

# A Framework for Governance:

## A flexible guide to strategic planning

January 2015





## Why a Framework for Governance

A governing board has three core functions for its school, as set out in the 2014 Department for Education's Governors' Handbook:

- setting the strategic direction
- holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school
- ensuring financial health, probity and value for money.

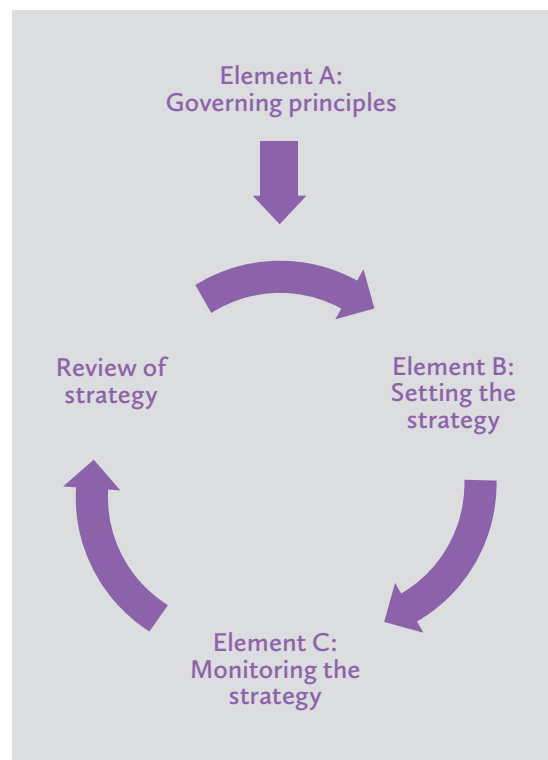
These core functions are consistent with the criteria that Ofsted will use to judge the governing board (for more detail see the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook, July 2014, pages 47–48).

Strong governance is a key part of a successful school. However, schools are beset by so many regulations and reporting requirements that it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees. To help school governors and senior leaders take a broader and longer-term perspective, we have developed this Framework for Governance. The aim is to give governors and senior leaders a robust framework that they can use to set the strategic direction for their school and monitor progress against the strategic vision.

### The three elements of the Framework

The Framework is designed to reflect the cyclical nature of the governing board's work. The element that should be started with will depend on what level of development the governing board is at and where it is in the annual cycle.

The Framework is intended to be flexible enough to allow schools to exercise autonomy, yet robust enough to enable governors to hold senior leaders to account. Over the past few years governance has evolved as the education landscape has become increasingly complex, and there now exists a diverse range of governance structures. For example, multi-academy trusts (MATs) often have two levels of governance, comprising boards of trustees and local governing bodies, with each having different responsibilities. In addition, governing boards of MATs and local authority maintained federations will govern multiple schools. These governing boards in particular may need to adapt the Framework to accommodate their own situation.



# Element A: Governing principles

Governing principles, against which governing boards can evaluate their practice

To successfully carry out its responsibilities, the governing board needs to agree some broad principles about the way it works. A good starting point is the National Governors' Association's eight aspects of effective governance:

1. The right people round the table
2. Understanding the role and responsibilities of the governing board
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.

These principles are captured by the following set of questions, which the governing board should ask itself. They are the All Party Parliamentary Group on Governance and Leadership's Twenty Key Questions for a school governing board to ask itself, available at [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk).

## 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. Are 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 chair: Does our chair show strong and effective leadership?**

6. Do we carry out a regular 360° review of the chair's performance and re-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 governing 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 and 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?

## Element B: Setting the strategy

A shared vision and long-term strategy for the school, from which annual school development plans can be derived

### The line between governance and management

It is important that governors understand where the line lies between their strategic responsibilities and the management responsibilities of the headteacher and senior leaders. Stepping over that line is inappropriate and can make the headteacher's job harder.

More detailed guidance can be found in *What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies*, a joint guidance document from the Association of School and College Leaders, the National Association of Head Teachers and the National Governors' Association (available at [nga.org.uk](http://nga.org.uk))

### Creating the strategy

Every school needs to have a long-term strategy, based on a shared vision. It is the job of the governing board, working with the headteacher and senior leaders, to agree a strategic plan for the coming three to five years. It is then the job of the senior leaders to turn the strategic plan into a school development plan, updated each year, and to implement this in practice with the support and scrutiny of governors.



The school's vision should, in a few sentences, describe what the school will look like in three to five years' time. It is not to be confused with the school values and/or ethos, which describe the manner in which the school operates.

The vision should:

- be ambitious but achievable
- take into account where the school is now
- describe what pupils will have left the school having achieved – in terms of attainment, progress and being prepared for the next stage of their education and life beyond the school
- take account of stakeholders' views
- be agreed and owned by the governing board.

# Element C: Monitoring the strategy

Key performance indicators against which progress towards the school's vision can be charted, and examples of the evidence that can be used to monitor and review the strategy

Key performance indicators (KPIs) define the success criteria against which progress can be measured. They will be agreed in detail between the governing board and the senior leaders, based on a shared vision of what the school is aiming to achieve (Element B). Some examples of high-level outcomes are in the tables on the next page. Each school can tailor them to its own situation and add others as appropriate.

When developing KPIs, it is important to ensure they are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, Timebound. These will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the governing board. But not all KPIs are quantitative: some of a school's most important outcomes do not lend themselves to simple quantitative measurement. Outcomes will be monitored through a combination of narrative and quantitative measures appropriate to the phase and type of school.

For some of the measures, there will be limited external data to compare with or use as benchmarks; in these cases, schools should be able to learn from comparing across different groups of students and tracking their own performance over time.

## Monitoring performance

Governors need data and information to help them judge how well the school is performing against the criteria that the governing board and senior leaders have agreed. This relates to the governing board's core functions of holding the headteacher to account and ensuring financial probity. It is also something Ofsted inspectors look at; they will consider whether governors "understand and take sufficient account of pupil data" and use this to "provide challenge and hold the headteacher and other senior leaders to account" (see the Ofsted School Inspection Handbook, July 2014).

Many KPIs can be linked to one or more school policies, so these can be a useful reference point. Governing boards should also ensure they monitor the policies themselves – it is a good idea to establish a policy review cycle so that policies are regularly reviewed and kept up to date.

The governing board will use a wide range of evidence to monitor performance, and it is useful to reflect on

this by considering the following questions:

- Do we have ready access to all the data and information we need to monitor the KPIs?
- Are we able to access that information independently, or do we depend on the senior leaders to provide it for us?
- Do we have the skills on the governing board to interpret data, or do we rely on senior leaders to do this for us?
- Is the information at the right level of detail – detailed enough to tell us what we need to know, but not so detailed as to make it difficult to see the wood for the trees?
- Is information available on all the aspects of the school's performance that we agree are important – or only on those aspects that are easy to measure?
- Are we able to use benchmarking data to compare the school's performance with that of comparable schools (not only local ones)?

There are a number of tools available to help governors monitor performance. The Fischer Family Trust Governor Dashboard is a six-page report which clearly displays key data about the school, including results and pupil progress, subject performance, progress of pupil groups, school context, attendance and the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Find out more at [fft.org.uk/fft-aspire/governor-dashboard.aspx](http://fft.org.uk/fft-aspire/governor-dashboard.aspx).

An excellent tool to help governing boards monitor effectively is the Wellcome Trust's Questions for Governors (see [questionsforgovernors.co.uk](http://questionsforgovernors.co.uk)). This currently focuses on science and maths, but may expand, and it is easy to see how an analogous approach can be applied to other curriculum areas and wider school issues.

## Element C (continued)

Key performance indicators against which progress towards the school's vision can be charted, and examples of the evidence that can be used to monitor and review the strategy

Below are examples of performance indicators for the governing board to monitor. These can be tailored to each individual school to complement the school strategy and school development plan. It is expected that schools will prioritise a small number of KPIs as part of the school strategy. There is information about why each performance indicator is important, and

examples of the evidence governors could use to monitor and report on each indicator. Note that some indicators apply to all phases, while others are specific to primary or secondary.

Proportion of pupils making expected progress	
<p>Pupils should be in an educational environment that enables them to make at least expected progress. Pupil progress forms part of the floor standards for both primary and secondary schools, which the government uses to hold schools to account. This includes the progress of certain groups, for example those eligible for pupil premium. Schools falling below the floor standards are subject to government intervention, including being taken over by an academy sponsor. Pupil achievement is one of the four areas for which Ofsted makes a graded judgement.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-school tracking data from teachers</li> <li>• (Primary) KS2 performance in the core subjects</li> <li>• (Secondary) Distribution of GCSE points score across individual subjects and best eight subjects</li> <li>• (Secondary) Distribution of A-level points across individual subjects</li> <li>• (Special schools) Progress against appropriate measures</li> <li>• RAISEonline and Fischer Family Trust data</li> </ul>
Pupil attainment	
<p>The proportion of pupils reaching a certain level of attainment forms part of the floor standards for both primary and secondary schools. This includes the attainment of certain groups, for example those eligible for pupil premium. Schools are held accountable for their pupils' attainment by both the government and Ofsted. In secondary schools, the attainment of pupils will also determine the qualifications they gain and consequently their future career options.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-school tracking data from teachers</li> <li>• (Primary) KS2 performance in core subjects</li> <li>• (Secondary) Distribution of GCSE points score across best eight subjects</li> <li>• (Secondary) A-level point scores</li> <li>• (Special schools) Progress against appropriate measures</li> <li>• RAISEonline and Fischer Family Trust data</li> </ul>
Quality of teaching	
<p>Research evidence suggests that quality of teaching is a critical factor affecting pupils' achievement. It is therefore strongly linked to pupil attainment and progress. It is one of the four areas for which Ofsted makes a graded judgement during school inspections.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher reports, including anonymised data from lesson observations and performance management systems</li> <li>• External validation from a school improvement adviser, including peer review from other schools</li> <li>• Ofsted report</li> <li>• Surveys of teachers</li> <li>• Pupil voice</li> <li>• Uptake and impact of general and specialist continuing professional development (CPD)</li> <li>• Proportion of positions filled by staff with relevant teaching and specialist qualifications</li> </ul>



Staff morale	
<p>There is a direct correlation between staff morale and staff performance; in short, happy workers perform better. Where staff morale is high, the quality of teaching is more likely to be high. Where the governing board is the employer, it has a duty of care to the school staff, and therefore needs to be aware of their wellbeing.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff surveys</li> <li>• Staff absence data</li> <li>• Staff turnover</li> <li>• Feedback from teacher exit interviews</li> </ul>
Pupil wellbeing and resilience	
<p>Governors and trustees will have an interest in pupil wellbeing because they care about the children in their school and parents will prioritise the happiness and wellbeing of their children at school. In maintained schools the governing board has a legal duty to “promote the well-being of pupils at the school”. Research evidence shows that children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social, and school wellbeing, on average, have higher levels of academic achievement and are more engaged in school, both during school and in later years.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupil and parent surveys</li> <li>• Pupil and parent focus groups</li> <li>• Anonymised reports from pastoral staff</li> <li>• Pupil absence data and behaviour data</li> </ul>
Behaviour of pupils	
<p>Pupil behaviour has a significant impact on the learning environment. Challenging behaviour disrupts teaching and learning, and consequently pupils’ achievement. As well as being one of the four areas for which Ofsted makes a graded judgement, behaviour has a wider influence on both pupil and staff wellbeing.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher reports, including information on incidents of bullying</li> <li>• Staff, parent and pupil surveys</li> <li>• School visits (looking at implementation of behaviour policy)</li> <li>• Number of behaviour management incidents (e.g. exclusions, detentions etc.)</li> <li>• Amount of authorised/unauthorised absence</li> <li>• Recognition and tracking of positive behaviour through school reward schemes</li> </ul>
Use of resources	
<p>One of the governing board’s core functions is overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent. Effective use of resources will allow the school to give pupils the best education possible on a long-term basis.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial benchmarking data</li> <li>• Reports from the school business manager/headteacher</li> <li>• Reports from auditors (internal or external)</li> <li>• How money is prioritised and impacts of spending measured</li> <li>• Available facilities (e.g. indoor and outdoor space, laboratories, technology equipment, arts equipment)</li> <li>• How pupil premium funding is spent and impact monitored</li> </ul>
Effectiveness of communication with parents	
<p>A school needs to understand its parents and their views of the education being provided to their children because parents care deeply about their children’s future. They have an enormous influence on their children’s learning and choose schools for their children to attend. Ofsted uses responses to Parent View when making inspection judgements, and will consider how effectively the governing board engages with parents.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent surveys</li> <li>• Feedback at parent evenings</li> <li>• Number and nature of parental complaints</li> <li>• Number of authorised/unauthorised absences</li> </ul>

## Element C (continued)

Key performance indicators against which progress towards the school's vision can be charted, and examples of the evidence that can be used to monitor and review the strategy

Relationship with local community	
<p>All state-funded schools are required in law to promote community cohesion. Developing a good relationship with the local community can benefit a school in many ways. It can open up experiences which support the curriculum and enhance pupils' learning, such as enhancing careers education via links with local businesses. It can improve cohesion between the different ethnic and religious groups within a school. The school's standing in the local community will also affect applications for places.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions data</li> <li>• Level of participation in community activities at the school</li> <li>• Parent surveys</li> <li>• (Secondary) Number of pupils gaining work experience in local businesses</li> </ul>
Future aspirations of pupils	
<p>Pupils with high aspirations are more likely to go on to university, apprenticeships and other forms of further education or training, leading to rewarding and successful careers. They are also more likely to work hard to achieve their aspirations and therefore reach their full potential academically.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers information, advice and guidance delivered to pupils and feedback from this</li> <li>• Pupil surveys</li> <li>• (Secondary) Proportion applying for degree programmes at universities (including elite universities), vocational programmes at colleges and apprenticeships</li> <li>• (Secondary) Number of former pupils not in education, employment, or training (NEET)</li> </ul>
Preparation for next stage of education	
<p>Part of the role of schools is to give pupils the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the future, in both the short and long term. Ofsted inspectors consider whether "teaching across the school prepares pupils effectively for the next stage in their education" (Ofsted School Inspection Handbook, July 2014) and this also forms part of the judgement for Achievement of Pupils.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys of former pupils</li> <li>• Pupil exit interviews</li> <li>• (Primary) Discussions with the secondary schools pupils move on to</li> <li>• (Secondary) Destination data for pupils up to three years after leaving and numbers of students who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)</li> <li>• (Secondary) Options available for next stage of education (facilitating A-level subjects etc.)</li> <li>• DfE experimental progression data</li> </ul>
Range of opportunities for pupils to experience and enhance success	
<p>Offering pupils multiple opportunities to experience success enriches their educational experience beyond academic attainment alone. It can positively influence pupils' wellbeing, health and academic achievement. It makes the school more attractive to prospective pupils and parents, and can facilitate engagement with the local community.</p>	<p><b>Evidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of extra-curricular activities on offer</li> <li>• Participation in extra-curricular activities across groups</li> <li>• Quality of facilities for extra-curricular activities</li> <li>• Pupil and parent surveys</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Barber M, Mourshed M. How the World's Best Performing School Systems Came Out On Top. McKinsey and Company; 2007.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Morrison Gutman L, Vorhaus J. The Impact of Pupil Behaviour and Wellbeing on Educational Outcomes. Department for Education; 2012.

## History of the Framework for Governance

The pilot version of this Framework for Governance, then named the 'Recommended Code of Governance', was developed by the Wellcome Trust following two workshops in March and June 2012, attended by governors, headteachers, and representatives of the Department for Education, Ofsted, the National Governors' Association, the National College for School Leadership, SGOSS, Governors for Schools, and other stakeholders.

The idea of a Framework for Governance is based on the UK Corporate Governance Code and on practice in charitable foundations, where the Statement of Recommended Practice provides a framework for annual reporting that is sufficiently flexible to accommodate diverse organisations.

It was piloted in 21 primary, secondary and special schools from autumn 2012 and has been revised by the National Governors' Association in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust in light of the findings from the pilot.

## The Wellcome Trust

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## The National Governors' Association

The National Governors' Association (NGA) 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 boards. We do this by providing information, advice and training to governing boards. The National Governors' Association represents governors and trustees across England in both maintained schools and academies.

**[nga.org.uk](http://nga.org.uk)**

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