



GOVERNORS' GUIDE

ON THE

EFFECTIVE GOVERNING BODY

PART 2

The Governing Body's Strategic Role

2009

The Effective Governing Body

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Introduction

Regulations (please refer to list on page 11) and **The School Governors Guide to the Law** clearly describe the respective roles and responsibilities of the governing body and headteacher. Of the three main roles of the governing body described in Part 1 of this series, it could be argued that the strategic and intervention role is the one that can make the biggest difference to the standards achieved by the school and its students. The setting of targets and the monitoring and evaluation of a variety of agreed measures enable the governing body to identify and react to the early warning signs of shortfalls in performance. Recognising where early intervention is needed can prevent failure to meet targets and achieve objectives. There are a number of things that the governing body should monitor over the course of the school year (see Page 8 Information Sources), in order to ensure that the school is progressing as expected and that targets are being met or exceeded.

The governing body should understand the difference between intervention at a strategic level ('what' needs to be done) and interference in the operational management responsibilities of the headteacher and staff of the school ('how' actions are carried out).

A School Development (sometimes called Improvement) Plan is an essential requirement for reviewing the school's progress and for challenging any strategies that do not appear to be delivering expected results. This provides a systematic check that everything is in place to provide the quality of teaching and learning that the school is aiming for. If this is not the case, governors must work with the head and Senior Leadership Team to decide what needs to be done.

A good mix of skills, experience and knowledge within the governing body can help the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) create a School Development/Improvement Plan (SDP/SIP) with all the targets and measures that really make a difference.

Creating the Vision

Before developing its strategic plans the question every governing body must ask is, “Do we know what ‘good’ looks like for us and our school?” Be that in terms of how an effective governing body performs or what an ‘outstanding’ school looks and feels like. It must also be clear about how far away from that vision it is and what it needs to do to bridge the gap.

The starting point for strategic planning is a vision that makes it easy for staff and the community served by the school to understand what the school is striving to achieve. It is good practice for governing bodies to take the time to discuss and decide what they want the school to look and feel like (within a specified period of time).

Once the vision has been confirmed, the governing body, headteacher and senior staff will determine the strategies and activities that will enable the school to progress towards it.

If we do not know where we are going, how will we know when we get there?

Having a well-communicated vision can help to motivate everyone associated with the school to work towards common goals and break down some of the barriers that might prevent progress.

Everything else, such as strategic plans, objectives and targets, all emanate from the vision of where the governing body wants the school to be within the time agreed.

The process of ‘vision setting’ can use the standard problem solving questions:

Where are we now?

What kind of school are we? What kind of governing body are we? Have the decisions we have made over time made a significant difference to the results achieved by our staff and pupils?

Where are we heading?

What results are predicted for the school and our students? Do we need to change anything? What will happen if we do not change anything? Do we have all the information we need to make sound, fact-based decisions?

Where do we want to be?

What kind of school do we want to have? What kind of governing body do we want to be? What results do we want our young people to achieve? How do we compare with other schools? What do we want to achieve? What do we want the school to look and feel like?

How will we get there?

What is the plan? Does the School Development/Improvement Plan address the practical implications of where we want to be and what needs to be in place to '*make it happen*'? What resources do we need? How will we ensure staff are properly prepared?

Are our objectives *specific* and *measurable*?

What do we need to do?

What do we need to do? What part will we play in implementing the plan? How far away are we from 'where we are now' compared with 'where we want to be'? Who else needs to be involved? What kind of help do we need?

When do we have to be there?

What timescales are we working to? What are our short term, medium term and long term objectives? Are all our objectives *agreed* with staff and our other stakeholders and do they have *timescales*? Are they *realistic*?

How will we measure and sustain success?

What are the measures of progress and success? What review mechanisms do we have? Who will review what? When will we review? What happens as a result of review? How do we compare with other schools over time? Do we understand the reasons for both success and failure? How will we ensure that what we have learned is turned into improvement? How will we record and demonstrate improvement?

Where we are heading and where we want to be may be two different destinations. It may be that predicted results are not what we would like them to be, so how can we ensure that the governing body's vision brings about greater added value for pupils during their time at school?

Schools add value by helping students realise or exceed their predicted outcomes in terms of social, vocational or academic achievements.

The School Development/Improvement Plan

Based on the information it has, and guided by the Headteacher and the senior staff, the governing body must decide what the priorities are for the school and what can realistically be achieved in any given period of time. In this context, the various skills, knowledge, experience and background of governors can make a significant contribution to the strategic plan, otherwise known as the School Development/Improvement Plan (SDP/SIP). The plan will describe, to anyone who has an interest in the success of the school, what actions are being taken to achieve its aims and objectives and realise its vision.

It is very important that the governing body devotes time specifically to developing the SDP/SIP as it summarises what the school will do to improve its performance and provides a vehicle for governors to review performance, ask relevant questions and challenge the status quo, e.g.

- What is the demographic forecast for the area in which we operate?
- What differentiates our school from others in our area?
- How can we/should we broaden the curriculum offering to be more inclusive, e.g. artistic or vocational skills?
- Are our relationships with partner schools and others as strong as they should be?
- How can we improve our facilities and resources?
- How can we improve the expertise of our staff?
- Can we show that we are adding value for pupils to exceed expectations?

As a minimum, the School Development/Improvement Plan will include:

- A statement of the school's vision, values, ethos and aims;
- A review of progress towards the priorities for development identified in the previous plan;
- A list of priorities for development in the period spanned by the new plan;
- A set of specific tasks related to each of the priorities that the plan identifies;
- The resources required in each case;
- Performance criteria for the measurement of progress;
- An indication of timescale within which each task must be completed;
- Identification of people who will be responsible for managing task/s.

The headings used for different sections of the plan can vary according to what best suits the school. Using the Estyn key question format may help to familiarise everyone with the requirements of inspection, especially if the same headings are used for school self-evaluation.

Alternatively, the headings could be those of the **School Effectiveness Framework** (refer to Part 3).

A plan covering, for example, three years or longer, will be subject to change, particularly where school budgets and finances are concerned, but at the very least it will give everyone with a vested interest in the school (the stakeholders) a clear sight of the governing body's aspirations and enable people to make long term plans. The plan will contain more detail for the immediate year ahead as priorities and targets are more clearly defined.

With any objective and its associated actions it is important to establish:

- Who will carry out the actions?
- Who does the person responsible report progress to?
- Who should be involved in the decision making process?
- Who needs to be communicated with to tell them what is happening?

The plan's objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Timed) as these are easier for the governing body to review and for the headteacher and the senior staff to action the appropriate day-to-day operational management decisions.

Information Sources

For any governing body to make fact-based decisions and sound plans, it needs to have up-to-date, accurate information from a comprehensive range of sources, for instance:

- School value added performance data;
- Relevant comparative benchmark data;
- What other schools in the same area are doing;
- Headteacher's Reports and recommendations;
- Financial performance and forecasts;
- SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats);
- The previous year's School Development/Improvement Plan;
- Observations from Estyn, LA, Diocese or others, such as IIP assessments;
- Needs analysis from the community the school serves;
- Parental expectations and perceptions of the school;
- Pupil expectations and perceptions of the school;
- Staff expectations and perceptions of the school;
- Demographic profile and skill/knowledge/experience of staff;

- Partner expectations and perceptions of the school (partner schools, colleges, employers and any others who make a major contribution to the performance and success of the school);
- Complaints and grievances;
- LA, Diocesan and Local Council expectations and perceptions;
- Welsh Assembly Government legislation, strategies and guidance.

A more comprehensive list of measures is suggested on the Governors Wales' website, but of paramount importance is the knowledge of how each stakeholder group: parents, pupils, staff, partner organisations and governors measure success.

Governors may play a part in the implementation of the plan through, for instance, a link governor role or bringing their personal expertise into the school to work with staff or through the work of committees. Governors can be linked to teachers, subject areas, faculties or departments and will meet staff to discuss progress being made to meet targets and assess what impact the strategic decisions made by the governing body is having on teaching and learning.

Monitoring and Evaluating

The headteacher and members of the senior staff are responsible for implementing the Strategic Plan (SDP/SIP). At regular intervals they will report progress to the governing body through the pre-determined structure of committees and meetings. Governors will use these reports and other inputs, such as link governor contacts, to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the School Development/Improvement Plan and its impact on students, staff and other stakeholders.

Further information about the '**Critical friend**' role of the governor and supplementary information can be found as a 'Fact File' in the publication section of

<http://www.governorswales.org.uk/publications/2009/03/16/01-09-critical-friend/>

The full governing body will not usually have time in its three or four meetings during the school year to look at everything in the plan in detail. To make the best use of time it will delegate aspects of the plan to committees, who will then give oral or written reports on progress at full governing body meetings. Certain committees are statutory and must be appointed (refer to '**A Handbook for Governors of Schools in Wales**', page 51 and **The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005**).

The governing body will determine the structure of additional committees that best serves the aims of the school. It will decide the constitution, membership, reporting procedures and terms of reference for each committee. The membership of committees can include non-governors, as long as the majority are governors, but the full governing body will decide whether they can vote at committee meetings. The governing body can delegate certain powers to committees in order to facilitate more efficient and effective decision-making (refer to **The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005**).

Other committees a governing body might consider establishing:

- Community – to manage community links and the media
- Curriculum (and Quality) – to oversee all aspects of curriculum delivery and receive inspection reports, e.g. LA observations, IIP assessment
- Personnel
- Premises – to oversee building maintenance and usage (sometimes includes Health & Safety as part of its remit)
- Finance – to oversee the school budget

Vision, Strategy and Ownership

It must be remembered that the world in which the school operates is forever changing and the Strategic Plan (SDP/SIP) must be equally dynamic. In reviewing the plan it is perfectly valid to question, 'Are we still doing the right things?' as well as, 'Are we doing things right?' What was identified as a priority when the plan was first developed may be less important and could be replaced by something else six months later.

The ability of the School Leadership Team and the governing body to communicate the vision and Strategic Plan (SDP/SIP) is a critical element of success. Keeping stakeholders, particularly staff, involved and informed will build commitment, ownership and loyalty. Everyone with an interest in the success of the school can make a contribution to its strategic planning. (In schools, with a religious character, this includes the relevant diocesan authority). An effective and successful governing body will create the environment where that can happen.

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

- 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