

# Governance Training

## Asking the Right Questions

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# Aims of the session



1. Where are you at, on your journey as a governing board?
2. Understanding the governance role and key accountabilities
3. Reviewing the role of questioning
4. Considering the most effective questions
5. Understanding the current context

# Where are you at?

- Membership of your governing board
- Fairly new governors – perhaps still finding your feet?
- Do we have the right people with the right skills around the table?
- Where are you at on your journey of working as a team?
- What is working/not working?
- What could we be doing better?



### Forming

Team acquaints and establishes ground rules. Formalities are preserved and members are treated as strangers.



### Storming

Members start to communicate their feelings but still view themselves as individuals rather than part of the team. They resist control by group leaders and show hostility.



### Norming

People feel part of the team and realize that they can achieve work if they accept other viewpoints.



### Performing

The team works in an open and trusting atmosphere where flexibility is the key and hierarchy is of little importance.



### Adjourning

The team conducts an assessment of the year and implements a plan for transitioning roles and recognizing members' contributions.



# Strategic vs operational roles

- **It is vital that governors understand that their role is strategic rather than operational.**
- Governors set the school's strategic framework and ensure that it meets all of its statutory duties.
- Governors should not be drawn into direct involvement in operational matters and the detail of the day-to-day management of the school, which are the responsibility of the headteacher and senior leaders.
- It is essential to have skilled governors, but equally important to emphasise that the skills required are those to create robust accountability, not to do the school's job for it.
- For example, a governor with financial expertise should use their skills to scrutinise the school's accounts, not to help prepare them. The school employs a finance officer for operational financial matters.

# Core strategic functions

- GBs should operate as **non-executive boards**.
- All boards, no matter what type of schools or how many schools they govern, have three core strategic functions.

## 1

### Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

- Ensuring school's vision and ethos are strongly reflected throughout the school and in its delivery of education functions
- Engaging with stakeholders
- Meeting all statutory duties

## 2

### Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils

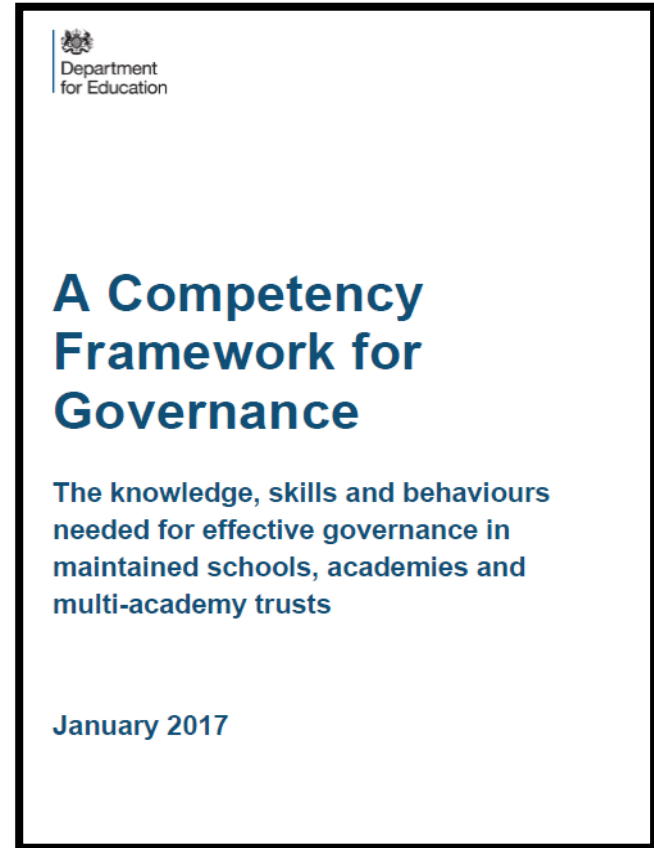
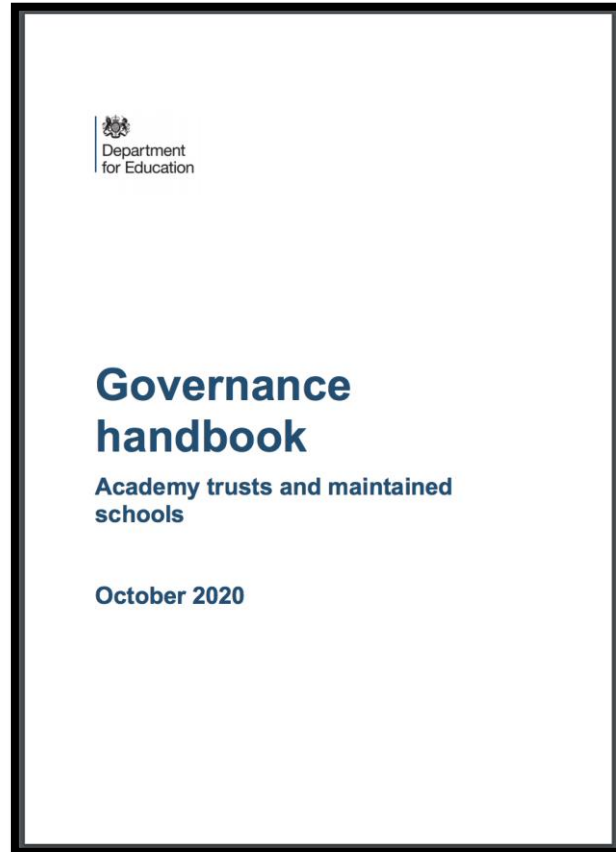
- Using data to provide challenge and hold leaders to account for teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety
- Strengthening school leadership, inc GB skills
- Performance managing HT
- Contributing to school self-evaluation and evaluating GB's impact.

## 3

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

- Ensuring solvency
- Effective and lawful personnel practices
- Effective and lawful financial management
- Effective use of pupil premium and other resources to overcome barriers to learning

## Key Documents



# Competency Framework for Governance (DfE)

- 16 competencies underpinned by a foundation of important principles and personal attributes.
- Grouped under the headings of the six features of effective governance, which are set out in the DfE Governance Handbook:

1. **strategic leadership**
2. **accountability**
3. **people**
4. **structures**
5. **compliance**
6. **evaluation.**

All those involved in governance should be:

- ✓ Committed
- ✓ Confident
- ✓ Curious
- ✓ Challenging
- ✓ Collaborative
- ✓ Critical
- ✓ Creative





# 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. This is a drop from 78%.*

What to attribute the drop to?

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

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

# What questions would you ask?

**Headteachers report:** *Exclusions this term are 1 permanent and 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 persistent absence.*

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 being 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](https://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?



Questions?





## **Governor Support Service**

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