



Thought Leadership – How do you know your board is performing?



The opening paragraph of the Governance Handbook 2019 states *“The purpose of governance is to provide confident and strong strategic leadership which leads to robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance.”*

In general terms the Governance Handbook tells us what we should be doing and the Competency Framework how we should go about it. The latter says *“Monitoring the board’s effectiveness is a key element of good governance. The board needs to assess its effectiveness and efficiency and ensure ongoing compliance with its statutory and legal duties under review. Individuals should also reflect on their own contribution helping to create a stronger and more motivated board.”* Further details can be found in Section 6, parts a. & b.

Consider the following questions:

- a. How can you make sure that you are having the desired impact and creating the best environment, for everyone associated with the school, for success?
- b. How do you know you are taking the best decisions you can?
- c. Are you adopting ‘best practice’?
- d. Do you know what the alternatives are and have you considered them?
- e. Who is holding you and your Governing Board to account?

The easy answer I hear you say is Ofsted. Well to a point that is partly correct, but how often does an Ofsted inspection take place? And what happens in between? An Ofsted inspection is a bit like an MOT on your car. It is a snapshot in time. It may only be as good as the day it happens. So what can you do? There are a number of things but in my view 4 things are really key:

1. Training

Do Governors recognise their strengths and areas for development both individually and collectively? Ensure ALL members have had relevant training, and equally important is current. Some Governors will tell you that they have attended training sessions, but how long ago? Why not at the next meeting ensure your Governor training records are up to date, and instigate a skills audit? Think about having a Training Link Governor who not only liaises with the Governing Body about staff CPD but equally importantly also takes an interest in the training of Governors.

2. Clerking

How this role has changed, to the point that the title ‘clerk’ is no longer adequate and sends out all the wrong signals. It was ok when they just ‘took notes’ but now their role means that in my view they are THE most important person that sits in that room!

The phrase ‘Governance Professional’ is being heard more and more as it far better encompasses their roles and responsibilities.

A good clerk will do so much more than provide the minutes but are in a position to offer advice on your responsibilities and best practice in governance, so don’t just let them sit in the corner quietly but actively involve them in the meeting, and ‘clerks’ among you should have the courage and confidence to interject in meetings if you see poor governance taking place.

Encourage the development of your clerk. It will pay dividends over and over. Also make sure they are well rewarded. If you have a good one, do everything you can to

keep them.

Chairs, are you carrying out a Performance Management of your clerk every year? If not, you should be.

3. Self-Evaluation

How effective are you as individuals and as a board? How do you know? Do you have a vision? Your Vision should be your 'guiding light'. It should direct everything you do, for example

- agenda
- budget setting
- staff structures
- Headteacher and staff performance management
- strategic planning

If you haven't got a vision 'you can hang your hat on' and a strategic plan to achieve it what are you measuring your effectiveness against?

Have you got the right (best) people around the table? Next time you have a vacancy (non-elected), go back to your skills audit and find the person with the attributes you need not just the first person to put their hand up. You want to be the best you can be! Is board succession planning an agenda item at least once per annum?

When was the last time you sat down collectively as board and discussed how effective you really are and what impact you are having?

What I have seen work well is where the GB sits down, away from a normal meeting environment, say over coffee and bacon sandwiches first thing in the morning and goes through the "[20 Questions every Governing Board should ask itself](#)" document from the NGA. It can be quite enlightening.

4. The Effectiveness of the Chair

As you will all know the Chair can have a massive effect on the impact and effectiveness of the whole Board. So:

- Is your Chair a 'Leader' or a 'Manager'?
- Does your Chair actively invite feedback on their performance? Is a 360° review carried out regularly?
- Does the Chair carry out an annual review of each Governors contribution to the effectiveness of the GB?
- Have they been in post more than 6 years?
- Is the Vice Chair ready to step up?
- Do they manage the business of the GB in general and meetings in particular, well?
- Do they close the meeting by asking "What impact on the children's lives have we made over the last 2½ hours"

A great Chair will make a significant contribution to creating an environment and culture for success. By the same token a poor one will cause good people to leave. Make sure you have the former not the latter!

So in summary, are you sure as a Governor and a Governing Board that you are doing the best you possibly can for your pupils?

Remember quite often it's not the really big things that make a difference but the effect of lots of small ones combined – the aggregate of marginal gains.

Hopefully some of the ideas above will stimulate some ideas of your own to evaluate your own effectiveness and the impact you are having.