

Asking the Right Questions

Autumn 2023

Megan Curtis and Julie Ioanna

school.governor@bradford.gov.uk

School Governor Service



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

This session

Structure

- Look at the governors role in holding the leadership to account
- Governors questioning - why, how, evidence collection, triangulation.
- Next steps
- Useful info. and links



Governing boards play a vital role in ensuring the best possible education that takes every child as far as their talents allow....



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

.....Crucially, that means **creating robust accountability** for executive leaders by using and being familiar with:

objective data on the performance of:

- **pupils**
- **teachers**
- **and finances**

to ask the right questions.

Governance handbook



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

What do Governors do?

Governing Boards Core Functions

All boards, whether in maintained or academy sector, have three core functions:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff: and
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

These are all corporate responsibilities



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Holding to account

Performance of pupils:

- Outcomes for all pupils and different groups of pupils according to your school priorities.
 - Their achievement
 - »results (attainment)
 - »progress
 - Attendance (against National)
 - Behaviour, wellbeing and safety (safeguarding)

Performance management of staff:

- Quality of teaching and learning, staff training and support and links to pay
- Staff welfare
- Safeguarding

Financial Performance



Background

The Governor's role is acquire knowledge of the school and its management, to enable the governing board:

- ❑ to give strategic direction to the school
- ❑ to monitor the effectiveness of the school in delivering the best possible outcomes for the children
- ❑ to strategically direct and monitor the effective use of the school's budget



Key questions every governing board should ask itself

Reviewing board effectiveness is good practice and self-review is one of the main methods that governing boards use to monitor and improve the quality and impact of their governance.

Boards are encouraged to:

- make these questions an integral part of review and reflection on current practice
- adapt the questions to cover all aspects of effective governance in your context
- use independent, expert support and facilitation where possible to make the process effective

[NGA: Questions to ask](#)

Twenty questions for maintained schools/ Twenty-one questions for MATs

Twenty Questions: 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. Is 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?



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 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?

Impact

20. Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?

How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing board's contribution been to this?



Strategic Planning

This might include:-

- Projected costs – such as staff becoming more costly, a headteacher planning to move or major renovations
- Possible changes to the intake of the school – such as ethnicity, levels on entry
- Possible changes to status, such as academy conversion

Governors need to carefully consider the information needed to make decisions and ensure that this is provided

School Development Plan

Governors should be involved in the planning and the monitoring of progress against the priorities in

- Different aspects can be allocated to committees or to different board meetings.
- Ask questions on the basis of circulated reports and presentations by staff as this allows more in depth scrutiny
- Governors ask questions around the identification and achievement of milestones
- Governors ask what possible changes to actions if milestones not being achieved in accordance with the timescales set. Ask what support Governors can give.



Governors need for general information



- be aware of the main targets of the school development plan and progress to date against KPIs
- know the **strengths and weaknesses** of the school and the principal challenges it faces
- **effectively** use committee minutes and reports from governor visits – how do they feed into the FGB?
- Governors need to receive **regular updates from staff in addition to those from the Headteacher** which are then shared via minutes and reports



The Concept of triangulation

Reports from
senior
executive
leaders

Reports from
trusted third
parties

What you see
with your own
eyes



Activity

- Are there regular opportunities in your meetings for in depth questioning about progress against the targets in the plan?
- Do you have opportunities to question staff other than the head teacher either during meetings or at visits to school?
- How do you prepare for these
- Do you use the questions from the governance handbook or other source?



What is fundamental to improving pupil outcomes ?

- Quality and impact of leadership and management at all levels
- The quality and leadership of teaching and learning
- The quality of the systems that support teaching and learning
- Holding staff to account



What you will be asking about?

Pupils progress and attainment

- early years,
- groups of pupils (SEND, EAL, priority groups..)
- e.g. lowest attaining 20% of children
- NTP & Coronavirus Catch-up Premium & Recovery Premium– Strategy - areas of focus and impact of programme and how measured.



Questions

Curriculum

- How does the curriculum relate to the vision for our school?
- What are the curriculum strengths and areas for development?
- How do we ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils?

Related reporting

- Every year group curriculum subject by term on website
- Linking to staffing structure and allocation of resources
- CPD planning, resourcing
- Reporting on how teaching makes connections between different subjects.



Questions

Behaviour

- What is the overall picture of behaviour in this school?
- How are pupils, parent and staff made aware of the school behaviour policy
- What impact does the policy have on classroom practice

Related reporting:

- What are - the levels of attendance; incidents of bullying (including cyberbullying and homophobic bullying
- How many managed moves this term/year (compared to...)
- What are you doing to address these issues



Questioning

Good Questions will allow the school to show how they are sustaining and continuing to improve the quality of education as well as their capacity for driving further improvement.



Evidence from questions needs to show that leaders and governors have **identified weaknesses** and have the capacity to tackle them quickly and effectively.

NEXT: We will look at collecting information, strategic questioning, monitoring questions, & financial.



Activity and Feedback

Lets' discuss the types of questions usually asked at your meetings and consider:

- are you seeking to understand data that has not been circulated in advance?
- are you asking operational type questions about detail that is the school's area of responsibility e.g. allowing specific governor questions that are not appropriate.
- are they asked by the same people at each meeting or do all governors contribute?
- are you asking follow up questions to ensure that items from minutes or governor visits etc. are addressed
- are you asking for validation, clarification, to analyse, to add greater depth to governors' knowledge



Focussed Governor visits

- Learning walks alongside members of staff based around a topic or theme –specific guidance should be given for these by the senior leadership
- Visits linked to a particular aspect of the school development plan e.g. marking and feedback
- Visits to look at the use of the school's facilities, including classrooms and how efficient the premises are for the purposes of the school



Activity

Consider the type of information that governors might look for during a school visit.

What might you want to monitor during a school visit?

Questions

Safeguarding/Health and Safety

- Do we keep children and staff safe & healthy?
- How often are safety inspections carried out and are the outcomes reported to the Governing body?
- How are child protection issues monitored do we have a Co-ordinator?
- Does the school meet the healthy School Food Standards?

Related reporting

- Link Governor reports
- Safeguarding reports
- Safeguarding annual assessment (Autumn)
- H&S reporting – Governors H&S monitoring checklist maintained on BSO [here](#)
- Sports and range of outdoor activities – how many pupils participate?



Achievement and progress data

Updates should be given on internal data with meeting dates linked to data collections and staff reviews.

N/B. be careful about how many times you are asking the school to do a data collection.

Governors need to compare data against other schools nationally and ensure questioning covers progress and outcomes for significant groups such as Pupil Premium and SEND



What does it all mean?

In all cases, you should consider what the data is telling you:

- what is going well?
- what learning can you apply from one area to another?
- what are the concerns?
- are any areas at risk of becoming a concern?
- what changes need to be made?
- what can be done about it?
- how will this affect productivity for the school?
- what is the impact on educational and financial outcomes?



Educational Performance questions

- Which year groups or subjects get the best and worst results and why?
- How does this relate to the quality of teaching across the school?
- What is the strategy for improving the areas of weakest performance?



Monitoring Questions

- Checking that systems, for example procurement, are used effectively
- Reports on performance, staffing and finance
- Progress against the targets set within the school development/action plan
- The effectiveness of interventions and of policies and systems set up to improve outcomes for children. For example the effectiveness of actions taken using the Catch up funding.



Finance

- An increasingly important area for governors in the light of funding pressures.
- Governors need to ensure that they are aware of the concerns because of the costs of staffing, contracts which have been agreed and projected pupil numbers.
- If there is likely to be a future shortfall any plans to address this need to be closely questioned to ensure that the outcomes for children are minimised.

Governor £ Questions

- Are resources allocated in line with the organisation's strategic priorities?
- Does the organisation plan its budgets on a bottom up basis driven by curriculum planning (i.e. is the school spending its money in accordance with its priorities) or is the budget set by simply making minor adjustments to last year's budget to ensure there is a surplus?



More finance questions

- How can better value for money be achieved from the budget?
- Do we have a clear budget forecast – have risks been identified and what have we in place to mitigate them?
- How does our spending compare to other schools e.g. on teaching assistants, energy..



Reflection and Next steps

Some suggestions:-

- Look at recent minutes – do they effectively show the quality of questioning that is taking place? Are all questions followed up?
- If improvements could be made consider training for individual governors to meet their needs – assertiveness, knowledge and understanding.
- Consider meeting 15 minutes before the start of a committee or governing board and agreeing the questions that need to be asked from the reports provided as a way of involving more governors, especially new governors.

Any other ideas?



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Reflection and action planning

- **What can you do to refresh your knowledge about the school?**

Think for:

- you as an individual
- whole board
- chair/vice roles-
- committee chairs-
- named governors
- new governors/induction.



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Preparation for meetings:

- What is good practice for governors when preparing for meetings and attending meetings?



Next steps:

- Personal – write down 3-5 actions for yourself as a result of this training
- For the board – 2 actions the board could consider



City of
BRADFORD
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COUNCIL