

House of Commons Education Committee: The role of School Governing Bodies

Response by the Wellcome Trust

December 2012

Key Points

- The Wellcome Trust maintains a strong interest in governance which arises from our belief that excellence in science education – as indeed in any aspect of schooling – is not possible without strong governance.
- Governing Bodies play an essential role in setting the strategic direction for the school and holding its leadership to account, but too often the role is seen more as a support body that simply agrees the head teacher's decisions. The governing body and school leadership should decide on their joint vision for the school and the measures that are needed to monitor its delivery.
- Governing Bodies will become increasingly important to improving state education, as the system moves strongly away from Local Authorities towards academies which are answerable directly to the Secretary of State. Such autonomy increases the responsibilities placed on governors, but it also offers governors the possibility that they can exercise some real influence over their school's future rather than rubberstamping decisions that are made elsewhere.
- Governing bodies sometimes find it difficult to understand how their strategic role should work in practice, and we believe a flexible recommended code of governance (see appendix) would help.
- For STEM education, we would urge Governing Bodies to pay particular attention within their schools to:
 - the need for high quality practical work;
 - provision of timely and appropriate careers advice to students;
 - the professional development of staff.
- Governors need to have clear and readily understood high-level data about the performance of the school, accessed independently of the school management. This should include both quantitative data such as examination performance and less readily quantified but important information such as pupils' self-confidence.
- Both the supply of, and the demand for, high quality training for governors need to be improved if School Governing Bodies are to be effective.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Wellcome Trust is committed to supporting science education. We work to ensure all young people develop the science skills and knowledge necessary to live and work in an ever more technological age. We believe it is important to equip young people with the

understanding necessary to make informed decisions about the impacts of scientific and technological developments on their lives, as well as engaging and inspiring some of them to continue studying science. This includes developing the next generation of scientists, and helping others move into careers that draw upon science skills.

2. The Trust has an extensive education programme, mainly directed towards science education. However, we recognise that excellence in science education – as indeed in any aspect of schooling – is not possible without strong governance. This point was made in the February 2010 report of the Science and Learning Expert Group¹ chaired by the Trust's Director Sir Mark Walport.
3. As a result of these concerns, and following consultation among stakeholders, the Trust initiated at the beginning of 2012 a programme of activity around improving school governance. The programme is focussed particularly on a code of governance, the provision of information and the training of governors and is in collaboration with the National Governors' Association, Teach First, the National College for School Leadership, Ofsted and DfE. This response draws on our experience in this programme and our beliefs about what constitutes good school governance.

THE PURPOSE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNING BODIES

4. **Governing bodies play an essential role in setting the strategic direction for the school and holding its leadership to account.** Schools are beset by so many regulations and reporting requirements that it can be difficult to see the wood for the trees. The Governing Body (GB) should work with the school leadership to create a strategic plan for the school, and should then monitor its implementation through the School Development Plan. The GB should have a clear long-term strategic vision for the school and should hold the leadership to account for its delivery. This is what the non-executive directors of a corporation or the trustees of a charity do, and school governors should work in the same general way.
5. The best GBs already work like this, with a monitored, strategic and long term approach to school development, but many do not. From our work with school governors, we have learned that in some GBs the role is seen more as a support body that rubber-stamps the head teacher's decisions instead of one that challenges and holds the school leadership to account. Support is an essential part of the role of GBs, but so too is challenge and it can be hard for a GB that has focused on the former to increase the level of challenge it employs. A key factor is the relationship between the chair of governors and the head teacher, which needs to be close and trusting enough for effective working, but not such that criticism is difficult.
6. We welcome work that DfE ministers have recently initiated to improve the strategic effectiveness of GBs, especially the move to encourage GBs to become more skills-based rather than representative. To carry out their role effectively, GBs need to be able to monitor with confidence key issues such as finance, property and human resources, and the presence among the governors of relevant expertise in such fields is essential.

¹ *Science and Mathematics Education for the 21st Century*, Report of the Science and Learning Expert Group, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, February 2010.

7. We believe that GBs will become increasingly important to improving state education, as the system moves strongly away from Local Authorities towards academies which are answerable directly to the Secretary of State. Such autonomy increases the responsibilities placed on governors, but it also offers governors the possibility that they can exercise some real influence over their school's future rather than rubberstamping decisions that are made elsewhere. This should be a selling point in the drive to recruit more high quality governors to schools that need them.
8. Despite the need for proper distance between the GB and the executive, we believe it is important that governors know and understand the particular circumstances of their own school. With the growth of academy chains, it is important that governance arrangements in such chains do not create remoteness between the GB and the individual schools.

STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE GOVERNING BODY

9. Our work with governors suggests that many find it difficult to understand how their strategic role should be carried out in practice. It can be particularly difficult for governors to understand where the line lies between their strategic responsibilities and the management responsibilities of the head teacher and senior management. Governors – particularly parent governors – may not appreciate that stepping over this line is improper and can make the head teacher's job harder.
10. With such concerns in mind, the Trust has produced, and is now in the process of piloting in 21 schools, a 'Recommended Code of Governance' included as an appendix to this response. The starting point for this Code was the Statement of Recommended Practice² used by charities, and the UK Corporate Governance Code³, and it has been developed through a series of workshops with teachers and governors and in collaboration with the National Governors Association, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Governance, the National College for School Leadership, Ofsted and DfE. The Recommended Code is intended as a flexible tool to guide GBs and school leadership through the process of developing and monitoring the strategic plan for their school.
11. **We believe it is essential that the governing body and school leadership decide on their joint vision for the school and the measures that are needed to monitor its delivery.** The GB is an important part of the accountability framework for schools' performance, but it is not the only part, and other elements may bear down more heavily on the school leadership. In particular, league tables, external testing and inspection by Ofsted strongly influence the day-to-day priorities of school leadership. But examination results are not the only thing that learners and their parents want to get from school. Parents are also concerned that their children are confident, employable, inspired by their teachers and by the extra-curricular activities available to them. There is a whole range of outcomes that define a 'good' school, and only some of these are to do with test results.

² Statement of Recommended Practice, the Charity Commission
http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity_requirements_guidance/accounting_and_reporting/preparing_charity_accounts

³ The UK Corporate Governance Code (Financial Reporting Council, June 2010). It provides a recommended governance Code for FTSE 350 companies. www.frc.org.uk/Our-Work/Codes-Standards/Corporate-governance.aspx

12. As part of the strategic planning exercise, GBs need to agree the key outcomes for the school, and how they will be measured and monitored. GBs need to accept that outcomes such as inspired teaching and pupils' self-confidence are not as easily measured as, say, GCSE results, and that the most important outcomes are not always the most easily measured.
13. We would hope that improving the functioning of GBs will improve science and mathematics education in various ways including those outlined below.

Looking beyond league table performance measures: some specific aspects relating to science and mathematics

14. One of the most important elements of good teaching is experimental investigation, but the current system of examining at GCSE and A level does little to encourage this kind of work because it drives teachers to focus on preparing for written exams. A GB with science achievement high among its priorities will want to satisfy itself that high quality practical work takes place in science. Similarly the focus on examination results could lead schools to undervalue informal science experiences such as visits to museums or industry^{4,5} which can improve student engagement and enrich and contextualise learning.

Careers Advice

15. Schools do not now have a dedicated budget for the provision of careers advice and guidance and may struggle to prioritise the delivery of high quality services. A GB should hold school leaders to account for the provision of high quality careers advice for students, including conveying the diversity of career opportunities and progression routes for students studying science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM). Preliminary data from a survey of 14-18 year olds that the Wellcome Trust commissioned from Ipsos MORI found that most said they know little or nothing about careers in science and that the majority felt that they had not received useful careers advice from their careers advisors⁶. A report from the National Audit Office⁷ listed careers information and guidance as one of five critical success factors in improving take-up and achievement in science.

Securing the professional development of teachers

16. Subject-specific professional development is important in both primary and secondary schools, because inspired teaching depends on both deep subject knowledge and strong teaching skills. Many school leaders are reluctant to prioritise professional development for their teachers because of the expense and disruption it can cause in school, but this is sacrificing long-term gain to short-term expediency. GBs need to hold school leaders to account for the professional development of their staff, who are the school's key asset. In the case of science teaching, professional development is particularly important because of the rapid pace of change of science, and the numbers of teachers who are

⁴ Analysing the UK Science Education Community: The contribution of informal providers. Stanford and Oregon State Universities, November 2012

⁵ Review of Informal Science Learning. GHK Consulting in association with Brand Driver and Red Kite Advice and Consulting, November 2012.

⁶ The Wellcome Trust Monitor, Wave 2, to be published early in 2013.

⁷ National Audit Office (November 2010). Educating the Next Generation of Scientists
<http://www.nao.org.uk/idoc.ashx?docId=95a6046d-8162-438c-b074-c9975db8a90e&version=-1>

required to teach science outside their specialist area, which is why the Wellcome Trust collaborated with the Government to found a network of Science Learning Centres to provide continuing professional development for science teachers and technicians.

INFORMATION FOR GOVERNORS

17. Although there are now abundant data available to schools on all aspects of their performance, governors may find such data hard to interpret. In addition, the supply of these data is normally controlled by the school management, with the risk that the information the governors most need may never reach them. For example, the RAISEOnline database used by Ofsted and DfE provides abundant quantitative data relating to examination performance, but its complexity puts it beyond the direct use of many governors. We believe there is a pressing need for an information source designed specifically for governors to meet their need for high-level summary information to give a quick overview of the school's performance against its strategic priorities. Governors need to be able to access this data independently of the head teacher.
18. The Wellcome Trust is a strong advocate of open data and we recognise that exposing government data for public use can be beneficial. We understand that Ofsted is proposing to produce short summary datasets for each school, designed to give governors, parents and the public access to high level information, and this is to be welcomed. In parallel with this, and in collaboration with the Fischer Family Trust and the National Governors' Association, the Wellcome Trust plans to produce and pilot school 'data dashboards' designed by governors, for governors, to augment the datasets that it appears Ofsted will provide.
19. Such work is moving in the right direction, but it will focus on readily quantifiable outcomes, particularly results in public examinations. Such data leaves unanswered many of the less readily quantifiable questions to which governors will seek answers, such as how the school is improving pupils' self-confidence and whether pupils are inspired by their teachers. Wellcome intends to carry out further work with governors in the New Year to explore the extent to which these more qualitative, but nonetheless important, outcomes can be monitored through information made directly available to governors.

GOVERNORS' TRAINING

20. Most governors are non-specialists in the field of education, which like many technical fields uses language which can be baffling to outsiders. Training can help governors, particularly newly-appointed ones, come to grips with the field, and there are other areas, such as the interpretation of school performance data, in which governors would benefit from training. Yet we hear from the governors we work with that the quality of training available to them is variable, and often poor. Governors are often busy people with full-time jobs, and they should not be expected to give up a day's paid work to train unless they get a rewarding experience.
21. The supply of high-quality governor training would improve if there were a stronger demand for it, and we believe that GBs should not only set aside a training budget for their members, but review each year how much training each member of the GB has received. The Wellcome Trust is at an early stage of discussions with the National

Science Learning Centre and others about developing training courses for governors with a particular focus on achievement in science and mathematics.

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.

A Recommended Code of Governance for Schools

October 2012
Pilot version 1

A Recommended Code of Governance for Schools

Why a Recommended Code of Governance?

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 Recommended Code of 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 that governors can use to hold the senior leaders to account.

The idea of a Recommended Code of Governance (referred to as the “Recommended Code” throughout) is based on the UK Corporate Governance Code (see Appendix) and on practice in charitable foundations, where the Statement of Recommended Practice provides a framework for annual reporting which is sufficiently flexible to accommodate diverse organisations.

This is a pilot version of the Recommended Code, for use from autumn 2012. It is a starting-point for schools to build on as needed.

We appreciate that many schools already have a Code of Practice – quite possibly based on the National Governors’ Association’s models – in which case this Recommended Code could be used as a starting-point for the further development of the existing Code of Practice, rather than as a template for starting from scratch.

The Appendix describes how this Recommended Code was developed. The pilot of the Recommended Code is being organised in partnership with the National Governors’ Association and National Leaders of Governance.

Overall structure of the Recommended Code

The Recommended Code has three elements:

Element A

A shared vision and long-term strategic plan for the school, from which annual school development plans can be derived, with the governing body monitoring these plans.

Element B

A framework for governance, setting out how the governing body is expected to function. Comprising: skills, effectiveness, strategy, engagement, the role of the chair and the accountability of the executive.

Element C

High-level **school performance indicators**, encompassing all outcomes for an effective school, on which governors report annually to parents.

Linked to the high-level **performance information** that governors need to monitor the performance indicators.

The Recommended Code is intended to be flexible enough to allow schools to exercise autonomy, yet robust enough to enable governors to hold the executive to account.

The Recommended Code set out here is a starting-point that each school will develop to suit its own situation and needs.

Element A

A shared vision and long-term strategic plan for the school, from which annual school development plans can be derived, with the governing body monitoring these plans.

Schools need to have a long-term strategy, based on a shared vision. It is the job of governing bodies, 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.



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* (see Appendix).

Even so, governors need to agree how the school will implement its strategic plan in practice, and they need to monitor how it is doing so. Governors may be particularly interested in monitoring the following:

- recruitment, retention and training of specialist and non-specialist staff, both teaching and non-teaching
- performance management of staff

- implementation of delegated financial responsibility, checks and balances
- behaviour policy and its implementation
- policy for deployment of resources – including buildings and equipment.

Element B

A framework for governance, setting out how the governing body is expected to function. Comprising: skills, effectiveness, strategy, engagement, the role of the chair and the accountability of the executive.

The governing body has three core functions for the school:

- setting the strategic direction
- holding the headteacher to account for improving 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 body (see paragraph 60 of Ofsted's *Framework for School Inspection*, September 2012, and further detail in the *Inspection Handbook*, pages 43–44).

To meet these expectations, the governing body needs to agree some broad principles about the way it works. In this element of our Recommended Code, these principles are captured here by the following set of questions (a slightly modified version of *Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself* – see Appendix):

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

1. Have we completed a skills audit of our governing body?
2. Do we appoint governors on the basis of their skills, and do we know how to find people with the right skills?

Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?

3. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?
4. Do we have a professional clerk and run meetings efficiently?
5. What is our training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?
6. Do we know about good practice from across the country?
7. Are the size, composition and committee structure of our governing body conducive to effective working?
8. Does every member of the governing body make a regular contribution?

Strategy: Does the school have a clear strategy?

9. Have we set an ambitious strategic plan, how do we monitor it and when did we last review it?
10. Does our strategic planning and reviewing cycle drive the governing body's activities and agenda setting?

Accountability of the executive:

Do we hold the school leaders to account?

11. Do we understand the school's performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?
12. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?
13. Are our financial management systems robust and how do we ensure best value for money?

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

14. How do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff?
15. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?
16. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

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

17. Do we carry out an annual review of the chair's performance?
18. Do we engage in good succession planning?
19. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?

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

20. How much has pupil progress improved over the last three years, and what has the governing body's contribution been to school improvement?

Element C

High-level **school performance indicators**, encompassing all outcomes for an effective school, on which governors report annually to parents. Linked to the high-level **performance information** that governors need to monitor the performance indicators.

The performance indicators will be agreed in detail between the governing body and the senior leaders, based on a shared vision of what the school is aiming to achieve (Element A). Some examples of high-level outcomes are in the table below. Note that some apply to all phases, while others are specific to primary or secondary. These are only suggestions, and each school can select from them and add others as appropriate.

Not all the performance measures are quantitative: some of the 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 tracking their own performance over time.

Outcomes that are more subjective may seem hard to measure. One example of a way to approach these is New Philanthropy Capital's eight 'aspects of well-being': www.well-beingmeasure.com/aspects-of-well-being

Element C (continued)

High-level **school performance indicators**, encompassing all outcomes for an effective school, on which governors report annually to parents. Linked to the high-level **performance information** that governors need to monitor the performance indicators.

School performance indicator	Examples of performance information for measurement
Do learners at this school achieve to their potential?	(Primary) KS2 numeracy and literacy points score distribution (Secondary) Distribution of GCSE points score across best eight subjects (Special schools) Progress against appropriate measures RAISEonline and Fischer Family Trust data
Are learners at this school inspired by their teachers?	To be decided as part of the pilot Possibilities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proportion of learners choosing to continue to study the subjects they learn at school • parents' ratings of how likely they would be to recommend the school • Ofsted data about teaching quality • objective surveys commissioned from an external provider.
Do learners at this school have high aspirations?	Proportion applying for degree programmes at colleges and universities (including elite universities) and for apprenticeships
Do learners enjoy coming to this school?	Attendance rates Parent and learner surveys
Are relationships among learners good at this school?	To be decided as part of the pilot
Are learners at this school self-confident?	To be decided as part of the pilot
Do learners at this school have multiple opportunities to experience success?	Range of opportunities available at the school (music, drama, sport, dance etc.) in addition to academic opportunities Proportion of learners taking part in such opportunities Quality of facilities for extracurricular activities
Are learners from this school employable?	Proportion in education, training or employment three years after leaving
Does the school have good community relations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the school outward-facing in the community? • Does it support the community, and does the community support it? 	To be decided as part of the pilot Could include ratio of applications to places
Are learners taught in a healthy and safe environment?	To be decided as part of the pilot Could include performance against 'Healthy Schools' criteria

Element C (continued)

High-level **school performance indicators**, encompassing all outcomes for an effective school, on which governors report annually to parents. Linked to the high-level **performance information** that governors need to monitor the performance indicators.

Annual reporting

There is no statutory requirement for schools to report annually to parents, but it is very good practice to do so. The performance indicators are a good basis for reporting to parents. During the pilot we intend to collect examples of different ways that schools report to parents.

Performance information

Governors need data and information to help them judge how well the school is performing against the criteria that the governing body and senior leaders have agreed. Questions that governors might ask include:

- Do we have ready access to all the data and information we need to monitor the performance indicators?
- Are we able to access that information independently, or do we depend on the senior leaders to provide or interpret it 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)?

As part of the pilot, we are planning to develop an associated system for providing information to governors. More details will become available as this work develops.

Appendix: How this pilot version of the Recommended Code was developed

This pilot version arises from two workshops held at the Wellcome Trust 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, School Governors' One-Stop Shop and other stakeholders.

The idea of a Recommended Code of 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.

This Recommended Code draws on the following sources.

The UK Corporate Governance Code (Financial Reporting Council, June 2010). It provides a recommended governance code for FTSE 350 companies. www.frc.org.uk/Our-Work/Codes-Standards/Corporate-governance.aspx

Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself (All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Governance and Leadership, May 2012). www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Useful-Documents/Twenty-Key-Questions.aspx

What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies (Association of School and College Leaders, National Governors' Association, National Association of Headteachers). www.nga.org.uk/About-Us/Be-a-Governor/Information-for-governors.aspx

Code of Practice for Academy School Governors (National Governors' Association, 2011). www.nga.org.uk/Resources/Useful-Documents/Code-of-Practice.aspx

Statements of Intended Impact (Teach First, 2012).

Good governance: Proposals from the 2012 Fellowship Commission (National College for School Leadership).

This draft was prepared by a small working party comprising: Paul Charman, Chair, Dyson Perrins School and RM; Helen Drake, Governor, Martin Primary School; Martin Post, Head, Watford Grammar School for Boys; Emlyn Samuel, Wellcome Trust; John Holman, Wellcome Trust. It has been revised following review by the National Governors' Association, the National College for School Leadership and several National Leaders of Governance.

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The future of science depends on the quality of science education today.

We are a global charitable foundation dedicated to achieving extraordinary improvements in human and animal health. We support the brightest minds in biomedical research and the medical humanities. Our breadth of support includes public engagement, education and the application of research to improve health. We are independent of both political and commercial interests.

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