

Introduction

The governing body is a major influence on the educational character, values and main aims of a school. Its responsibilities are many and sometimes complex. There are several ways to measure the effectiveness of the governing body but ultimately it will be held to account for the well-being of its young people and the value the school adds to help them attain results and achieve their full potential.

The Three Main Roles of the Governing Body

1. The Strategic Role

Governors will work with the Headteacher to:

- (i) set the aims and objectives for the school;
- (ii) agree policies, targets and priorities for achieving these objectives;
- (iii) monitor and evaluate the aims and objectives and whether the policies, targets and priorities are being met, always with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement.

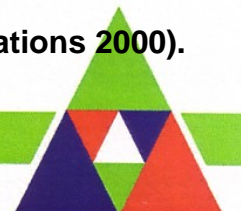
Please note that the strategic role is discussed more fully in Part 2.

2. The Critical (or 'questioning') Friend

Governors will provide support and constructive advice to the Headteacher and act as a forum for discussing ideas and initiatives. Governors also seek clarification, ask challenging questions and request information in order to arrive at the best decisions for all concerned.

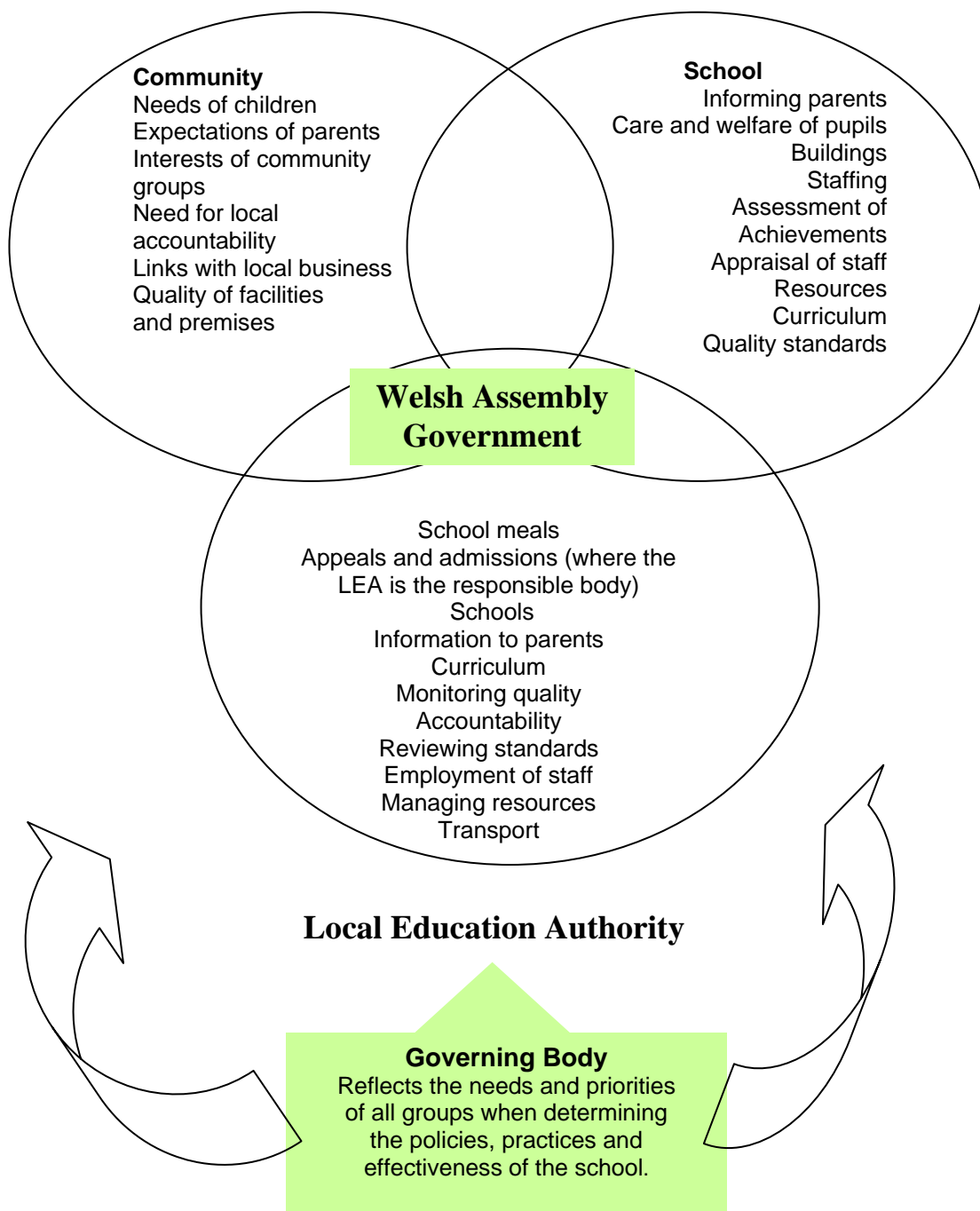
3. The Accountable Role

"The headteacher and professional staff are accountable to the governing body for the school's performance. The governing body must be prepared to explain its decisions and actions to anyone who has a legitimate interest. This may include staff, pupils, parents and the press, as well as the LEA, the school's foundation or Welsh Assembly Government." **(Guidance on the School Government (Terms of Reference) (Wales) Regulations 2000 – NAFW circular No: 34/2000 and The School Government (Terms of Reference) (Wales) Regulations 2000).**



Sharing Responsibilities – How Governors are Responsible and Accountable

The chart below indicates how governors are responsible and accountable.



School governors are expected to:

- attend a full governing body meeting at least once per term;
- participate in sub-committees, as required, at least once per term;
- carry out their strategic role (see Part 2 of this series);
- visit the school to get a good understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and any issues there may be. Many schools have governors who are linked to teachers or curriculum areas to establish stronger relationships with staff;
- act as contact with parents, community, employers and other partners, receiving their feedback and reviewing their opinions;
- keep up-to-date with what is happening in education, particularly the law as it affects schools and governors;
- make best use of their own and other governors' talents to strengthen the team;
- set objectives for the Headteacher and implement a pay policy for all staff;
- participate in the inspection of the school and prepare the action plan in response to the inspection report;
- respect people's rights to privacy and keep sensitive information confidential.

For further information, please refer to the Decision Planner on pages 66 to 69 in '**A Handbook for Governors of Schools in Wales.**' The planner sets out the various functions and responsibilities of schools, allocating the decisions to those:

- (i) made by the governing body;
- (ii) made by the governing body with advice from the headteacher;
- (iii) delegated to the headteacher;
- (iv) made by the headteacher.



Principles of Conduct

In order for governors to discharge their responsibilities and duties effectively and efficiently, governing bodies should adopt a set of guiding principles. The following list is suggested as something governing bodies may wish to consider.

Governors should:

- ensure that their actions reflect the considered, best interests of the school and its pupils;
- attend governing body meetings regularly;
- on appointment avail themselves of the opportunity to attend induction training provided by the local education authority or the school;
- on appointment, familiarise themselves with work of the school and keep this knowledge up to date;
- maintain their knowledge of current education policy, regulations and guidance and extend their skills by participating in training programmes including whole governing body training and other events;
- demonstrate a commitment to equality of opportunity and reflect this in developing and applying the policies the school is required to have in respect of disability discrimination, race relations, sex discrimination and age discrimination;
- act as a critical friend towards those with professional responsibilities in the school, bearing in mind the governing body's own responsibility to promote high standards of educational achievement;
- be conscious of, and act within, the limits of the responsibilities of the governing body and when necessary, seek and give due consideration to professional information, advice and guidance;
- respect the responsibility of the Headteacher for the day-to-day decisions for the management of the school;
- observe collective responsibility by supporting, once determined by democratic means, the decisions of the governing body;
- respect the governing body's right to deem certain matters to be confidential, restricting discussion of such matters, whether inside or outside governing body meetings, solely to governor colleagues and in appropriate cases solely to discussion within governing body committees;



- develop with colleagues on the governing body, a clear vision for the school;
- focus their contribution to governing body decisions upon what is in the best interests of pupils, and be conscious that the welfare of pupils should always come first in terms of child protection, health and safety and helping each child to develop their full potential;
- encourage and participate in systems which provide for open and effective communication, helping to establish a clear vision of the school's development;
- be aware that all governors are equal and respect others' views and behave accordingly in dealings with governor colleagues;*
- be aware of their accountability to parents and others in the local community and seek to devise effective dialogue with all those interested in the conduct and standards of the school;
- observe all protocols and procedures agreed by the governing body;
- be open, honest, objective, fair and impartial and prepared to confront the personal prejudices that may hinder informed decision-making including conflicts of interest.

**Reference: “Principles of Conduct for Governors of Schools in Wales” –
Governors Wales: 2006**

- * Please note, in schools with a religious character, of the particular responsibilities of Foundation Governors, and assist them with the discharge of those responsibilities;

Working as a Team

It is often difficult for a governing body to emulate the same kind of teamwork that a natural work team or sports team can achieve.

Nevertheless, rising to the challenge to become a high-performing team is the best way for a governing body to help its school to also become high performing or ‘outstanding’.

One of the most important tasks of every governing body is to ensure that it builds itself into an effective team, where governors trust each other, share goodwill and support and encourage one another. Remember that governors have no power to act as individuals unless tasks have been specifically delegated to them by the governing body. The functions of governing bodies are exercised corporately.



The qualities of a high-performing leadership team

- There is a good range of skills, experience and knowledge amongst team members that they are willing to contribute and share;
- Individual and team knowledge and skills are continually updated through training and information sharing. Specialist knowledge is developed to ensure it is not lost when people leave;
- Workload is shared and different people take a leadership role when their particular skill and expertise warrants it; the elected leader encourages and supports this;
- Members challenge each other in a constructive way – conflict is handled positively;
- There is open discussion and everyone's views and opinions are respected and valued;
- There is group responsibility for decisions and actions that are taken. No-one acts on behalf of the team without the team's permission – there is *'one face'* to the community;
- The team systematically reviews its own effectiveness and efficiency – *'Did we do the right things?' 'Did we do the right things well?'* and *'What do we need to change to do better?'*

Remember that to ensure 'good teamwork' a good team leader is needed. One of the most important tasks of the Chair is to provide governor colleagues with the lead and support that will assist the governing body to perform as an effective team.

The relationship between the governors and the Headteacher is extremely important. Working together in partnership, respecting and trusting each other's roles, are essential ingredients for the effectiveness of the governing body.

The School Governors Guide to the Law provides further information on governing bodies, their functions, duties and relationships with the Headteacher. "In a well-managed school, the headteacher and governing body will work in close and balanced partnership". Information is also provided in the Guide to the Law about the legal status of a governing body.



Effective meetings

A critical element of teams working well is good management of meetings. The Headteacher, Chair of Governors (or Chair of committee) and Clerk to the governing body are key 'players' in making meetings productive and making good use of time.

The Chair, like any other governor, has no power to act without the endorsement of the governing body, except in certain cases where urgency is required. The Chair ensures that meetings are conducted efficiently and follow correct procedures.

A meeting is effective when it achieves its objectives in a minimum amount of time to the satisfaction of the participants.

The Chair considers and approves the agenda for each meeting (refer to '**A Handbook for School Governors in Wales**', Section 2, part 4, for further guidance on the governing body agenda). The Chair encourages participation and contribution, sets the tone and acts as a role model, making sure that decisions made are carried through. The Chair controls the start and finish times, ensuring that agendas are adhered to. An effective meeting, be it a full governing body or a committee meeting will allow for open discussion, encourages everyone to contribute, leads to clear outcomes and decisions and is conducted in a business like manner.

The Clerk plans and organises the meeting on behalf of the Chair, ensuring that all relevant documents to be used in the meeting are received at least five days beforehand. (S)he keeps a record of the meeting and 'next steps' – who will do what, by when – to follow up at the next meeting. The Clerk will also keep records of attendance for the governing body to review at the end of the year.

The Headteacher is the provider of much of the information that will be reviewed at meetings and (s)he will ensure that all the school and comparative performance data is accurate and up-to-date for governors to make sound judgements and decisions.

Good meetings are not just about content and outcomes. It is also about attitudes and behaviours.



An example of ‘ground rules’ for effective meetings:

- Be punctual;
- Participate openly;
- Focus on the problem, not the person;
- Listen actively to what others have to say;
- Respect others’ opinions and values;
- Be constructive and positive;
- Summarise the issues;
- No hidden agendas;
- No telephones/no mobiles;
- Stick to the time contract (may mean postponing agenda items to another meeting);
- Do what you promise – follow through on any actions delegated to you and report back;
- Learn from past performance, but put the main focus on the future;
- One meeting at a time – pay respect to the current speaker;
- Take ‘one-to-one’ issues outside the meeting and report back any decisions taken (e.g. those issues that can be resolved by individuals or sub-committee decisions);
- Notify the Clerk two weeks in advance of the meeting of any issues you want to raise.

It is often useful to spend five minutes at the end of a meeting to note the participants’ ‘benefits’ and ‘concerns.’ Was the meeting a good use of time? What was good about it? What needs to be improved?

To enable governing bodies to make good, effective decisions, governors should be provided with detailed and high quality performance data and information, by the headteacher or the LEA. This information should include comparative data and trends over time.

Lastly, an effective meeting is reliant on thorough and efficient preparation.



Training and Development

LEAs and most schools provide new school governors with an induction to the role. This induction usually involves a presentation from the Chair and/or Headteacher with an information pack for the new governor to take away. Some schools have also provided new members with governor mentors to guide them through their first year; this is a good way of ensuring that new governors are fully supported through their early experiences and builds upon the LEA training.

It is good practice for governing bodies to issue new governors with an information pack (please refer to '**A Handbook for School Governors in Wales**', pages 34 and 35, for suggestions on what should be included in the pack).

Whilst LEAs are legally obliged to provide free training for school governors it is for the individual governor and the governing body to decide what development they need and what training they will attend. It is good practice for governing bodies to review training requirements as part of their self-evaluation and draw up a training plan for governors. It is also good practice for governors who have attended training sessions to share their new knowledge with the rest of the governing body. 'Training' may be added as an agenda item to meetings.

Governing bodies hold many responsibilities and the need, therefore, for training has never been greater. Whether or not you are a new or experienced governor, training is highly recommended to enable you to carry out your role effectively.

Training may also be offered to governors in Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled schools by the relevant Diocese of the Church of Wales or the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the areas of developing the religious character of the school, and in the additional duties and responsibilities for such governors for staffing, admissions and buildings.

In Part 2 of this series the strategic role of governing body strategic will be explored.

This guide offers a summary of some of the main points on Effective Governing Bodies. It should be used in conjunction with detailed advice and support produced by your LEA and diocesan authority where appropriate.



Bibliography and useful website links

- EFQM Excellence Model: www.efqm.org
- Estyn: 'Annual Reports' - www.estyn.gov.uk/annual_report.asp
- Investors In People UK: www.investorsinpeople.co.uk
- Wales Quality Centre (Wales Quality Award) - www.walesqualitycentre.org.uk
- Welsh Assembly Government - www.SkillsPeopleSuccess.com

Governors Wales: www.governorswales.org.uk

- A Handbook for School Governors in Wales (2007)
- The Critical Friend' Fact File (2008)

Publications from the Welsh Assembly Government

- 'School Effectiveness Framework' - <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications>
- 'The School Governors' Guide to the Law' – www.wales.gov.uk
- Guidance on School Government (Terms of Reference) (Wales) Regulations 2000' - NAFW Circular No. 34/2000 www.wales.gov.uk
- The Code of Practice on LEA-School Relations: Welsh Office (June 1999) - www.wales.gov.uk

Regulations

- The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005 – www.opsi.gov.uk
- The School Government (Terms of Reference) (Wales) Regulations 2000 - www.opsi.gov.uk

See also reference materials on www.governorswales.org

- Critical Success Factors and Key Processes
- Cross-referencing Critical Success Factors with Key Processes
- Framework of improvement Models
- Suggestions for performance measurement

Other sources

- Drucker P: Managing challenges for the 21st Century – 1999 Harper Business
- Taylor & Ryan (2005) Excellence in Education: the making of great schools - David Fulton Publishers
- Tuckman B (1965) – Developmental sequence in small groups

