



GOVERNORS' GUIDE

ON THE

EFFECTIVE GOVERNING BODY

PART 3

The Governing Body's Role in School Improvement

2009

The Effective Governing Body

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Introduction

Improving school performance is the main priority of the governing body. Working alongside the headteacher and Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the governing body plays a crucial part in providing the appropriate learning opportunities and environment that encourages young people to succeed. There are a number of Models or Frameworks that are designed to help schools to continuously improve and four of the most common are described here.

The School Effectiveness Framework (SEF)

The SEF is founded on the five core themes of Systems Thinking; Bilingualism; High Performance Culture; Equality; Supportive and Interdependent. It encourages schools to actively participate in '*learning communities*', supported by the Assembly Government and Local Authorities, to focus on improved learning and learner well-being.

This model recognises that sustainable improvement is not achieved by a piecemeal approach. The six elements: *leadership, working with others, networks of professional practice, intervention and support, improvement and accountability, and curriculum and teaching* are interconnected. When planning to take action in one area of the SEF the governing body needs to consider the impact it will have on the other elements.

Integrating the SEF elements into the School Development/Improvement Plan and self-evaluation may be a good way to align the school and governing body's work with the expectations of National and Local Government with respect to school effectiveness.

The DCELLS publication, '**School Effectiveness Framework**', describes the role of classroom practitioners, the school (including leadership and governance), Local Authority and Welsh Assembly Government for each element.

(Copies of the SEF document can be obtained from the Welsh Assembly Government website: www.wales.gov.uk)

The Estyn Inspection Framework

Estyn Inspection (and in schools with a religious character, the section 50 inspection) uses a number of key questions to enable the School Leadership Team and governors to validate their own self-evaluation of school performance. It provides a benchmark for schools to gauge their progress along an agreed scale, the top of which indicates that the organisation is demonstrating excellence in a particular facet of their education provision.

The key questions and subsidiary questions asked by the framework are graded to give schools a measurable comparison with other schools.

The main objectives of inspection are to:

- identify strengths and areas for improving standards and quality;
- provide an independent evaluation of school effectiveness;
- identify and promote good practice and strive for excellence;
- keep the Assembly Government and public informed.

A school's self-evaluation is one of the key inputs to the inspection, so it is crucial that governors have realistically and systematically assessed their school against the key questions and can demonstrate a good understanding of what is happening in their school. Inspectors will question governors about all the areas discussed in guidance notes 2 and 3 of this series. For further information on the inspection framework, please refer to: www.estyn.gov.uk.

The governing body, working with the head and Senior Leadership Team (SLT), must ensure that parents are informed and involved in the inspection and that the staff, pupils and the school's nominee are supported in preparing for the inspection. Members of the governing body and the SLT will meet the Registered Inspector to discuss all aspects of governance, with particular reference to the governing body's influence over standards achieved by the school and its students.

On publication of the Inspection Report, the governing body must produce an Action Plan within 45 days. The Action Plan will address all the issues and points raised by the Inspection Report. The governing body must ensure that it monitors and evaluates the implementation of the Action Plan and reports progress in its Annual Report to parents.

*Reference: **A Handbook for Governors of Schools in Wales**, Section 4.8*

If self-evaluation has been carried out systematically and realistically, then many of the issues raised by inspection will already be incorporated in the School Development (Improvement) Plan.

Other Quality Frameworks

In addition to the Estyn Inspection Framework (and section 50 inspection), most schools and governing bodies are familiar with the concept of quality improvement frameworks, having worked with a variety of other improvement models that complement the **School Effectiveness Framework**. The most popular and frequently adopted are the Investors In People Standard and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model.

The Investors In People Standard

By 2008, Investors In People recognition had been achieved by around 600 schools in Wales since the Standard's introduction in the early 1990s. In recent years around 70 Welsh schools have had their Leadership and Management more vigorously assessed and achieved additional recognition. The Standard has been reviewed and updated a number of times since its introduction and there are now many more similarities with parts of the European Excellence Model.

Further information on 'Using IIP to Support School Improvement in Wales' and some associated links can be obtained from the Welsh Assembly Government's website:

www.SkillsPeopleSuccess.com or www.governorswales.org.uk

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model

The Excellence Model was launched in the early 1990s, around the same time as IIP. The Model is founded on eight fundamental concepts: Results Orientation; Customer Focus; Leadership and Constancy of Purpose; Management by Process and Facts; People Development and Involvement; Continuous Learning, Improvement and Innovation; Partnership Development; Corporate Social Responsibility.

Since its conception as the European Business Excellence or Total Quality model, the framework has been reviewed and updated several times to keep pace with changes in both the private and public sector. Its growing popularity as a self-assessment tool in the public sector, schools and colleges has been one of the factors that has led to the framework maturing into the European Excellence Model of today.

Self-assessment and external assessment (for National and International recognition) are based on nine criteria:

Enablers:

1. Leadership
2. Policy and Strategy
3. People
4. Partnerships and Resources
5. Processes

Results:

6. Customer Results
7. People Results
8. Society Results
9. Key Performance Results

In each criterion there are several sub-criteria that assessors will use to gauge the effectiveness of the organisation's Plan-Do-Review mechanisms, e.g. are the school's strategies and

activities soundly based and integrated? How well and how systematic have the strategies been deployed? How has progress been measured and learning and improvement demonstrated? Have the results targeted been achieved or bettered? Do the trends of all key results show improvement over three years or more? If not, can shortfalls be explained? Do the results compare well with best practice?

The points system used with this model is from 0 to 1000, 700 to 750 points being regarded as 'World Class' (regardless of market sector or industry). European Excellence Award winners will score in this region whereas winners of National Awards will typically score between 550 and 650 points.

Small to Medium Enterprises (organisations with less than 250 employees) would normally be assessed using a condensed version (typically using 22 sub criterion rather than the full 32). The benefit of the points system is that it provides a benchmark against which organisations can measure progress.

For instance, if a governing body wanted to benchmark 'Leadership', it could locate partners who score well in that criterion to share knowledge and experience.

For more information: www.efgm.org

Comparisons with and use of the different Models

Self-evaluation is an extremely important part of the continuous improvement process and the Models that are described in this guidance note can help a school and its governing body to benchmark progress against a variety of criteria.

There are strong relationships between these models for improvement and they can be used to drive outstanding performance in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), the governing body and within the school.

The potential linkages between the various frameworks can be seen in a table on the Governors Wales' website. Not all linkages are shown, but the table is indicative of the overlap that exists between the various frameworks. It attempts to demonstrate that evidence that satisfies a particular criterion or sub-criterion in one Model, will almost certainly satisfy elements of another.

Frameworks such as those above play a significant part in promoting school and governing body effectiveness because they provide a benchmark against which progress towards excellence can be measured.

They are the tools that governing bodies and School Leadership Teams can use to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement to prioritise activities in the School Development/Improvement Plan.

Self-evaluation

The governing body and SLT should have a common vision or model of what 'good' looks like for their school. This model will have been developed from their own combined professional experience together with the information gathered to prepare the Strategic Plan or School Development/Improvement Plan, described in Part 2.

Whatever framework the governing body chooses to use to evaluate its effectiveness, it is important to be realistic and systematic. The starting point for improvement is critical self-evaluation. If self-evaluation is inaccurate, the starting point for improving performance will be wrong and much time and resource could be wasted trying to build for success on a weak foundation.

An example of a governors' questionnaire to check the governing body effectiveness is illustrated in '**A Handbook for School Governors in Wales**', Section 3.7. Alternatively, the LA may provide a document designed to do the same thing.

What makes a good governing body?

Governing bodies have a direct impact on all aspects of strategic leadership. The qualities of a high-performing team discussed in Part 1 will be clearly evident in an effective governing body. In addition, the concepts of excellence as applied to governing bodies are:

1. They have a clear understanding of stakeholder (staff, pupils, parents, employers, local community, LA, Diocese and the Welsh Assembly Government) needs and expectations and are able to respond appropriately. This knowledge is used to develop, implement and review policies, strategies, targets and objectives.
2. They are able to differentiate the needs and expectations of individual pupils and parents and when things go wrong they can respond quickly and effectively. They have a good understanding of the education sector and manage change to the school's advantage.

3. They provide leadership and a constancy of purpose that clearly sets out their expectations and vision for their school. They establish values, standards and a governance structure that attracts loyalty and commitment to achieving the school's aims.
4. They understand the interdependence of systems and processes and how the school works. They have defined the success factors and key processes that are vital to the success of the school. Meetings are focused on the facts and performance data. Decisions are based on reliable information. All major risks to performance are identified, including budget restrictions, and plans put in place to minimise or eliminate them.
5. They appreciate the importance of recruiting and retaining good teachers and support staff. Personal development is promoted and supported to meet future demands. They care for, reward and recognise people, building a culture of respect and trust.
6. They challenge the status quo and are not afraid to be the first to try something different. They use the learning from internal reviews and that of others to innovate and create improvement opportunities. Internal and external benchmarking is systematically used to identify more effective ways of doing things.
7. They recognise that in the fast changing education environment, success may depend on developing strong partnerships with other schools, employers, sectors of the community, FE Colleges, the LA and Diocese. Partnerships are focused on delivering more value to pupils and parents and developing the school's core competencies.
8. They adopt a highly ethical approach to the school's social responsibilities, ensuring that care for the environment and the local community is reflected in the values they promote and is integrated into the processes used by the school.

Critical Success Factors and Key Processes

For excellence in anything to be achieved all the prior conditions that must be fulfilled need to be acknowledged and catered for. These prior conditions are also known as 'Critical Success Factors' (CSFs). In focusing staff and other stakeholders on the school's aims and objectives it is important for the governing body and SLT to determine the CSFs as part of the strategic planning process. The acid test for a CSF is, 'If this Factor is not fulfilled, can our vision be realised?' An example of a CSF is '*Achievement of Learners / Successful Completion*'.

More information on Critical Success Factors and Key Processes and an example of a matrix can be viewed on the Governors Wales website www.governorswales.org.uk.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The governing body and SLT will use a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to manage school improvement and review progress towards their vision for the school. In selecting which KPIs to monitor and evaluate, the governing body will ask a number of questions:

Are we measuring the right things?

Do we have three years data to demonstrate that trends are going in the right direction?

Do we have realistic, logical targets?

Do we have comparisons with best practice (LA, Wales or UK)?

Can we link outcomes (results) to our strategies and our intervention?

What review mechanisms do we have? Are the outcomes as predicted or better than target?

Can we show continuous improvement?

Can we show 'value-add'?

See also: Information Sources in Part 2 of this Governor Guide series.

A mark of a good School Leadership Team (SLT) is to ensure that this data is accurate and timely.

A mark of a good governing body is being able to work with the SLT to turn this performance data into strategies that help all pupils reach their full potential.

In Summary

Having reviewed this three-part guide, school governors will be left in no doubt about the significant role that the governing body can play in both developing and achieving their school's vision, objectives and targets. The governing body bears a heavy responsibility for ensuring its school delivers the best opportunities for each child, whatever the age or ability, to reach his or her full potential in a caring environment.

However, governing bodies and schools cannot hope to meet the challenges facing them without the help and support of parents and a strong and effective network of partner organisations.

Other schools (and their governors), colleges, employers, community organisations, the LA, the Diocesan Authority and the Welsh Assembly Government can all help the school achieve its aims.

An effective governing body will ensure that it utilises every available resource that could add value to the educational experience their school and its partners can offer.

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 LA 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.uk

- 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