

SKILLED, KNOWLEDGEABLE GOVERNORS AND TRUSTEES

There is an increasing emphasis on the importance of skilled, knowledgeable governors and trustees with an expectation that they keep their knowledge and skills up to date.

The recently published Ofsted report *Improving Governance* identifies the barriers faced by governors in 24 improving primary, secondary and special schools and the actions taken to strengthen their professional skills and their ability to fulfil their roles as effective, strategic school leaders.

Key recommendations are around the importance of professional support and governor training to ensure effective governance and clarity of roles and responsibilities, as well as for governing boards to have robust methods of self-review to assure themselves that they are effective. Two thirds of the schools surveyed had not engaged in any self-evaluation of governance and had not identified any weaknesses until an Ofsted inspection judged the school to be less than good

'A lack of effective internal or external reviews of governance can mean that weaknesses in governance can remain unnoticed over long periods of time'.

Ofsted will be reporting more robustly on the extent to which governors are committed to their own professional development in order to secure sustained improvements in governance practices.

Constitution of governing bodies of maintained schools

This expectation is reflected in the revised guidance (September 2016) *Constitution of governing bodies of maintained schools*. For example:

- A key consideration in the appointment and election of all new governors should be the skills and experience the governing body needs to be effective. **The skills they need are a matter for governing bodies to decide having regard to the Department's Competency Framework for Governance.**
- Regulations specify that anyone appointing governors to the governing board must only appoint someone they believe has the skills to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school. **Their decisions should be informed by interviews and references** and made in the light of the skills the governing bodies identify that they need
- So as to ensure that governors continue to have the necessary skills to contribute to the effective governance and success of the schools, governing

boards **should enable their governors to receive any appropriate training and development needed to address any skills gaps...** liaising, where appropriate, with the local authority.

Governance Handbook

A revised Governance Handbook is about to be published to reflect changes since November 2015 and the *Competency Framework for Governance*, due for publication by January 2017.

The November 2015 Handbook does, however, **already emphasise the importance of recruiting skilled and knowledgeable governors, for training and development to keep these up to date and for processes for self-evaluation such as regular skills audits and external reviews of governance as necessary.**

Here is an excerpt from 3.3 Induction and ongoing training and development:

23. Boards are responsible for identifying and securing the induction and other ongoing training and development governors need. **They should set aside a budget for this purpose.**

27. **If, in the view of the board, a governor fails persistently to undertake the training or development they need, then they should consider suspending the governor** on the grounds that they will be in breach of the board's Code of Conduct and may bring the board or the office of a governor into disrepute.

28. **Boards should have succession plans in place** and develop future leaders by identifying and nurturing talent and sharing responsibility.

Competency Framework for Governance

This is due to be published by January 2017 and sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance in maintained schools, academies and multi-academy trusts.

The framework is made up of 16 competencies grouped together under the headings of the six features of effective governance set out in the Governance Handbook:

- strategic leadership
- accountability
- people
- structures
- compliance
- evaluation

For example, under People -

3a Building an effective team

Everyone on the board
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates commitment to their role and to active participation in governance ability to acquire the basic knowledge that they need to be effective in their role
The Chair
Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the importance of succession planning to the ongoing effectiveness of both the board and the organisation
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> takes a strategic view of the skills the board needs, identifies gaps and takes action to ensure these are filled develop the competence of the vice-chair to act as chair should the need arise

6a Managing self-review and development

Everyone on the board
Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recognises their own strengths and areas for development and seeks support and training to improve knowledge and skills where necessary
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintains a personal development plan to improve his/her effectiveness and links this to the strategic aims of the organisation is open to taking up opportunities, when appropriate, to attend training and any other opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours undertakes self-review, reflecting on their own personal contributions to the board, demonstrating and developing their commitment to improvement, identifying areas for development and building on existing knowledge and skills

6b Managing and developing the board's effectiveness

Everyone on the board
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> utilises inspection feedback fully to inform decisions about board development contributes to self-evaluation processes to identify strengths and areas for board development
The Chair
Skills and effective behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sets challenging development goals and works effectively with the board to meet them undertakes open and honest conversations with board members about their performance and development needs, and if appropriate, commitment or tenure recognises and develops talent in board members and ensures they are provided with opportunities to realise their potential creates a culture in which board members are encouraged to take ownership of their own development