What governing boards, headteachers and executive leaders should expect from each other

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ASCL Association of School and College Leaders

ISBL Institute of School Business Leadership

Local Government Association

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This joint guidance sets out how the three strands of leadership work together to ensure organisational success in single schools:

- **Governance leadership** – strategic vision, oversight and accountability.
- **Education leadership** – organisational management, pedagogy and school improvement.
- **Business leadership** – operations, human resources, estates management, procurement, technology and finance.

The governing board delivers its strategic functions while the executive leadership team (including the headteacher, education and business leaders) provides operational leadership, implementing the strategic priorities of the board through their day-to-day management of the school.

Terminology

We use '**governing board**' in this guidance to mean governing bodies in local authority (LA) maintained schools including federated bodies, trust boards in single academy trusts (SATs) and academy committees in a multi academy trust (MAT), also known as local governing body. And we use '**governor**' for all board members governing in those settings.

We use '**headteacher**' to mean the senior executive leader who is responsible for the overall management of the school and leads the executive team. They are held to account by the governing board.

1 Promoting effectiveness

Professional development is essential to ensure the effectiveness of leaders, helping to build expertise and capacity. All leaders are responsible for establishing a culture that promotes continuous quality improvement and for enabling and investing in it.

The needs of all employees should be considered in CPD programmes, including both those with educational and business functions.

Attention should also be given to governance capability – NGA believes that there are eight key elements that form the foundations to governing effectively in a school.



1. **The right people around the table** – having a diverse blend of knowledge, skills, perspectives and backgrounds to govern effectively.
2. **Understanding the role and responsibilities** – the overarching aim of governance is to ensure the wellbeing of children and young people, enabling them to achieve to the best of their ability.
3. **Good chairing** – the chair leads the board and influences culture and conduct.
4. **Professional governance support** – coordinates board business, providing advice and overseeing compliance.
5. **Good working relationships** – between board members as well as with the headteacher and other executive leaders.
6. **Knowing the school/trust** – understanding the school's strengths and weaknesses.
7. **Committed to providing scrutiny and challenge** – discussing the information provided, with confidence to have courageous conversations where needed.
8. **Continuous evaluation and improvement** – boards should regularly review impact and seek to improve.

Governing boards adopt a code of conduct that details the behaviour and professional standards expected of governors.

2 Working together

Delegation

Governing boards can delegate their strategic functions to committees, where sub-sets of governors oversee specific areas in more detail, and will also delegate operational functions to the headteacher. Arrangements should be set out in a delegation planner or equivalent.

The chair and headteacher relationship

Governing boards appoint a chair (or co-chairs) to lead the board. Supported by the vice chair, the chair ensures that the board fulfils its functions well by facilitating teamwork and supporting all governors to participate actively and equally.

The chair and headteacher have equal responsibility for developing a professional relationship based on trust, mutual respect and appreciation of their respective roles. They will have routine one-to-one meetings which can be used to:

- discuss the headteacher's development needs and wellbeing
- keep each other informed to ensure there are no surprises at meetings
- have honest conversations where the chair acts as a confidential sounding board

Governance professionals (clerks)

The governance professional (ie clerk) works with the governing board, headteacher and other executive leaders to ensure that meetings are well planned, take place at appropriate intervals and have manageable agendas. They provide advice and communicate with the chair and headteacher to confirm the custom and practice of the governing board. The governance professional may also have a range of compliance responsibilities, particularly in SATs.

Integrated decision-making

Integrated ways of working between the governance, business and educational functions include:

- operational leaders attending relevant board and committee meetings – for example, the business leader can attend finance committee meetings and answer questions related to budget performance
- link governors assigned to lead in a particular area regularly meeting with the relevant members of staff – all boards must have a SEND governor and a safeguarding governor and may also decide to have link roles for other areas
- shared reporting and monitoring on different outcomes and performance areas, such as integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP)

Board monitoring practices

To hold the executive leadership to account, governing boards monitor and triangulate different sources of information, using that to provide support and challenge.

Reporting and data

The headteacher's termly report is fundamental to the governing board's ability to provide effective oversight. The governing board determines the content of the reports and the data it needs to evaluate progress made towards strategic priorities, identify risk and inform support and challenge. This should be discussed with executive leaders to ensure that the resulting workload is both reasonable and proportionate.

School monitoring visits

Governors visit their school to gain an understanding of how the vision and strategy are being implemented in practice and the culture reflected in daily life. Visits are usually focused on a specific area or priority and carried out by link governors who will meet with the member of staff with relevant leadership responsibility. Executive leaders are expected to encourage such visits and support with the arrangements.

Asking questions

Governors are expected to ask questions about the information they are provided with, and they should receive clear answers from executive leaders. Boards should ask challenging questions to gain clarity and test assumptions, having courageous conversations where needed in the interests of pupils. This should be done in a collaborative and constructive manner.

The following sections provide a non-exhaustive overview of functions carried out by the governance, education and business strands of leadership. This will vary for academies in a MAT – check your scheme of delegation.

4 Vision and strategy

The governing board and executive leadership have a shared responsibility for setting the vision of where they want their school to be in three to five years' time and a strategy with agreed priorities for achieving that vision.

This is then used to inform operational planning, which the headteacher, education and business leaders implement through day-to-day management.

Governance	Education	Business
• Lead on and approve the values, vision and strategy. • Set risk appetite. • Ensure stakeholder voice is considered. • Promote whole-school equity, equality, diversity and inclusion. • Monitor and evaluate progress made on strategic objectives.	• Propose evidence-based school improvement options and develop operational plans. • Consider resourcing and staff development needed to meet strategic aims. • Monitor and evaluate impact on pupils.	• Advise on capacity and affordability. • Ensure sustainability. • Consider resourcing implications regarding finance, people and infrastructure. • Maintain the risk register on risks associated with strategic objectives.

All have shared responsibility	• Self-evaluate to establish where priorities lie. • Champion shared strategic priorities and measures. • Foster an ethos and culture that reflects the school's values.

5 Operational accountability

The board provides accountability and assurance over the effective operation and performance of the school in the following four key areas:

Financial performance	
Governance	• Approve and monitor the budget. • Ensure value for money in purchases. • Monitor resource management eg benchmarking.
Education	• Ensure resources are aligned to educational needs and priorities. • Manage resources within agreed budgets. • Evaluate impact of spending on pupils.
Business	• Draft the budget. • Provide timely budget monitoring reports. • Manage resources efficiently. • Maximise value for money in spending decisions.

Pupil outcomes	
Governance	• Monitor pupil performance data including for specific pupil groups such as those with SEND. • Monitor quality of teaching and learning and its impact on pupils. • Ensure a culture of inclusion. • Monitor pupil mental health and wellbeing. • Monitor attendance and behaviour to support both effective learning and wellbeing.
Education	• Implement school improvement plans. • Promote a working culture of quality improvement and professional development for staff. • Embed latest pedagogical knowledge and practice. • Use ICFP to design a curriculum that achieves educational priorities. • Identify barriers to pupil learning and wellbeing and establish systems and practices that respond to needs.
Business	• Secure resourcing needed for educational priorities, including workforce deployment, learning environment and technology and systems used. • Use ICFP to design an affordable and sustainable curriculum.

Employer responsibility	
Governance	• Appoint the headteacher and manage their performance, development and wellbeing. • Approve staffing structure that will enable strategic priorities. • Monitor impact of strategies and initiatives that promote a positive and sustainable workplace. • Ensure access to professional development for all staff.
Education	• Model a positive and sustainable workplace culture. • Seek to reduce unnecessary workload. • Identify staff support and CPD needs. • Consider staff structure and roles needed to meet operational and pupil needs.
Business	• Advise on staffing costs and sustainability. • Consider staff wellbeing and development costs in budget. • Provide HR and employment advice.

Compliance	
Governance	• Ensure legal and regulatory compliance eg health and safety, data protection. • Monitor pupil safeguarding. • Approve certain policies and ensure all policies are applied consistently. • Monitor risk, maintaining oversight of the risk register. • Seek independent assurance.
Education	• Formulate and implement policies. • Undertake training as needed. • Monitor practice, carrying out checks and reviews as appropriate. • Safeguard pupils.
Business	• Manage the risk register. • Ensure statutory compliance. • Arrange and conduct necessary audits and checks. • Seek expert advice when needed. • Formulate and implement policies. • Undertake training as needed.

6 Stakeholder engagement

The governing board and executive leaders have a shared commitment to building and maintaining key stakeholder relationships with pupils, parents, staff and the wider community. This creates the conditions for more informed and effective decision-making as well as shared ownership in them.

Governance	Education	Business
• Ensure stakeholder views inform board decision-making. • Oversee engagement strategies. • Promote transparency and accountability, communicating decisions clearly to stakeholders.	• Develop and implement communication and engagement mechanisms eg surveys. • Collate results and feed back to the board. • Identify and seek to remove barriers to engagement with the school community.	• Support implementation via school operations. • Make sure the systems and technology used work well and provide value for money. • Ensure engagement is effective and accessible.

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