

Knowing your School

A series of briefing notes for school governors from the National Governors' Association produced in association with partners



Questions for governing bodies to ask

Briefing note: 6

Updated March 2015

National Governors' Association

The National Governors' Association aims to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by promoting high standards in all our schools and improving the effectiveness of their governing bodies. NGA represents governors across England in both LA maintained schools and academies. In these notes, 'schools' includes academies.

The NGA is a membership organisation: governing bodies can join at a standard (£75 for 2014/15) or GOLD rate (£260). To join NGA and receive regular updates, visit the following website:

Website: www.nga.org.uk

Telephone: 0121 237 3780

Email: membership@nga.org.uk

Thanks to NGA members

This resource was developed with the help of many NGA members who attended one of seven regional meetings between February and April 2013. Their comments were invaluable in fine tuning this suite of questions.

Other 'Knowing your School' briefing notes:

1. RAISEonline for Governors of Primary Schools: NGA with RM education
2. RAISEonline for Governors of Secondary Schools: NGA with RM education
3. Getting to know your parents: NGA with Kirkland Rowell Surveys
4. Governors and staff performance: NGA with COGs
5. a. The FFT Governor Dashboard for secondary school governors
b. The FFT Governor Dashboard for primary school governors

The eight elements of effective governance:

1. The right people around the table
2. Understanding role & responsibilities
3. Good chairing
4. Professional clerking
5. Good relationships based on trust
6. Knowing the school – the data, the staff, the parents, the children, the community
7. Committed to asking challenging questions
8. Confident to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people

Questions for governing bodies to ask

This briefing note alerts governors to a range of questions that governing bodies can use to help them hold their schools to account and ensure high standards and the best outcomes for young people. The governing body needs to know its school's strengths and weaknesses, and this is intended as one aide (amongst many) to point you in the right direction. Knowing your school well and asking challenging questions are two of the eight elements of effective governance. Governing bodies are not always as good as they could be at challenging the school effectively and constructively in a way that leads to improved practice and outcomes. It is intended that these questions will help governors to do this.

This new resource complements the 'twenty questions' published in July 2012 by the All-party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership, which concern the governing body's own performance and how it governs itself. Those 'twenty questions' prompted the Secretary of State for Education to suggest that a further set of questions could be developed for governing bodies to ask headteachers; and NGA accepted the challenge.

The House of Commons Education Select Committee in its report on *The Role of School Governing Bodies* also discussed the importance of governors asking effective questions and interrogating data effectively, and supported the publication of further questions.

However, during their development it became apparent that not all the questions for which governors need to have answers have to be directed in the first instance to the headteacher. Some answers are available from other sources. Some of the questions are ones the governing body should be asking itself (and of course the headteacher would be involved in the discussion), for example questions about the vision and ethos of the school, and some the governing body should know the answers from nationally available sources. However, most of the questions will be asked of school leaders, and thought needs to be had as to the time, place and style of the questioning: see the health warning below.

These new questions started with the ten questions included in the Government's White Paper 2010 'The importance of teaching' with further questions added under each, plus two more overarching questions. There is inevitably some cross-over between questions. They have also been cross checked against Ofsted's questions for governors and the questions in the DfE's Governor's Handbook.

The new set of questions is designed to cover a range of governing bodies, from the very confident and competent, to the less so. In the former case, the governing body will already know the answers to a number - if not almost all - of the questions, but may use others to probe further. For those governing bodies on a journey of improvement, the headline questions will provide a steer of what you need to know. The questions are generic and need to be adapted to suit your school and its context. Despite the number, these are not an exhaustive list; the more you discover about the school and its performance, the more follow-up questions you may need to ask to dig deeper on specific issues. Some of those may be as simple as 'So what are we going to do about it?' and 'How will we know the impact of doing that?' Governing bodies need to concentrate first on areas where self-evaluation suggests a need for improvement.

Health warning: these questions need to be used appropriately. You need to consider the best time and place to ask any questions – it may be at the relevant committee meeting, rather than in a full governing body meeting, and must be pertinent to the discussion at hand. It is absolutely **NOT** intended that these questions should be handed over to the headteacher and an answer to each one sought. This is not a test for school leaders, but a tool to help governors.

If you are in any doubt about how to use these well, please contact NGA at governorhq@nga.org.uk

The questions themselves can be found at:

- 1. Do we have a clear vision and strategy for the school?**
[http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/The-Governing-Body-\(1\)/Governance-Tools/Questions-for-heads--School-vision-and-values.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/The-Governing-Body-(1)/Governance-Tools/Questions-for-heads--School-vision-and-values.aspx)
- 2. What are the school's values?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Holding-your-school-to-account/Challenge/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask-School-value.aspx>
- 3. What are we doing to raise standards for all children?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/School-Improvement/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Raising-sta.aspx>
- 4. Are we making best use of the Pupil Premium?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/School-Improvement/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Pupil-premi.aspx>
- 5. Have we got the right approach to staffing?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Finance-and-Staffing/Staffing/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Staffing.aspx>
- 6. How well does the curriculum provide for and stretch all pupils?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Teaching-and-Learning/Curriculum/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Curriculum.aspx>
- 7. How does the school promote good behaviour to enhance learning?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Teaching-and-Learning/Behaviour-and-Safety/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Behaviour.aspx>
- 8. Do we have a sound financial strategy, make the most efficient use of our resources, obtain good value for money and have robust procurement and financial systems?**
[http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Finance-and-Staffing/Finance-\(1\)/Finance-\(1\)/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--finance.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Finance-and-Staffing/Finance-(1)/Finance-(1)/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--finance.aspx)
- 9. Are the buildings and other assets in good condition and are they well used?**
<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Finance-and-Staffing/Premises/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Buildings-a.aspx>

10. Do we keep children safe and healthy?

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Teaching-and-Learning/Behaviour-and-Safety/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Health-and-.aspx>

11. How well do we keep parents informed and take account of their views?

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Teaching-and-Learning/Parents/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Parents.aspx>

12. Does the school offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities which engage all pupils?

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Guidance/Teaching-and-Learning/Curriculum/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask--Extra-curri.aspx>

13. Are we actively promoting British values in our school?

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Holding-your-school-to-account/Challenge/Questions-for-governing-bodies-to-ask-British-Valu.aspx>