

## Effective Local Governance

Our Scheme of Governance (SoD) relies on LGB's being close to individual schools and their communities to ensure that we are together delivering on our mission for young people. The focus for Local Governing Bodies (LGB's) is the quality of education delivered by the school for the young people it serves. The Ofsted Education Inspection Framework provides an extremely useful set of criteria by which to measure whether a school is performing at a high level in the key areas that make a difference to young people.

- Quality of Education
- Personal Development
- Behaviour and Attitudes
- Leadership and Management

There is also an overall effectiveness judgement as well as separate criteria for early years and foundation stage and sixth forms. For LGB's a simple way of ensuring that there is appropriate focus for meetings is to consider your role in terms of "The four C's":

1. Curriculum
2. Culture
3. Children
4. Community

Safeguarding needs to be woven through all these areas with LGB's encouraged to ask questions about the wellbeing, safety and support of children, particularly the most vulnerable, in all areas of school life. The Trust operates formal safeguarding systems with Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) in each school and a Trust Safeguarding Lead supported by a specific Trustee. The statutory responsibility for safeguarding lies with the Trustees but LGB's perform an important role by being 'curious outsiders'. Through their work with the school staff and pupils they are able to see how our Trust values and safeguarding policies are being applied on the ground, in their schools. All LGB members are required to undergo safeguarding training that helps inform their work.

### **Governance behaviours**

There are an additional 3 C's that apply equally to any aspect of school life and describe how governors behave in their role, these are:

#### **1. Challenge**

There needs to be an element of challenge in the work of LGB's, they should not be afraid to ask difficult questions or present divergent solutions to problems. The LGB brings greater diversity to the leadership of the school allowing people with different experiences to contribute to continuous improvement. Parent governors will also have valuable insights into the school's provision from their everyday experience.

## 2. Celebrate

Leaders and the rest of the school team will appreciate the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the school and the children they serve. Governors should be able to share in that celebration and look out for things they feel are worth noting positively at meetings.

## 3. Curiosity

Curiosity is a requirement for all LGB members. The professional curiosity that informs great questions that lead to better understanding and helpful insights. Curiosity does not infer a lack of trust but an eagerness to read, listen, understand, learn and reflect on what governors see and hear.

## 1. Curriculum (Quality of Education)

This is what schools want children to know, learn and remember and also how children go about learning and securing knowledge. Key questions Governors may want to ask are:

- a) How do Leaders at the school construct a curriculum that is ambitious and designed to give all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, including pupils with SEND, the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life?
- b) How does the school provide “a rich and broad curriculum where great teaching and confident reading are fundamental to enriching children’s lives”? <sup>1</sup>
- c) How is the school’s curriculum coherently planned and sequenced to allow children to cumulatively gain sufficient knowledge and skills for future learning and employment?
- d) How does the school with teachers in the classroom, adapt, design and develop the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND?
- e) Do all pupils study the full curriculum? Is the curriculum at least as broad and balanced as the national curriculum?
- f) Do all teachers have the knowledge, expertise and support they need to deliver the curriculum expertly?

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<sup>1</sup> Trust Goals, Values, Mission document

## 2. Culture

The Ofsted inspection framework has a whole section on behaviour and attitudes, much of this is driven by the culture in a school which is determined by the leaders and should reflect our shared Trust values. Questions about culture could include:

- a) How does the behaviour of leaders in the school, including Governors, reflect the content of our Red Kite Leadership Charter?<sup>2</sup>
- b) Is the school a calm and orderly environment that allows children to learn and feel safe?
- c) Are there a set of clear routines and expectations for the behaviour of children across all aspects of school life?
- d) Is there a strong focus on attendance and punctuality, and is it good enough?
- e) Do the children have positive attitudes to learning and are they positive and respectful to their peers and adults?
- f) Do all pupils feel safe from bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, either online or offline?
- g) Is the culture of the school open and welcoming to parents and other members of the community?
- h) Is the wellbeing of staff and children a high priority for all?

## 3. Children

Whatever agenda items are discussed at Governing Body meetings the focus must always be on children. This is not just about delivering the formal curriculum but ensuring the personal, cultural and social development of children and young people is supported effectively. The Ofsted handbook gives some good indications of what expectations should be, including consideration of the work the school does providing extra-curricular activities which strengthen the school's offer. LGB's are in a very good position to be able to get to understand what the experience for children in their school is on a day-to-day basis.

- a) Does the school have a clear system based on the Trust's Policies to ensure safeguarding is always highly effective?
- b) Are there any areas of school life in which safeguarding could be even better or more effective?
- c) What opportunities does the school offer to build their "cultural capital"?

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<sup>2</sup> Red Kite Leadership Charter

- d) How does the school manage issues regarding mental health and wellbeing?
- e) Do young people have the opportunity to work with children beyond their own community and learn about Equality, Inclusions and Diversity?

As well as speaking to staff they can ask children questions such as:

- a) Do you feel safe in school?
- b) Do you take part in any extra-curricular activities or have you been on any residential?
- c) What part does music, drama, sport and physical activity play in your school life?
- d) Who do you go to if you are worried about your safety or the behaviour of another child or adult?

Governors may also usefully meet with specific groups of children, for example those with special educational needs or disabilities in order to find out how the school is adapting to cater for their needs.

#### **4. Community**

In our Trust, we believe that our schools need to work positively and constructively with the community that they serve. There are many benefits for young people that can come from utilising resources, expertise and local knowledge that exist just outside the school gates. Equally the community can benefit from the facilities the school has to offer and from having access to a trusted community resource that is your school. Governors may want to ask:

- a) Are there any ways in which the school has used the local community to enhance or support the curriculum?
- b) Does the school utilise people from the community who have special skills, knowledge or experiences that can extend their cultural capital or assist them in finding employment and/or training?
- c) Does the school do any work to support their own community through volunteering, charity fund raising or, for example, inviting local people to school events?

The four C's are a useful aide memoire to be used in setting agendas for Local Governing Body meetings. The questions provided are just starting points and LGB's will have many more but can also reference the Inspection Handbook to give inspiration for questions and other conversations they might have.

The Education Inspection Framework (EIF) should not, however, be a limit for our ambitions as a Trust and individual schools, simply a starting point. Governors will want to develop areas of the school's provision that go beyond "outstanding" and make the school unique and special, in tune with

the needs of their own context. By focusing in on the four C's, the intention is that there can be a greater depth of conversation about the things that really matter for our young people.

Local Governing Body meetings are always much better when Governors have a chance to visit the school themselves, when it is open, and meet with children and staff. This does not have to be time consuming and may be part of a structured "open day" event for Governors or just be about dropping in for an hour to look at a particular theme, question or issue. Local Governors are also encouraged to come along to school activities, plays, concerts, sports events etc., as these form such an important part of the overall educational provision and give clear insights into the culture of the school.

Local governance should be enjoyable and productive. By focusing on the four C's and moving away from simply reviewing policies and processes, the Local Governing Board can ensure that the challenges the school face are really well understood, leaders encounter informed, productive questions and governance adds value in terms of our shared desire to continually improve provision for young people.

### **Making Local Governance Work Well**

Having the right focus is a great starting point for LGB's but there are some very practical things that need to underpin their work:

#### **Attendance**

We all appreciate the generosity and selflessness that Local Governing Body members demonstrate by stepping forward to serve. Good attendance at meetings is vital if the Board is to be able to function effectively. Intermittent attendance makes things difficult for all parties. If Local Governing Body members are unable to attend through unforeseen circumstances, it is important that apologies are given in advance, so others' efforts are not wasted. Our Trust will ensure that dates of meetings are published in advance and in full for the year ahead to help support all members to attend.

#### **Come Prepared**

Principals/Headteachers will usually get their report to you, plus any additional documents, a week ahead of the meeting. This gives time for pre-reading and questions to be raised either before or at the meeting rather than just information being given out. Allocating time in your diary in the week before the meeting to read, think and reflect on the school will make your meeting more enjoyable and more productive.

#### **Time in School**

People who volunteer to be Governors are already very busy people, we appreciate this. There is no minimum amount of time you need to spend in school and each Governor's "real life" will dictate to them how much time they can give. There is, however, no more effective way to understand

the school than seeing it in action. You are not being a school inspector or providing management advice but visiting school and listening to children and staff will make governance more enjoyable and effective. We encourage schools/academies to set times for meetings within the school day, so Governors get to see the “school in motion” rather than after hours when it is just another building. This needs to be balanced with the availability of individual Governors and we expect Local Governing Body Chairs, working with their Headteacher/Principal, to come to an agreement about what works best for them.

### **Governors not Parents**

We would never expect Governors to have to manage or lead the school at an operational level. The NGA uses the term “eyes on, hands off” to remind us of the difference between Governance and leadership and management. School leaders in a Trust environment are held to account by the CEO and Trustees, and there is a dedicated team of experts to support the school to operate effectively. Insights from other sectors can be really useful but Governors should be wary of stepping over the line between governance and management.

### **Agendas**

The outline agendas for each meeting across the year can be set before the Autumn term begins. The Chair, working with the Headteacher/Principal will want to decide a particular focus for each meeting based on the “4 C’s” and the school’s own development plan. A brief financial report will always be provided in advance and the school Business and Operations Manager and Trust Finance Officer should be in attendance to answer questions. Governors will want to work with the school leaders to agree their improvement priorities for the year based on a solid evidence base and the budget parameters set by the Trust.

Governors should always be mindful of the workload implications of their work on Headteachers/Principals and other school staff. Long meetings which go on late into the evening can have a debilitating effect on everyone’s mental health and wellbeing!

### **The Headteachers/Principal’s report**

School leaders will present a report to each meeting of the LGB. The report will be distributed with any other documents prior to the meeting to allow content to be read in advance and meeting time spent on questions rather than reading out content. The format of the report follows the ‘four C’s’. The attached aide memoire is provided for school leaders and governors to indicate the kind of evidence and issues they should expect to present under each section. We encourage school leaders to keep reports concise and focus in on areas where they are making changes, have concerns or require decisions. Long descriptive prose are less valuable than summative statements drawing on evidence.

## **Minutes**

The Clerk will take minutes and take a careful note of follow up actions required. Clerks are supported by the Trust Governance Lead and can provide support and advice to LGB's on their work as a Board. Minutes are a public record and will be reviewed by the Trust to see if themes or issues are being raised across more than one school.

## **Governors and Ofsted**

Members of local governing bodies are often anxious about their potential role in any Ofsted inspection process. The first question the inspector will ask LGB members is, "who is responsible for your school?". The answer is, the Trustees, but they delegate significant responsibilities to the LGB using through the SoD. LGB members should be aware of the SoD and its contents, so they are prepared for any specific questions and know their own remit.

Ofsted Lead Inspectors know that you are volunteers and not educational experts, they will not seek to catch you out or ask questions better reserved for the school leadership team or the Trust.

LGB members crucial role is demonstrating that they know the school and use their knowledge to inform, challenge and support the leaders to continuously improve the quality of education for children.

The Trust CEO and/or the Director of Primary Education will attend the meeting with the Lead Inspector and LGB members and will also have a separate meeting with the lead regarding Trust level support for the school.