

Asking the right questions, 27th April 2023

This resource brings together a range of data to help boards analyse, discuss, and challenge the educational and financial performance of their school or academy trust.

Department for Education

[Understanding your data: a guide for school governors and academy trustees -September 2022](#) (Extract)

The [7 themes](#) bring together a broader range of information to help guide board discussions and provide a basis for challenge to ensure value for money is achieved, whilst focusing on educational outcomes.

Examples of typical questions on pupil numbers

- Arrangements on transition from primary to secondary schools
- Pupil projections/ future financial planning including considering those with additional needs that will require additional funding
- Differences between pupil projections and actual pupil numbers
- Number of service pupils/ pupils from traveller families/ seasonal employment trends

Examples of typical questions of absence levels by pupil characteristics

- Gender [different ethnicities](#) and first language
- Different year groups
- Free school meal (FSM) eligibility
- Those with special educational needs and disabilities, or long-term medical conditions
- Those who have needed a social worker (looked after children (LAC) and children in need (CIN))

Examples of typical questions about suspensions and permanent exclusions, those taken off roll and those on roll but attending education off site

- Effectiveness and consistency in implementing the school's behaviour policy
- Instances where pupils receive repeat suspensions
- Interventions in place to support pupils at risk of suspension or permanent exclusion
- rolling average of permanent exclusions to ensure they are used very sparingly
- Timing of moves and permanent exclusions, and whether there are any patterns including any indications which may highlight where policies or support are not working
- The characteristics of children who are suspended or permanently excluded, removed from roll, or educated off site, such as the proportion who have SEND, whether they are supported by social care and have needed social workers, and their ethnic background. This should include considering whether any groups are permanently excluded or moving out of school at a higher rate than others, discussing why this is and whether any changes to practice are required to address disparities
- Whether the placements of pupils directed off site into an Alternative Provision (AP) are reviewed at sufficient intervals to provide assurance the education is achieving its objectives and that the pupils are benefiting from it

Good Governance

[How to ask the right questions, June 2021](#) (Extract)

Being a good questioner is a key governance skill and one that all board members should possess and continually develop. It is all about asking the right questions at the right time.

It is important to be clear about what type of question you are asking. This boils down to the purpose of the question. Good questions are shaped before a word is uttered. Asking the right question is about being clear about what you want from the answer. Are you looking for facts? Expert advice? A well reasoned judgement?

Questions are excellent, multi-purpose tools. In the boardroom there are many different, key types of questions for different purposes and scenarios:

- Establishing the facts
- Developing understanding
- Clarifying
- Providing challenge
- Scrutinising
- Reframing an issue
- Stimulating new ideas or perspectives
- Aiding and assuring decision making
- Identifying risk
- Prompting discussion

Things to avoid

When asking questions because there are such things as bad questions. Asking questions intended to highlight an individual's shortcomings or lack of knowledge can be damaging. Not only can this elicit negative responses, it can create mistrust and disrupt group dynamics.

The Active Learning Trust

[Effective questioning: a toolkit for governors](#) (Extract)

To identify the right question, first and foremost, you need to be a good listener ... this includes

- Articulating – repeating what has been heard and understood – what I hear you saying is ...?
- Clarifying – checking out whether something heard is correct ... trying to achieve a better understanding of the context
- Being Curious – waiting for information before drawing conclusions and identifying solutions
- Silence – giving time - avoiding answering for others or finishing others' sentences