Improving Governance Improving Schools

Improving your governing body to improve your school:

Messages from Research

Chris James

University of Bath

c.james@bath.ac.uk

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The wider context for governing

- Academies and free schools
- Collaboration pressures
- The changing role of the local authority
- Teaching schools
- Funding changes
- Curriculum and assessment changes
- Changes to inspection

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School governing and change

- The governing of a school is always changing.

- The context for governing is often changing.

- Schools are 'fragile' institutions.

- The importance of well-managed collective governing.

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- School governing:
- is important
- can be complicated, demanding and difficult
- is usually done well
- is a voluntary activity.
- School governors give an enormous amount, yet their contribution is hidden.

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Governing body effectiveness

- About 80-85% of GBs are effective.

- The lack of a capable GB is a substantial disadvantage for a school.

- The effect of vacancies on GB effectiveness is small.

- No consistent relationship between GB size and effectiveness.

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Effective governing bodies:

- have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities
- share a common vision of what the school is trying to achieve
- are well-attended
- have good communication
- work to clearly structured agenda
- are effectively chaired
- have meetings where members feel able to speak their minds
- are supplied with good quality, relevant information.

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Ineffective governing bodies tend <u>not</u> to:

- challenge the headteacher

- monitor plans and targets

- scrutinise decisions

- ensure the accountability of the governing body.

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The governing of primary schools and secondary schools
- They are different
- They have different effects on pupil attainment

Size, complexity, closeness and contact are important factors.

Know what you're governing

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The nature of governing

- Critical friend?
- Supporter?
- Challenger?
- User of data?
- Scrutiniser?

Strategic collective scrutiny is important "Are we doing the right thing?"

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The governing task

- Being responsible for the conduct of the school.

- Make sure the GB is clear what its task is.

- Ensuring a secure understanding of the task when there are changes to GB membership is important.

- Don't get diverted from the main task – projects, initiatives; structures; whingeing; squabbles . . . .

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The capabilities required

- Having the right skills and capabilities is very important

- The significance of the core group

- Skills audits can be very useful

- Training and development are important

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The capabilities required

- The in-school presence/involvement of governors is important can be very helpful in developing governing capability

- The link governor role

- Inter-personal relational skills are very important

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The capabilities required

- Expertise in understanding pupil performance data can be very helpful.

- Keep a close eye on performance – especially 'within-school variation'.

- Governing is a development activity in its own right

It's important to learn <u>about</u> governing and <u>through</u> governing.

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Participation

- Is important and difficult to manage.
- The jargon can be difficult.
- The issues can be complex.
- Newcomers may need time to settle in.

Ensuring full and appropriate participation is essential.

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Different contributions

- The role of the local authority governor is unclear and can be unsatisfactory.

- Local councillors make a mixed contribution

- Staff governors make a mixed contribution but it is typically beneficial.

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Governing body organisation

- The committees

- The core group

- The meetings

- The clerk

It's important to be organised.

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Important aspects

- The full governing body meetings are important but so are all the other 'meetings'.

- The task of appointing a new headteacher can be particularly important and difficult – Get ready!

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The motivators and the dissatisfiers in school governing

- School governing touches very significant motivations and it can be highly satisfying

- Governance agency

- Aspects of it can be irritating and dissatisfying

Maximise motivators and governance agency.

Minimise the dissatisfiers.

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The Chair - legally a very significant role and responsibility

- Governing bodies are responsible for the conduct of schools in England.

- *"The governing body must elect a chair".*

- The role carries specific legal responsibilities.

- The Chair has considerable emergency powers to act alone.

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The Chair - in practice a very significant role and responsibility

- A substantial undertaking requiring considerable capability.

- A considerable time commitment.

- Very challenging and extremely rewarding.

- Chairs - considerable motivation and very high level vision for the role.

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Being a governor

- Chairs are governors and members of the governing body.

- Chairs carry a share of the governing body's collective responsibility for the conduct of the school.

- The 'lead governor' aspect of the role.

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Appointing the headteacher

- A relatively infrequent event but a very significant moment.

- One of the more worthwhile aspects of the role.

Working with the headteacher

- A close, productive working relationship is important.

- It brings considerable benefits.

- A pivotal relationship in governance.
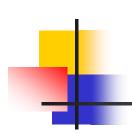
- Extensive joint working.

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Acting as a change agent

- A good chair can change the school and the governing body for the better.

- Involvement in change management - important and worthwhile.

- The chair can be particularly significant in times of 'crisis'.

- The 'reluctant chair' can be damaging and impede improvement efforts.

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Active participation in the school

- Participating actively in the work of the school is a significant.

- Participation – a range of ways for various purposes.

- The in-school presence/involvement is significant and can be substantial.

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Organising the governing body

A key aspect of the role:

- improving functioning

- ensuring a collective way of working

- being the lead expert in school governing.

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Dealing with complaints

- Can be significant (esp. parents' complaints).
- Unjustified complaints . . . . .
- Protracted complaints . . . . .

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Working with parents

- A positive and not so positive aspect.
- Managing relationships between school/staff and parents.
- Working with parent governors can be challenging.
- Can make the role isolating and 'public'.

Chairing meetings

- A minor part of the role but quite a task.

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The Chair-Headteacher relationship

- Overall, relations between Chairs and Heads are strong – respect and investment on both sides.

- Chairs and Heads differ in their views on the frequency and length of interactions (Chairs more frequent and longer).

- Heads accept that the Chairs has to challenge them, Chairs do not have such a positive view.

- Heads say that they are open with the Chairs, Chairs do not have such a positive view.

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Important aspects of Chairs' practice

- Heads and Chairs agree on what is important.

- 'Leadership/group management skills (such as 'supporting effective teamwork' and 'managing differences of opinion) are prioritised over functional skills (such as Finance and HRM).

- The important skills are in 'managing the group' to ensure collective functioning.

- Heads say that they are open with the Chairs, Chairs do not have such a positive view.

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The role of the Chair:

- is a complex, demanding and multi-faceted responsibility – yet hidden from view

- can powerfully impact on schools and their governing bodies

- involves boundary work - between the school and the governing body – and increasingly between their own and other governing bodies

- is likely to increase in importance in the future

- is *"a significant educational and community leadership responsibility"*.

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