

External Review of Governance



Governor Services

Providing comprehensive support for clerking, training and development

Bolton Council

External review of governance

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Introduction

School governance has changed rapidly over recent years and the role of school and academy governance has never been so pivotal in ensuring the improvement of educational performance and opportunities for all children.

Governing bodies are made up of people from a variety of backgrounds who can contribute their skills and experience to what is one of the most important voluntary roles in schools and academies. Through their strategic leadership, governing bodies are key to improving performance and ensuring that resources are used effectively so that every child has the best possible education.

The framework for inspection reflects the importance of the role of governors and, through inspection, Ofsted have identified that evidence indicates that there is a relationship between effective governance, the quality of leadership and management, and the quality of provision and pupil achievement.

Whilst being a governor can be a rewarding experience, we are all too aware of the increasing demands and responsibilities of the role. Although there are many sources of information and advice available to assist governors, the Bolton Governor Services Team provides accessible local services to allow all governors and leaders within the Bolton Family the opportunity to access good quality guidance and support in order to strengthen strategic leadership and accountability in schools.

The service recognises the time and commitment given by individual governors to this important voluntary role and therefore endeavours to provide support and guidance to assist wherever possible. The programme of External Review provided by the Bolton Governor Services Team will not only provide validation of the work of the governing body but also highlight any areas for improvement and, if appropriate, recommend appropriate action where necessary. Information about the external review process and the programmes available to governing bodies is detailed further within this booklet.

External validation

External validation allows for a judgement to be made following a scrutiny of the systems and practices in place drawn from evidence presented to a reviewer or assessor. Through self-evaluation, governing bodies can make a judgement of their own or their school's performance; however, an external perspective is also useful and can be seen as having 'fresh eyes' on a particular situation or task in hand.

Having somebody external from the governing body to assess their own practices or performance can highlight strengths and also potential areas for improvement which may have been missed. Validation can also back up statements made by the school and governing body and can reassure governors that they are on the right path for improvement.

What is a review of governance?

An external review of governance looks at how well a governing body is operating within its strategic core functions. An external reviewer works with the chair of governors, head teacher/principal and a selection of governors to improve the performance of the governing body.

The review is offered as support to improve and develop governance and should not be seen as an additional inspection. It is seen as good practice to engage external validation on a regular basis to ensure improvement and stability. The review will help the governing body identify strengths and weaknesses together with priorities for improvement and development, and provide support on what steps to take. The review will also provide advice and guidance in order to assist to move governance from an Ofsted inspection rating of 'requires improvement' to at least 'good'.

A review of governance will help the governing body to:

- Be more skilled, focused and effective;
- Be more aware of the freedoms that it has to work in different ways;
- Be clear in its vision for the school or academy and how, together with the school leadership team, it can achieve this;
- Be confident that it has a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities;
- Have the right number of skilled and committed governors to meet the needs of the school or academy.

Why request a review?

Governing bodies do not need to wait for an Ofsted inspection recommendation to seek a review. A school or academy can arrange a review of governance at any time to improve the effectiveness of the work of the governing body.

A governing body will receive a recommendation for a review of governance if an Ofsted Section 5 Inspection finds that governance is weak in a school judged to require improvement, or that leadership and management is graded as 'requires improvement'.

In some cases, where a school has been judged as 'requires improvement', later monitoring visits may also result in a recommendation for a review of governance. The issues that Ofsted have identified in governing bodies include:

- Governors not ambitious about expectations;
- Lack of a 'critical friend' approach;
- Over reliance on information from the head teacher;
- Lack of systematic visits to school;
- Lack of engagement with school development planning;
- Limited role in monitoring, and none of it 'independent';
- Limited understanding of data and school quality.

If an Ofsted inspection report recommends a review of governance, the monitoring inspector will expect it to be undertaken in a timely manner.

It is important to bear in mind that a governing body can choose whoever they want to conduct a review of governance; however, it is highly recommended that they ensure that the reviewer has a good understanding of governance and has successful experience of leading governors and school improvement.

The Bolton Governor Services Team provides experienced officers who have a wealth of experience of working with governing bodies on matters of school and academy governance. The Service keeps abreast of all developments affecting governance and works with external partners such as Ofsted, The Department for Education, The National Governors' Association and The National Co-ordinators of Governor Services, in order to provide the most relevant and up to date advice and support.

Principles and protocols of the review

The Bolton Governor Services Team would recommend that when a review of governance is conducted, principles and protocols should be followed, which include:

Principles

- The review is offered as support to improve and develop governance and will begin with a review of a governing body's current situation. It is not intended as an additional inspection but is about helping the governing body to address the issues that could have been raised during an Ofsted inspection, however, where applicable, the review is linked to and built on the Ofsted report and evaluation criteria so that the governing body is able to understand its strengths and weaknesses and the basis upon which it will be judged in subsequent monitoring visits and inspections.
- The review is based around a process of externally supported self-review.
- The review is manageable in terms of time and process.
- The reviewer leading a review should be able to evidence a track record of supporting schools in improving governance.
- The review should be sufficiently flexible to take account of the differing needs, contexts and size of schools.
- The review should be robust and comprehensive and provide clear evidence-based recommendations about how governance might be improved in order to support the required improvement in school performance.

Behaviour and protocols

- The reviewer will aim to build confidence and capacity.
- The review should be based on trust and mutual respect.
- All parties should respect confidentiality and encourage transparency.
- The Reviewer will use their experience and skills to assist the chair of governors and the governing body to identify appropriate priorities, solutions and actions.
- Where possible, the governing body feels ownership of the outcomes of the review.

Review options and costs

The extent of the review will be agreed between the reviewer and the governing body depending on the level of support required. Whilst initially each review will be undertaken as a 'core review', it may be appropriate for additional support to be purchased as necessary.

The programmes of support available and related costs are detailed below. Please note that charges may vary for Federations and Multi-Academy Trusts depending on the complexities of the governance arrangements. These can be discussed with the reviewer prior to the review taking place.

Model A – Core review (default model)

Guide cost: £980

This model follows the steps listed on pages 11 to 13 of this booklet. It does not include any significant work between the reviewer and the other members of the governing body, besides the chair.

A copy of the External Review of Governance folder and materials, including self-review and resource documentation will be provided as part of the core review.

Model B – Core review plus any two additional elements;

Guide cost: £1,180

This model includes the core review plus any two of the following elements:

- Meeting with other governors – for example, chairs of committees to discuss how the governing body functions and what might help it be more effective.
- Observation of a full governing body meeting or a committee meeting to support the chair in exploring ways in which the governing body can work more effectively.
- Support the chair in analysing and using performance data.

Model C – Enhanced review

Guide cost: £1,500

This model includes the core review, all the additional elements listed in Model B, plus the following elements:

- Following the review, a meeting with the chair and available members of the governing body, to review the governing body action plan, to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in terms of the recommendations of the review.
- A three or six month monitoring meeting with the chair and head teacher to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the governing body action plan, in terms of overall improvement of the governing body.

Core review programme (model A)

A copy of the External Review of Governance folder and material, including self-review and resource documentation will be provided as part of the core review. The content and process of the review will be based on sound and relevant documentation, including:

- Framework for External Review of Governance (National College for Teaching and Learning)
- Criteria for the Effectiveness of Governance, based on the Quality of Leadership in and Management of the School (Ofsted School Inspection Handbook)
- Twenty Key Questions for Governors (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance & Leadership)

The content of the review and self-review process will be based around the key areas of Skills, Effectiveness, Strategy, Accountability, Engagement, Role of the chair and Impact.

The expected steps of the core review programme are as follows:

1. Initial discussion

The appointed reviewer and the chair and head teacher have a preliminary conversation to provide an overview of the process involved.

2. First meeting

The reviewer will meet with the chair and head teacher (and another governor and/or member of the leadership team as appropriate) to:

- Discuss the context and needs of the school;
- Explain the principles and protocols of the review;
- Explain the content and process of the review;
- Discuss the self-review process;
- Agree dates for receiving information from the school and for the initial face-to-face meeting;
- Identify the key focus areas for the review;
- Agree how to run the self-review meeting with the governing body.

3. Gather documentation

During the initial and subsequent meetings, the reviewer and chair may identify additional elements to help address the issues and priorities for the governing body. The reviewer will have access to relevant documentation provided by the school to prepare for the self-review session. This is likely to include:

- Recent Ofsted report
- School Prospectus
- Governor membership details

- Instruments of Government / Memorandum and Articles of Association
- Minutes from full governing body meetings
- Minutes from committee minutes
- Governance structures: committee terms of reference and work programmes
- Head teacher's reports
- The school development plan
- School self-evaluation documentation
- Current governing body self-evaluation and action plans
- RAISE online
- Reports from governor visits
- Governing body skills audit returns

4. Meet other governors

The reviewer is likely to want to have conversations or meet with as many other governors as possible. This will help the reviewer assess the capacity of the governing body, its strengths and areas for development.

5. Self-review session

The reviewer will conduct a self-review session with the governing body. The logistics for these meetings and the extent, to which the reviewer supports, facilitates or leads will be agreed with the chair. The chair may decide that further sessions are required and can discuss with the reviewer how these will be handled. During the self-review process the reviewer will confirm with the governing body the key areas for development and the action required.

6. Agree areas for improvement

Once the self-review process is complete, the reviewer will have a discussion with the chair and/or head teacher/principal to confirm the key areas for improvement and action plan.

At the end of the review, the reviewer will produce a concise report. It will outline the governing body's strengths and areas for development, and the actions required to address these.

7. Next steps

Once the review is concluded, it will be up to the governing body to implement the agreed action plan, drawing on external support as appropriate. By mutual agreement and in addition to the model of review undertaken, the review could contain some further support from the reviewer to assist the governing body in its development. Charges for additional support would be as negotiated between the school and the reviewer.

For schools judged to be 'requiring improvement', Ofsted monitoring visits will include:

- Discussions about the action plans from the review
- Evidence of progress in improving governance
- Evidence of progress in improving the leadership and management of the school

Reports of monitoring visits will comment on the effectiveness of the review and the evidence of impact on the quality of governance.

Review outcome and action plan

It is expected that the core review will lead to a concise report. Included within the report will be an indication of where, in the reviewer's opinion, there are areas of strengths and areas of recommended development within the governing body.

Any areas of recommended development would then form the basis of an action plan for the governing body. It will be the responsibility of the governing body to implement the action plan, utilising any additional Enquires in respect of undertaking an External Review of Governance should be made via the chair of governors and/or head teacher.

An initial discussion with a reviewer will determine what level of support is required and the costs involved with the support. A subsequent meeting will then be arranged with the reviewer, chair of governors and head teacher to discuss the principles and protocols of the review in further detail.

Any advice and support will be provided throughout the process from your designated reviewer.

For further information and informal discussion about the process, please contact the Governor Services Team directly on 01204 332104 / 338603 or via email at governor.services@bolton.gov.uk

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