

Governor Support Service

Asking the right questions

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Sian Mathias

Leadership and governance consultant

- Working with MATS and Local Authorities (LA's) across London as an independent trainer and consultant
- Currently Chair of the Trust Board of a multi-academy trust (MAT)
- Chaired two maintained schools governing boards
- Worked as head of governor services in a successful LA school improvement team
- Worked on numerous task groups supporting schools causing concern

Etiquette



We will take it in turns to speak and when not speaking we will keep ourselves on **mute**.



It is good to see colleagues but you can turn your **camera** off if you wish.



You can use the **chat** feature to make comments or ask questions.

Aims of the session



1. Understanding the governance role and key accountabilities
2. Reviewing the role of questioning
3. Considering the most effective questions
4. Understanding the current context

An exceptional year – the impact of Covid-19

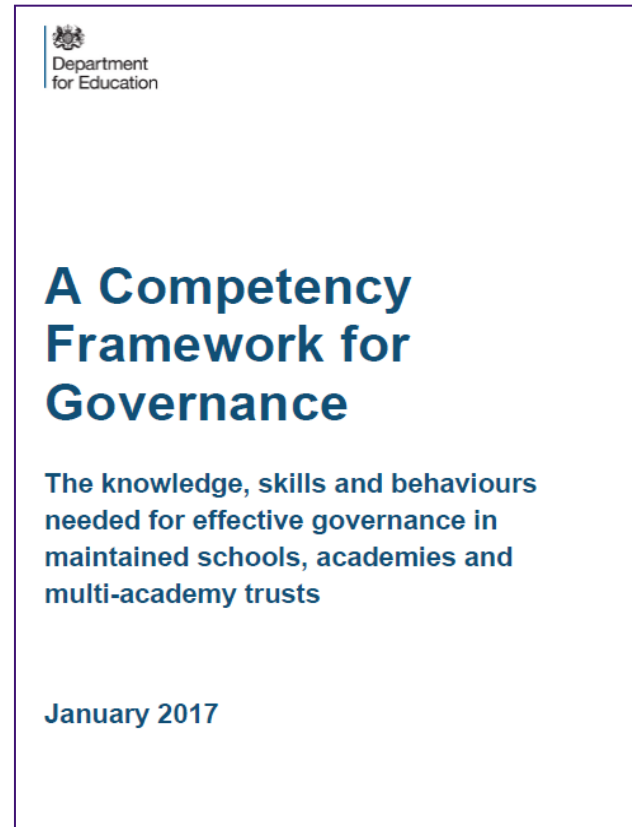
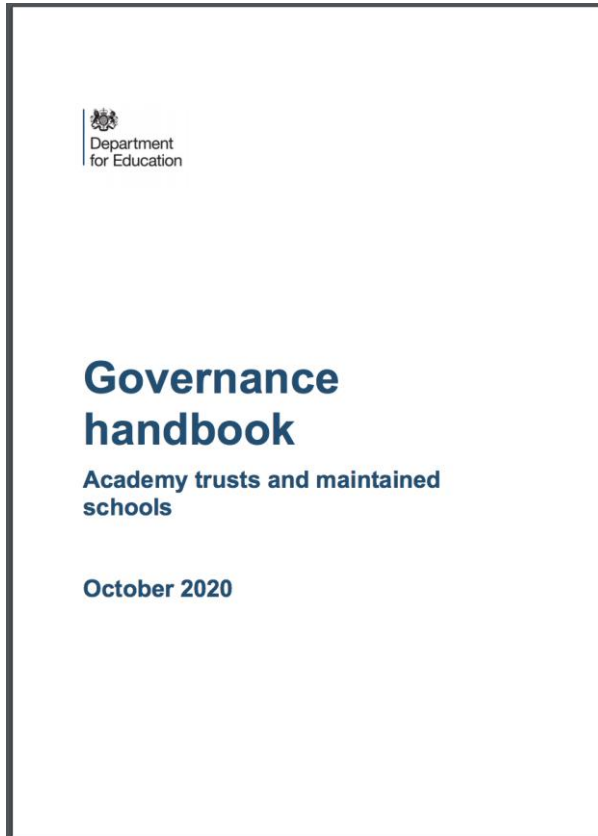
- Partial closing of schools
- Unprecedented health risks for staff and pupils
- Concern for pupils isolated at home
- Significant loss in learning and progress
- Staff working through traditional holiday time
- Managing constant change and uncertainty
- New ways of supporting pupils learning at home
- Virtual meetings and the impact on relationships
- Assessment and data impact

Three Core Statutory Functions

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and **strategic** direction;
2. **Holding executive leaders to account** for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of the staff; and
3. Overseeing the **financial performance** of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Governance Handbook, October 2020

Key Documents





Department
for Education

The Competency framework for Governance

- Committed** Devoting the required time and energy to the role and ambitious to achieve best possible outcomes for young people. Prepared to give time, skills and knowledge to developing themselves and others in order to create highly effective governance.
- Confident** Of an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations, to express their opinion and to play an active role on the board.
- Curious** Possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach and understanding the value of meaningful questioning.
- Challenging** Providing appropriate challenge to the status quo, not taking information or data at face value and always driving for improvement.
- Collaborative** Prepared to listen to and work in partnership with others and understanding the importance of building strong working relationships within the board and with executive leaders, staff, parents and carers, pupils/students, the local community and employers.
- Critical** Understanding the value of critical friendship which enables both challenge and support, and self-reflective, pursuing learning and development opportunities to improve their own and whole board effectiveness.
- Creative** Able to challenge conventional wisdom and be open-minded about new approaches to problem-solving; recognising the value of innovation and creative thinking to organisational development and success.

The purpose of good governance questions

- To clarify
- To extend governors understanding of an issue
- To add to the knowledge of the school across the governing board
- To challenge and support school leadership
- To clearly demonstrate accountability

What is a successful question?

Rarely why – what and how is much more effective

***Why** have key stage 2 for boys reading results dipped this year?*

***What** are the factors that led to the changes in the reading scores for boys?*

***How** can we support boys reading to ensure that boys do as well as girls?*

Follow up questions

- Listen
- Process
- Reflect
- Respond with second question

Strong accountability, deepening understanding

Where does questioning go wrong?

Have you felt uncomfortable?

Problem questioning ?

- Lack of respect
- Lack of information
- Repetitive
- Accusatory

Better questions come from preparation:

- Reading papers
- Developing knowledge and skills – training, governor visits
- Understanding it's a partnership

Our core functions: 1 STRATEGY

*Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and **strategic** direction;*

What are the big questions?

- How well is your school doing?
- What type of school do we want to be?
- What do we most value?
- What are the key areas that need to improve?
- What are the key risks and challenges we face in the next few years?

School Evaluation

- Results ASP (Analyse School Performance)
- Compare school performance service
- Ofsted report
- Stakeholder views
- SLT self review – staff, pupils, parents
- Link advisor/LA reports
- External advisor/consultant reports
- Comparison with similar schools locally
- Audit and financial position
- Governor visits

Questions for you

How clear are you on the vision, values and ethos of your school?

How clear are you on the key strategic priorities?

Does this raise any questions for you that you now need to ask?

Our core functions: 2 EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

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

- How strong are pupil outcomes?
- How good is pupil progress? Groups? SEND?
- What are the principles behind our curriculum choices?
- What is the quality of teaching like overall?

More widely:

- How good is behaviour? Data - exclusions
- How good is attendance? Data
- How good is the development of staff?

Peeling the onion

Headteachers report: 65% of year 2 pupils are estimated to reach the standard expected in the phonics check in December 20. This is a drop from 78% in 2019

What to attribute the drop to?

What, if anything, would we do differently in any further lockdown?

What is happening now to support the 2021 cohort and how do we expect they will perform?

What questions would you ask?

Headteachers report: Exclusions this term are 1 permanent a 3 fixed term which is not altogether surprising.

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Attendance questions

Headteacher report: *Attendance this term has been impacted by covid and we currently have 14 children meeting the threshold for PA.*

Do these children share characteristics? SEND, family groups?

How do these figures compare with recent years?

What impact is this having on these children

What are we doing to encourage and support these children?

Is this happening in comparable schools?

Longer term – new questions?

- How are pupils been supported in re-engaging with learning?
- How is the curriculum being adapted to start to bridge gaps?
- What are the curriculum priorities in the short-term?
- Which pupils have been most disadvantaged and how will we address inequalities?
- How are staff being supported with the recovery plans?
- How will we know what good outcomes next year look like?
- What have we learnt about on-line/home learning?
- How will we use on-line support in the future and during staged reintegration?
- How can we support our senior leaders and the wider school community with this challenge?

Our core functions: 3 FINANCE

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

Have we set a balanced, realistic budget?

Do we have a 3-year financial forecast?

Are we learning the lessons of SVFS and audits?



Department
for Education

Schools Financial Health and Efficiency

gov.uk/government/collections/schools-financial-health-and-efficiency

Schools financial efficiency: top 10 planning checks for governors

1. What is our staff cost as a percentage of total expenditure?
2. What is our average teacher cost?
3. What is our pupil to teacher ratio (PTR)?
4. What are our class sizes?
5. What is our teacher contact ratio?
6. What proportion of our budget is spent on the leadership team?
7. What are our 3-to-5 year budget projections?
8. How does the spend per pupil for non-pay expenditure lines compare to similar schools?
9. Are our school improvement plan priorities set with relative cost of options?
10. Are we reviewing the list of contracts with costs and renewal dates?

The respective roles of governance and management

Governance is **strategic** and management is **operational**. This distinction 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 **micro-managed**. The governing board should concentrate on matters related to strategy and school improvement, delegating to school leaders those tasks which are operational (for example, drafting policies, making judgements about teaching quality, and recruiting and deploying staff below senior leadership level).

What governing boards can expect from their school leaders and what school leaders can expect from their governing boards (NGA, ASCL and NAHT)
November 2019 – 5th Edition



What have we learnt from the last 6 months?

- Strategically?
- Accountability – standards and finance?



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