

# **Food for thought: the effective governing body**

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## Background

This document is not directed at any specific school. It simply aims to share the experience gathered in 25 schools;

This document is not a formal Central South Consortium document.

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## Good to know: Key priorities (local and national imperatives)

1. Reducing the impact of poverty:
  - Comparing attainment for FSM pupils and non-FSM pupils, what was the gap last year?
  - What is it likely to be this year?
  - Is the gap getting wider or narrower?
2. Raise standards in English:
  - What does this actually entail?
3. Raise standards in numeracy.
  - What does this actually entail?
4. Improve the quality of leadership
  - How systematically is leadership reviewed?
  - Can the head explain how s/he intends to make the school 'excellent'?
  - Is the deputy providing the much-needed muscle?
  - Are the teachers with a TLR post able to lead their area and present their findings to the curriculum committee?
5. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
  - Are learning walks taking place? What is being learnt? What is their impact?
  - Are lesson observations taking place? What is their impact?
  - How are pupils assessed?
  - How do pupils take part in the assessment process?
6. Improve attendance rates in primary and secondary schools:
  - 95%?
7. Ensure that there is a quality cycle:
  - Actions are deliberately planned:
  - The impact of these actions is reviewed systematically:
  - The subsequent actions needed are identified

It seems that...

- the effective school does not necessarily have a very different vision from another less effective school.

The effective school seems to simply be better at managing change. The key difference seems to be linked with:

- the degree of urgency of change (change is very quick in an effective school as it is well project managed)... Pace can promote drive and enthusiasm for all;
- the attention to detail:
  - change is effective as it is not led in isolation is a school's silo but is integrated with the whole school practice;
  - individuals work in teams.

**Sometimes, roles get confused, and it makes dealing with change difficult. Some fundamentals on the key drivers:**

### **The head**

In successful schools, the head:

- sets the vision and is accountable for all operations in the school;

### **The deputy**

In successful schools, the deputy head teacher has a detailed understanding of all the following areas:

- performance in the Foundation Phase;
- performance at key stage 2;
- performance in English and Literacy and associated impact of interventions;
- performance in Maths and mathematical development and associated impact of interventions;
- performance in PSD and associated impact of interventions;
- performance in Science and associated impact of interventions.

In successful schools, the deputy head's performance is critical to the success of the school. S/he:

- provides real time intelligence to the headteacher.;
- has an eye for detail;
- ensures that everyone has a clear understanding of what the headteacher expects.

A potential self-assessment developmental tool is included in the appendix.

## The chair of governors

In successful schools, the chair of governors:

- plays a key role in supporting the head teacher on the path to becoming excellent;
- understands headline data and data associated with the school tracker;
- is able to bring the whole-school context into focus when dealing with the head teacher's performance;
- is able to have honest and challenging conversations with the head behind closed doors;
- is 100% behind the head teacher at all times. In successful schools, issues are confronted and dealt with.

## The curriculum committee (governors)

In successful schools, the curriculum committee (or data scrutiny committee) plays a key role in supporting the headteacher. In successful schools, the curriculum committee is able to:

- scrutinise the headline data:
  - How does last year's data compare to the local authority, the family of schools, Wales?
  - How does last year's data compare to other schools with a similar percentage of free-school meals?
  - What are the targets for this year?
  - How will this year's data compare to the local authority, the family of schools, Wales?
  - How will this year's data compare to other schools with a similar percentage of free-school meals?
  - How will next year's targets be set?
- scrutinise the 'live' data:
  - Are targets likely to be met?
  - Will all pupils reach the expected outcomes succeed?
  - Who is not expected to reach the expected outcomes? Why aren't they? Will they still make good progress over a key stage as a minimum? What does good progress mean?
  - Have all more able and talented pupils been identified? Are they on track?

## The performance management committee (governors)

In successful schools, the performance management committee acts as a final quality check. By reviewing the head's objectives, the performance management committee is effectively reviewing the whole school. Whilst the format of the performance management review is specific, the conversation leading up to the performance review is, in successful schools, wide-ranging. This ensures that the objectives set are robust.

The performance management review:

- a. Governors review last year's objectives with the challenge adviser and agree whether the objectives have been met or not.
- b. Governors link the head teacher's performance with the head teacher's standards in a short paragraph (see appendix).
- c. Governors set targets in line with the head's needs and the school's needs. The challenge adviser is always on hand to provide support.

## 'The school'

'The school' has a public face which is made out of the head, the deputy head, the senior leadership team and the chair of governors.

In successful schools, all issues are resolved internally. When issues cannot be resolved internally, the school accesses external support. This itself becomes an agreed outcome and therefore represents a resolution to the issue in hand.

In other words, the successful school places a high degree of focus on corporate responsibility.

## Data, accountability and intelligence

### Headline data

Headline data is not necessarily a true representation of the quality of the work in a school. However, it is always a line of enquiry for scrutiny (see 'Curriculum committee'). Cohorts are different so the school's tracker must prove that all pupils have made good progress.

In successful schools, everyone knows what 'good progress' means.

Headline data is about accountability. It looks at the past.

### School tracker

In effective schools, the school tracker:

- incorporates all the school's data;
- identifies the level at which a pupil is working at a specific time;
- contextualises progress in relationship to the pupil's target;
- identifies when a pupil is under-performing;
- identifies what intervention is used to bring a pupil back up to expected standards;
- monitors the impact of interventions.

The school tracker articulates its validity by comparing the levels at which the pupil is working with the level at which the pupil is supposed to be working at. It therefore revolves around two priorities:

- The data put into the tracker is reliable:
  - Has the staff been trained?
  - Is the information in line with expectations when compared to headline data?
- The targets set are robust and ambitious.
  - are FFT D estimates used?.

In effective schools, the school tracker is about intelligence. It is about using data to have an impact on the future.



## Discussion hygiene

In successful meetings, teachers understand that whilst the governors understand the jargon, they cannot manipulate it as easily as them. In these schools, teachers:

- strive to provide straight answers to straight questions from governors, without using jargon;
- supplement the potentially simplistic answers separately from the main question;
- strive not to use judgements without automatically providing evidence. To the question, "How well are the boys doing?", their answer is: "We monitor boys like that..., from that we know that..., these are their targets..., as a result I am confident that their progress is good".
  - If a judgement is provided without evidence, the governors either challenge the judgement (which makes the meeting harder than it needs to be), or simply do not challenge (which means the meeting is a waste of time).

In successful schools, governors are increasingly systematic in their approach. By having clear expectations, governors reduce the stress of the scrutiny process. In successful schools, Governors:

- query any value statement which is dissociated from evidence;
- understand why 100% of students are not reaching the expected outcomes;
- question the head about the progress of more able and talented pupils;
- identify the progress made by all students who are not reaching the expected outcomes;
- are clear about the name of the interventions deployed to deal with under-achievement. Whilst they do not need to know how the intervention will work, they need to be able to see whether it is effective at a later stage;
- are happy about asking the school staff to explain themselves again if there is a failure of communication.

In successful schools, governors are wary of asking questions about operational decisions.

## Appendix

The leader (because authority is not leadership)

In successful schools, the leaders juggle with a number of leadership styles. Where do they fit on the spectrum below?

Style	Focus	Progress ladder						
		Represents a risk to the school	Closer to red than green	Closer to green than red	Solid with potential	Made some improvements	Adds capacity to his/her manager	Future head
<b>Innovator</b>	Design & creativity	Generates too many ideas and fails to implement any			Has generated an original idea and implemented it			Regularly contributes to the creation and deployment of original solutions.
<b>Developer</b>	Designs & builds	Impatient when solutions do not work immediately			Has fixed a faulty way of doing things			Takes action on original solutions and learns along the way
<b>Activator</b>	Demands immediate compliance	Pushes him/herself too hard. Danger of burning out. Not considerate			Has identified a way forward and enlisted the support of the staff.			Moves forward by enabling others to overcome obstacles
<b>Maximiser</b>	Diplomat. Forges consensus through participation	Inactive when a decision must be made. Too dependent on opinion of others			Has a keen eye for detail when monitoring others' work			Embraces the good of the past whilst implementing changes through collaboration
<b>Stabiliser</b>	Consistency	Paralyses the organisation by applying systems without thinking			Is experienced and a safe pair of hands			Creates systems that demand the highest standards of accountability.
<b>Pragmatic</b>	Change is messy	Managing is about inflicting change, it is bound to be messy.			Change is deliberate and does not follow a simplistic approach.			If we are thorough, change needs not be messy

This grid was adapted from another source. A comprehensive detailed personal audit is available.

## Food for thought: Working with other schools

A number of schools are thinking about strengthening their relationship with other schools in their area in order to deploy effective quality systems.

This collaboration could, for example, lead to lesson observations, learning walks and book scrutiny exercises being scheduled across schools with staff from different schools.

Such quality tasks would therefore be hard-wired into the calendar and their outcome would be probably more robust.

A partnership between schools would have no impact on the governance of each individual school or with existing links in the cluster or SIG.

## Good to know: The head teacher's standards

### Shaping the future

The head knows:

- what the school needs to do in order to become excellent (clear articulated vision);
- how to plan (linking strategic aim with management goals, milestones, accountability and reporting procedures);
- how to lead change by understanding the difference between innovation (evidence based change) and experimentation (working things out on the fly);
- how to anchor high expectations on a sound evidence base.

### Leading learning and teaching

The head knows:

- what strategy is deployed when a pupil under achieves;
- that all strategies support the values of the school (high expectations, personalised learning, inclusion...);
- how to translate the pursuit of excellence into one coherent school development plan;
- how to transform a poor performer into an ambassador for excellence.

### Developing self and working with others

The head knows:

- that a team approach leverages the power of individuals whilst negating individual 'idiosyncrasies';
- that authority and leadership are totally different things;
- that the effectiveness of their deputy is a testament to their ability to manage effectively.

### Managing the organisation

The head:

- knows how to take the best possible decision with whatever information is available at a given time;
- accepts that a decision was the best call at the time but is not necessarily the right decision;
- adopts a risk-based approach to managing multiple issues. Being always right is not necessary. Taking decisions systematically and deliberately is necessary.

## Securing accountability

The head:

- understands the different accountability strands:
  - accountability towards outsiders;
  - accountability towards pupils.

Ruthlessly focusing on only one of these priorities will often deal with the other priority as a matter of course...

## Strengthening the community

The head:

- works closely with any institution or group in the community when objectives happen to be similar;
- strives to engage parents to improve parenting skills as improving the support at home can often be the key factor to reduce the poverty gap.

## The curriculum committee

Where is it on this scale?



<p>The chair and head do not trust each other.</p> <p>The governance of the school is dysfunctional.</p>	<p>The head deals with data.</p> <p>Governors do not understand data and so do not understand accountability.</p>	<p>Governors ask random questions based on their personal interests.</p>	<p>Governors are keen to scrutinise progress but are not systematic in their approach.</p>	<p>Governors are systematic in how they scrutinise the school.</p> <p>Outcomes (actions needed) are minuted and reviewed.</p>	<p>Governors can account for the apparent attainment gap at expected levels.</p> <p>They always factor in the progress of ALN pupils.</p>	<p>Governors are secure in their understanding of the issues linked with the identification and tracking of the MAT pupils.</p>	<p>Governors bring their systematic focus at the sharp end by establishing links with the different curriculum leads.</p>	<p>Governors ensure that the school is a self-improving school</p>
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