

An annual checklist for your school's governing body

Published by the SecEd and the Headteacher-Update

What should the annual to-do list look like for an effective governing body? Al Kingsley considers some of the key roles and responsibilities and how they should be carried out.

So, like most things in life, governing bodies have an annual calendar – I like to think of it as the governing body rhythm of the year. Let us look at some of the things a school will need to consider to help its governing body enhance and support its operation, questions that governors will need to ask to best fulfil their roles, and some recommendations for **school governance throughout the year**.

Assembling your governing body

At the start of each academic year, whether at local governing body or trust level, there are lots of things that need to be planned and prepared to ensure we are doing our jobs to provide the best quality of governance possible.

A good starting point is an annual review of the composition of your school's current governing body to check whether you have the right people around the table. One of the ways to do this is to complete a governor skills matrix each year, which will highlight each governor's professional skills and experiences, as well as record their confidence around the role they need to perform.

Next is the legal side of things – ensuring your governors complete their pecuniary interest forms (a requirement) and making sure they have read the latest national

policies, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education (DfE, 2020). This is something governors should confirm each year.

It is good practice to make sure governors are reminded of the Nolan Principles of public life (1995) and to make sure that appropriate inductions are planned for any new members of the team.

Enabling good governance

In the broader picture of enabling good governance, there are three key strands that governors themselves need to consider.

- First is values. What do we believe in? Are we doing the right thing? Being open-minded? Being purposeful?
- Second, there is the understanding. What do I know? Do I understand the finance and risk considerations in a school? Do I understand compliance, culture and what the role of governance is?
- Third, there is the practice. Am I able to influence, enable and support? Can I help with problem-

solving? Can I advise and do I get involved in the planning and organising?

Setting out responsibilities

Governance at local school level is always shaped by – certainly in the case of MATs – a trust's Scheme of Delegation. This sets out the responsibilities and where within the trust structure those responsibilities lie. If you are a local authority standalone school, then of course you will have your own summary in terms of the governing body's responsibilities and making sure you are meeting all legal obligations.

You will be thinking about whether you are going to assign selected governors as link governors to particular topics, for example health and safety or a specific strand in the curriculum – and also that there are appropriate training schedules (e.g. safeguarding or accessibility) in place for all governors.

Also, if you require any governors to help with the recruitment of staff during the year, they will need to





complete the relevant safeguarding for recruitment courses.

The school year begins

Once the school year starts in September, a priority for governors is to review the key stage 1 and 2 results for a primary school, or GCSE and post-16 results for a secondary. Those results, particularly in subjects that may not have performed as well as expected, will most likely shape the content for the first standards or curriculum meeting at a local governing body.

They will also dictate whether any “deep dives” or reviews of action plans are needed for underperforming subjects. These action plans are important, as they will allow the checks and balances for the governing body through the year to see what is being done to influence areas of improvement.

Other checks throughout the year will include:

- Any updates on staffing and teaching.
- Reviewing the Pupil Premium plan for the year ahead and, if you are a primary school, the PE and Sport Premium.

- Tracking of Pupil Premium spend and, most importantly, recording and evidencing what it was spent on and how you are going to measure the impact of that ring-fenced money.
- Ensuring your school website is up-to-date and regularly reviewed to confirm it complies with Ofsted requirements for the information it makes available for parents (Ofsted, 2018).
- Evaluating digital strategy. Perhaps, after recent events, ensuring that, at either a school or a trust level, a review of things like the school’s digital strategy takes place, noting what worked and what

did not work during the Covid-19 lockdown and what is required to facilitate or mitigate in the future, so that the school can operate more efficiently.

- Reviewing attendance and exclusions. Certainly, if you have any permanent exclusions, as per the changes in legislation, you will want to make sure that the governing body is aware of any destinations of those individuals.
- Monitoring behaviour and SEND reports.
- Comprehensive tracking of school data – especially curriculum data – and how that aligns with your School Development Plan. This might involve your link governor if you are looking at topics that did not perform as hoped the previous year.
- Ensuring transparency of finances. For trusts, making sure that the chair of the trust or finance chair receives monthly statements on finances (again, new legislation) is key to ensure budget monitoring and providing an on-going review of whether the school is operational and has funds to perform its task. This is particularly relevant to the local governing body if you are a standalone local authority school.
- Considering staff wellbeing. Think about how staff wellbeing within the school is facilitated and





of the local governing body have been addressed.

Further reading

There are lots of fantastic resources for governance available. I certainly recommend The Key as an excellent resource. To support that, my own blog – www.schooltrustee.blog – shares topics and tips on current governance issues, including online safety, getting value from ed-tech, being up-to-date with parental engagement and communication, and how schools can tackle bullying.

About the author

Al Kingsley is group MD at NetSupport. He is also chair of a MAT (as both a trustee and member), chair of his local governors' leadership group, and is a member of his local authority's scrutiny committee for children and education. To read Al's previous articles for SecEd, visit <https://bit.ly/3dBhptc>

Further information & resources

- DfE: Keeping Children Safe in Education, last updated April 2020: <http://bit.ly/2bI2Zsm>
- HM Government: The 7 principles of public life (Nolan Principles), 1995: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life
- Ofsted: What maintained schools must publish online, last updated October 2018: <https://bit.ly/3eKGGT8>

tracked, and ensure questions are being asked of the head and senior leadership to ensure staff are looked after and that their wellbeing is considered.

Ofsted calling

To provide the key data and indicators about your school that Ofsted will want to see, consider developing a SOAP report (school on a page). Do you know what your school strengths and weaknesses are? The areas for development? This kind of report documents all the headline data for your school to ensure you have a complete, accessible overview.

Questions, questions

Good governance is about being a source of challenge and support to the school's head and senior leadership team. Some refer to it as being a "critical friend", as it is only by asking difficult questions and having those discussions that the school is enabled to find the best way forward.

There are so many questions from the governing body to be built into the year. Often, these are shaped individually, school-by-school, based on the areas of development being focused on. Some typical ones are:

- How have you evidenced impact? How have you provided challenge?

- If you are a primary, is there sequencing in your curriculum? How do the themes follow on and build skills as children progress?

- Do you have confidence in your forecast for exam results at the end of the year? How are you benchmarking? How are you tracking and building that confidence?

- What about community engagement? As a governing body and as a school, how do you know that you are engaging successfully with your community and parents? And how are you developing that?

Once these basics are built into the annual rhythm of the governing body, then it really comes down to developing this, based on the challenges or strengths that your school is focuses on.

What is most important is having your initial plan and making sure that, from the very first day, governors know what their obligations and responsibilities are for the year ahead. This way, when you reach the end of the year, you will be in the best position to perform a 360° review of the chair and the governing body's effectiveness – a reflective process that checks against the local governing body resolution or Scheme of Delegation to ensure all the tasks that are the responsibility