



UNIT 3: GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE

MONITORING THROUGH ACTIVITY BASED
AGENDA ITEMS AND CHALLENGING
QUESTIONS

Introducing Exceed Teaching Schools Alliance

Our pupils and students deserve good schools where they fulfill their potential. School leaders face a wide range of challenges to achieve this but the expertise to address these exists in schools within or beyond our own community. School leaders are best placed to drive effective school improvement. At different moments in time, schools will be in a position where they can provide support to their peers, formally or informally, or they need to access support from other schools to add capacity to address a specific priority. Schools are increasingly working with each other in this way as they continue on their journey of improvement – celebrating and sharing all that is effective and addressing the challenges together to the benefit the wider educational community and the life chances of our young people. This empowers leaders and their staff and gives schools a central role in developing a self-improving and sustainable school-led system. To effectively implement this model we need to utilise every schools' passion, intelligence and talents.



Exceed Teaching Schools Alliance is a developing community of like-minded school and system leaders who are committed to using and accessing the resources available to them – including teachers' and leaders' skills, expertise, and practice – to the benefit of all schools in

Bradford and those across the region. Through bespoke tailored support, Exceed Teaching Schools Alliance facilitates a range of inter-related quality assured school improvement opportunities “for schools by schools” including: school to school support to address identified priorities including via the deployment of Exceed Teaching Schools Alliance’s Specialist

Leaders of Education (SLE); classroom-focused action research and development; leadership development programmes; collaborative professional learning networks; and school-centered initial teacher training (ITT).

Exceed is a cohort five designated Teaching School led by Copthorne Primary School and Horton Grange Primary School, Bradford. As a hub for system leaders, the Alliance of member schools are contributing to shaping the local and national strategy for school improvement that makes us all “stronger through collaboration”.

“We all have the luxury of looking out for ourselves. System leaders have the honour of looking out for others”.

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GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE: MONITORING THROUGH ACTIVITY BASED AGENDA ITEMS AND CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

'**Governance in Practice**' are a series of self-study or, ideally, small group-study training resources to support a Governing Body to further develop effective ways of working. Each unit consists of a blend of background information, short preparatory activities and in-school follow up activities.

The intended outcome, having read and completed all the elements of the unit, is to have assisted Governors to have considered how they undertake their role and fulfill their responsibilities and to support them in the application of enhanced approaches to governance in their school.



2

ACTIVITY BASED AGENDA ITEMS

Increasing the monitoring undertaken by governing bodies through efficient and effective meetings

Some schools are starting to use governing body meeting time differently to make monitoring the school's performance in addressing School Development Plan (SDP) priorities. Through activity based agenda items, governing bodies are collecting first-hand information and validating the information and data provided by senior leaders – key areas Ofsted expect governing bodies to be secure in.

These governing bodies don't just receive information via, for example, the Headteacher's Report; they look to see evidence of actions taken by the school. For example, if 'Big Maths' has been introduced they receive information from senior leaders via the SDP, ask the Numeracy Leader to provide a short, ten-minute presentation about the priority and look at pupils' books to see evidence of the approach in practice.

In addition, governing bodies are using this meeting time to contribute to key documents, such as helping to draft a section of the SDP (perhaps the 'improving governance' section) and statements about governance to include in the whole school self-evaluation. This way, they have ownership of the documents, rather than just being aware of them.

Through introducing activity based agenda items, these governing bodies are learning more about their school, increasing their monitoring and, subsequently, the amount of support and challenge they provide. They are finding meetings more enjoyable too!

These activities can be introduced into committee meetings as well as full governing body meetings – particularly the second meeting of each term (where a governing body meets each half term with three meetings per year of the Resources and Standards Committee running alongside these). The first full governing body meeting of the term is used to cover as many 'information giving' agenda items as possible, such as committee reports, Wakefield Council reports, the Headteacher's Report (which may lead to an activity based agenda item at the next meeting), and policy adoption. This way, the agenda for the second meeting is freed up for activity based agenda items – short, focused agenda items of 10-20 minutes each that increase the governing bodies monitoring function.

These activities don't replace the need to visit the school and classrooms, but it does help reduce the amount of monitoring that needs to be done outside of meetings. There is still no reason why meetings should last longer than 90-120 minutes, as Ofsted would recommend.

The agenda templates provided by School Governor Services via the 'Annual Planner' and the template provided by the Governor Support Officer are already set up to accommodate this approach.

Provided below are a number of examples that governing bodies could apply to introduce such activities within committee meetings and the second full governing body meeting of the term.

Activity: Review the agenda items for the academic year as provided in the 'Annual Planner'. Which activities will you build into the second meeting of the full governing body each term? Which will be included in the committee meetings? Build this information into your monitoring schedule.

| Agenda Item and meeting | Example activities |
|--|--|
| <p>Whole school self-evaluation: Full governing body meeting with specific sections reviewed in Committee meetings.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Standards Committee review the content and the related pupil performance data in the 'achievement' section (autumn term). 2. Full governing body jointly draft two short statements describing governance to incorporate into the document (leadership & management section). |
| <p>School Development Plan (SDP): Full governing body meeting</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At full governing body meeting, assign Governors to individual roles and responsibilities linked to specific SDP priorities, e.g. Pupil Premium Governor, Big Maths Governor. 2. Write on the new copy of SDP in the autumn term to identify how each SDP priority will be monitored (e.g. classroom visit, staff presentation, committee report), when (see the plan's milestone) and by whom (e.g. Pupil Premium Governor). Ask the school's admin support to type this information up to create a monitoring and evaluation schedule. |
| <p>Governor monitoring and evaluation visits: Full governing body meeting</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share visit reports for all visits including short verbal summary. Clarify how the visit links to monitoring the SDP. Recommend and agree any further visits that are required, when and by whom. |
| <p>Headteacher and staff performance management: Full governing body meeting and/or Resources Committee</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Verbal and written report on the process and outcome of performance management and the link to SDP priorities. 2. Review the documentation used by senior leaders when conducting performance management to establish a common understanding of the process. 3. Review anonymised performance management information to establish a common understanding of the process and the link to pay and responsibility. |
| <p>Profile of teaching: Full governing body meeting and/or Resources Committee.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review data on the percentage of teaching that is good or better, e.g. by key stage, by year group, trend over time. 2. Explore how the school is supporting staff, e.g. to get more outstanding or good teaching through a staff presentation linked to CPD, school-to-school support provision. 3. Review documentation to see how staff responsibilities link directly to Teaching Standards. |

| Agenda item and meeting | Example activity |
|--|---|
| <p>Pupil performance data: Full governing body meeting and Standards Committee.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At a full governing body meeting, review the school's headline performance data (autumn term) to ensure all governors are aware of the measures for the school. Identify priorities, e.g. from trends over time; performance compared to floor standards and national expectations (for the previous year if national for the current year is not yet available); age related expectations. 2. As above, once the Ofsted Data Dashboard is published (spring term). 3. Review RAISEonline, including the school context, transition matrices and pages marked with a 'G' at the Standards Committee meeting (spring term). 4. At the Standards Committee receive, each term, an update on progress towards school targets compared to floor standards, national averages and national expectations. |
| <p>Pupil Premium: Full governing body meeting and Standards Committee</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Verbal and written reports on the income, use and impact of the Pupil Premium funding for the previous year and plans for the current year (autumn term). 2. Staff presentation(s) linked to specific intervention strategies adopted by the school. 3. Governor learning walks to look at the resources purchased to support eligible pupils. |
| <p>Governance Development Plan: Full governing body meeting</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the summer term, review the previous year's plan to identify successes, priorities that remain, and the impact on governance. 2. In the summer term, draft a plan to include in the SDP for the next academic year. All governors contribute to discussions and its formation. 3. Review each priority mid-year and record progress to date and the actions that still need to be taken. 4. Review the 'leadership and management' section of the Ofsted inspection handbook and agree a judgement on the quality of governance. |
| <p>Committee Reports: Full governing body meeting</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share a short verbal report and written minutes for each committee. The full conversations should not be repeated - this is a delegated responsibility. |

| Agenda item and meeting | Example activity |
|--|---|
| Specific school priorities , e.g. new National Curriculum, assessment without levels: Full governing body meeting | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review a scheme of work to see how lessons have been adapted (supported by Senior Leader). 2. Review a sample of childrens' books to see actions to address priorities in action, e.g. marking, the sharing and recording of learning intentions. |
| Training Link Governor Update: Full governing body meeting | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the training programme and record attendance at upcoming events linked to school priorities and those able to commit to attending. 2. Take feedback from those who attended training: How could/will governance be improved? 3. Consider bespoke support needs for a working group of governors during the working day linked to governance priorities. |
| Headteacher's Report: Full governing body meeting | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use challenging questions rather than clarifying questions to challenge senior leaders and strengthen the evidence of challenge further. |



3

ASKING LEADERS CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

Provide clear evidence for monitoring and evaluating a school's performance through the use of challenging questions.

Governing bodies are expected to support and challenge school leaders; this is an essential part of their role. Clerks provided by School Governor Services will record the questions and answers raised during clerked meetings. This provides Governing bodies with a clear evidence base that they fulfil this duty effectively.

It's worth considering whether the questions being asked are challenging questions (e.g. What is the impact of the Pupil Premium funding on closing the attainment gap with non-Pupil Premium funded pupils?) or clarifying questions (e.g. what is our policy on the approval of term time holidays?). The former are more powerful although there is a time and place for both. For example, a governor may be to clarify a policy to be able to effectively challenge senior leaders.

Below is a range of challenging questions governing bodies could use.

Activity 1: Whilst reading the Headteacher's Report in advance of a full governing body meeting select the questions you would ask that are relevant to the report's content.

Activity 2: Consider how these questions will feature at various points across the school year? How will you ensure they are all used?

General questions to ask:

- What has been the impact of xyz?
- What was the cost of X? Was it worth it?
- What is the evidence for impact? How do we know it's had impact?
- Are the right priorities identified in the School Development Plan? How were these selected?
- What are the key actions/programmes/interventions planned to address these priorities?
- How will the impact of these actions/interventions be monitored, and by whom/when?

General questions to ask about budget/finance:

- Who is involved in the approval of the school budget?
- How is pay linked to performance?
- Is there a projected surplus or deficit this year and the next two years?
- What are the plans to meet the deficit or use the surplus?
- How much of the total budget is spent on improving outcomes for Looked After Children?
- How much is spent on improving outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)?
- What proportion of the total budget is spent on staffing costs? (It is recommended to be around 80%).

- How much funding has been delegated in the current budget under the headings: AEN (Additional Educational Needs), SEND and Personalised Learning? How is this funding being used in school? (It is expected to be used to support pupils with additional needs).
- What changes have been made to the budget, and can the Headteacher explain any virements between cost centres? (This should be asked during every budget monitoring).

General questions to ask about standards:

- What is the overall attainment in reading, writing and maths? How does this compare to the school's targets, national averages and aged related expectations?
- Will we achieve this year's targets?
- How well does pupil tracking support progress in class and how does this feed into the picture of progress across the whole school?

Questions to ask about the Ofsted Data Dashboard:

- If our school/academy is not in the higher quintiles compared with similar schools/academies, why is this and what is leadership doing to improve this subject/Key Stage? Is this clearly addressed in improvement planning?
- What is realistic yet challenging to expect in terms of improvement?
- If our school/academy is in the higher quintiles compared with similar schools/academies, what is leadership doing to ensure this is sustained and developed?
- If our school/academy is not in the higher quintiles compared with schools/academies nationally, why is this and what is leadership doing to improve this subject/Key Stage?
- If there are issues relating to context then how is the leadership team working to overcome any barriers to pupils' learning?
- Is this clearly addressed in improvement planning?
- If our school/academy is in the higher quintiles compared with schools/academies nationally, what is leadership doing to ensure this is sustained and further developed?
- How does the percentage of pupils achieving Level 2 (at Key Stage One) and Level 4 (at Key Stage Two) in each subject compare with the previous year?

- If it is different, why is this so?
- Is this an upward or downward trend over three years?
- What does the school's/academy's data suggest about current cohorts i.e. what will the dashboard look like next year?
- What is leadership doing to maintain any upward trend?
- What is leadership doing to address any downward trend?
- Is the rate of expected improvement realistic yet challenging?
- If there are differences between subjects, what is the leadership doing to address this?
- How will this progress be measured?
- Who is responsible for improvements and how are they are being supported?
- If the attendance rate does not compare favourably with national data then what is leadership doing to address this?
- Is there a sustainable upward trend and why?
- What is the school's/academy's current attendance figure and is this on track for measurable and agreed improvement by the end of the year?
- How does the data for our disadvantaged pupils compare with the national picture?
- Are the positive indicators sustainable and why?
- What is leadership doing to address any issues?
- Is this clearly addressed in improvement planning with rigorous targets for quickly 'narrowing the gap'?
- How will the governing body monitor developments during the year?

Questions to ask about RAISEonline:

- Are there any potential barriers to learning indicated by aspects of the contextual data?
- If so, how successful are the measures put into place by the school leadership in overcoming these barriers?
- How is this success measured?

- Can the school leadership describe any patterns that are emerging over three years of the contextual data?
- Are there any indicators that the school will need to adapt to meet future needs?
- If so, how can the leadership team, including the governing body, incorporate this into the strategic planning cycle?
- How does the attainment of pupils at all Key Stages included in Raise compare with national data?
- By taking a Key Stage and a subject at a time, is the comparison favourable?
- Why are there Sig+ and/or Sig- indicators?
- What are the trends over three years?
- Which subjects appear to be strongest?
- If the schools'/academy's data does compare favourably with national data then why is this and is it going to be sustained and improved even further?
- If the schools'/academy's data does not compare favourably with national data then why is this? What is being implemented to improve teaching and therefore improve attainment in this area?
- How quickly will the situation improve?
- What does the data suggest about the attainment of groups (gender, race, SEND, FSM, CLA, Autumn/Spring/Summer birth etc.)?
- If any groups performed particularly favourably / unfavourably then is this typical for other cohorts and why is this?
- What is being done as a result of this analysis?
- Can the leadership team provide data to show predictions for attainment next year
- Do improvements correlate with planned improvements in teaching?
- How does the school's/academy's Value Added (VA) percentile rank compared with all schools nationally?
- Is this an improving trend over time or not? Why is this?
- What does the data show about the attainment and achievement of pupils for the pupil premium compared with pupils who are not eligible? Are attainment and progress gaps closing?

- Does this suggest that pupil premium funding is being spent effectively?
- Is the school/academy 'narrowing the gap' effectively and if so, how is this sustainable?
- What does the data show about the attainment and achievement of more able pupils? e.g. the process made by KS2 pupils who attained Level 2A or Level 3 at Key Stage One.
- Are there any differences between subjects for these pupils?
- Are there any trends emerging and if so, why is this?

Questions to ask about the Pupil Premium and vulnerable groups:

- How much funding has the school received to support those eligible for the Pupil Premium?
- What are the plans for the use of the funding?
- How is this funding being used to address the needs of the eligible pupils, rather than the needs of the whole cohort?
- What impact do we expect it to have?
- What impact has it had?
- How is the school identifying its vulnerable groups and pupils?
- Which group is most vulnerable? Is tracking of progress in place and how do you monitor this?
- How does the progress of the vulnerable groups compare to local and national averages?
- What is being done to improve/accelerate progress made by the vulnerable groups? How does the school evidence pupil progress?
- How is the evidence used to raise standards further?
- How does the school work with parents and carers to help them to support their children's learning?
- How does the school celebrate achievement of all pupils including vulnerable groups?

Questions to ask about the quality of teaching:

- How does the headteacher/principal organise the monitoring of teaching and learning throughout the school/academy?
- What does this involve and how does it best provide an accurate picture of day to day practice?

- How does the leadership team ensure that monitoring activities focus on pupil progress?
- How are the outcomes of monitoring activities correlated with progress data?
- How does the headteacher/principal ensure that the judgements made on the quality of teaching and learning are accurate and reflect the current Ofsted grade descriptors?
- Is there consistency of approach by all leaders involved in monitoring so that teachers and support staff receive the same messages?
- What percentage of the teaching is judged to be 'good' or better in the most recent monitoring cycle?
- What percentage is 'outstanding'?
- Is any teaching 'inadequate'?
- Is this an improvement on the previous cycle?
- Are there any differences between the quality of teaching in maths compared with English?
- Are there any differences between the quality of teaching in different Key Stages?
- Where teaching is 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate', what actions are being taken to address this?
- How will this be monitored?
- Can the leadership team evaluate the impact of the school's/academy's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme on pupil outcomes?
- How has teaching improved because of the training that staff have undertaken?
- How are support staff involved in CPD? What is the impact of this training?
- In general terms, what are the outcomes of the latest performance management/appraisal meetings?
- Can the headteacher/principal explain how their pay recommendations for teaching staff link clearly to performance and pupil outcomes?

Questions to ask about behaviour, safety and SMSC development:

- What are pupils' levels of social development on entry?

- What issues does this raise and how are they addressed?
- How does the leadership team know that the behaviour policy and any policies linked to behaviour are being implemented consistently across the setting?
- What is the exclusion rate this year and are there any patterns emerging e.g. are excluded pupils from any particular group/s?
- If pupils are excluded can the headteacher/principal explain the procedures that need to be followed and demonstrate compliance?
- Does the monitoring of teaching and learning show that pupils' behaviour has a positive effect on their learning?
- Is this consistent across the setting?
- What does this look like and can it be further developed?
- Who had completed 'Safer Recruitment' training?
- Is the Single Central Record in place? Is it checked by Governors?
- How do we know that children and staff are safe?
- Are there any potential safety issues relating to the context of the school/ academy that need to be addressed?
- How does the leadership team know that the health and safety policy and any policies linked to health and safety are being implemented consistently across the setting?
- How does the leadership keep up to date with the rapid changes in IT and the associated risks to pupils?
- How are any pupils new to the setting and their parents/carers made aware of the IT safety policy and procedures?
- How is the school/academy monitoring its IT safety policy and its procedures and is this effective?
- Can the leadership team explain how pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) and development reflect the context of the school?
- How is this being monitored and developed?
- **Questions to ask about leadership and management, including Safeguarding:**

- How do members of the leadership team monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching throughout the school/ academy?
- What has been the impact of recent improvements to teaching and how has this been measured?
- How is teachers' pay and progression clearly linked to performance?
- Which Governors involved in the Headteacher's Performance Management? Is this completed before the end of the autumn term?
- Do the governing body use support from outside the school?
- How are the objectives selected?
- How do Governors know that objectives have been met? Has a mid-year review taken place with Governors?
- What changes have been made to the curriculum this year and why?
- How is the curriculum underpinned by the teaching of basic skills?
- How does the curriculum meet the needs of learners in a particular Key Stage/ subject?
- How is the curriculum evaluated and does this process concentrate on outcomes for pupils?
- How does the curriculum meet the needs of more able pupils and does progress data support the view that this is effective?
- What has been the impact of the pupil premium in terms of outcomes?
- Is the pupil premium being targeted at all pupils who are eligible, not only lower attaining pupils?
- What is the evidence of this?
- How is subject leadership organised and how is the impact of subject leadership evaluated?
- How do subject leaders keep up-to-date with best practice?
- How do subject leaders monitor and evaluate learning in their subject?
- Is the Child Protection Policy made available to all parents, carers and staff?
- How are relevant risk assessments made available to staff?
- What procedures are followed for risk assessing school trips?

- How does the leadership team in the school ensure that safeguarding remains a priority on a day-to-day basis?
- Are there any changes to the statutory safeguarding requirements and Ofsted guidance in this area?
- What do pupils tell us about whether they feel safe in school?
- Are there any places in and around school that they identify as being a concern?

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