

The effectiveness of the governing body

Briefing for section 5 inspectors

Purpose of the guidance

This guidance is intended to help inspectors to judge the effectiveness of schools' governing bodies in challenging and supporting their schools so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met. It should be read in conjunction with *The evaluation schedule for schools*.

Age group: All

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Introduction

1. In order to secure the judgement about the impact of governance it is essential that inspectors use the broad range of evidence available. The evidence gathered to help inspectors reach this judgement may also help inspectors when judging other aspects of the school's work such as pupils' outcomes, elements of provision and areas relating to the school's leadership and management.

Guidance

2. The following prompts are designed to help inspectors source evidence to help them evaluate the effectiveness of governance.

Before the inspection

3. The self-evaluation form (SEF) provides useful insight into the effectiveness of the governing body. Inspectors will want to:
 - scrutinise all sections of the SEF, particularly Part A
 - outcomes for pupils, especially enjoying and achieving
 - pupils' attendance and punctuality
 - the contribution of the governing body to the quality of provision
 - aspects of leadership and management, including school improvement planning and review, target setting and whether the governing body meets its statutory duties
 - briefly look at the remaining sections – there may be helpful references to
 - extended services
 - designated SEN resource base or similar provision
 - partnerships, including whether the school is federated
 - the nature of pupils' special needs and pupils' disabilities
 - pupils' mobility
 - looked after children
 - statutory targets
 - transfers and retention
 - staff turnover
 - temporary teachers and teacher vacancies
 - explanation of surplus /deficit budget in excess of 5%

- in Part C, look in particular for any statutory requirements that are not in place or partly in place so that this can be followed up in discussion with governors.

During the inspection

4. Inspectors will identify a range of opportunities throughout the inspection which will help them to secure a robust evidence base in supporting the judgement for governance. The annex provides a range of questions that inspectors may find useful when evaluating the work of the governing body.
5. Inspectors may find it helpful to carry out one or more of the following activities:
 - hold a discussion with at least one representative of the governing body. If it is not convenient for a representative to meet in person, a telephone conversation can be arranged. Please note that telephone conversations must be pre-booked with the governor concerned. If it is possible to arrange, a discussion with a small group of governors will give a clearer picture of the breadth of governors' involvement in self-evaluation and improvement planning and review, the level of understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the extent to which statutory duties are met. Inspectors' questions will need to focus on the impact that governors have on tackling weaknesses and securing improvement
 - briefly scrutinise minutes of the full governing body and sub-committee meetings for the past year. This will help to identify how robustly governors are focused on improvement and how effectively leaders are challenged and held to account. Inspectors will want to find out:
 - if priorities in the improvement plan are discussed regularly
 - whether issues are being addressed quickly enough or whether the same issues emerge with consistent regularity.

Inspectors may identify pertinent issues from this scrutiny, to pursue in discussion with governors or senior leaders, for example about the pace of improvement

- in discussions with senior and middle leaders, inspectors can include questions about the impact of the governing body and governors' involvement in self-evaluation and improvement planning. They might ask whether:
 - middle leaders communicate directly with governors about standards and achievement
 - named governors linked to key aspects of the school's work.

- check when scrutinising the single central record whether governors in regular contact with children are included (see separate safeguarding guidance). Find out if the policy for safeguarding is reviewed annually
 - when looking at the school's lesson observation and monitoring records, check the extent to which governors are actively involved. For example, whether they visit classrooms and provide feedback on their visits
 - as part of the case study scrutiny, check how governors may have been informed about issues. Look at the extent to which they have challenged leaders to ensure the needs of all groups are being met effectively
 - look at the school's plan for improvement to identify how governors are involved in its development and evaluation. Check whether any of the success criteria are quantifiable and enable the governing body to hold staff to account. Check the extent to which the allocation of resources is linked clearly to appropriate priorities and whether it is based on a secure understanding of pupils' needs
 - when analysing questionnaires ask whether parents feel that their views are taken into account and acted on. Check whether the questionnaires' comments indicate how well complaints are dealt with by governors and how accessible parents feel governors are. (you might look out to see if governors are identified on the school notice board)
 - in moving around the school check whether it is safe and secure. You can also check whether resources are of good quality and sufficient for all pupils' needs. Find out whether any governors are present during the school day, for example to support pupils in their work.
6. It is important to note that evidence gathered through inspectors' activities such as those suggested in paragraph 5 above, are part of normal inspection practice. They are not used for gathering evidence about the effectiveness of governance only.

Annex

Inspectors may find the following questions useful when talking to governors. The questions *are examples only* and will clearly need to be tailored to the individual school and linked to the pre inspection briefing.

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the school and how do governors know?
- What are the strengths and areas for development of the governing body?
- What are the main barriers to learning and what action has been taken to overcome them? How successful have the actions been?
- What contribution does the governing body think it has made to improving provision, especially teaching, and outcomes for pupils?
- To what extent is the governing body involved in the school's processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning?
- How do governors monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school improvement plan?
- Can governors give examples of how they have supported and challenged the school?
- What are the procedures for safeguarding pupils and how have training needs been met?
- How are governors involved in the life of the school?
- Do governors have specific areas of responsibility and/or links with school classes/form/tutor groups/subjects/departments? What is the impact of these links?
- How do governors consult parents/the local community?
- Can governors give examples of when parental/community views have been sought and acted on?
- How are the training needs of governors identified and addressed?
- What training have governors undertaken recently and what has been the impact of this training?