“Is there a demonstrable causal link between the actions of/effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance?”
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School Governors’ One-Stop Shop (SGOSS) is a small private company with charitable status. It was launched in 1999 with the remit ‘To recruit Governors with management skills for Schools that need them most’, and it works across England in partnership with local authorities, schools, academies and colleges to secure mutually beneficial placements. During 2011, the placement of the 13,000th governor volunteer recruited by SGOSS was confirmed.

SGOSS values the commitment, experience and expertise that those it has recruited bring to schools, the value they add to the quality of education children receive, and their support for continuous school improvement. It is wholly appropriate that, when relevant, we access this group for their thoughts and opinions, and I would like to publicly record my thanks here to all those who responded to this Impact Survey.

**Steve Acklam, Chief Executive**  
School Governors’ One-Stop Shop, May 2012.
1. Executive Summary of Key Findings

- 96% of respondents believe that there is a demonstrable link between the effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance.

- The appointment of, the subsequent support for, and the holding to account of the Head Teacher are regarded as the most important governor contributions to the performance of the school.

- The role of the governor/governing body as a proactive link with the community, and as a champion for the school in the context of the wider social community, is viewed as an important contributor to school performance and improvement.

- Many respondents highlight a real passion for their role, and a willingness to add additional value by utilising their specific skills and expertise for the benefit of the children in their school.
2. Introduction

There is widespread acceptance that effective governing bodies add significant value in the critical areas of school improvement and compliance; ranging from selecting and appointing senior staff, including the Head Teacher, through budgetary allocation and control, up to planning the school’s long-term future. The following endorsements support this:

“Good governing bodies make a material contribution to the performance of their schools”

(Ofsted).

“The lack of a capable governing body is not a neutral absence; it is a substantial disadvantage for a school”

(Research led by the University of Bath).

“It is absolutely clear to me that the most important decision-making group in any school is the governing body. We need to ensure that governing bodies have the best possible people, representing a range of different groups and with the right mix of skills”.

(Lord Hill, Under-Secretary of State for Schools)

Where there is an acute lack of evidence, however, is in the area of a demonstrable causal link between the actions of/effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance. How do governors impact the quality of education a school provides, and through this enhance the life chances of the pupils? Providing quantitative verification of such impact is obviously always going to be highly problematic, as even where a governor-sanctioned investment in a particular subject area has been accompanied by a measurable increase in pupil achievement in that same subject, many other factors could have intervened.
Nevertheless the SGOSS survey of its serving governor database has generated a large number of replies, and this data aligns to and supports other earlier studies by way of confirmation that a causal link between the actions of/effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance can be reasonably inferred. In the Executive Summary of the 2010 SGOSS research entitled “Governors Mean Business” (Professor John C Adams, Emeritus Professor, University of Hertfordshire and Dr Anne Punter, Research Fellow, University of Hertfordshire), Head Teachers themselves shared a perception that governors recruited by SGOSS “demonstrated an ability to assimilate information quickly, ask the relevant questions, approach issues from a strategic standpoint and stay objective”. They were also unanimous in their view that “skills-based governors were an important and necessary means by which to enhance the effectiveness of the governing body”.
3. Aims and Objectives

• To obtain examples of perceived governor impact on pupil performance.

4. Method

An electronic questionnaire using www.SurveyMonkey.com (Appendix 1) was prepared by SGOSS. It was emailed to the database of governors recruited by SGOSS on the 12th October 2011. Within 2 weeks, at which point analysis began, 609 (11.2%) responses had been received. Responses were anonymised, no personal details were collected, and no email reminder was sent. Expert opinion concurs that the size of the response is both relevant and meaningful.

The questionnaire sought responses to a number of simple sequential questions as per the list below. While providing valuable contextual information, Questions 1-4 do not directly provide answers to the key question regarding the causal link between the governor role and pupil performance. Their results are therefore simply presented as Appendices for reference (Appendix 2). There are views within the verbatim responses to Question 3 that are relevant, however, and the analysis focuses on these and the answers to Questions 5 and 6.

Q1. Do you think an effective governing body is a contributory factor to school improvement?

Q2. Do you agree that governing bodies are required to carry out the following responsibilities?
Q3. Are there any other key responsibilities of a governing body that you feel have been missed out?

Q4. Please rate how important these responsibilities are to the overall performance of the school.

Q5. In your opinion is there a link between the effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance?

Q6. Please rate the impact each of the following governing body responsibilities has on the performance of pupils in the school.

Q7. Provide an example of how a decision taken by your governing body has made a positive impact on the performance of pupils in your school.

SGOSS is clear that this report is a collation of a limited number of opinions, and lacks the rigour of comparative research. It is also conscious of a potential respondent bias, leading to exclusively positive responses. Nevertheless, the request for specific instances of impact has resulted in a bank of examples where the respondent believes there is clear link between the actions of the governing body, the quality of education provided by the school, and the performance of the children in the school.
Question 5: In your opinion, is there a link between the effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance?

Of a total of 572 responses to this question, over 96% (551) indicated that in their opinion there is a link between the effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance. Within the 96%, a total in excess of 78% felt this link was a strong one, and within this, 23% saw the link to be a major one. Of the 551 who provided a positive response, 255 (45%) also provided an example of how they believed their governing body had made a positive impact on pupil performance.
Question 6: Please rate in your opinion the impact each of the following governing body responsibilities has on the performance of pupils in the school.

![Graph showing the impact of various governing body responsibilities on pupil performance.]

It is the appointment of the right Head Teacher that is rated as the governing body responsibility that has the greatest impact on pupil performance. Of 555 responses, over 97% (542) scored this as having a reasonable, great or major impact, with an overwhelming 73% (404) categorising it as having major impact.

Question 7: Can you provide an example of how a decision taken by your governing body has made a positive impact on the performance of pupils in your school?

The verbatim opinions received in response to Question 7 and those included within the replies to Question 3 (“Are there any other key responsibilities of a governing body that you feel have been missed out?”) provide significant anecdotal support for the areas of responsibility specified in Question 6. They also introduce additional ideas which are equally relevant.

To provide structure to the analysis of the replies, they will, as far as possible, be grouped under the Ofsted headings for gathering evidence of effectiveness of the governing body.
Pupil achievement, including:

- What are the main barriers to learning and what action has been taken to overcome them? How successful have the actions been?

Quality of teaching, including:

- Do governors have specific areas of responsibility and/or links with school classes/form/tutor groups/subjects/departments? What is the impact of these links?
- What contribution does the governing body think it has made to improving provision, especially teaching, and outcomes for pupils?

Leadership and management, including:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the school and how do governors know?
- To what extent is the governing body involved in the school’s processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning?
- How do governors monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school improvement plan?
- Can governors give examples of how they have supported and challenged the school?

Behaviour and safety of pupils, including:

- What are the procedures for safeguarding pupils?
- How are governors involved in the life of the school?
- How do governors consult parents/the local community?
- Can governors give examples of when parental/community views have been sought and acted on?

Examples of where the activities of a governing body appear to align to the standard have been selected for the analysis that follows. If additional references are required in any area, SGOSS has retained archive access to all the responses.

Where a reply suggests an impact across more than one of these headings, it has been allocated to whichever heading is mentioned first.

Respondents provided many examples of how barriers to learning and pupil achievement have been tackled, together with measures of how successful they perceive their actions to have been.
In some instances the investment is in teaching per se. For example, “We voted an additional allocation of the budget to the Maths Department in order to support the teaching of Mathematics in the school. This resulted in a 5% increase in the number of pupils achieving grades A*-C in GCSE Mathematics”, or “We agreed to employ extra readers for our most vulnerable students during the KS2 SATs. The benefits have been self-evident in how results have improved”. In others cases the investment is in learning facilities: “We agreed additional budget to develop a library space and new books; this linked to the need to improve reading and English throughout the school. We are a primary school and the 2011 SATs showed that pupils attained more highly at level 5 than in the previous year in English”.

Other examples highlight how critical it is to understand the nature of the children in the school as the basis for taking the decisions that will improve performance. There are high-level instances such as, “The governor’s decision to monitor results, and analyse by reference to identifiable characteristics - say of family make-up - shone a light on areas for investment - and that increased emphasis means better pupil attainment”, or “To appoint a Deputy Head with reduced teaching commitment - to allow time to focus on improving teaching and learning”. There are also extremely specific examples such as “The governing body was asked to support a pupil inclusion programme aimed at reaching those children who… would normally have expected to achieve very little. One of the Deputy Head Teachers drew up the support plan which was discussed with and challenged by the governing body. This year’s GCSE results showed a 100% achievement for all pupils getting at least 1 GCSE grade A-E the first time ever”.

In respect of each theme (use of data/willingness to invest in improvement) respondents are indicating that in their opinion there is a clear link between the actions they took or sanctioned, and an improvement in children’s performance.

**Quality of Teaching**

The key measures here relate to the existence of links between governors and subject teaching, and to the contribution the governing body has made to improving teaching provision. An analysis of a selection of responses can be made on this basis.
In respect of governors having specific areas of responsibility and/or links with school classes/form/tutor groups/subjects/departments (and the impact of these) the spectrum is from a very heavy involvement, “Each governor is linked with one or more subjects in the school and works with the subject leaders to review how the subject is taught, how pupils progress, any concerns, etc. Suggestions are made directly to the teachers and, where necessary, areas of improvement are raised to the full governing body”, to a more distanced approach, “Each faculty is reviewed each year, following in-classroom evaluations, and then the allocated governor will work with the head of faculty to raise standards”. The respondents are equally persuaded, however, that their actions do stimulate improved teaching provision and pupil performance, “Continued monitoring of standards by the governing body has pushed faculty performance up, and so examination results”, or “… allowing time for the teacher to implement improvements in how a subject is taught”, and finally “By challenging the predicted exam grades we were able to support the school by reallocating resources to ensure the results met the forecasts”.

With regard to contributions made by the governing body to specifically improving teaching provision, these focus on the direct deployment of funds to achieve this objective, and the following are extracts from the many examples provided: “Employing staff at above average salaries to improve KS2 children’s outcomes and SATs performances. These staff assisted the leadership team to enable them to help ordinary class teachers improve on techniques and skills, and to widen the expectation of the children to be high achievers, whatever their ability. The improvements brought the SATs results from the 60-70% figures to the 80-84% range”, or “By allocating funds for an extra part-time member of staff to major on improvement in numeracy”, and “Governors were part of the decision to introduce initiatives focused on improving teaching throughout the school. This involved allocating budgets to provide training (attended by some governors) and teaching materials”.

Details have also been provided of instances where the budget has been utilised in a different way with the aim of achieving similar outcomes: “The GB discussed and approved the policy of teaching core E-bac subjects of Maths and English in smaller groups at a financial cost in terms of teaching hours, but leading to improved attainment in KS3 & 4 results in those subjects”, and “A decision to have 3 smaller classes rather than 2 larger ones in a particular year group… has paid dividends as recent results have shown a marked improvement in achievements”.

Relating the results respondents suggest were achieved to the Ofsted criteria within Quality of Teaching, it is reasonable to posit that a link between the actions of the governing body, the quality of teaching and the subsequent results can be observed.
Leadership and management

The primary emphases for Ofsted under this heading are:

• The extent of governor awareness of the challenges and issues facing their school and of the plans in place to address these.
• The governing body involvement with and challenge of the School Development Plan.

From the response to the SGOSS questionnaire it is possible to identify examples linked to both of these dynamics. Additionally, and crucially, it is under the Leadership and Management heading that governors believe they make their greatest contribution to pupil and school performance through their appointment of the Head Teacher.

Challenges and issues, how to identify and understand these, and then to take the appropriate action to address them can be a complex process. For some respondents, correctly addressing the first part of this equation leads most naturally to making the right decisions on part two, “Driving use of assessment data, its DETAILED examination and interrogation… the statistical analysis of cohort and whole school data and feeding these results through the SMT and into the school development plan”, or “Monitoring progress and achievement in Early Years Foundation Stage and challenging the Head Teacher on results has led to re-organisation and investments, which are already showing improved outcomes”, and “Discussing and challenging, to reach a conclusion all were in agreement with, around staffing required for 2011 to support improving the 2010 results”. Others took an even broader view, “Our principal’s reports include regular statistics on attendance, performance (both expected and achieved), racial incidents etc. These are scrutinised by governors and trends explored for reasons behind them. I would like to think that interest shown and ideas suggested are part of the reason why we are gradually improving our results”, and “Ensuring that the future planning, objective setting, monitoring etc applies to all school staff… knowing the ethos of the school and having an understanding of safeguarding anti-bullying policies”.

With regard to the appointment, respondents are almost universal in their perception that making the appropriate decision is critical in contributing to the Leadership and Management of the school. “Actively involved in appointing new Head (who) had to be the right person to continue with the outstanding achievement. Then involved in appointing new Deputy Head… At each stage governors were involved, bringing not only an educational perspective but also a managerial and commercial outlook to the process which was particularly useful in the case of appointing the new Head”, and “We appointed an excellent Head who identified needs in relation to pupil performance and is making significant changes with improving results. We changed the school’s vision statement (again with the Head) to put learning at the heart of it - this is part of long-term planning set in place by the Head with our support”.

For those whose examples have been referenced here, they are clear that through utilising available data for a wide spectrum of school results, it is possible to achieve a good understanding of their school and what it needs to achieve continuous improvement. For them, it is then possible to pose the relevant questions, make appropriate challenges, and influence/effect necessary action, which might include changes to the school development plan, through to the recruitment of a new school leader.

**Behaviour and Safety of Pupils**

A number of different threads are included under this Ofsted heading. They include the procedures for safeguarding pupils, the degree to which governors are involved in the life of the school, and the means by which governors consult parents/the local community, and act on the feedback they receive. The breadth of this combination is echoed by the variety of responses.

The approach to safeguarding and to providing a healthy and supportive environment, in which children have the best chance of learning, has many different dimensions. They include very important but very practical decisions such as, “We (the governing body) were able to ensure that the school had new fire doors as the old ones did not meet with the health and safety fire standards”, or “Making sure buildings are up to standard and put to best use”. There are instances where the intervention by the governing body is more about ensuring school leaders deliver; “Hold the senior leadership team to account not only for pupil performance but for pupil safety and wellbeing”. There are also examples of strategic actions with fundamental implications for the school such as, “Appointing a strong Head Teacher has already made a difference by the new Head Teacher bringing in a zero tolerance policy, this has improved the pupils’ attitudes towards teaching staff and therefore having a positive impact on pupil performance”, or “Advising and helping to set standards for discipline and supporting the Head in implementing discipline standards including exclusion and any consequential challenging and holding of parents to account”.

Some of the examples of the degree to which governors are involved in the life of the school are extremely interesting and demonstrate how effective a true partnership between governors and the SMT can be in ensuring the school is both conducive to effective learning, and responsive to the particular needs of the children.
Such examples would be “Working with the SIP… to try and reduce the negative impact of the high number of challenging and SEN children in our school on the rest of the pupils. We developed, with the SMT, a different strategy, which was less tolerant of disruptive behaviour, put more responsibility on parents and focused on raising the standards of all children, particularly the more able, who had previously been adversely affected by the poor behaviour of a minority. Standards overall have shown an improvement” or “Deciding to appoint a Partnership Head Teacher instead of bringing in a new Head from outside the area has benefited not only the school without a Head, but has provided a more coherent education system for the whole area allowing more flexibility between teaching staff of the infant and junior school which now have the same Head Teacher. Producing a continuity of care for families, some with great social need”.

These last two examples also link into the third thread under the Behaviour and Safeguarding heading, namely how governors consult parents/the local community, and act on the feedback they receive. In these examples the governors took the actions they describe based on knowledge of the dynamics of the community in which the school was situated, and a willingness to increase meaningful engagement with parents and families. Some of the responses take this further, with their writers talking in terms of “Being a champion of the school”, “Promoting the school and its interests”, “Being an active and visible part of the wide school community to advocate and represent the school’s interests”, and “Lobbying on behalf of the school at local, regional and national levels”.

In context of the Ofsted requirements under their Behaviour and Safety of Pupils heading, the respondents have provided many examples of how they believe they have contributed to “Ensuring that pupils and staff have an enjoyable school to be in and that the environment is safe and recognised by the public and other agencies as an establishment for continued educational development and excellence”. They are equally clear in their belief that the impact they can make as governors in respect of the school’s fabric and ambience links directly to improved pupil performance.
6. Conclusions & Recommendations

**Overall**

- In the opinion of the majority of those who responded to this survey, there is a tangible causal link between the actions of the governing body and pupil performance, and a significant number offered evidence of this.

**Specifically**

- In the context of Pupil Achievement, respondents viewed the use of available data as a route to understanding the school and the challenges faced, and a willingness to invest in the necessary resource to improve the situation as critical.

- In the context of Quality of Teaching, respondents identified a combination of the knowledge derived from involvement with/links to teaching and teachers, and their capacity to sanction or directly deploy funds to enhance delivery as the route by which they could impact the quality of provision.

- In the context of Leadership and Management, respondents are clear that through effective interpretation of available data it is possible, ideally working in partnership with the SMT, to identify the actions they need to take to ensure continuous improvement.

- In the context of Behaviour and safety of pupils, and across the spectrum of governor involvement with pupil safeguarding, with their school, its parents and wider local community, respondents have provided examples of the value they believe they add and how this positively impacts improved pupil performance.
7. Next Steps

• To utilise SGOSS communication options and networks to ensure the key findings of this survey are made available to the widest possible appropriate audience, ensuring that those who contributed are thanked, and the importance of their views acknowledged.
*1. Do you think that an effective governing body is a contributory factor to school improvement?

- Yes, it is a major factor
- Yes
- Yes, but only a minor factor
- No, it is not a factor at all

*2. Do you agree that governing bodies are required to carry out the following responsibilities?

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<th>No</th>
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<td>Monitor and evaluate progress</td>
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3. Are there any other key responsibilities of a governing body that you feel have been missed out?

- No
- Yes

Please detail which key governor responsibilities you feel have been left out.
4. Please rate how important these responsibilities are to the overall performance of the school

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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>1 - unimportant</th>
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<th>6 - critical</th>
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The Impact of Governing Bodies

5. In your opinion, is there a link between the effectiveness of the governing body and pupil performance?

- Yes, a major one
- Yes
- Yes, but only a minor link
- No

6. Please rate, in your opinion, the impact each of the following governing body responsibilities has on the performance of the pupils in the school

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7. Can you provide an example of how a decision taken by your governing body has made a positive impact on the performance of pupils in your school?
Question 1: Do you think that an effective governing body is a contributory factor to school improvement?

All those who responded to the questionnaire answered this question. Over 90% felt that an effective governing body made a contribution to school improvement and of this group over 60% rated the impact as Major.
Question 2: Do you agree that governing bodies are required to carry out the following responsibilities?

96% of those who responded to the questionnaire answered this question, providing a total of 3,510 responses (585 respondents and 6 questions), with only 24 (4%) not answering this question at all. Of the responses received, an aggregate of over 95% supported the premise that these were actual governing body responsibilities. In respect of the governing body involvement in School Improvement, Ensuring Accountability, Monitoring and Evaluating, and Supporting and Challenging the Head Teacher almost 100% of those who replied agreed.

Question 3: Are there any other key responsibilities of a governing body that you feel have been missed out?

The response to this question, which also offered the opportunity to give details, was unexpectedly large, with a total of 191 responses being received. Among them are examples of governor actions that are relevant to the question this survey was seeking to answer, and these are included with the analysis of responses linked specifically to Question 7.
Question 4: Please rate how important these responsibilities are to the overall performance of the school.

![Chart showing ratings of responsibilities]

What is particularly evident from the weighting of the responses towards Critical is how seriously serving governors view their responsibilities. 94% of respondents (573 serving governors) provided an answer to this question, which looks to ascertain how important governors feel each key responsibility is to the overall performance of the school. Inevitably there are variances between the ratings averages, but they are relatively minor. Out of over 4,000 responses, (7 x 573) only 13 claim that any one or other of the specified responsibilities is unimportant. On every dimension the ratings average is at least 5.23 out of 6 (87%), and on Appointing Senior Staff the average is 5.65 out of 6 (94%). The importance of this single decision is complemented by the 5.55 rating for Support and Challenge the Head Teacher, and re-inforced by the significant number of governors suggesting that the recruitment of the Head Teacher was a decision taken by their governing body, that has made a positive impact on the performance of pupils in their school.
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