

Preparing for inspection

Governors' Toolkit



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Preparing for inspection

- Governance is a key element of how Ofsted make judgements on leadership and management of the school. Leadership and management are one of the four judgements make on the school.
- Governance has a much higher profile in the present framework and it is getting increasingly more important. There are very specific things that inspectors must investigate and report on. All Ofsted reports now have very clear judgements about how governors:
 - ✓ Have overview of the link between pay progression and teaching ability
 - ✓ Monitor spending and impact of the pupil premium and year 7 catch-up premium
 - ✓ Understand data relating to pupils' achievement and attendance
- During an inspection, an inspector will meet with one or more members of the governing body. Paragraph 77 of the subsidiary guidance (April 2013), available of the Ofsted website states that 'Inspectors should meet with as many governors during and inspection as possible..'. It is quite common for the meeting with governors to include 4 or more of the governing body therefore.
- In addition to the three key areas of governance outlined above, paragraph 78 of the subsidiary guidance asks inspectors to consider whether governors:
 - ✓ Carry out their statutory duties
 - ✓ Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching
 - ✓ Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
 - ✓ Understand and take sufficient account of pupil data, particularly their understanding of the school data dashboard
 - ✓ Are aware of the impact of teaching on learning and progress in different subjects and year groups
 - ✓ Are challenging and supporting leadership in equal measure
 - ✓ Are providing support for an effective headteacher or whether they are hindering school improvement by not successfully tackling key concerns
 - ✓ Understand how the school makes decisions about teachers' salary progression
 - ✓ Performance manage the headteacher rigorously
 - ✓ Are failing to perform well and contributing to weaknesses in leadership and management
- Well before an inspection, you will need to discuss with other governors who is best to meet inspectors. Sometimes it a good idea to have a governor there who has a good knowledge of achievement and another who has detailed knowledge of performance management. You will need to decide this well in advance so that it can be arranged quickly when the school receives the phone call.
- The timing of the meeting is usually discussed with the headteacher either in the phone call before the inspection or on the first morning. Inspectors are usually flexible on their timing for this meeting, knowing that governors have their own commitments.
- It is a good idea to let your headteacher know when you are available as soon as you're made aware of an inspection so the meeting can be speedily arranged on the first morning.
- Don't necessarily expect the lead inspector to be interviewing you. This interview is often delegated to a member of the inspection team.
- A governor is usually present at the final feedback meeting which will take place on day 2 of the inspection at around 16:00

The Headteacher's report to governors (HTRG)

Often the HTRG is the main document that governors rely on to obtain regular information on the school and acts as a starting point for further investigation if it is needed. In many schools, this document fails to give incisive information on achievement and therefore governors do not have much to go on when challenging the school to improve. Such HTRGs may give too much information on trivial matters such as what happened in soccer tournaments, how much money was raised in the school fair etc.

Many HTRGs contain information on past achievement of pupils who have now left the school but little or no information on current cohorts. This gives a very superficial overview of achievement and does little to help governors challenge the school successfully.

High quality HTRGs include :

- Progress that pupils are currently making in each year group and projections. For example in primary schools projections of how many pupils are going to make 2 levels progress in reading writing and maths alongside historic data for the past 2 years is very useful to see what the weak areas are. The information should be presented alongside national averages (NOT local authority averages). This then gives governors something to follow up throughout the year.
- Where there is an Early Years Foundation Stage, there should be an evaluation of childrens' progress against the new early learning goals and how the school has addressed the increased requirements of children in Reception.
- Where there is a sixth form, projections of value added progress and an explanation against national benchmarks is useful.
- Strengths and weaknesses in teaching as monitored by school leaders. This can then be linked into information about pay progression and performance management
- Current grades according to the ofsted handbook on the four Ofsted headings : Achievement, teaching, behaviour and Leadership with commentary of strengths and weaknesses. It is important for the weaknesses to be outlined very clearly, since these should be the basis of the school development plan. To make things easy, this section can then be the main part of the school's summary of self evaluation.
- Information about behaviour and attendance. These should be displayed alongside national averages (NOT local authority averages). Any particular concerns about behaviour should be outlined in the HTRG so that this can be monitored by governors. In secondary schools for example, it is useful to have a summary of 'call outs' or removals from lessons for the term alongside previous terms. Governors can then ask questions about patterns of removal or whether behaviour is better in some departments than others.

Governors should visit the school with a particular focus and make a written evaluation on that focus by the end of the visit. It is not really enough to simply describe what happened during the visit. If the visit was entirely positive, there are always things that can be suggested to make the event even more successful. These might be phrased as ‘things to consider’ in the report visit.

Protocols for visits should be agreed with the headteacher in advance. The Subsidiary guidance, paragraph 77 states that:

‘Whatever the mode of governance, inspectors must evaluate the extent to which governors both challenge and support the school and hold senior staff, including the headteacher, to account for the achievement of the pupils. Governors are not expected to be routinely involved in the day-to-day activity of the school. Governors are not expected to undertake lesson observations, unless the school has clear protocols for visits so their purposes are understood by school staff and governors alike¹. However, they hold important strategic responsibilities for the development and improvement of the school.’

Such protocols for visits are important for staff to understand the purpose of governor visits and for governors to know where their role begins and ends. A suggestion for such a protocol that can be customised to a school’s needs is on Appendix A

Governors commonly feel they don’t know what to ask school leaders during visits, particularly if the governor is new to their role or does not feel they have a good enough understanding of the day to day running of the school or of the data. These prompts are intended as a starting point for further discussion. Always try to steer the discussions to find out what the impact has been on what the school is doing. You may get a lot of information about what a school leader has been doing, but this doesn’t tell you how this has positively affected pupils.

- How do you think your area of the improvement plan is going?
- What has been happening in the last 12 months?
- What is working well? What needs more work and how are you going to do it?
- How have you measured the impact of that?
- What is planned for the next 12 months?
- What further help and support do you need?
- What is the current state of resources in that subject?
- What have been the main challenges?
- How will you know if this has been successful?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in that area?

¹ School governance: Learning from the best

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-school-governance-learning-best>

The challenge of managing governor meetings is that procedural issues, such as reviewing past minutes, going through governor visit reports and reviewing policies can take up much valuable time. While these are important, governing bodies should find ways to expedite matters so that the GB can spend time on the three core areas, which, once again are that governors:

- Have overview of the link between pay progression and teaching ability
- Monitor spending and impact of the pupil premium and year 7 catch-up premium
- Understand data relating to pupils' achievement and attendance

Inspectors often find, when they scrutinise governor minutes for the 12 months prior to an inspection, that the GB have spent minimal time on these three core areas. In several cases schools have gone into special measures as a result of weak achievement and poor teaching that has not been tackled well enough by school leaders. When inspectors looked at governing body minutes, they found much discussion about how the school was to be decorated, the cost of replacing windows and of school uniform. There was, however, minimal discussion about the three core areas. In all these cases, governance was deemed to be offering insufficient challenge to school leaders.

Ofsted visited 14 schools and compiled a helpful report on characteristics of high performing governing bodies in the report '*School governance, learning from the best*' (May 2011). In addition, here are a list of tips, some from good and outstanding schools of how full governing body meetings can be better managed :

- 'Any other business' is not an opportunity for governors to unload their concerns. It is an opportunity for items to be considered for future inclusion in minutes. The AoB section of the meeting should last a maximum of 5 minutes
- Set up a virtual learning environment for governors to share information, download draft policies and view past minutes. This saves on printing and enables governors to consider changes to policies before the meeting
- Ensure all policies are available for governors and parents on the school website
- Governor visits need not be discussed in meetings. The governor visit notes should suffice. Also, if the protocols for visits is in place and a regular schedule is in place for visits, it is not necessary to spend time in meetings discussing whether or not a governor should visit and what the focus should be.
- Unless absolutely urgent, governors should not insist that an item is put on the agenda for a meeting
- Sometimes, a disproportionate amount of time is spent discussing items for the school development plan. It is up to the school to produce a development plan, arising from the remaining weaknesses in the school. The development plan can be amended in the light of challenges from governors but time should not be spent in meetings about how it should be worded etc.

Committee meetings are where in depth discussions can take place. *Learning from the best* describes committees as the 'engine room of governance'.