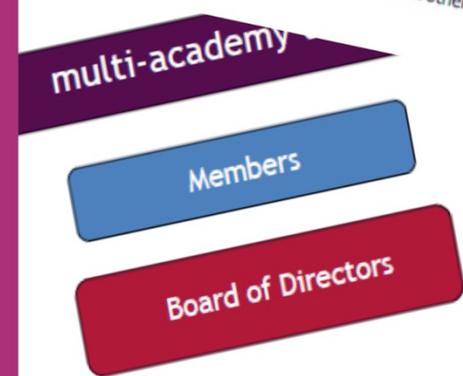


GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE

UNIT 3: COLLECTING FIRST-HAND INFORMATION AND ASKING CHALLENGING QUESTIONS



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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
ACTIVITY BASED AGENDA ITEMS	4
Increasing the monitoring undertaken by governing boards through efficient and effective meetings	4
ASKING LEADERS CHALLENGING QUESTIONS	8

GOVERNANCE IN PRACTICE: COLLECTING FIRST-HAND INFORMATION AND ASKING CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

'**Governance in Practice**' are a series of self-study or, ideally, small group-study training resources to support a Governing board 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 fulfil their responsibilities and to support them in the application of enhanced approaches to governance in their school.

The structure of the governing board is based on a full governing board meeting, perhaps each half term, proceeded, perhaps on a termly basis, Resources Committee and Standards Committee meetings. This model is not a recommended model, it is purely illustrative. Schools and trusts will determine their own structure. This resource may need to be adapted to meet your governing board's needs.

This unit is complemented by the **Governance in Practice Unit 2: Undertaking Classroom Visits** resource.

ACTIVITY BASED AGENDA ITEMS

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

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

These governing boards 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 'Maths Mastery' 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 sample some pupils' books to see evidence of the approach in practice.

In addition, governing boards 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 boards are learning more about their school, increasing their monitoring and, subsequently, the amount of support and challenge they provide.

These activities can be introduced into committee meetings as well as full governing board meetings. The first full governing board meeting of the term can be used to cover as many 'information giving' agenda items as possible, such as committee 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 boards 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 minutes.

The suggested agenda schedule in the 'Annual Planner' is designed to accommodate this approach.

Provided below are a number of examples that governing boards could apply to introduce such activities within meetings.

Activity: Review the agenda items for the academic year as provided in the 'Annual Planner'.

Which activities will you build into committee and/or full governing board meetings? Build this information into your monitoring schedule.

Agenda Item and meeting	Example activities
Whole school self-evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the content and the related pupil performance data in the 'achievement' section (autumn term). 2. Jointly draft two short statements describing governance to incorporate into the document (leadership & management section).
School Development Plan (SDP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At a full governing board meeting, assign Governors to individual roles and responsibilities linked to specific SDP priorities, e.g. Pupil Premium Governor, Maths Mastery 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.
Governor monitoring and evaluation visits	<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.
Headteacher and staff performance management	<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.
Profile of teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review data on the percentage of teaching that is good or meets the school's expectations, e.g. by key stage, by year group, trend over time. 2. Explore how the school is supporting staff, e.g. to get more to the expected standard (or better) teaching through a staff presentation linked to CPD, school-to-school support provision.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Review documentation to see how staff responsibilities link directly to the teaching standards.
Pupil performance data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At a full governing board 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 national averages (for the previous year if national for the current year is not yet available); age related expectations. 2. As above, once the School Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR) is published. 3. At the Standards Committee receive, each term, an update on progress towards school targets compared to national averages.
Pupil Premium	<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.
Governance Development Plan	<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.
Committee Reports	<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.

<p>Specific school priorities, e.g. curriculum development, phonics teaching</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review a curriculum plan 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 (supported by a Senior Leader).
<p>Training Link Governor Update</p>	<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.
<p>Headteacher's Report</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use challenging questions (see below) to support and challenge senior leaders and strengthen the evidence of challenge further when appropriate.
<p>Curriculum continuum</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Receive information about the school's curriculum over an academic year for each year group and how it is progressive and sequential year on year through the school. 2. Review a sample of children's books from each year group to see a visual representation of the progression.

ASKING LEADERS CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

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

Governing boards are expected to support and challenge school leaders; this is an essential part of their role. Clerks should be prompted to record the questions and answers raised during clerked meetings. This provides governing boards 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? Where it has been discussed previously). The former is more powerful although there is a time and place for both. For example, a governor may need to clarify a policy to be able to effectively challenge senior leaders.

Below is a range of example challenging questions governing boards could use.

Activity 1: Whilst reading the Headteacher's Report in advance of a full governing board meeting select 1-3 questions you would ask that are relevant to the report's content.

Activity 2: Consider how these questions might feature at various points across the school year

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 Children Looked After (CLA)?
- 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%).

- What changes have been made to the budget, and can the Headteacher explain any variations between cost centres? (This should be asked during every budget monitoring).
- Has the school engaged with a School Management Resource Adviser?
- Has the school undertaken a curriculum led financial planning review?

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?
- 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 being supported?
- 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'?
- 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?
- How will the governing board monitor developments during the year?

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 personal 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?
- Does the school engage with 'gaming'?
- Are pupils 'off-rolled'? If so, for what reasons? How does this impact on standards?
- 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' personal development reflects 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 are involved in the Headteacher's Performance Management? Is this completed before the end of the autumn term?
- Do the governing board 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?