97 per cent, 60 individuals)
- helpline (94 per cent, 58 individuals)
- dissemination of good practice (90 per cent, 56 individuals)
- enabling networking with other governors (87 per cent, 54 individuals).

In the majority of cases, survey respondents reported that governors found these services useful (either *quite useful* or *very useful*).

4.2 Effectiveness of support and information, advice and guidance

Support received

As Table 4.1 reveals, advice was most frequently received from the clerk, the local authority governor coordinator/governor support services and the school improvement partner. For example, half of governors (50 per cent) reported having received *a lot* of advice from the clerk. In contrast, just over half (52 per cent) said they had received *a little* through networking with other governors. The case-study data largely supported these findings and indicated that there was some scope for improvement with regard to networking. However, the time required to undertake such activities was noted as a particular barrier.

Further analysis of support received indicated a statistically significant difference in the proportion of respondents involved in networking with other governors; a greater proportion of secondary respondents (46 per cent) than their primary counterparts (38 per cent) had accessed such support.

In contrast, over four-fifths of governor respondents indicated that they had received *no* advice from a mentor and over three-fifths had received *no* advice from the NGA or Governorline. Access to support from the NGA and Governorline was reported to be variable amongst case-study interviewees. However, reasons for not accessing advice from these central services included having received sufficient support at a local level.

Table 4.1 Advice received from governor services

	A lot %	A little %	None %	No response %
Clerk	50	39	10	1
The school improvement partner	39	40	19	2
The local authority governor coordinator/governor support services	33	48	17	2
Networking with other governors	15	52	31	2
A mentor	3	10	83	3
NGA	4	30	64	2
Governorline	4	29	64	3

N = 1591

A series of single response questions.

Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.

A total of 1580 respondents gave at least one response to these questions.

Source: NFER (Governance Models in Schools: Governor Survey, 2010)

The majority of case-study governors and chairs of governors felt supported or very supported in their role, as illustrated by the following comment:

[I feel] very supported because I know if there were ever any issues or anything I wanted to do, I know that there would always be someone to help me or point me in the right direction.

Governor

Over half of governors in the survey (56 per cent) and the majority of governors and chairs of governors across the nine case-study areas felt that the support they received from local authority governor support services was effective (either *very effective* or *effective*), while over a quarter (28 per cent) felt that it was satisfactory. However, around one in ten respondents (nine per cent) said that they had not received any support. This finding may not be surprising given that governors often have other commitments and responsibilities outside their role as governor.

Survey responses amongst governors, who had received advice from the clerk, were largely positive: 81 per cent stated that the source had helped them fulfil their role as governor. This was also the view held by 77 per cent of governors who had accessed advice from the school improvement partner and 69 per cent of governors who had sought advice from the local authority governor coordinator/governor support services.

Coordinators across two case-study areas stated that the removal of school improvement partners would impact on school improvement. In contrast, fewer governors who had received advice from Governorline (42 per cent), a mentor (41 per cent) or the NGA (37 per cent) reported that they had helped them to fulfil their role.

The majority of governor respondents who had made use of good practice examples, as well as the helpline, direction to relevant documents, and networking with other governors, found the support services useful (either *very useful* or *quite useful*).

Further analysis by school phase revealed a statistically significant difference between primary and secondary school respondents commenting on the usefulness of the advice received through networking with other governors. A greater proportion of secondary school respondents (20 per cent) than their primary

counterparts reported that networking had helped them to fulfil their role *a lot* (14 per cent). Additionally, proportionally more secondary respondents (41 per cent) found being directed to relevant documents *very useful* compared with their primary respondents (34 per cent).

The majority of coordinators that were surveyed (95 per cent, 59 individuals) stated that governors in their local authority regularly request help and support with specific issues.

Information, advice and guidance

Sixty per cent of governors who responded to the survey said that they get enough support with information, advice and guidance regarding statutory requirements and legal responsibilities. However, they were least likely to report that the local authority governor support service provided them with enough support with undertaking school evaluation (39 per cent).

Some of the key areas where governors appeared to need further information, advice and guidance were:

- self-evaluation (39 per cent would welcome further support)
- new developments in education (mentioned by 38 per cent of respondents), perhaps an unsurprising finding given the present introduction of academies and free schools
- specific issues (29 per cent of respondents)
- statutory requirements and legal responsibilities (26 per cent).

Some case-study interviewees reported training as a way in which their local authority provided them with information, advice and guidance about governance requirements and responsibilities.

It is worth noting, however, that around one in ten governor respondents had not received any information on new developments in education (nine per cent), help and support with specific issues (11 per cent) or support with undertaking school self-evaluation (13 per cent).

Eighty-five per cent (53 individuals) of coordinators who responded to the survey reported regular requests for information, advice and guidance regarding statutory requirements and legal responsibilities and 60 per cent (37 individuals) noted requests for information on new developments in education. The frequency of requests for support with undertaking school self-evaluation appeared more varied: 50 per cent of respondents (31 individuals) reported that governors regularly requested such information, while 45 per cent (28 individuals) said they sometimes did this.

Dissemination of good practice

The more commonly cited ways in which coordinators sought to ensure that effective practice is shared with governors across the region included

- printed leaflets/newsletters (71 per cent, 44 respondents) website (65 per cent, 40 individuals)
- emails (60 per cent, 37 individuals)
- by facilitating networking between governors from different governing bodies (60 per cent, 37 individuals).

The finding about printed leaflets and newsletters corresponds with the case-study data. Information was reportedly produced in a range of formats (hard copy and electronic/online) in order to accommodate different preferences and capture the attention of governors where possible.

Coordinators also identified regional meetings as a useful way to share information with colleagues. For example, one interviewee said:

It's good to meet with colleagues who do a similar job because we can share experiences ... share knowledge and we can share good practice ... also we can get a broader national perspective because we all work in different ways ... there is no hard and fast model for the provision of governor services.

4.3 Improvements to training and support

While coordinators across two case-study areas felt that no gaps existed in the services they provide to governors, responses amongst those who did were diverse and included the need for an accredited clerk qualification and the dissemination of information. One interviewee highlighted the importance of this: 'The passing of information depends very much on who receives it in school and what procedures they have for passing that on.' It was suggested that coordinators could channel the information which in turn, could prevent information being interpreted in different ways.

Ongoing training and support to reflect changes and developments, including information on converting to academy status, were particularly welcomed amongst governors and chairs of governors. One governor, for example, remarked: 'We have to move forward with whatever it is that's current at the time.' Nonetheless, there was evidence to suggest that some governors or chairs of governors did not require any further training or support.

4.4 Sustainability of governor support services

The sharing and dissemination of information and good practice were considered the most effective approaches for sustaining training and support for governors and clerks in the light of budget cuts. In particular, sharing good practice more extensively through networking opportunities was identified by over three-fifths (63 per cent) of governors, compared with just over half (52 per cent) who felt this could be done through more use of online training. Responses amongst coordinators largely supported these findings.

The use of technology also emerged as a theme amongst case-study coordinators. The benefits of training online were perceived to include flexibility in that governors could access it at a time that is most convenient. It is also a less resource-intensive approach to delivering training. Another comment made reference to online chat-rooms as a way to facilitate discussion amongst governors. However, these were

considered a more labour-intensive method given that they would require monitoring to ensure that there was a wide awareness of the issues raised. Interestingly, some governors thought accessing training and support through technology was a potential barrier. This highlights the need for different forms of training to be available so that it suits governors' different styles of learning and lifestyles.

A further two case-study interviewees highlighted the need to inform schools about the 'real costs' of services. One coordinator identified considerations for schools when deciding upon training for governors: 'They will have to choose very carefully how much value they place on governance – if schools are more autonomous, then governors are more important – there is no other backstop.'

5 Changing contexts and future developments

Key findings

- Governors and coordinators were unclear about the full impact of budget cuts. However, there was an expectation that this would lead to a decrease in governor support services for schools. The implications of this include schools seeking governor support services outside of their local authority and from independent providers and consultants, resulting in greater competition amongst local authorities and other providers. Services provided by local authorities would, therefore, be subject to greater competition.
- Key principles and components of effective governance were reported to transcend all models of governance and included committed and skilled governors with a common purpose and effective chairing and clerking to ensure governing body roles are fulfilled.
- The evidence indicates that effectiveness could be improved by introducing mandatory induction training for new governors. However, the implications of funding pressures may affect the feasibility of this. Clarifying governor roles, a better selection and recruitment process for governors, and governors acquiring a better understanding of data were also highlighted.

The recently submitted *Education Bill* (GB Parliament, 2011) which has taken forward the reforms put forward in the Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010), has a number of implications for school governance. With the aim of improving current standards of teaching and learning in schools, proposals to enable greater school freedom and autonomy include:

- support for all schools to acquire academy status

- support for charities, educational groups, teachers and groups of parents to set up free schools in response to parental demand
- reduced inspections for schools judged as 'outstanding'
- changes to student exclusion which grant schools new responsibilities.

In light of these proposed changes and the move towards a greater number of schools becoming academies, governing bodies may have additional accountabilities, including supporting schools outside of the control of local authorities. With the move towards academies, there will also be the freedom for schools to define their own governance procedures, such as the composition, size and representation on the governing body depending on individual school needs, subject to secretary of state approval.

5.1 Perceptions on changes to school governance in the light of greater school autonomy

In an open question asked of governors in schools that had become academies (16 respondents), the most frequently cited changes to governors' roles and responsibilities were:

- school policy was now set by an overarching trust (three respondents)
- governing bodies were felt to be focused on local community issues (two respondents)
- the academy sponsor had taken on the role of the local authority (two respondents)
- extra governors had been recruited (two respondents)

Some governors felt it was too early to comment on changes (three respondents).

An example of this is shown in case study 2.

Case study 2:

A converting academy

The chair of governors and a governor of an 11–16 maintained school, which will be converting into an academy in September 2011, explained that they had recently recruited an accountant onto the governing body to ensure the governing body included a governor with strong financial skills. The governing body also includes governors with backgrounds in architecture and law.

The governing body was said to be well supported by the senior leadership team, the school improvement partner and the local authority; and the chair regarded the local authority role as critical. While the governing body had a preference to continue using local authority services, their main priority was cost-effectiveness. They were currently looking at the costs of procuring clerking services from the local authority and explained that if local authority services were too expensive, they would 'go to an outside body'.

The governing body currently has a buy-in training package and plans to start looking at courses from around the country once the school converts into an academy. After converting, interviewees expected the governing body culture 'will need to be sharpened, it will become more business-orientated [...]. Training will need to become more business-focused and that might put some governors off'. The academy had no business sponsors but had 'moved towards a more business-orientated model [because] stakeholder governors need to become more business orientated'. One governor had resigned from the governing body in light of the forthcoming conversion to academy status due to concerns about new responsibilities.

A third of coordinators (21 respondents) responded to an open-survey question about how governing bodies in schools that were now academies had changed, and offered their views on the subsequent changes:

- there had been a formation of a board of governors (two respondents)
- there were now fewer responsibilities for governors (two respondents)
- most coordinators (11 respondents) were unsure or felt it was too early to comment on changes, while some (six respondents) did not support any academies within their local authority.

Governors and coordinators who responded to an open-survey question about how they expected governing bodies to change when schools have more freedom and autonomy in the future (1063 governors: 46 coordinators) highlighted:

- governors would need to become more business-like and professional (420 governors: 26 coordinators)
- governors would have a greater workload and increased time commitments (404 governors: 16 coordinators).

Nearly half of all case-study interviewees across most of the nine case-study areas reported that the greatest change to school governance as a result of increased autonomy, as with budget cuts (see section 5.2), would involve schools moving away from local authority providers for support services. There was an expectation from one interviewee that people would be 'setting themselves up as independent consultants and selling their services back to people, whether that's to the borough or academies or schools'.

Some case-study coordinators felt that greater budget control and the related implications of greater autonomy could put further financial pressure on schools. They believed that many local authorities generally subsidise the support services they provide to schools and, therefore, reduced support may have a detrimental effect on the quality of the governor support services that schools currently receive, with a negative impact on school improvement. In addition, coordinators across two case-study areas stated that the new arrangements put forward in the recent

Education Bill (GB Parliament, 2011), will not require schools to have a school improvement partner, and this could impact on school improvement.

In the context of, for example, schools entering the market, there was a shared view among coordinators that local authorities that currently operate 'buy-back' or 'traded' services to schools, allowing schools the flexibility to obtain services from other providers, were in a better position than those that did not currently do this and would be better prepared for these changes. Further expected changes in light of greater school autonomy, some of which reflected the views of survey respondents, were highlighted as follows.

- Coordinators in seven case-study areas anticipated **increased responsibilities for governing bodies without the 'local authority safety net'**, resulting in governors assuming more of a local authority role. This could result in a high turnover of governors and challenges in terms of recruiting governors.
- In five case-study areas, coordinators said that **governor training, skills and experience could become a higher priority** as governors and models of school governance needed to become more 'business-like' in order to equip schools for a competitive economic market. This is discussed in sections 2.2 and 5.3.
- It was also suggested in two case-study areas that **schools with greater control over their budgets could have different priorities**, which could 'compromise governance priorities' and lead to less emphasis being placed on governing bodies in terms of, for example, training.

5.2 Perceived impact of spending cuts

At the time of the NFER's research, case-study interviewees were unclear about the implications of budget cuts due to limited information about the impending changes about to be announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010. However, the general view was that local authority governor support services would diminish, resulting in a decrease in local authority support for schools.

Interviewees speculated that schools might be expected to procure services not provided by their local authority from other local authorities, independent providers and consultants, resulting in competition for high-quality services amongst schools and greater competition between local authorities.

Interviewees suggested governor services would become more competitive. The NCOGS 2010 survey of coordinators found a 'mixed picture' among coordinators and reported an expectation amongst governors of negative change in the future, with the feeling that the current situation will worsen.

5.3 Appropriateness of current models of governance across different school contexts and key transferable components

As mentioned in Chapter 2, both the literature review and survey data suggest that models of governance are less important than the principles of good governance. Case-study interviewees further supported this view and reported that different models of governance were not needed for more autonomous schools in the future, because 'good governance has at its heart the same things – improving the outcomes for young people and holding the school to account'. This is to say, the model itself may not be the key determinant of effective governance but that features of effective governance, such as good leadership, clarity of purpose, flexibility and transparency, may transcend the models. Interviewees across five case-study areas concurred with this view, as one coordinator explained:

All models have pros and cons but good governance transcends models. Key transferables are having the right people around the table, integrity, the right training, trusting relationships and a shared moral purpose that [individuals] are there for the children – advocates for the children.

Coordinator

Interviewees in three case-study areas outlined the key transferable components of effective governance across any model of school governance:

- committed and skilled governors who are adequately experienced or trained to fulfil their roles

- individuals who are focused on improving education and outcomes for all children and young people
- effective chairing and clerking to ensure the governing body remains strategic and supports, monitors, challenges and scrutinises the senior leadership team
- a system which ensures that senior leadership teams and governing bodies are ensuring the needs of children and young people are being met.

5.4 How effectiveness could be improved

Suggested improvements

The survey data showed that over half of governors felt that the following improvements would help improve the effectiveness of governing bodies:

- mandatory induction training for all new governors
- appointing governors with relevant specialist skills
- understanding of data by governors
- clarity of the roles of governors from central and/or local government
- access to information independent of the headteacher.

Coordinators concurred with governors' views with regard to the importance attached to mandatory induction, understanding of data and clarity of governor roles in order to further the effectiveness of governing bodies.

Further insight into how to improve the clarity of governor roles was provided by governors who responded to an open-survey question about possible improvements required to ensure effective school governance. Two desired improvements were most frequently cited. Firstly, better selection and recruitment process for governors (110 respondents) as 'governors must understand the requirements before appointment and be prepared to train to become effective', because 'the strength of a governing body is limited to who

volunteers'. Secondly, greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the governing body (78 respondents) as there can be 'confusion when they [governors] ask for advice' and 'there is a marked disparity between governors' legal responsibilities and the power they have to ensure that they fulfil them'.

Similarly to governors, coordinators who responded (42 respondents) felt that the governance could be improved with a better selection and recruitment process for governors, with more flexibility (12 respondents). Two coordinators suggested 'changing the entry requirements for governors (having minimum competency levels)' and encouraging recruitment among 'professionals, the community [and] external stakeholders such as charities or community groups'. They also recommended greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the governing body (seven respondents) saying: 'heads can't [make] governors make decisions that are not lawful' and 'everybody involved in education (headteachers, senior leadership teams, governors and parents) needs a clear understanding of what effective governance involves'.

Moreover, the majority of coordinators felt that widespread improvements would help effectiveness a lot. Over four-fifths of coordinators felt the effectiveness of governing bodies would be improved greatly by having:

- accurate identification of strengths and weaknesses in the school
- a senior leadership team that involves the governing body appropriately in key decisions
- a senior leadership team that keeps governors informed
- a willingness by governing bodies to challenge the headteacher
- mandatory induction training for new governors
- clarity of the roles of governors from central and/or local government
- understanding of data by governors.

Further analysis found a statistically significant difference in governors' views based on school phase. A greater proportion of primary school governors (38 per cent) felt that 'understanding of data by governors' would help to improve effectiveness a lot compared to their secondary counterparts (30 per cent).

A 'reduction in the range of responsibilities of governors' was the most frequently cited key element that governors reported would make *no difference* to effectiveness. Governors who felt that a reduction in their range of responsibilities would help to improve effectiveness either *a lot* or *a little* were asked to specify the areas of responsibilities they felt should be reduced. The most frequently cited was the expectation for governors to attend/visit the school frequently.

Coordinators tended to most frequently report local authority services as already effective, including the guidance from school improvement partners and other forms of external advice and support from clerks to the governing body, many of whom are supplied by the local authority. Coordinators who felt that a reduction in the range of responsibilities would help to improve effectiveness either a lot or a little were asked to specify the areas of responsibilities they felt should be reduced. There were some similarities with governors and, of those who responded (32 respondents), the four key areas most frequently cited were:

- the expectation for governors to attend events/visit the school frequently (ten respondents)
- finance and budget responsibilities (six respondents)
- health and safety responsibilities (six respondents)
- staff recruitment and disciplinary responsibilities (six respondents).

Further analysis found statistically significant differences in governor views based on school phase.

- A larger proportion of secondary school respondents (33 per cent) felt that 'appointing governors with relevant specialist skills' was *already effective* compared to the views of primary school governors (25 per cent).
- A greater number of secondary governors (32 per cent) felt that a governing body that includes

'representatives of other partners' was *already effective*, compared to primary governors (21 per cent).

- A slightly greater proportion of primary respondents (33 per cent) felt that a governing body that is 'representative of minority groups in the local community' would make *no difference* to effectiveness compared to the views of secondary governors (27 per cent).

Barriers to improvement

Case-study interviewees felt that in addition to the above improvements needed, there were a number of ongoing challenges that impeded the function of governing bodies and these needed to be addressed to ensure governing bodies were fit for purpose in light of greater school autonomy:

- financial challenges (six case-study areas)
- lack of central government information and guidance regarding greater school autonomy and the implications for governing bodies (five case-study areas)
- high turnover of governors, in particular difficulties in recruiting parent governors (four case-study areas)
- school improvement as an ongoing challenge (four case-study areas).

The review of literature highlighted a number of barriers to effectiveness and there were similarities and contrasts with the survey data. The literature highlighted a reluctance amongst governors to scrutinise and challenge the headteacher [Balarin *et al.*, 2008; DCSF, 2008; Ranson and Crouch, 2009; James *et al.*, 2010a; James *et al.*, 2010b; DCSF, 2010]. In contrast, over half of governors (54 per cent) reported that a 'willingness by the governing body to challenge the headteacher' was *already effective*.

Balarin *et al.* (2008) suggest poor communication between governors and between governors and the headteacher is an issue. However, the majority of governors (63 per cent) felt that having a senior leadership team that kept them informed was *already effective*. Balarin *et al.* (2008) also suggest a lack of

understanding amongst governing bodies about their roles and responsibilities. In line with this, around a third of governors reported that 'clarity of the roles of governors' (30 per cent) and the appointment of 'governors with relevant specialist skills' (31 per cent) would also help to improve effectiveness *a lot*.

The DCSF (2008) highlighted a lack of appropriate knowledge and skills. Similarly, nearly two-fifths of governors felt that 'mandatory induction training for all new governors' (38 per cent) and an 'understanding of data by governors' (37 per cent) would help to improve effectiveness *a lot*.

6 Conclusions and implications

The Schools White Paper (DfE, 2010) states that the government will 'make it easier for schools to adopt models of governance which work for them' (p.13). This research found that the personal attributes of governors such as interest, commitment and skills are more influential than 'models' of governance on the effectiveness of school governance. In addition, governors' understanding of the importance of providing strategic challenge and their ability to build relationships with all interested parties, including headteachers, chairs of governors, clerks, governors and current and future suppliers of governance support services, were considered essential.

6.1 Conclusions

What are the current perceptions of the effectiveness of the governing body?

Key principles and components of effective governance are more significant to the governance of schools than the type of model followed. The evidence indicates that an effective governing body can have a valuable impact on school improvement. The majority of governors felt that their governing bodies were effective and coordinators were also positive about the overall effectiveness of governing bodies.

Governors most *often* reported that their governing bodies fulfilled monitoring and supporting roles (and coordinators agreed that they principally fulfilled these supportive roles). In addition, coordinators were not as confident as governors that governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

Only two-fifths of governors felt their governing body *often* fulfilled the role of challenging the decisions of the headteacher or the senior leadership team or representing the views of the local community. Additionally, only a minority of coordinators felt that most governing bodies 'provide strategic direction to the senior leadership team' and 'are actively involved in self-evaluation of the governing body'.

The majority of governors reported that the governing body took into account how to support all children and young people in the local community. However, coordinators were less confident that governors were doing this.

What is perceived to make governance effective?

Governors perceived the most important elements of effective governance to be a productive working relationship between the governing body and the senior leadership team, an effective chair of governors and clerk to support the governing body (for example, by ensuring governing body roles are fulfilled), and governors having a clear understanding of their role and its limits. The size of the governing body and having governors representative of the local community were not considered to be as important to effective governance. Furthermore, a reduction in the range of governor responsibilities was not considered to be key to facilitating future effectiveness.

There appears to be a need to strengthen understanding of the strategic responsibilities of governing bodies. Governors in schools where governance was rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted were more likely to be clear about governors' roles and responsibilities and to report that they provided strategic direction alongside the senior leadership team more *often* than those not rated 'outstanding'. In addition, the quality of the relationships between the headteacher, the chair of governors and the clerk was recognised to be particularly important to achieving strategic focus.

In terms of local accountability, the majority of governors *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that they ensured the school responded to the needs of all children and young people in the community and that they responded to the needs of the local community. However, coordinators were less certain that governors fulfilled this role.

What are the key skills needed to be a governor in the future?

The ability to build partnerships and relationships with all interested parties, including headteachers, chairs of governors, clerks, governors and current and future suppliers of governance support services, was considered to be a requisite skill, particularly in order to meet strategic responsibilities.

Additionally, the evidence suggests that the key attributes for governors of the future to have are interest in and commitment to the school. In addition, they do need to have the ability to recognise, particularly in the more autonomous schools of the future, what type of external guidance might be needed (for example, in terms of business input such as accountancy and human resources) and to access the required support and/or training if needed. The evidence also suggested that governors need to develop the skills and knowledge needed to provide strategic challenge by, for example, understanding how to interpret data.

How can these skills be developed?

The evidence suggests that further training to ensure all partners, including headteachers, understand the strategic responsibilities of governing bodies is needed. All parties would then be aware of the value of governing bodies challenging headteachers and the senior leadership team as part of a more strategic approach to governance.

The majority of governors who had accessed training and, in particular, face-to-face training felt that it was useful. Governors reported that they would welcome further support particularly in relation to new developments in education, governance self-evaluation, specific issues (relevant to their role on the governing body) and the statutory requirements and legal responsibilities of governing bodies. Case-study interviewees, in particular, suggested some elements of training need to be compulsory (although it is appreciated that current funding pressures may affect the feasibility of this), such as ways for governance to provide strategic focus.

Coordinators identified the key barriers to governors attending training to be a lack of time, lack of support

from employers, an unwillingness to travel and variable encouragement from schools. The most effective ways of sustaining training and support for governors and clerks in light of budget cuts include sharing and dissemination of good practice and information, particularly through networking opportunities.

Which models of governance are appropriate for schools in the future, particularly in the light of greater autonomy?

The evidence suggests that the stakeholder model is viewed as the most appropriate model of school governance, although this model was recognised as needing some improvements to ensure flexibility and fitness for purpose in the context of greater autonomy. However, key principles and components of effective governance were reported to transcend all models of governance.

Governors and coordinators were unclear about the full impact of budget cuts. However, there was an expectation that this would lead to a decrease in local authority governor support services for schools. This potential change, along with greater school autonomy, was expected to result in schools seeking governor support services outside of their local authority, and from independent providers and consultants, resulting in greater competition amongst local authorities and other providers.

6.2 Implications for policy and practice

The recruitment of governors with the appropriate personal attributes including interest, commitment and skills is considered more important for the effectiveness of governance than consideration of the model of governance.

While governors feel that they provide strategic challenge to some extent, the evidence suggests that coordinators were not so sure they are doing this. Governors are volunteers and have indicated that they cannot always attend training. Nevertheless, an understanding of the importance of the strategic dimension of the governor role needs to be acquired by all partners involved in governance including

headteachers, chairs of governors, clerks, governors and current and future suppliers of governance support services. Only by acquiring this knowledge, and embracing the need to provide strategic challenge, will all governors fulfil this necessary commitment and play their part in ensuring that the more autonomous schools of the future improve young people's attainment and wellbeing and their accountability to their local community.

The delivery of training needs to be flexible to suit the different audiences in terms of different styles of learning and different lifestyles. This could be face-to-face training at different times of day, web-based training or, in the case of headteachers, included in their current headteachers' training. It is possible that headteachers could acquire further appreciation of the importance of governors' strategic input through greater emphasis being placed on it in their current training. All parties would then be aware of the value of governing bodies challenging headteachers and the senior leadership team as part of a more strategic approach to governance.

Suggested improvements to school governance, in order to meet the principles of effective governance, include a better selection and recruitment process for governors (in line with the necessary governor

attributes) and greater clarity of governor roles and responsibilities. This would contribute to governors having further capacity to play an even more critical role in school improvement than at present.

The implications of greater school autonomy and schools seeking support services outside of the remit of their local authorities should be considered in terms of the future quality and consistency of services received by schools and the subsequent impact on school improvement.

With reduced funding for local authority governance support services, it is worth considering ways for neighbouring schools in a locality to reduce duplication of effort and instead share effective practice and to think of creative ways of doing this.

It is likely that schools will have to reconsider the way they access governance support services as it is likely that local authorities' governance support services will change. Furthermore, it is likely that there will be a transition period before other suppliers of governance support services emerge. Consequently, the priority is for governors, clerks and headteachers, in particular, to work creatively and proactively in partnership to ensure that effective, strategic governance is realised.

Appendix A Representativeness of the survey sample

Overall, the achieved sample of governors was broadly representative geographically. However, there are nine government office regions (GOR) and eight NCOGS regions so direct comparison is not possible. A detailed breakdown by school type, local authority (LA) type and region is presented in Tables A1, A2 and A3.

Table A1 type of LA – national sample

	N	%
London borough	3159	12
Metropolitan authorities	5262	21
English Unitary authorities	4548	18
Counties	12456	49
Total	25425	100

Please note that this number includes all schools in England and comes from NFER's register of schools 2009.

Table A2 school type – national sample

	N	%
Nursery	465	2
Infants	1597	6
First school	888	4
Infant & junior (primary)	13033	51
First & middle	17	0
Junior	1392	6
Middle deemed primary	46	0
Middle deemed secondary	225	1
Secondary modern	160	1
Comprehensive to 16	1115	4
Comprehensive to 18	1463	6
Grammar	164	1
Other secondary school	3	0
Independent school	1934	8
Special school	1694	7
Pupil referral unit	468	2
6th form college	95	0
Tertiary college	39	0
FE college	231	1
HE institution (inc. Uni)	128	1
Academies	199	1
Sixth form centre	34	0
Total	25390	100
System	35	0
Total	25425	100

Table A3 GOR regions – national sample

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
North East	1280	5.0	5.0	5.0
North West/ Merseyside	3658	14.4	14.4	19.4
Yorkshire & The Humber	2541	10.0	10.0	29.4
East Midlands	2300	9.0	9.0	38.5
West Midlands	2749	10.8	10.8	49.3
Eastern	2935	11.5	11.5	60.8
London	3159	12.4	12.4	73.2
South East	4104	16.1	16.1	89.4
South West	2699	10.6	10.6	100.0
Total	25425	100.0	100.0	

Rapid review of literature

Parameters for the literature review included the following:

- Publications since 2006
- Relevant databases – BEI, BEIFC, AEI and ERIC
- Publications from:
 - Portugal and Luxembourg as they have centralised decision making, given very little autonomy to schools and have specific legislation on school governance/autonomy. This was informed by *Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators* (OECD, 2008) and *Key Data on Education in Europe 2009* (Eurydice, 2009).
 - Netherlands as they represent a similar model to England of school governance where all power is given to schools and there is a highly developed tradition of school autonomy
 - Sweden, United States of America and Australia
 - The United Kingdom, covering compulsory education from age 4 to 16 (or 18 where schools have sixth forms).

In total, 13 key items formed the evidence base.

Analysis of data

The analysis of the survey data included:

- descriptive statistics of the responses to the coordinator and governor surveys
- cross-tabulations, exploring the relationship between a number of variables (for example, school phase and perceptions of governor responsibilities). Differences are only reported if they are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

It is worth noting that significance tests were not undertaken because the exact population of governors is not known.

A systematic analytical framework was developed to analyse the qualitative case-study interviews. It involved identifying emerging themes and drawing out key underlying points in order to add depth of understanding to the quantitative data.

References

Balarin, M., Brammer, J., James, C. and McCormack, M. (2008). *The School Governance Study* [online]. Available: http://www.bitc.org.uk/resources/publications/school_governance.html [24 August, 2010].

Caldwell, B.J., Harris, J., Douglas, E., Goodfellow, M., Saarivirta, T., Spinks, J. and Zhao, Y. (2008). *Breakthrough in Governance* [online]. Available: <http://www.ssat-inet.net/pdf/Breakthrough%20in%20governance%201%20chapter.pdf> [24 August, 2010].

CfBT Education Trust (2009). *School governors and the new partnership arrangements* [online]. Available: [http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/SchoolGovernors\(Perspective\)1WEB.pdf](http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/SchoolGovernors(Perspective)1WEB.pdf) [25 August, 2010].

Chapman, C., Lindsay, G., Muijs, D., Harris, A., Arweck, E. and Goodall, J. (2010). *Governance, leadership, and management in federations of schools in School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An international Journal of Research, Policy and Practice* [online]. Available: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a919207952~db=all~jumptype=rss> [17 September, 2010].

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). *What does the evidence tell us about school governors?* DCSF Research Paper. London [online]. Available: <http://www.nga.org.uk/uploads/DCSF%20Research%20Paper%20May%2008.doc> [18 February, 2011].

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010). *A Guide to the Law for School Governors* [online]. Available: <http://www.governor.net.co.uk/linkAttachments/GTTL%2024.10.09.pdf> [18 April, 2011].

Department for Education (2010). *The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper* [online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching/> [20 April, 2011].

Department for Education and Skills (2007). *School Governance (Constitution)*. London: HMSO.

Eurydice (2007). *School Autonomy in England* [online]. Available: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/index.cfm?9B1E174F-C29E-AD4D-066C-5357F1EBB20C> [2 September, 2010].

Eurydice (2009). *Key Data on Education in Europe* [online]. Available: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/105EN.pdf [26 April, 2011].

Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons (2011). *Education Bill (Bill 180)* [online]. Available: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2010-2011/0180/cbill_2010-20110180_en_1.htm [18 February, 2011].

James, C., Brammer, S., Conolly, M., Fertig, M., James, J. and Jones, J. (2010a). 'School governing in England: Primary schools, secondary schools, performance and socio-economic status.' Annual Conference of the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society, Wokefield Park, Reading, July 2010.

James, C., Brammer, S., Conolly, M., Fertig, M., James, J. and Jones, J. (2010b). *The 'Hidden Givers': A Study of School Governing Bodies in England*. Reading: CfBT.

Ministerial Working Group on School Governance (2010). *The 21st Century School: Implications and Challenges for Governing Bodies* [online]. Available: <http://publications.education.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00351-2010.PDF> [26 August, 2010].

National Governors' Association (2009). *NGA/TES Survey 2009* [online]. Available: www.nga.org.uk/uploadfiles/Research/NGA%20Survey.doc [11 January, 2010].

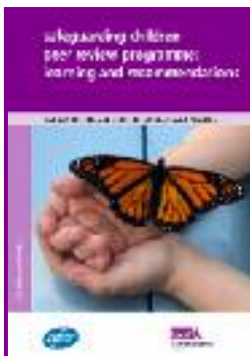
Ofsted (2011). *Framework for the inspection of maintained schools in England from September 2009* [online]. Available: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Framework-for-the-inspection-of-maintained-schools-in-England-from-September-2009> [24 August, 2011].

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2008). *Education at a Glance 2008: OECD Indicators* [online]. Available: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/23/46/41284038.pdf> [26 August, 2010].

Ranson, S. and Crouch, C. (2009). *Towards a New Governance of Schools in the Remaking of Civil Society* [online]. Available: <http://www.nga.org.uk/uploadfiles/Research/RansonCFBTfinal.pdf>

Recently published reports

The Local Government Education and Children's Services Research Programme is carried out by the NFER. The research projects cover topics and perspectives that are of special interest to local authorities. All the reports are published and disseminated by the NFER, with separate executive summaries. The summaries, and more information about this series, are available free of charge at www.nfer.ac.uk/research/local-government-association/



Safeguarding children peer review programme: learning and recommendations

Based on telephone interviews with staff from five local authorities and their partners, this study draws out key messages from the programme, covering the impacts of a safeguarding peer review, key benefits and challenges, organisational and contextual factors, and learning and recommendations for the sector.

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LSGP01>



Hidden talents: exploiting the link between engagement of young people and the economy

This report identifies a range of opportunities for local authorities and businesses to work together for mutual benefit. It provides case studies showing how local authorities can create links between their work to engage young people, economic development and business support, in order to achieve improved outcomes for young people and employers.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/HITA01/



Safeguarding children: literature review

Building on the work and recommendations of the scoping study, and with the aim of supporting improvement in the sector, this new literature review distilled current learning and key messages around the levers and challenges for safeguarding practice post-Laming. The findings suggest developments across a wide spectrum of practice

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/LSGL01>

For more information, or to buy any of these publications, please contact: The Publications Unit, National Foundation for Educational Research, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, Berkshire SL1 2DQ, tel: +44 (0)1753 637002, fax: +44 (0)1753 637280, email: book.sales@nfer.ac.uk, web: www.nfer.ac.uk/publications.

Recent developments in policy relating to schools have highlighted governance and the role of school governors. In the light of this, the NFER was commissioned by the LG Group to carry out research exploring governance models.

This report reviews models of school governance and considers alternative models that may be fit for purpose in schools of the future. It covers:

- current approaches to governance
- the impact and effectiveness of school governance
- governor services, support and training
- changing contexts and future developments
- conclusions and implications for policy and practice.

It is important reading for colleagues at the LG Group, the NGA and NCOGS, as well as for anyone working in school governance.