



# **ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS**

**A RESOURCE  
FOR GOVERNORS**

**Governor Services Team  
August 2015**

These questions have been compiled to assist the governing body to know its school well, to support monitoring and evaluation procedures and to hold the school to account.

The list of questions is not an exhaustive one and there will be other questions that are particularly relevant to your school's current situation.

It is **NOT** intended that these questions should be handed over to the headteacher and an answer to each one sought. This is not a test for school leaders, but a tool to help governors.

You should consider the most appropriate time and place to ask questions – it may be at the relevant committee meeting or whilst undertaking a governor visit, rather than in a full Governing Body meeting, and should be relevant to the discussion at hand.

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## **Outcomes for Pupils**

- Does the headteacher give a clear indication of pupil progress for all year groups and subjects in the school on a regular basis?
- Does the headteacher give a clear indication of progress towards objectives/targets in the school improvement plan?
- Are Key stage assessment tests/overall GCSE or A level results concealing limited progress?
- How does the school's performance compare to similar schools?
- Are all our pupils achieving their potential/conversion rates or could they achieve more?
- Are the most able pupils stretched and challenged sufficiently?
- Does the school analyse and respond to data about rates of progress for subjects and groups of pupils?
- Has the school identified which pupils or groups of pupils are most at risk of underperforming?
- How does the school ensure that underperformance is identified quickly – in one subject, or across a number of subjects?
- What sort of additional support is offered to pupils or groups that are at risk of underperforming?
- How are parents/carers involved?
- How does the school monitor the effectiveness of additional support provided?
- Is pupil performance affected by poor attendance?
- How does the school celebrate pupils' success beyond academic achievement?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Raiseonline/Data reports
- Headteacher's report
- School self-evaluation assessment
- Raising Achievement Partner's Annual Performance Dialogue report
- School presentation on achievement and progress
- Attendance/exclusion data linked to pupil performance

## **The Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

- How good is teaching throughout the school?
- What is the proportion of lessons which have been judged to be good or better?
- What proportion of teaching requires improvement or is inadequate?
- What action is being taken to improve the quality of teaching?
- How are we supporting our less effective teachers?
- How is the best classroom practice in our school shared to the benefit of all of our teachers?
- How are we developing teaching through the professional development programme?
- Do we share our best practice with other schools?
- How are we learning from the best practice in other schools?
- What do we need to do to further improve teaching at the school e.g. to move it from good to outstanding?
- How are we developing our newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and our teaching assistants (TAs)?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Ofsted Inspection judgement/commentary
- Headteacher's report, including :-
  - Outcomes from classroom observations
  - Outcomes from work scrutinies/learning walks
- Reports from senior/key stage leaders on teaching and learning
- NQT induction programme
- Continuous professional development programme for all staff

## **Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare**

- How well do pupils behave in lessons?
- How well do pupils behave around the school?
- Do pupils have a positive attitude towards school and learning?
- What measures are in place to monitor that the behaviour policy is applied consistently across the school?
- How good are attendance and punctuality?
- Is bullying a cause for concern and how are incidents of bullying addressed?
- Are safeguarding procedures fully in place?
- What are our exclusion rates? Are there particular issues with any "vulnerable" groups?
- Are learners taught in a healthy and safe environment?
- How are pupils supported to make informed choices about healthy eating, fitness and their emotional and mental well-being?
- How does the school promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development?
- How are British Values promoted?
- Do we meet the statutory health and safety requirements?
- What steps do we take to educate staff and pupils/students about the issues of social media?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Ofsted Inspection judgement/commentary
- Parental feedback/survey
- Outcomes of lesson observations
- Student voice - What pupils say about the school
- Rewards and sanctions data
- Records of racist/bullying incidents
- Attendance and exclusion data

## **Safeguarding**

- Does the school have a safeguarding policy and procedures in place that are in accordance with Local Authority guidance?
- Is the Governing Body aware of its role and responsibilities under the new OFSTED inspection framework?
- Does the school operate safer recruitment procedures and are all appropriate checks carried out on new staff and volunteers who will work with children?
- Is there a senior member of the school's leadership team designated to take lead responsibility for dealing with safeguarding issues?
- How are child protection/safeguarding issues monitored?
- Are all staff aware of the procedure that needs to be followed when they have concerns about child protection?
- Does the school have procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff and volunteers?
- Does the designated person undertake specified safeguarding training?
- Does the Governing Body set clear priorities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and explicitly state these in key policy documents?
- Does the Governing Body review its policies and procedures annually and does it complete the annual self-assessment provided by the Local Authority?
- Does the school run e-safety awareness training for staff, governors, pupils and parents?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Ofsted inspection judgement/commentary
- Headteacher/Designated Senior Lead's annual safeguarding report
- "Safeguarding" Governor visits and reports
- Safeguarding self-audit tool

## **Effectiveness of Leadership and Management**

- Is the Headteacher and the governing body ambitious for the school and does they have high expectation of staff and pupils?
- Does the Headteacher provide a clear sense of direction?
- How are areas of weaknesses and areas of underperformance being tackled?
- How good are our results?
- How accurate is the school's self-evaluation?
- How good is behaviour and the quality of teaching?
- How are we developing leaders at all levels?
- Is there a strong focus on the quality of teaching?
- How well is the school working in partnership with other schools?
- How good is communication and engagement with parents/carers?
- Are safeguarding procedures fully in place?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Ofsted grade for effective leadership and management
- Parental feedback/surveys
- Raising Achievement Partner's Annual Performance Dialogue report
- Evidence of succession planning
- Professional development opportunities relating to leadership development
- Examination/assessment results and internal judgements on the quality of teaching and behaviour
- Governing body training and development records
- Impact of links with other schools

## **Effective Governance**

- Do governors receive meeting papers/information 7 days in advance?
- Does the Clerk provide professional support to enable the governing body to work efficiently?
- Do we work well as a team?
- Are we aware of the skills each governor has to offer? Are these appreciated and used?
- Are we all encouraged to take part in discussions and treated as equal partners in decision making?
- Do all our discussions consider the impact any decision will have on our pupils/students?
- How do we celebrate the school's successes?
- Do we understand the differences between the operational role of the headteacher and the strategic role of the governing body?
- How does the governing body monitor the work of the school?
- How does the governing body engage with the leadership team - are senior leaders held accountable and supported by the governing body?
- How do we know our pupils receive a broad and balanced education?
- Does the school website meet statutory requirements?
- How can we improve our effectiveness?
- What has been the governing body's contribution to school improvement?
- What are the governing body's priorities for the coming year?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Governing body and committee meeting minutes
- Delegation of responsibilities/terms of reference for committees
- Completed National Governors' Association decision planner (or equivalent)
- Raising Achievement Partner's Annual Performance Dialogue
- Governing body development/improvement plan
- Governor visit reports/attendance at schools events

## **Effective Governance – an Individual Contribution**

- Am I familiar with and have signed the governing body's Code of Conduct?
- Do I attend all governing body meetings and send apologies when I am not available, giving the reason for non-attendance?
- Do I come to meetings prepared with all the necessary papers and ready to ask questions?
- Does the governing body know what skills I have to offer?
- How well do I know my fellow governors?
- How well do I know the staff in the school?
- How often do I visit the school in an official capacity?
- Do I attend governor training and/or access GEL on-line governor training and development?
- How do I report back on the training to the governing body?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Signed Code of Conduct
- Minutes of governing body/committee meetings
- Individual governors' training and development record
- Record of governor visits and report

## **Financial Management**

- Does the school/governing body comply with the Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)?
- Does the governing body have adequate financial skills among its members to fulfil its role of challenge and support in the field of budget management and value for money?
- Does the governing body have a finance committee (or equivalent) with clear terms of reference and a knowledgeable and experienced chair?
- Is there a clear definition of the relative responsibilities of the governing body and the school staff in the financial field?
- Are business interests of governing body members and staff properly registered and taken into account so as to avoid conflicts of interest?
- Does the school have access to an adequate level of financial expertise, including when specialist finance staff are absent, eg on sick leave?
- Does the school review its staffing structure regularly?
- Does the school set a well-informed and balanced budget each year (with an agreed and timed plan for eliminating any deficit)?
- Is there a clear and demonstrable link between the school's budgeting and its plan for raising standards and attainment?
- Does the school make a forward projection of budget, including both revenue and capital funds, for at least three years?
- Does the governing body receive clear and concise monitoring reports of the school's budget position at least three times a year?
- Is the end of year outturn in line with budget projections? If not, is the governing body alerted to significant variations in a timely manner, and do they result from explicitly planned changes or from genuinely unforeseeable circumstances?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Finance Committee/governing body minutes
- Completed governors' skills audit
- Completed Decision Planner/levels of financial delegation clearly defined
- School Improvement Plan is fully costed and linked to the financial planning cycle
- Completed Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS) Assessment

## **Performance Management**

- Does the governing body/committee receive good quality information/an annual report about the appraisal outcomes of staff?
- Is the Headteacher's appraisal carried out in line with the school's current Appraisal policy and regulations?
- How effectively does the governing body carry out the headteacher's appraisal? Has our panel of governors accessed training?
- Are the objectives set in line with school priorities?
- What should our pay policy say about performance and progression?
- What is the correlation between appraisal outcomes, pay and the quality of teaching and learning?
- How effective is performance management in improving teaching and learning?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Appraisal Policy
- School Improvement Plan priorities
- Annual report from Headteacher on appraisal
- Pay Policy
- Pay Committee minutes (confidential)

### **Pupil Premium (including Early Years Pupil Premium)**

- How effective is the school's pupil premium policy in supporting the target groups?
- How confident is the governing body that the pupil premium grant is spent appropriately on the intended target groups?
- Is the pupil premium funding kept separate from general school resources so it can be specifically and identifiably used as intended?
- How is the allocation of the pupil premium decided?
- What is the pupil premium used for?
- How is the progress of different groups of pupils monitored so that the school can identify any under-performing groups?
- Are there groups of pupils whose attainment falls behind others?
- How does the attainment of pupil premium pupils as a group compare with others?
- What would you say are the main challenges in the use of the pupil premium, and how is the school working to overcome them?
- What benefits can you see from the allocation of the pupil premium?
- Is there anything that the governing body should be aware of that could help the school gain the maximum advantage from the pupil premium?
- Do we ensure that the school website includes details of the pupil premium allocation, spending plans and impact on attainment?

### **Sources of Evidence**

- Committee meeting minutes
- Budget monitoring reports
- Headteacher's reports
- School website

## **Vision, Aims and Values**

- Is there a clear vision for the school?
- Do our aims and values underpin our vision?
- Do we know where we want the school to be in the next 5 or 10 years?
- Do we have a culture of high expectations and achievement?
- When did we last review our ethos/values statement?
- Are the school's vision and values reflected in the school improvement plan?
- Do we value success and is it celebrated?
- How do we publicise our values? (eg are they on our website?)
- Do pupils/students know what the school's values are?
- Do we have a mission statement to promote the school?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- School website
- Vision/Mission statement
- School improvement plan
- Governor visit reports
- Governing body minutes
- Behaviour Policy/Rewards (and sanctions)

## **Working with Parents and the Wider Community**

- Are we meeting statutory requirements on publishing information on the school website?
- How does the school communicate with parents?
- How easy is it for parents to communicate with the school/headteacher?
- How useful is the school website as a source of information for parents – how do we know and how could it be improved?
- When and how were parents last asked for their views about the school? What did the results show and what action was taken as a result?
- How are parents encouraged to help their children learn?
- What is the school doing to provide support to/for parents to do this?
- What complaints have we had from parents and what action was taken as a result?
- What extra-curricular activities does the school offer? Do they complement the school's vision and values? Are they accessible for all year groups?
- How do you monitor the impact of extra-curricular activities?
- Are particular extra-curricular activities offered to close the attainment gap between different groups of pupils? How do you know if this is successful?
- How do we engage with our local community? Could this be improved?

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Governor visit reports
- Parent governor/parental feedback
- Headteacher's report
- School website
- Information on parent workshops, family learning sessions etc
- Summary of compliments/complaints received