



Twenty Questions ~ 2nd Edition 2015

Key questions every governing board should ask itself

Strong governance is essential for good schools. In too many schools, governing boards are not effective or confident enough. One of a governing board's three key functions is to support and challenge headteachers; holding them to account so that pupils get the best possible education. But governing boards also need support and challenge.

Three years ago we set out to encourage governors to challenge themselves as the best governing boards already did. This first edition of 20 questions for governing bodies was developed by the National Governors' Association (NGA) and the Key for School Governors but we consulted widely at the May 2012 meeting of the APPG and published at the APPG's summer 2012 reception. Since then they have been used extensively by many governing boards across England when reviewing their governance practice, and it was timely to review them in the light of that experience.

Once again the questions are **NOT** attempting to:

- cover every aspect of effective governance,
- give the answers – these can only be obtained from reflecting honestly and fully on current practice in comparison with others,
- replace the good guidance for governing bodies provided by a range of organisations.

A number of organisations, including NGA and the Key, have developed material to both help governing boards evaluate their performance using these questions, and to take action following the review to improve governance practice.

These questions are being incorporated into a new guide to strategic planning for school governors and trustees called: *Framework for School Governance* published by NGA and the Wellcome Trust.

We are still committed to keeping these questions to twenty as that has been part of the reason for their popularity. We want to engage as many governing boards as possible in a simple exercise to reflect on their practice. Governing boards, especially those which are struggling, can be overwhelmed by too much irrelevant information. While there are some magnificent governing boards, there are also still some working in isolation without a good understanding of what



constitutes effective practice or success. We suggest that every school should engage with these '20 questions'. Please send any comments to: education.governance.appg@nga.org.uk.

20 questions every governing board should ask itself

Governing board effectiveness

Right skills: Do we have the right skills on the governing board?

1. Have we completed a skills audit which informs the governor specification we use as the basis of governor appointment and interview?

Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?

2. How well do we understand our roles and responsibilities, including what it means to be strategic?
3. Do we have a professional clerk who provides legal advice and oversees the governing board's induction and development needs?
4. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing board conducive to effective working?
5. How do we make use of good practice from across the country?

Role of the chair: Does our chair show strong and effective leadership?

6. Do we carry out a regular 360° review of the chair's performance and elect the chair each year?
7. Do we engage in good succession planning so that no governor serves for longer than two terms of office and the chair is replaced at least every six years?
8. Does the chair carry out an annual review of each governor's contribution to the board's performance?

Vision, ethos and strategy

Strategy: Does the school have a clear vision and strategic priorities?

9. Does our vision look forward three to five years, and does it include what the children who have left the school will have achieved?
10. Have we agreed a strategy with priorities for achieving our vision with key performance indicators against which we can regularly monitor and review the strategy?
11. How effectively does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing board's activities and agenda setting?



Engagement: Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?

12. How well do we listen to, understand and respond to our pupils, parents and staff?
13. How do we make regular reports on the work of the governing board to our parents and local community?
14. What benefit does the school draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

Effective accountability

Accountability of the executive: Do we hold the school leaders to account?

15. How well do we understand the school's performance data (including in-year progress tracking data) so we can properly hold school leaders to account?
16. Do governors regularly visit the school to get to know it and monitor the implementation of the school strategy?
17. How well does our policy review schedule work and how do we ensure compliance?
18. Do we know how effective performance management of all staff is within the school?
19. Are our financial management systems robust so we can ensure best value for money?

Impact: Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?

20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing board's contribution been to this?

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