

What governing boards and headteachers should expect from each other

updated 2022

Getting governance right is important because of the significant impact it has on the quality of educational provision and the opportunity and life chances of children. This joint guidance aims to help governing boards and headteachers to get governance right by working together, being mutually supportive and respecting each other's roles and responsibilities.

A parallel version of this guidance is available for multi academy trust boards and CEOs.

Terminology

We use 'governing board' in this document to mean governing bodies in local authority (LA) maintained schools and federations, trust boards in a single academy trust (SAT) and regional or academy level committees, sometimes called the local governing body.

We use 'headteacher' to mean those responsible for the overall management of a school, a federation of schools or an academy. This includes the headteacher of a single school and executive leader of a federation.

Those governing on academy committees should read this guidance alongside the scheme of delegation for the multi academy trust their school is part of. This is important as the scheme of delegation defines the committee's responsibility.

The eight elements of effective governance



1. Respecting the respective roles

A key aspect of an effective working relationship is respecting the difference between strategic governance and operational management.

- The governing board is expected to concentrate on delivering its core strategic functions.
- The headteacher is expected to implement the strategic priorities of the governing board through their day-to-day management of the school.

Those governing are not asked to, and should not try to, involve themselves in day-to-day management, or carry out staff roles on an unpaid basis.

2. Working together to set a strategy

The governing board and headteacher have a shared responsibility for setting a future strategy that reflects the values of their school. In practice, this means:

- Articulating a clear vision of where they want their school(s) to be in three to five years' time, reflecting their values and ethos.
- Using self-evaluation to identify priorities that reflect the current context and challenges.
- Agreeing priorities that will achieve that vision and align with available resources.
- The governing board monitoring progress within an annual cycle, which provides a focus for their meetings.

Further guidance on developing a strategy is available for boards and school leaders.

► Visit www.nga.org.uk/BeingStrategic

3. Engaging stakeholders

Meaningful engagement with stakeholders – pupils, parents, staff and the wider community – helps the governing board to make informed decisions and build trust and shared ownership in those decisions.

The governing board and headteacher have a shared commitment to building and maintaining key stakeholder relationships, modelling openness and transparency and developing lines of communication, thus creating the conditions for:

- a diverse governing board
- local knowledge to be valued
- meaningful engagement and consultation
- full participation
- informed decision making

Participating in inspections

The governing board is expected to make itself available and participate in meetings with Ofsted inspectors and inspection feedback meetings.

The headteacher is expected to support the participation of the governing board in inspections by requesting meetings are held at the beginning or end of the school day to maximise attendance.

4. Ensuring your school is a great place to work

Staff are a school's most valuable resource and the largest area of expenditure in the budget. Governing boards have legal responsibilities as the employers of staff, which vary depending on the type of school. Boards in all LA maintained schools must comply with employment and health and safety legislation.

The governing board and headteacher have a shared responsibility for creating the leadership culture and climate necessary for the school to be recognised as a great place to work. This means:

- complying with employment and equalities legislation
- promoting safeguarding, transparency and equality of opportunity
- avoiding discriminatory practice
- HR policies being applied consistently
- ensuring policies and their implementation promote a positive culture
- recognising, encouraging and rewarding talent
- tackling workload issues
- engaging with staff to bring about improvement

Discharging your duty of care

The governing board is expected to exercise its duty of care towards the headteacher and support their work-life balance. This means monitoring the impact of strategies and initiatives that promote a positive and sustainable workplace and ensure a safe and secure working environment.

Dedicated leadership time

The governing board is expected to grant the headteacher dedicated time for strategic leadership activity, including, where appropriate, time away from their school.

The headteacher's annual appraisal

The governing board and headteacher share the responsibility for ensuring the appraisal process serves not only as a mechanism for accountability but also as an opportunity to provide support and encourage development. This means ensuring:

- a panel of appraisers who are suitably trained
- the requirement to appoint an independent external advisor is met
- the advisor is suitably experienced and trained
- objectives are linked to strategic priorities
- performance is monitored consistently over a twelve-month period
- an annual appraisal meeting and six-month review
- issues are dealt with on an ongoing basis
- CPD is encouraged and needs are met
- pay progression is dealt with promptly and effectively

Monitoring staff wellbeing

The governing board is expected to have an overriding concern for the wellbeing of all staff in their school and monitor the impact of strategies and initiatives that promote a positive and sustainable workplace culture.

The headteacher is expected to model a positive and sustainable workplace culture to all staff and seek to reduce unnecessary workload.

5. Making governance effective

Governing principles

The governing board and headteacher are expected to:

- act in accordance with the seven principles of public life
- understand their responsibilities under equality legislation
- be guided by the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education

Getting the right people around the table

The governing board is expected to:

- determine what size and composition works for them
- conduct skills audits to identify skills gaps and development needs to be met, whether through recruitment or training
- adopt transparent processes for recruiting and selecting governors, including interviewing prospective candidates
- consider targeted recruitment to create a more diverse board
- replace board members over time (ie after their second term of office), including timely succession planning for the chair

An effective chair and vice chair

The chair leads the governing board and ensures that it fulfils its functions well. The vice chair can be very important in sharing the leadership of the board, not only making the role of chair more manageable but also acting as a sounding board when there are challenges and opportunities to reflect on.

The chair and vice chair are expected to work together to facilitate the governing board working as a team and supporting all governors to participate actively and equally.

Developing skills and knowledge

The governing board is expected to prioritise and have a system in place for the induction of new governors, including signposting to relevant training as appropriate. The headteacher is expected to be part of the induction process. For example, by attending a welcome meeting and or visit to the school(s).

The governing board is expected to remain proactive in developing its skills and knowledge. This means keeping up to date on its responsibilities and good practice, responding to the results of the skills audit and arranging training as appropriate. The headteacher is expected to encourage and support this. For example, through arranging joint training with the governing board and leadership team where appropriate.

Self-evaluation

The governing board is expected to evaluate its impact on a routine basis as well as the contribution of individual governors. This includes meeting the expectation of carrying out an annual self-assessment of the governing board and commissioning independent external reviews of governance. The headteacher is expected to support this process.

Guidance is available from the DfE on how to arrange an effective external review of governance and questions are available to support the process of self-evaluation.

Conduct

The governing board is expected to adopt a code of conduct, which sets out general standards of behaviour and how governors deal with each other and employees. Both the board and headteacher are expected to model the standards of behaviour set out in the code and demonstrate their commitment to their school's values, ethical governance and leadership. NGA has published a model code of conduct for governing boards to adapt.

Avoiding conflicts of interest

Those governing should do their best to avoid conflicts of interest and related party transactions and must declare any which exist. The National Audit Office and Charity Commission both provide useful advice on avoiding conflict of interest.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is not good practice to govern on more than two boards.

6. Ways of working

The chair

The chair of the governing board is expected to:

- undertake regular and appropriate CPD
- seek external support as required
- support all governors to participate actively and equally
- ensure appropriate succession planning is in place
- avoid serving more than six years on the same board

The chair and headteacher relationship

The chair of the governing board and headteacher have equal responsibility for developing a professional relationship based on trust, mutual respect and a full appreciation of their respective roles and remits.

Working with the governance professional

The governing board and headteacher are expected to recognise the role of governance professionals (sometimes referred to as the clerk) and promote an effective working relationship. This means having due regard for the advice of the governance professional, supporting their CPD and ensuring the salary that they receive is commensurate with the service they deliver.

Working with school business professionals

Business professionals make a significant contribution towards the effective leadership and management of schools.

The governing board is expected to understand the role of the business professional, the professional standards they adhere to and recognise their contribution to financial and governance

compliance and risk management. The governing board is encouraged to champion business professionals working at all levels and to promote the benefits of business and governance working seamlessly together.

The headteacher is expected to facilitate collaboration between school business professionals and the governing board, ensuring that they are fully involved in reporting to the governing board on operational management and strategic resource planning.

Meetings

The governing board and headteacher are expected to work together and with their governance professional to ensure that meetings are well planned, take place at appropriate intervals and have manageable agendas, which prevent overlap in the work and responsibilities of senior leaders and committees. When arranging meetings, consideration should also be given to the work-life balance and commitments of the governing board, headteacher and relevant staff, including how appropriate use of online platforms can support increased attendance and accessibility.

Headteacher reporting

The governing board is expected to determine the content of the termly report it receives from the headteacher to gain an overview of progress being made towards strategic priorities. This should be discussed with the headteacher to ensure that the resulting workload is both reasonable and proportionate. Typically, the report will cover:

- current context (eg pupil numbers)
- progress against strategic priorities
- current high-level risks
- the curriculum, teaching and learning outcomes
- financial performance, compliance and resource management
- human resources and the performance management of staff
- pupil behaviour, wellbeing, welfare and safeguarding

Using data

The governing board and headteacher are expected to agree on what data is required by the board and how it is presented in a meaningful way, which allows the board to evaluate progress, identify risk and inform support and challenge, at the same time as avoiding placing an unreasonable burden on the headteacher.

The governing board collectively is expected to gain the knowledge it needs to use data in a meaningful way. For example, by understanding how its school(s) assess attainment and track progress between external assessment points.

Monitoring visits

Governors are expected to visit their school(s) to gain an understanding of how the vision and strategy are being implemented and culture reflected in daily life. The headteacher is expected to encourage such visits and support with the arrangements.

Governors carrying out and supporting monitoring visits are expected to follow agreed protocols, which help ensure the visit is effective, conducted in the right spirit (ie not perceived as an inspection) and convenient to all parties.

Delegation

The governing board is responsible for developing a compliant and effective framework (scheme) of delegation, which is clearly documented, including terms of reference for all committees. This should be reviewed at least annually or sooner if any significant changes are needed. The governing board and headteacher should expect to work together on this and seek the advice of the governance professional.

Oversight of policies

The governing board is expected to have in place and follow a schedule for reviewing policies that are required by law. The schedule should include review frequency, approval rules and be aligned with the framework of delegation. The governing board is expected to monitor the impact of policies it is required to approve.

The headteacher and their leadership team are expected to write/draft/adapt policies in line with the schedule and ensure they reflect the values of the school(s), are sufficiently robust, compliant with the law, and consider the views of stakeholders.

