



Thought Leadership – What is an External Review of Governance?



External Reviews of Governance

So, an External Review of Governance (ERG) has been mentioned to you. Isn't that just an inspection of the Governing Board? But we're just volunteers, I hear you cry, why on earth do we want to be inspected? Good question, and one which we'll now explore.

Firstly, ERGs are not inspections. They are not judgements about your effectiveness, they are designed to critically analyse your effectiveness and come up with a series of recommendations to help your Governing Board become more efficient and effective.

When a School is judged Inadequate by Ofsted, a recommendation will nearly always be that the Governing Board commission an External Review of Governance. This can be why they are sometimes seen in a bad light, because it feels as though they have been forced on the Board. But this should not be the case, ERGs should be viewed in a positive light, as a way of improving governance practices which will result in a better educational experience for every child. Your network of National Leaders of Governance can assist you with ERGs as they have been trained by the DfE to conduct ERGs in a structured way. You may find that some have not used up all of their committed NLG time, so may even be able to do them FOC for you; it's worth asking the question.

The most efficient and effective Governing Boards are continually looking for ways to improve on their previous best and commissioning an ERG helps massively with the self-evaluation process for Governors. You do not have to wait for Ofsted to recommend an ERG, Schools rated Good and Outstanding will also get great benefits from an external and independent pair of eyes taking a constructively critical look at governance.

So, what is looked at in an ERG? Well, it won't surprise you to learn that the ERG follows the 3 Core Functions of Governance.

The first area is around the Vision and the reviewer will be looking for evidence that Governors 'own' the Vision. Next is holding the Executive Leader to account for data and performance management and again, this is all around reviewing the evidence. Finance is the next area that the reviewer looks at and to carry on a common theme, it's all about the evidence. Finally, there will be a section on effective governance, which brings the previous three areas together.

As far as the process is concerned, the reviewer will be asking for a lot of information – copies of minutes of meetings, Headteacher reports, performance management information, governor details, etc. The reviewer will wish to meet with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors to gain some background contextual information and will also probably wish to attend a Governing Board meeting, to gain a sense of how the meetings are conducted. This helps enormously with triangulation of the written information. The main focus is around evidence of challenge, are Governors accepting information at face value or are they triangulating and challenging. The reviewer may also wish to have separate conversations with some Governors, just to gain additional information and context. But this can depend on the information provided.

Once the information has been received, the reviewer will compile the report and present it initially just to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, before presenting the final report to all Governors.

As far as a timescale is concerned, generally the entire ERG process should not take any longer than one term. Quite often they are completed much quicker than this, but sometimes they can take longer. It can depend on how times of meetings fall. Some reviewers like to spend 1 or 2 days within the School, speak to everybody concerned within that time period, gain information and then compile the report. Others like to gather all information and then compile the report remotely, there is no right or wrong way of doing them.

The important aspect of External Reviews of Governance though, is that they are a supportive mechanism designed to make governance more effective for the benefit of the children and young people within your School.

If you wish to find out more about External Reviews of Governance, then please speak to the Entrust Governor Services Team at governors@entrust-ed.co.uk