

What governing bodies should expect from schools leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies

Introduction

In spring 2008, NGA, ASCL and NAHT met to discuss the effectiveness of governing bodies. It was acknowledged that there can be a lack of clarity about what is expected for a governing body to be effective, from both school leaders and governing bodies themselves, and that some guidance would be helpful to all parties. This paper aims to address this issue.

It was agreed that effective governing bodies should be:

- prepared and equipped to take their responsibilities seriously
- acknowledged as the accountable body
- supported by the appropriate authorities in their task

Underpinning this paper is an expectation that governing bodies and school leaders will jointly develop effective working practices which are mutually supportive and respectful of each others' roles and responsibilities. This paper provides some key guiding principles to facilitate that process.

1 Ways of working

The way that the governing body operates and the way that it organises itself should be related to the nature of its work. Governing bodies have considerable freedom regarding the delegation of work to committees or individuals (including the chair and the headteacher) and they should carefully consider the tasks to be undertaken before making decisions on the delegation of responsibilities. Governing bodies should keep their working practices under review.

- Governing bodies are required to act in accordance with the provisions of the workforce agreement and must have regard to the work-life balance of school leaders when arranging meeting times.
- School leaders should have regard to governors' work and other commitments when meetings are being arranged.
- It should be the joint responsibility of school leaders and the governing body to ensure that meetings are well planned, at appropriate intervals, with agendas

that are appropriate to the remit and that are manageable. Business should not be repeated in different forums, and matters discussed by committees should be consistent with their terms of reference.

2 Governance and management

The distinction between governance and management needs to be clearly understood by all involved, so that governors are not asked to, and do not try to, involve themselves in day to day management.

- The governing body expects to be able to monitor the work of the school and to hold the headteacher to account for the performance of the school. It is vital that the headteacher is present or is represented at full governing body meetings. However, other school leaders may represent the management of the school at other meetings. For example, the school business manager may be the appropriate person to attend budget monitoring meetings.
- School leaders should not be micro-managed, and the governing body should concentrate on matters related to strategy and school effectiveness, delegating those tasks which are deemed to be managerial rather than strategic (for example the deployment of staff below leadership team level). School leadership teams should be fully involved in discussions of strategic issues.

3 Supporting the governing body

In order to manage its workload, it is vital that the governing body is properly supported and serviced.

Clerking

- Even in the many schools where the clerk to the governing body is also employed to carry out different duties under a separate contract, resources should be made available for the clerk to be properly qualified and capable of servicing and advising the governing body with independence. The clerk should have a job description and pay grade appropriate to the post.
- The governing body should use the clerk to manage the business of the governing body, and should not make unnecessary demands of other school staff.

Expenses

- Governors' out of pocket expenses should be reimbursed as per an agreed policy on governors' allowances.
- There should be adequate allowance in the budget for governors' expenses.

4 The role of the chair

As the principle link between the governing body and the headteacher, the chair of the governing body bears additional responsibilities.

The headteacher and the chair of the governing body should meet regularly at mutually convenient times to discuss school matters.

- The chair should be prepared to undertake any necessary additional training, and to attend local authority (or other locality) briefing meetings in order to fulfil her/his role. This expectation should be underpinned with the appropriate budget commitment for training and expenses.
- The chair must have regard to the limitations stipulated in government guidance when exercising 'chair's action':

The chair or vice chair has the power to carry out functions of the governing body if a delay in exercising a function is likely to be seriously detrimental to the interests of the school, a pupil at the school or their parents, or a person who works at the school. This power excludes matters related to the alteration and closure of schools, change of school category, change of school name, approval of the budget, discipline policies and admissions. Any action taken under this power must be reported to the governing body.

(Ch 3 Para 48, A Guide to the Law for School Governors, DCSF, 2008)

5 Information

The governing body is reliant on the school to provide it promptly with the information that it needs to carry out its role. In addition to documents they are required by law to approve (such as the School Profile), governing bodies should expect to receive:

- school improvement partner reports

- any local authority school improvement visit reports
- the RAISEonline report (in full to at least one governor)
- budget reports presented in an appropriate format
- self-evaluation form (SEF)

Sensitive information must be kept confidential.

6 Active governance

Like all responsible and professional bodies, the governing body should commit to its own professional development and training should be seen as an entitlement. Visiting the school provides important opportunities for governors to better understand both the strengths of the school and the working environment. All visits should be arranged by appointment in accordance with an agreed protocol.

Training

- Governing bodies should make it clear that there is an expectation that all new governors (including staff governors) commit to undertake both school based induction and professional induction training. All governors should commit to specific issue based training as it arises.
- It is essential to have a properly trained governing body and appropriate budget allocations should enable this to happen.
- Effective training should be planned to include both internal and external providers and should consist of a manageable programme combining activities for individual and small groups of governors and occasional activities for full governing bodies working in partnership with leadership teams.

Visiting the school

- Visits should be planned in advance and agreed with the leadership team.
- Governing bodies should expect school leaders to welcome governors to visit the school, both formally to monitor agreed priorities and developments, and less formally to broaden their knowledge of the school.
- School leaders should expect governors to adhere to visiting protocols, to be professional in their monitoring role, and to be sensitive to the pressures of the school calendar.