

SLIDE NOTES

SLIDE FOUR

Setting the context ... the three GB Core Functions Are

1 Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

- Engaging with stakeholders – *staff, pupils, parents, community, LA, Diocese*
- Strategic planning including succession planning – *key roles on GB – Chair, Vice Chair (consider co-Chairing and co-Vice Chairing), Chairs of Committees, Vice Chairs of Committees*
- Meeting statutory duties – *statutory link roles – Safeguarding/Health and Safety/Inclusion/GDPR; approval and monitoring of statutory policies.*

2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff

- Appointing senior leaders
- Making **evidence based judgements** about the performance of the school-working with the SEF, data, monitoring visits and responding to reports

3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

- SFVS or annual report
- Pupil premium and Primary PE and Sport budgets **and now Covid Catch Up Premium – how is it being used?**
- Risk management – *particularly in light of Covid. Example of secondary school who wanted to allow students to attend overnight Duke of Edinburgh trip to Brecon Beacons to achieve their Gold Award. Governors supported decision to go ahead with the trip as the students have already missed out on so much this year. Unfortunately overturned by Regional Commissioner who ultimately said no, despite school pupils leaving an area with a higher transmission rate to a lower transition rate.*

I have the three core functions printed on the front page of FGB minutes, and have an additional column in my minutes' table which says 'GB Core Function' and indicate whether the discussion item relates to 1, 2 or 3 in the column. This is an 'at a glance' tool which helps demonstrate that governors are fulfilling the three functions in meetings.

How OfSTED judges Overall Effectiveness - What is it?

Overall effectiveness is the judgement OfSTED inspectors come to when they've taken into account the 4 key judgements:

- Quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership and management (including Governance)

Where relevant, they also judge the effectiveness of: Early years education & 6th Form.

In making their judgement, inspectors will also consider:

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- The extent to which your school's education provision meets the needs of the range of pupils at your school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Inspectors will judge the effectiveness of your school's safeguarding arrangements. If they are 'ineffective', your overall effectiveness will be 'inadequate'.

The difference between Strategic vs. Operational

- Governance is strategic and Management is operational
- This difference between governance and management needs to be clearly understood by all, so that governors and trustees are not asked to, and do not try to, involve themselves in day to day management.
- Governors and trustees are there to govern, not to carry out other work within a school on a pro-bono basis.
- School leaders must not be micromanaged.
- The governing board should concentrate on matters related to strategy and school improvement
- They delegate to school leaders tasks which are operational (for example, drafting policies, making judgements about teaching quality, and recruiting and deploying staff below Senior Leadership level).

SLIDE FIVE

The Clerk's Role within Governance – four key areas:

Understanding Governance

The clerk to the board will:

- Ensure you are familiar with the core functions and governance structure of the board in a school and be familiar with the governance structure and constitution relating to implementing effective governance
- Be completely familiar with the key features of effective governance and understand how to help the board achieve that.
- Understand the board's moral and legal accountability to stakeholders including pupils, staff, parents, the wider community, DfE/ESFA, Ofsted and the LA/Diocese where applicable
- use that knowledge to help the board fulfil and not exceed its authority
- understand the specific duties and functions of the clerk in order to fulfil and not exceed your responsibilities

- keep well informed about current local and national policy and initiatives in Education
- communicate relevant information gathered to the board

How do you keep yourself informed?

- ***Clerks Briefings***
- ***Training and Development – Clerks are able to attend all training open to Governors in Hillingdon***
- ***The Clerks’ Collective – a network of local Clerks***
- ***NGA***
- ***The School Bus***
- ***Key for Governors***
- ***Governor Hub***
- ***DoE bulletins***

- if necessary remind the board of the importance of maintaining a strategic view – including by reviewing values and vision with key stakeholders on a 2/3 yearly cycle
- ensure that strategic reviews address the requirements of the Equality Act
- understand the importance of trustees/governors ensuring that all statutory policies, and such others necessary because of the context, are being implemented (monitoring) and are having the intended effect (evaluation).
- ensure that the board addresses and reviews at regular intervals the risk management strategies in the school
- In an academy be familiar with the requirements of Charity and Company Law
- In an academy ensure they understand the relevance of the Articles of Association and the Trust’s Funding Agreement

Administration, Advice and Guidance

The clerk to the board will:

- use technology effectively to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in all aspects of governance – *especially in light of moving to virtual meetings. Does your governing board have a virtual attendance at meetings policy? What do you find are the pros/cons of virtual meetings? Pros – shorter, more focussed meetings, safer, less travel. Cons – technical issues, recording of attendance, voting issues.*
- support the board and SLT in scheduling board, committee and LGB meetings, so that the work of the board runs in parallel with the school’s monitoring and evaluation schedules. (Agendas can be refined as necessary in advance of each meeting)
- support the board in identifying the range and format of data it needs in order to make judgements about the school’s performance, financial probity and trends over time
- work with senior leaders, and others providing information to the board, to ensure timely scrutiny of documents by the board
- prepare carefully for meetings attempting to identify issues that might arise and sourcing relevant additional information where necessary

- where necessary, be prepared to prompt the board about the type of probing questions that should be asked
- use a range of methods for recording key points from meetings, highlighting questions and follow up questions, in order to provide evidence of the board's challenge and scrutiny, and to facilitate decision making. Seek feedback on what works best for different audiences – *I underline and italicize governors' questions in minutes.*
- ensure that where actions are agreed participants also identify by whom and by when and recording this detail in the minutes
- equally, record evidence of acknowledgement of effort and success – have a 'Thanks and Celebrations' agenda item at the end of the meeting.
- manage governance documentation so that it is readily accessible to those entitled to view it
- be familiar with the requirements of governance meetings for example re apologies, declarations of interest, whether a meeting is quorate, and advise the board accordingly
- have the confidence and sensitivity, within your advisory role, to challenge the conduct of the board in the event of it not conducting itself appropriately. For example understanding when confidentiality should be invoked and when it is not appropriate – *staff salaries, pupil names etc.*
- ensure the safe custody and proper use of any corporate seal(s)
- NB in a MAT any responsibility for reporting changes in Members and Trustees to Companies House must be assigned explicitly. Details of governors on LGBs do not have to be reported to Companies House.
- In a maintained school it is the clerk's responsibility to notify the LA of changes to the board.
- in a MAT support the board and LGB chairs in scheduling LGB meetings to ensure information is available for trustees to identify patterns and trends over time.

People and Relationships

The clerk to the board will:

- work to develop a strong, confidential and trusted relationship with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors and act as a sounding board for both using tact and diplomacy.
- provide the board with clear and impartial advice and guidance within, and where applicable, after meetings. This will include information about legal and contractual duties and responsibilities of the board and the consequences of non-compliance
- know where and how to access specialist advice or guidance for the board and, where appropriate, on their own behalf
- in all contexts advise the boards to utilise skills audits in order to make best use of individuals' skills and knowledge and to inform recruitment
- support the board in developing a culture where constructive challenge is welcomed

- develop relationships and clear channels of communication with the board, relevant school staff and other stakeholders agreed with the board
- advise on possible structures and schemes of delegation that enable effective governance at every level
- keep records of governor/s trustees terms of office and alert the chair three months in advance of a term of office finishing
- establish with the board open and transparent procedures for election and appointment and negotiate their role in these processes
- advise the board about the election of the chair to maximise transparency
- in a school/academy advise the board on possible structures and delegation to committees, working parties, governors/trustees, the head. If not delegated to a governor/trustee, advise the board on relevant training options
- in a MAT support the trustees in creating the scheme of delegation to LGBs
- work with the board to identify ways in which it can self evaluate and highlight relevant documentation and other sources of evidence (e.g. SLT, staff, parents, pupils) to support or challenge their conclusions
- be proactive in establishing an appraisal for your own work, have a job description and sit down with the Chair to fine tune and agree your job description.
- attend relevant training and briefings to meet others in similar roles/learn from best practice

SLIDE 7

How you can support your board to be compliant and effective in the execution of their governance duties

- Remind Clerks that the dimensions of the GB may be quite unique/distinctive and some of these suggestions may work for some and not for others.
- Clerks will need to be mindful/aware of personalities, relationships between them, etc. when new - seeing in the first instance how meetings run, before making any significant changes or discussing these with the Chair.

SLIDE 8

Where does your board sit on the grid?

Bottom left - Low Challenge/Low Support – inertia/apathy

Bottom right – Low Support/High Challenge – stress for SLT

Top Left – High Support/Low Challenge – Cosy Club

Top Right – High Support/High Challenge – The Loving Boot / The critical friend is ‘a trusted person who asks provocative questions’

So what seems to work best in maximising the teacher/school/governor relationship?

These ideas seem to be tried and trusted:

Visible faces: Make sure governors are known around the school. Their faces should be familiar and their current roles shared with staff.

Specific links: Link governors can work well (where individual governors are linked with a department or role within the school) but only when the governor has the time and inclination to attend school during working hours. If this is the case, it's worth building such relationships as they can really help governors to understand more about the role of the teacher, and what hinders and helps.

Communication: While staff governors can be conduits of information from staff to governors, it's helpful if there are wide channels of communication generally between governors and staff. This will also help governors to keep tabs on tough times and stressful periods so that staff wellbeing remains a core focus.

Kindness and care: Critical friends are so much more powerful when their message is given from a place of support. The closer a governing body can work with staff (rather than just each other) the more likely their messages will be received in the spirit intended.

Practical support: School improvement takes investment and that means, in part, supporting the individual in developing skills and knowledge for the job. The NGA suggests that governors recognise that continuous professional development is both vital for the school's ongoing success, and also for the individual's progression.

SLIDE 9

5 Ways to Step Up Your Governance

Make everyone accountable via the GB Code of Conduct

Share the workload evenly - setting standards for participation will help your board move away from a 'hero' model of governance - where the chair shoulders all the work and others can coast along. Other tips for chairs on changing this sort of culture include:

Chair to directly ask other governors if they'll take on specific actions within meetings

Delegate as standard - the default position shouldn't be that the chair does the work outside of meetings

Review the roles on your board and make sure each board member has an individual responsibility

Put dedicated agenda items throughout the year for link governors to report back to the board

Be comfortable with silence in meetings. Don't jump in to take on an action or ask a question, leave space for others on the board to do this.

Set up a 'shadow structure'

To help with succession planning and mentoring governors in one go, set up a shadow structure where all roles on the board have a counterpart. This includes:

The chair, vice chair and committee chairs

Link governors and other roles with specific monitoring responsibilities

Pair a more experienced governor carrying out the role with a less experienced one as the shadow governor. They should do all work associated to the role in their pairs - such as visiting the school to meet staff members, writing reports, looking at relevant data.

It helps your board do mentoring, or use a buddy system, in a less forced way. The mentoring work fits in to the existing work of the board and there's an expectation that everyone takes part. It's not another thing the chair has to arrange whenever there's a new governor or someone says they'd like some more support. It's easier to learn by doing. This system means a new governor gets first-hand experience of good governance.

It helps with succession planning because if the experienced governor leaves, it's expected that the 'shadow' governor will take over that role. The new governor will then take on the vacant shadow role. This means succession planning is continuous. You don't lose established and institutional knowledge when someone leaves - governance can involve a lot of turnover and it's easy to lose momentum when key people leave.

Loosely align board and staff CPD

If there's whole-school CPD related to your strategic priorities - try sending governors along too. Governors ask better questions when they fully understand the issue itself and how it works in the school.

Get expert eyes on your data

Get a headteacher from another school to sit on the committee that looks at your pupil performance data. Ideally, this would be someone with no personal connection to the headteacher.

They can give you expert advice and potentially challenge the headteacher in a more granular and nuanced way than governors could.

In a maintained school or single academy: you could look for a headteacher through any regional governor collaboration events you attend, cluster groups you're part of, other governors you know, or ask a school improvement partner to recommend someone. Invite them along as an observer, or appoint them to your board as an [associate member](#)

In a multi-academy trust: get a headteacher from another school within the trust and

Ask them to:

- Read the data reports your board gets
- Attend committee meetings and give the governors a better sense of the context for the data
- Ask informed, challenging questions of the headteacher, using their own expertise
- Expertly interrogate the headteacher's narrative and explanation for the data
- Give their objective, unbiased view on where governors should be concerned and focus their attention
- This should not replace governors' own knowledge
- An experienced headteacher's presence should enhance governors' understanding of data - not replace it. The relevant committee should still:
- Look at the full reports and establish their own impression of the school's strengths, weaknesses and trends
- Ask the headteacher for the important information to be elevated in reports, with key figures traffic-lighted to aid understanding
- Ask for data to be presented with a clear view from the SLT on what the key takeaways are

Set fewer objectives to ensure tangible progress

Choose 4 objectives to focus on at the exclusion of all else, based on:

- A solid understanding of the school and where provision could be better
- Your vision and values
- The areas that you think will make the most impact
- Advice from a school improvement partner

Have regular review points and clarify what 'good' will look like at various stages of the journey

8 ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

The right people around the table – this is helped by the skills audit. Is the membership of your governing board a reflection of the community it serves?

It is great to have skills based governors, but business people tend to be very busy, may miss meetings and may not often be able to get in to see the school in action.

Understanding roles and responsibilities – Governor training helps with this.

A good chair ...

- *Can keep to time/keep to agenda/move items on*
- *Can invite discussion from everyone*
- *Can delegate actions*
- *Can summarise and make sure actions are clear – particularly with using virtual calls.*
- *Chair needs to realise you are clerking meetings differently now*

Professional Clerking

- *Do Governors know what your role entails?*
- *Do you share your agreed JD with them?*
- *Do you have an annual performance management appraisal linked to your pay?*
- *Are you encouraged to go on training? Is there a CPD budget for governance which includes you?*

Good Relationships based on trust

- *Ask to be copied into correspondence between Head and Chair*
- *Find out best times to contact Head and Chair and how they like to be contacted – email/text. One of my Chairs works shifts and I have his shift pattern in my diary so that I know when he is available for meetings.*
- *Let your governors know when you are happy to be available to be contacted.*

Knowing the School

- *How visible are your Governors to staff/pupils/parents?*
- *How visible are you to office staff/SLT?*

Committed to Asking Challenging Questions

- *Through training*
- *Through seeking out questions to ask which specifically link to link governor roles – have link governor role descriptions.*

In summary



Top Tips in Clerking

1. Develop mutual trust and confidence with your Head and Chair by keeping in regular contact and if possible have termly catch up meetings to plan the term's work.
2. Be accessible and sensitive to HTs/Chair/Governors work/life balance.
3. Work out best times/ways of contacting Head, Chair, Governors - eg by text/email/telephone.
4. Have an evaluated and relevant job description and annual appraisal with objective setting. Make sure your school knows your worth and what you can bring to the table.
5. Agree working parameters/times when you prefer *not* to work e.g. certain evenings/weekends but remain flexible particularly at peak times of high workload.
6. Develop a programme of meetings and agenda items for the year - makes agenda planning a breeze!!
7. Time Management - have a system for agenda planning and papers circulation in advance of meetings.
8. Have a To Do list and highlight prioritised jobs then cross them out/delete them as they are completed. I love a list! Recommend Pirongs Planners - bespoke planners with to do list on one page and diary on the opposite page.

9. Turn minutes around as quick as you can whilst the detail is fresh in your mind. Have a tracking system for minutes from draft stage to approval and circulation.
10. Have a system for tracking Governor apologies in advance of meetings.
11. Make your minutes a powerful evidence tool - underline questions, annotate where the GB is hitting core functions.
12. Share best practice with other schools, build your network of colleagues - other clerks/Governor Support/Schools HR - otherwise it can be an isolated role!
13. If possible, attend all the training open to Clerks and Governors - expand and share your knowledge with your Governors - Clerks Briefings, Hot Topics, OfSTED prep, Hillingdon Governors Meetings.
14. Develop a crib sheet for Governors going in to see OfSTED inspectors.
15. Get GB to self-evaluate/reflect on their impact at the end of each meeting.
16. Set committee objectives and have these on the top of agendas and minutes
17. Develop your confidence in advising your GB at meetings - public speaking may be out of your comfort zone but the more prepared you are about agenda items the better you will feel. Develop a crib sheet for yourself before you go into an FGB meeting. You may not always know the answers to questions but you can always signpost or find out the answers you need.
18. Keep your eye out for potential issues/pitfalls for the governing body and flag them early! - e.g. succession planning, distributing the experience of chairing committee/FGBs, expirations of terms of office.
19. Think about your own welfare and comfort when taking minutes at meetings - I always request a desk and an adjustable office chair when in school and to be close to a plug point! If you are carrying a laptop and lots of papers around invest in laptop trolley bag. I got a Targus Laptop Trolley Bag for around £35.00 and it comfortably fits all my papers, diary and laptop in it. Also think about your comfort and posture, seating arrangement and your 'office' area at home if you work from home on clerking. Take regular breaks from typing!
20. Sign up for as many website and twitter feeds as you can!

21. As clerks we offer a niche professional service and it is something you can develop into a business/career if you would like to!!