

Hackney Governors' Annual Conference

Improving Governing Bodies

26th January 2014
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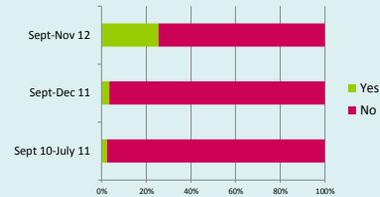
The NGA

- NGA is a membership organisation representing school governors in England: governors from all state funded schools, both LA maintained schools and academies
- NGA aims to improve the effectiveness of governing bodies by providing expert and tailored information, advice and support, and challenge when needed
- NGA is one of the organisations named by the National College for Teaching and Leadership as being able to carry out reviews of governance

Do we need to improve governing bodies?

Since September 2012, Ofsted has significantly increased the focus on school governance

Proportion of all inspected schools receiving recommendations regarding governance



- What is expected of governing bodies
- The core functions of the governing body:
 - Being strategic and ensuring robust accountability
- Effective governance
- Evaluating governing body effectiveness

The message from government ...

... is that high quality governance in all types of schools is characterised by a relentless focus on the three core strategic functions:

- Setting vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding headteachers to account for teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety, and challenging and strengthening their leadership;
- Ensuring finances are managed well leading to probity, solvency and effective use of resources

In other words, they want all GBs to operate as non-executive boards

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- The 'board of governors' should operate at a strategic level, leaving the head teacher and senior school leaders responsible and accountable to it for the operational day-to-day running of the school.
- The governing body provides non-executive leadership. Its role is to operate as a board akin to the board of trustees of a charity, or the board of directors of a company.
- The board should avoid its time being consumed with issues of secondary importance, and focus strongly on three core functions:
 - Setting the vision and strategic direction of school
 - Holding the headteacher to account for its educational performance
 - Ensuring financial resources are well spent

The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013
 Departmental advice for school leaders and governing bodies of maintained schools and management committees of PRUs in England

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The message from Ofsted

'without strong and effective governance,
our schools simply won't be as good as they can be'

Whatever the mode of governance, inspectors must evaluate the extent to which governors both challenge and support the school and hold senior staff including the headteacher, to account for the **achievement** of the pupils. Governors are not expected to be routinely involved in the day-to-day activity of the school or, for example, to undertake lesson observations. However, they hold important strategic responsibilities for the development and **improvement** of the school.

Ofsted Subsidiary Guidance Feb 2013 paras 75-77

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Governance in the spotlight

- The great and the good are taking an interest
- A growing body of research confirming the importance of the role of the governing body and the importance of the chair
- The September 2012 Ofsted framework raised expectations the core responsibility of governing bodies is to ensure high standards
- More autonomy brings more responsibility and more risks
- More decision-making is being devolved e.g. academy conversion, performance related pay
- Limited resources require more efficiency
- We need to learn from other sectors

Organisations with strong governance do not fail

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The standards agenda

- Data, data, data ...
- Publication of league tables, performance data and data dashboards
- Analysis and evaluation by a whole range of organisations and individuals - Sutton Trust, Fischer Family Trust, Teach First, academics, journalists
- Setting of benchmarks and floor standards
- Parental pressure and the need for schools/academies to be accountable
- Global competition using international measures – Pisa, Timss

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Setting the vision, ethos and strategy

What does it mean to be strategic?

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Being strategic

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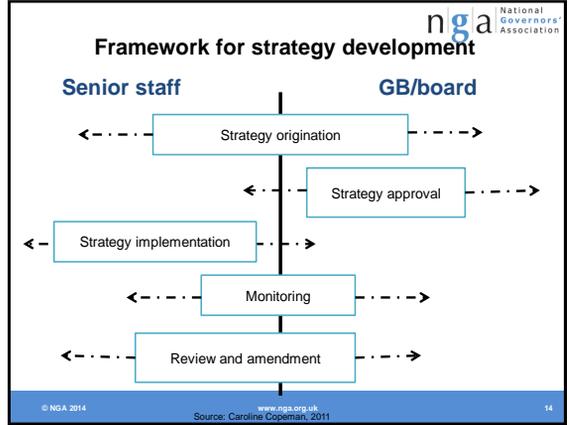
The GB determines the vision and ethos ... and a strategy for achieving this

The vision and ethos describe the sort of school we want to be in three to five years time

GBs do this by:

- Setting goals and agreeing the school's development priorities
- For each priority setting targets or key performance indicators (KPIs) for the short and longer term
- Structuring most of the GB business towards monitoring progress against these
- At the end of the year, formally reviewing and evaluating the strategy

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Strategic (i.e. governance)	Operational
Monitoring reports on quality of teaching against pupils' outcomes	Making judgements about the quality of teaching
Receiving financial audit report	Governor coming into school to supervise book-keeper
Ensuring necessary audits have been carried out by qualified professionals	Governors undertaking audits e.g. health and safety
Interviewing senior leaders	Interviewing teachers
Agreeing to invest in school buses	Organising the bus routes
Agreeing to a building project	Obtaining quotes for cost
Ensuring school is marketed well	Writing school prospectus

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Staying strategic

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- Distinguish when you are governing and when you are volunteering in another capacity
- Use your time to best effect - on the key school priorities, not just compliance and 'policies' ... differentiate 'principle' from 'procedures'
- Ensure the school improvement plan has high level targets / KPIs with measurable milestones against which the GB can monitor progress
- Check that school leaders are equipped to do their jobs (including HR, procurement, health and safety) to avoid operational support from governors
- Do not do someone else's job: see the joint statement with ASCL and NAHT: *"What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies"*

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Ensuring robust accountability

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In order to be able to hold the school to account the governing body needs to know its school ...

How do you get to know your school?

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Key documents

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- Prospectus
- Strategy documents with the academy's vision / aims / key priorities / KPIs / targets / budget
- School development plan
- HT report - operational and strategic with data to evidence
- Financial management reports – budget / pay / pupil premium
- Ofsted reports and other external consultant reports
- Pupil / parent / staff surveys
- GB minutes

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Visiting the school

- Is the purpose of school visits clear?
 - Getting to know the school and / or
 - Monitoring improvement priorities
- Is there a policy and protocols which have been agreed and shared with staff?
- How do governors report on visits?

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Evaluating governing body effectiveness

How do you know if your governing body is fit for purpose and effective?

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The eight elements of effective governance

1. The right people round the table
2. Understanding role and responsibilities
3. Professional clerking
4. Good chairing
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

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Last week ...

DfE announced a consultation on changes to the School Governance Constitution Regulations

The key changes proposed in relation to the governance regulations are that:

- all local authority maintained governing bodies will be required to reconstitute by September 2015
- all appointed governors (i.e. local authority (LA), foundation, appointed parent, and partnership governors), must in future be appointed on the basis that they have (in the opinion of the person making the appointment) 'the skills required to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school'

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Self evaluation as a management tool

- Schools are expected to self evaluate and this should include governance
- Knowing your strengths and weaknesses is the starting point for identifying where to begin with developing the governing body
- The discipline of a review / development / review cycle leads to incremental improvement

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Reviewing governing body effectiveness

Why – because governance matters and it needs to improve

When – regularly and according to circumstances

How – systematically, proportionately, professionally

By whom – don't underestimate the value of an external reviewer

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Self evaluation tools

- Governor Mark
The standards are freely available but the accreditation process has a cost
- GSET
Governance self evaluation tracker from Target Tracker
- Ofsted
Criteria for good and outstanding governance
- The APPG 20 Questions
... and NGA's 20 key questions evaluation framework
- An external consultant
The NGA run a consultancy and training service

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Governance making an impact

- Set the vision and ethos, including what the children should leave the school having learned
- Stay strategic and focused on improvement priorities: leave the operational to school leaders, and delegate
- Don't get overwhelmed by compliance and reviewing policies: focus on principles, delegating procedures
- Recruit good school leaders (a future challenge) ... and trust them to recruit good staff
- Ensure school leaders are equipped to do their jobs, including HR, procurement, legal advice, and CPD

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Reflection

Is governance making an impact in my school ...
... and how do you know?

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