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A word from the chief executive

Emma Knights outlines the key issues on NGA’s agenda for this academic year

At GovernorHQ we paused momentarily at the start of the school year to reflect on our priorities for improving school governance; after all that is NGA’s charitable objective. We have decided that continuing professional development (CPD) for all is an issue that must be at the top of every school’s agenda.

Staff are of course the most important asset of any school but has their CPD been given proper consideration by your governing board? David Weston of the Teacher Development Trust gives us some food for thought on p20.

We won’t jettison other key issues; Clerking Matters will continue, and on p33 Rani Kaur focuses on appraisal. This links nicely to another of our campaigns: to improve human resources (HR) practice in schools. Not by doing it ourselves, but by ensuring that there is a member of staff who has the role of co-ordinating HR. This is not an optional role for an organisation employing staff and if your structure does not extend to this, the governing board needs to review the staffing structure.

Time pressures

Members often tell us that too much time is expected of governors. We will examine the time expectations further but when we do point out tasks which are not governance, many governors don’t wish to drop them! Dare I mention once again the practice of interviewing candidates for posts below senior level; that is the role of management.

If your senior leaders are unable to carry out these recruitments, you have identified a CPD need or perhaps again a flaw in your staffing structure. You may tell me you are a small primary school without management staff, but the governing board can consider who else to federate with to ensure there is the staff capacity to provide the full offer to your pupils. The benefits of governing groups of schools will also remain one of our main issues, and a growing multi academy trust shares its experience on p16.

“Members often tell us that too much time is expected of governors”

Thanks to both Ofsted and the DfE’s Pupil Premium team for sharing their expertise with governors at our regional conference (p28). Ofsted raises its head rather a lot in this edition – we don’t believe the inspectorate should always call the shots, but we are in conversation about whether inspectors are really getting to the fundamentals of governance (p26).

As a secondary school governor and a former chief executive of an early years organisation I’m happy to say that, like Ofsted, this year we will be giving more attention to both ends of school life: early years (p15) and sixth forms (p22).

Conflicts of interest

On p30 Philip Wood looks at the issue of whistleblowing as we continue to consider the implications of Trojan horse. A conflict of interest is a set of circumstances that creates a risk that an individual’s ability to exercise judgement or act in one role is, or could be, impaired or influenced by a secondary interest.

We need to get better at recognising these conflicts and acting appropriately. One governor recently challenged a chair who’s living with the head, but extraordinarily didn’t get the support of a majority of the governors when pointing out this huge conflict. We shouldn’t need to codify every example; we need a change of culture so that conflicts are understood. The House of Commons select committee on education published a report in September outlining payments being made to academy trustees; these may be within the rules, but it is surely not practice we want to support.

Some of NGA’s academy members have requested more bespoke material to cover their additional responsibilities, and we have begun a focus on academies strand (p10). We hope it might also be of interest to schools considering converting in the future. Governance is governance is governance whatever the sector, but clearly there are some legal niceties which need explaining.

When you are setting the strategic direction of your school (p38), you may find it particularly difficult not knowing what lies in store for education after the general election. To help provide some political context, on p9 I report on NGA’s activity at the party conferences, but don’t let national uncertainty stop you cracking on with improving education as governing boards, school leaders and their staff have been doing across the country.

You can contact Emma at emma.knights@nga.org.uk
Is my school doing well?

Fundamental to whether your school is doing well is whether the quality of teaching is good. So how do governors assess whether the quality of teaching in their school is good (or better) – indeed what does good look like and do all your teaching staff have the same understanding of what it is? And why is it important?

It matters because the quality of teaching and the quality of learning are intrinsically linked. Governors have a number of legal responsibilities, but our first and foremost duty is to provide the best possible education for the children and young people in our schools. The best possible education is dependent on having high quality teaching.

What not to do

The following from a real Ofsted report is a prime example of what not to do: “They [Governors] make regular visits to the school to check on the quality of teaching.”

Governors have no business going into school to check or assess the quality of teaching. The governing board has appointed a lead professional – commonly known as the headteacher – to ensure that is being done properly. If there are question marks about the quality of teaching then the governing board needs to address that with the headteacher – and if over time the board is not satisfied with the response then it needs to be dealt with formally through the performance management of the headteacher.

You should ensure you have access to critical progress data

In reality, no-one, including the head, should be judging the quality of teaching based solely on lesson observations. Even fantastic teachers have off days and not every lesson can be outstanding – the corollary is that a teacher who perhaps would be better off pursuing an alternative career can probably pull off the odd masterpiece with notice while being ineffective for the vast majority of the time.

But to come back to one of the original questions – what does good look like? The best headteacher in the world will struggle to improve a school if s/he does not have effective teaching staff. So if children are not making progress there must be a question mark over the quality of teaching.

Observation of individual lessons will not on its own provide this information. Indeed Ofsted has ceased to grade lesson observations during inspection because it has recognised that in 20-minute slots inspectors are not in a position to state that any individual is inadequate, indifferent or incredible – a teacher may have a bad 20 minutes, but that does not make them a terrible teacher overall or there simply may not be enough to observe.

Ofsted is much more interested in progress over time – does the children’s work show evidence of progress throughout the year? The Ofsted ‘outstanding’ grade descriptor for the quality of teaching states: “Much teaching over time in all key stages and most subjects is outstanding and never less than consistently good. As a result, almost all pupils currently on roll in the school, including disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs, disadvantaged pupils and the most able, are making sustained progress that leads to outstanding achievement.”

Sustained progress

In setting its vision and strategy for the school and holding the senior leaders to account this is what the governing board should be ultimately aiming for – all children to make sustained progress in order to achieve their full potential. This is true whether you are governing in a grammar school with academically gifted children or in a special school with children with profound and multiple learning difficulties. What sustained progress looks like may be very different but, regardless of setting, it should be happening.
The governing board needs to receive sufficient data for it to be confident about how the children in the school are doing. This means that the board needs to know where the children started – not at the individual level of named pupils – but at class or year group level and by subject. In some schools there will be two starting points: the official published starting point and the school’s own starting point.

The official starting point will always be the relevant key stage test but most schools carry out benchmarking exercises when children arrive. Yes, this is partly because schools (particularly junior schools – see my blog on the NGA website) often think that the official results paint a rosy picture of children’s actual level, but equally the impact of transition from one school to another and fallback during the school holidays all mean that a large number of children may not arrive in their new school at quite the same level they left the old school.

Teachers need to be able to assess children’s progress from when they arrived in their classroom – primarily because that is the only way they can help them to move forwards. It is no good setting work for a student that their key stage 2 results say they should be able to manage if in reality the student isn’t confident about the subject. And it is also important for teachers’ performance management; they should be judged against the impact they have had – not against some arbitrary level.

**Progress reports**
Governors should receive progress data against both figures – i.e. the results of the key stage at which pupils came to the school and the results of the school’s own benchmarking data. Progress against these starting points should be reported at least termly. If your head is doing a good job this data will already be in school and easily reportable – if the data isn’t available the governing board needs to ask some serious questions about how the headteacher knows how the school is doing in relation to its priorities.

The governing board also needs to have access to critical assessments – what training and development have staff received to ensure their benchmarking and assessments are robust and consistent? Are the results moderated across classes and subjects and indeed across other local schools? It is not much use having termly data about progress if the data itself is of poor quality.

If the in-year data the governing board receives tells it that 50% of students are on course to achieve at least a C grade in GCSE maths and only 35% actually do, then again the governing board will need to ask some hard questions about the quality of assessments.

**Visiting the school**
Does this mean that governors should never visit their schools? Of course not – going into school, being visible, explaining to students (and sometimes staff) the role of the governing board is really important. Equally going into school to meet the subject lead, the senior leader responsible for data, or the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) to monitor progress in individual subjects or for a particular group of pupils is important. But you have no licence to inspect – regardless of your professional background.

The governing board also needs to seek external verification – not only because Ofsted will not accept ‘because the headteacher told us’ as an answer and not because you do not trust your headteacher. But just as financial procedures are in place to both mitigate against fraud and ensure that individuals are not put in a position where they can be accused of a fraud because no controls were in place, external verification provides a validation for both headteachers and governors. So the fact that your benchmarking of children is moderated across a group of schools can give you confidence that the school’s assessment is accurate.

Or you could commission an external school improvement professional to carry out a review to give you a clear picture of the school. This could be especially useful in schools which have not seen Ofsted for a few years – are you still as good as you were? Likewise the governing board doesn’t need to wait for an Ofsted inspection to undertake an external review of governance – you can do it any time. External verification works for the governors as well as the governed.

Gillian Allcroft is NGA policy manager

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The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are intrinsically linked

The vast majority of headteachers will be providing this information as a matter of course and will not need to be asked – but if you don’t get this information you cannot as a board be fulfilling one of your core functions “to hold the headteacher to account”.

If you are having difficulties then it is worth referring to the DfE’s Governors’ Handbook which states: “It is the headteacher’s job (and in maintained schools it is their legal duty) to give governing bodies all the information they need to do their job well…Governing bodies, not the headteachers, should determine the scope and format of the headteacher’s termly reports. This will mean that they receive the information they need in a format that enables them to stay focused on their core strategic functions and not get distracted or overwhelmed by information of secondary importance.”

This does not mean you should overwhelm your headteacher with constant requests for trivial information, but that you should ensure you have access to critical progress data.

**Questions**
Governors need to ask questions about the accuracy of internal assessments – what training and development have staff received to ensure their benchmarking and assessments are robust and consistent? Are the results moderated across classes and subjects and indeed across other local schools? It is not much use having termly data about progress if the data itself is of poor quality.

If the in-year data the governing board receives tells it that 50% of students are on course to achieve at least a C grade in GCSE maths and only 35% actually do, then again the governing board will need to ask some hard questions about the quality of assessments.

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by Gillian Allcroft
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Party Conferences

NGA jointly with ASCL (the Association of School and College Leaders) and CfBT held a roundtable at each of the three main party conferences. The topic was ‘Can a school-led system improve outcomes?’ A politician began the discussion, Nicky Morgan MP, secretary of state, for the Conservatives, Kevin Brennan MP, shadow minister for schools, at Labour and Simon Wright MP, the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on education, families and young people.

As well as a couple of other politicians (local as well as parliamentary) a broad range of interests joined us – from Teach First, subject associations, chief executives of multi academy trusts (MATs), teaching school alliances and examination boards to large employers among others. The discussions were held under the Chatham House rule: you can report what is said but not who said what.

Broad agreement
It was interesting how similar the terrain covered was, and how much agreement there is. We need to have the right climate for excellence to flourish, not overbearing, but without leaving schools – and therefore children – behind in places where governing boards and school leadership are not ensuring education is improving.

There was discussion of the language commonly used – ‘autonomy’ for whom? In multi academy trusts (MATs) with the board of trustees calling the shots, individual schools, their leaders and local governing bodies may have less autonomy than in local authority (LA) maintained schools. The phrase ‘self-improving system’ seems to be preferred to ‘school-led’ as the latter doesn’t necessarily encapsulate the need for collaboration and facilitation.

The limited capacity within schools to provide this themselves was raised as a barrier, especially coupled with being accountable only for one’s own school. An example was given of an NLE who while spending time supporting another school had his own school downgraded by Ofsted from ‘outstanding’ to ‘requires improvement’; this scenario can deter other school leaders from taking the risk of putting energy and expertise into improving another school. The best leaders and teachers get out of their schools, but this can’t be mandated.

There was much emphasis on the importance of trust.

The tension between competition and collaboration was raised, with some saying schools had learned to cope with this and others giving examples of where schools were only honest when collaborating with those well outside catchment areas. The importance of locality to practical school improvement was noted: joint activities for children and staff, and the sharing of specialist skills. There was much talk of how collaboration could be incentivised, and an impetus for change created.

Culture change
There didn’t seem to be an appetite for major structural change, a common theme at other fringe meetings too. Instead there was much talk of the need to change the culture, especially in those schools in danger of getting left behind. There was a general acceptance that a self-improving system needs agencies which act as brokers and facilitators.

We did not solve the problem of who should provide that brokerage and co-ordination role. The conflict of LAs doing so while at the same time remaining accountable for a large number of schools in their area was raised, but without time to explore fully. The difficulty of schools ensuring quality and a fair price when commissioning services from a market was acknowledged.

Learning lessons from the improvement of London schools and the Challenge programmes was a repeated theme, but whether any new government would invest in such infrastructure remains to be seen. The need to invest in developing school leadership – at both senior and middle levels – was stressed by many and the dismantling of the National College seemed to be universally mourned.

It was suggested we might be approaching a crisis in leadership with fewer people putting themselves forward. There was also discussion of how the best leaders and teachers might be enticed to move to the parts of the country which need them most.

There was also much emphasis on the importance of trust, and how we can move the system from the very fearful place it is now to one where professionals can flourish, improving the education of pupils. The public do have a large degree of trust in the teaching profession, and we need to ensure that schools continue to be accountable to pupils, parents and communities. Governing boards have a central role in developing such a positive culture and commitment to collaboration.

Emma Knights reports on NGA’s participation at the recent political conferences

Emma Knights is NGA chief executive

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The Academies Financial Handbook

Philip Wood looks at the implications of the revised handbook for academy trustees

The Academies Financial Handbook is the document that gives guidance on financial matters, governance and conflicts of interest for academies. Compliance with the handbook is required in academy trusts’ funding agreements and breach of it is taken seriously by the Education Funding Agency (EFA). The new 2014 version came into effect on 1 September.

Separation of roles and responsibilities

The new edition has added clarity to the definitions of the various governance roles within an academy, including the members, directors, trustees and governors. Essentially members are in lieu of shareholders in a company and have limited rights over the constitution of the academy – so their permission is needed to change the articles of association and approve the accounts. They also have the power to appoint trustees.

The directors and trustees are likely to be the same people, with these roles coming from company and charity law respectively. These are the people who are accountable for the performance of the academy trust and ensuring that it is solvent, well run and delivering the trust’s charitable objectives. In a single academy trust the governors will likely be the same people as the directors and trustees; however in a multi academy trust (MAT) these may well be different people operating at an individual academy level on a local governing body.

‘Governor’ isn’t defined in the handbook as different trusts will attach different meanings and responsibilities to this role. MAT boards of trustees should set down what responsibilities local governing bodies will have. This decision can be changed by the board of trustees at any time.

NGA has long advocated that academy conversion is a crucial opportunity to review the school’s governance and this is reflected in the new handbook with a requirement that trusts which are filing their accounts for the first time must now set out what they have done to review and develop their governance since conversion. A great place to start might be the 20 key questions self-evaluation framework, which is on the NGA website.

Connected party transactions

In a recent House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) was criticised for its lack of oversight in related party transactions. The new handbook seeks to clarify various bits relating to connected party transactions but doesn’t change the general framework in this area from that introduced in November 2013.

Related party transactions are where a trustee or member, or an individual connected to a trustee or member, provides goods or services to the academy trust. These are defined as:

- one of their close family
- a business they carry on
- a company they have a stake larger than 20% in
- an organisation that they control
- an organisation that has the power to appoint members or trustees

As you’ll appreciate this is quite a wide definition and boards need to be aware of this when they are thinking about procuring services for the trust. If a transaction would be with a related party then the goods or service must be provided ‘at cost’, i.e. without any profit but including the indirect costs for producing the service or product. This was introduced in the last handbook and so isn’t new, but the EFA has introduced a couple of clarifications.

Firstly, for organisations providing legal advice and audit services, the restrictions only apply to a partner managing the service who is a trustee or member of the academy trust.

Secondly, the new handbook introduces a threshold of £2,500 so that related party transactions cumulatively below this do not have to

Guidance


Even though the Charity Commission is not the principal regulator of academies, its guidance is still relevant, and for boards of trustees The Essential Trustee: What You Need to Know is useful.

NGA recently worked with our legal partners Browne Jacobson to produce an introduction to MATs document that could be useful for any MATs thinking about reviewing their governance, whether because it’s good practice to do so or because an expansion of the trust makes such a review timely and necessary www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/School-structures-and-constitution/Academies-and-free-schools/introduction-to-multi-academy-trusts.aspx
be provided at cost. Where there are many smaller goods or services that would bring the total to more than £2,500, it would be the costs above this limit that have to be provided ‘at cost’ to the academy trust.

All governors, trustees and members must have recorded any pecuniary or business interests in the register of interests, but trustees must now consider whether the interests of others should be included. The handbook gives the examples of other employees of the trust as well as close family members of individuals already on the register. While this is not a requirement, if there is any doubt there is a presumption in favour of disclosure. Academy trusts must now publish on their website the pecuniary and business interests of trustees and members.

There is also an added section in relation to some relationships with connected parties. The handbook draws trustees’ attention to the fact that contracts with profit-making ventures, relationships with auditors that go beyond audit, and dealings between individuals in a position of control in the academy trust (such as the chair of trustees or the accounting officer) will be looked at with greater scrutiny than may otherwise be the case. Trustees in this situation need to be careful that decisions are carefully documented with the reasons for the decision included.

Updates to the bits of the handbook about Financial Notices to Improve now include breaches of the duties and requirements relating to this, so the academy trust could find itself subject to one if trustees didn’t follow the rules. Such a notice would set out what the trust needed to do to remedy the situation and by when.

The handbook also now sets out that all trusts must have a written scheme of delegation of financial powers.

"Academy trusts must now publish on their website the pecuniary and business interests of trustees and members"
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In my opinion

Finding sixth form efficiencies

The answer lies in class size, says Nick Linford

In August 2013 the government’s Education Funding Agency (EFA) introduced a new way of calculating funding for school and college sixth forms. It moved away from a cash rate per qualification to a rate per student, in an effort to simplify the system and reduce the temptation to run unnecessary courses.

The change led to winners and losers, although it came with protection until 2015/16. However, sixth forms have not been protected from the EFA budgetary squeeze in the form of a falling rate per student.

Governors will need to consider how to respond to the impact of potentially significant cuts to sixth form funding rates.

Officials at the Department for Education have to find £600m in savings in their 2015 budget, rising to £4.6bn by 2018/19, according to the Association of Colleges. Pre-16 school spending is ringfenced and therefore protected from cuts, so the 16- to 18-year-old sixth form funding is left exposed.

In other parts of the education system, such as adult funding, the answer would be to cut the budget and reduce the number of students benefiting. This is not an option for sixth forms, as the government has legislated for near full participation up to the age of 18 (see p22).

Substantial savings

So, the government needs to pay for more students, but also make substantial savings. As a result, it’s the funding per student that will fall. This year the full-time funding rate for 18-year-olds has fallen 17.5%; meanwhile the 16- and 17-year-old rates have not risen with inflation – and most assume there are deeper rate cuts to come.

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) said in March that the sixth form “funding situation will become even more desperate” and governors will need to work closely with the senior leadership team to consider just how desperate the future would be if they didn’t take pre-emptive action.

For example, could your sixth form continue to deliver a high quality education if the funding for all students fell 20%?

“Could your sixth form continue to deliver a high quality education if the funding for all students fell 20%?”

Once you have considered this difficult outcome, it may be that you will need to make substantial efficiencies. And efficiencies come from reducing costs without reducing quality or the number of full-time students being taught.

It’s not an easy challenge, but this is why class size should be top of the list. Half-full classrooms are inefficient as the costs remain fixed but the EFA is paying per student. Put another way, if you increase the class size you are earning more for the same cost.

However, in most cases increasing the average class size will be achieved by, as the ASCL puts it: “reducing choice and withdrawing less popular subjects such as languages, further mathematics, music, computing and applied science”.

These decisions will differ widely by sixth form, and are never easy, not least because to really find the efficiency it will require a real reduction in staffing costs. But, from my experience as a curriculum planner for more than seven years at a college with nearly 3,000 16- to 18-year-olds, increasing the average class size is the first place to look for efficiencies.

**Termly reports**

Every governor should know what their average funded class size is, how it varies by subject and year and, most importantly, if more can be done to safely increase it. So governors should ask to see termly reports on class size and for A-level courses, for example, ask probing questions where they fall below 20.

Efficiencies don’t end with class size, but they should start there. Other options to reduce expenditure without reducing student numbers might include renegotiating contracts (such as with the awarding organisations), or reducing staff numbers in the administration and/or senior leadership team.

There are no easy answers to the efficiency challenge, but all roads will need to be explored and the simple economics of class sizes makes this a popular destination.

Nick Linford is Editor of Academies Week and author of the Hands-on Guide to Post-16 Funding, Nick.Linford@lsect.com
Beatrice Merrick looks at the challenges facing governors of maintained nursery schools

Ofsted’s figures show 57% of maintained nursery schools are currently rated ‘outstanding’, and a further 38% ‘good’. Yet, from a high of around 600 in the 1980s, there are now only just more than 400 remaining in England. The key challenge for governors is not maintaining excellence but ensuring survival.

Research by Early Education in 2013 found that nursery schools are contributing hugely to the delivery of key government agendas. They perform well above the sector average in delivering improved outcomes for children from disadvantaged areas, offering suitable provision for children with SEN and disabilities and increasing the number of high quality places for two-year-olds. However, their added value is not always quantified, and one of the challenges for governors is to ensure they have good data to show that the additional cost of nursery schools is a sound investment.

Specialist expertise
Beyond the outcomes they achieve for individual children, nursery schools do much more with their specialist expertise. As hubs for excellent practice they are extremely active in delivering training and CPD for early years staff in the maintained and private, voluntary and independent sectors. Those with children’s centres add value to integrated services for children and families, while those without still often work with parents and families more closely than is the norm for the early years sector or schools, and are providing informal, often undocumented support. The impact of this needs to be clearly documented to show that comparing value on the basis of per capita funding fails to recognise the wider way nursery schools have an impact.

Governors should ensure they have:
- Excellent self-evaluation
- Evidence of data, strengths, quality and costings ready and available at short notice
- Clear evidence of vulnerable children’s progress including evidence from social care and health sources
- External evidence of evaluation, Ofsted and other inspection reports, parental and community engagement

If your nursery is threatened
- Develop your armoury and understand that being ‘outstanding’ is of key importance as it makes it far more difficult to start closure procedures. Use the frequent inspections to celebrate your quality
- Develop a strong parent body with a clear voice to challenge closure
- Understand in detail the DfE’s guidance on the five-stage statutory procedures for school closure as it is quite rapid

If closure procedures are begun:
- Make sure that the information required by the guidance is all there, and challenge the local authority (LA) if it isn’t
- Make sure that parents understand their right of access to a local school place of similar quality
- Engage with the unions to check that due process has been followed
- Check all details from the LA about costings, consultation periods, minutes of meetings and documents
- Ask for all the LA’s evidence of why they see closure as the only option

Make sure you keep a trained specialist early years headteacher and that he/she is supported; heads may be pressurised by the LA not to speak out against proposed closure. Governors may need to lead on writing letters to councillors, MPs and the press. You can call in opposition support for your case at Overview and Scrutiny meetings of the local council, and ask questions via Freedom of Information requests if necessary.

“Nursery schools are contributing hugely to the delivery of key government agendas”

It can be a long and wearing process, so support your fellow governors and the headteacher: other nursery schools which have survived past closure attempts are a good source of support and ideas.

Last, but not least, contact Early Education and we’ll offer you all the support we can.


Beatrice Merrick
Chief Executive
Early Education
The Inner School
36 Indian Road
London NW5 1PD
www.early-education.org.uk
www.nga.org.uk

14 Nurseries.indd   14
0x0 21/10/2014   14:00
Over the summer holidays and whilst everyone concerned with education has been on holiday, we at Canopies UK have been working on ‘Operation Playground’. We have been speaking to teachers and researching some of the issues primary schools are currently having, especially with regards to getting children outside and enjoying the great outdoors.

What is ‘Operation Playground’?

‘Operation Playground’ is a set of 5 free lesson plans with supporting classroom material to allow teachers to meet and deliver certain aspects of the National Curriculum. Importantly though, it brings fun and enjoyment to the children as well as having a structured academic approach for teaching.

The objective is to create an outdoor game that all children can play. The lessons are designed to engage with Key Stage 2 pupils. Our aim has been to make it easy for teachers to deliver an accessible class project that gets pupils active and outside, whilst delivering National Curriculum targets. Each lesson meets specific National Curriculum objectives with every lesson planned and structured so that teachers and children can make the most of this free resource. Each lesson is planned to last 60 minutes and is split into various sections.

As well as a ‘teacher pack’ that explains ‘Operation playground’, there are also ‘supporting classroom aids’ which should be used in class to help stimulate conversation, ideas and activity.

By taking part in ‘Operation Playground’ your school also has the chance to win an outdoor play canopy to the value of £10,000.

The Game Rules

We want to give pupils every opportunity to make their own unique game that is fun, safe and inclusive so we have only three rules.

1: The game has to be played outside
2: It must be safe
3: It must be a game everyone in the class can play

National Curriculum Learning Objectives Covered:

We want this competition to be fun and engaging for pupils whilst helping to deliver the National Curriculum. The activities included in ‘Operation Playground’ cover targets for PE, English, Spoken Language & Composition and ICT Computing as part of encouraging outdoor play, game design, open discussion, recording of rules and presentation of content.

How Do We Participate?

To participate, we would like you to create and share with us your favourite outdoor game as designed by your pupils. It can be an adaptation of an existing game or a totally brand new game.

To register for ‘Operation Playground’ and have access to this unique resource please visit www.canopiesuk.co.uk/education/playground. All classroom material, teacher packs and instructions are ready for download.

If you have any questions about ‘Operation Playground’ then please call Karen on 01254 777002 Ext: 221 or email: competition@canopiesuk.co.uk
Working together to raise standards

Frank Norris describes the work of the Co-operative Academies Trust

The Co-operative Group is part of the worldwide co-operative movement whose origins date back to 1844 when a group of workers in Rochdale made the decision to open their own shop to provide cheaper food for workers. In an effort to raise education standards a reading room was added to the shop and these became an integral part of other shops as they rolled out across northern England.

The Co-operative movement has always valued education and the Group saw the academy programme as a way of supporting a fundamental principle as well as using education to regenerate and support communities.

The Co-operative Academies Trust is responsible for seven academies (three secondaries and four primaries) in Leeds, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. The trust is different from the many co-operative trust schools (GM Jan 2012 p16 and Jan 2014 p20) across the country because its academies are sponsored by the Co-operative Group and have a number of key educational partners such as Manchester City Council, Leeds City College and Staffordshire University. We all share a commitment to co-operative values and principles but our academies are governed by a central trust board with the Co-operative Group as a key player.

Steady growth
We took a conscious decision that the trust should grow relatively slowly. We have found that school improvement and community regeneration through education take time to embed, especially in the academies we support because they have traditionally been challenging schools to work in; too much growth can be an unnecessary distraction so it all needs careful consideration.

However, we have a large new-build primary school that opened this autumn in Leeds and a further academy is considering joining our trust. We would be happy to talk to schools in the north of England with a commitment to co-operative values and principles that may want to join us in the future.

We took a conscious decision that the trust should grow relatively slowly

Our governing bodies benefit from the commitment, expertise and skill of senior managers and members from within the Co-operative Group who sit as governors. Their contribution is immense and I am always impressed by their passion and determination. They have very high expectations and know, often intuitively, how to support and challenge senior school managers. They also know what a good, open meeting looks like and set a good example to other governors.

We have had four inspections in our academies in the past year and they have all reported in glowing terms on the contribution of governors, the trust and the sponsor. In addition, the Co-operative Group provides business expertise and acumen in a wide range of areas and also supplies curriculum programmes for our academies. It’s an impressive package.

Central oversight and local governance
We recently merged the three trusts for the seven academies into one. It seemed sensible to simplify the governance arrangements and establish a single central trust board that had oversight of the academies.

This approach also allowed us to review the scheme of delegation and re-emphasise that responsibility for key decisions such as staff appointments and academic oversight rests with the local governing bodies.

Merging the trusts did prove more difficult and time consuming than I expected, so I recommend that anyone intending to go down this route should chat to others who have gone through it before they embark on the journey.

Advice
If your school is considering merger or conversion, NGA Goldline offers impartial advice for NGA Gold members.
Contact gold@nga.org.uk or phone 0121 237 3782.

Frank Norris is a former senior HMI with Ofsted and currently director of the Co-operative Academies Trust. www.co-operative.academy
YoungMinds is the UK’s leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people.

With over 10 years’ experience of supporting schools, we can help you address your concerns about pupils’ behaviour, emotional wellbeing or mental health and enable improved academic attainment, resilience, positive behaviour and attendance.

Training for school leaders, staff, parents and governors

Develop your team’s understanding and skills through training from our experts. Sessions can be held in or out of house and tailored to all levels.

- Teens, turmoil and transition: adolescent mental health
- Promoting mental health in the primary or early years
- Perspectives on self-harm
- Building resilience: Children, Young People, Staff, Parents and Communities
- Understanding and working with CAMHS
- Working effectively with parents
- The mental health needs of looked after children and young people

Training is from £165 per person for a day course. Team training rates are negotiable.

Consultancy Support

Employ our Academic Resilience and other specialist consultancy support to enable your school to:

- Develop strategies to achieve academic resilience — helping young people attain against the odds.
- Effectively assess the mental health needs of their students.
- Plan a comprehensive approach to address those needs in the curriculum, across the whole school and using external services.
- Support for Headteachers, SENCOs and the leadership team in sourcing evidence-based external support.

Consultancy services rates are negotiable.

YoungMinds programme has been absolutely brilliant. Most important was the training offered to the staff. I learnt things I didn’t know, in terms of student behaviour and emotional wellbeing and have been able to cascade this to other staff. The training to me has been invaluable.

Juliet Coley, Deputy Headteacher at Gladesmore Community School

www.youngminds.org.uk/schools
contact Katie Bennett-Hall on 020 7089 5050 to discuss your needs
Governors in over 1,300 schools and academies receive this information:

**Finance Dashboard**

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We would all hope that bullying doesn’t happen in our school. Unfortunately the reality is that even in the best schools bullying incidents can occur, however rarely, and the school needs to be in a position to deal with them effectively.

What is bullying?
The Department for Education (DfE) defines bullying as “behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally”. Within this broad definition bullying can take many forms and can be motivated by a vast range of factors, but these are often grounded in perceived or actual differences between the bully/bullies and victim(s).

In the past few years cyberbullying, which involves bullying via technology such as text messages or the internet, has become more common. This form of bullying can be particularly challenging for schools to deal with, as it can take place at any time of day and with a potentially much bigger audience.

What are governors’ and trustees’ responsibilities?
The law states that every school must have measures in place to prevent all forms of bullying. Schools are not required to have a standalone bullying policy but, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the school behaviour policy must include “the prevention of all forms of bullying among pupils and that this is drawn to the attention of pupils, parents and staff at least once a year”. For academies and free schools, the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010 provide that the proprietor of an academy is required to ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is drawn up and implemented.

Ofsted’s 2012 survey report No Place for Bullying found that although a minority of schools had combined their written behaviour policy and anti-bullying policy into one document, these represented some of the strongest policies. This was because these schools generally saw bullying as part of a continuum of behaviour, rather than as something separate.

Governors and trustees should be monitoring behaviour and bullying

How should we approach bullying in our school?
It is not enough simply to have a policy in place. The Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) recommends taking a whole-school approach to bullying, and has produced a School Assessment Tool (www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/resources/school-assessment-tools.aspx) that enables schools to measure their progress in anti-bullying work and identify areas for development.

Ofsted recommends that schools have “a set of clear, inclusive values that are understood and lived by all members of the school community”. The governing board has an important strategic role in defining the school’s ethos and values, so a first step might be to revisit yours. Do they support positive behaviour?

Are they being implemented by the whole school community?
Staff are in an ideal position to nip potential cases of bullying in the bud, as they are on the front line and know their pupils best. However, they will only be able to do this successfully if they have the relevant skills and expertise, and it is important to ensure they are appropriately trained.

It is worth consulting the staff as a whole – including support staff – to find out whether there are any areas in particular in which they would like training. For example, Ofsted’s report found that many teachers were not confident in dealing with derogatory language, and identifying the difference between ‘banter’ and bullying. You should also consider whether bullying and related issues are part of the school’s curriculum, particularly in personal, social and health education (PSHE). Have your PSHE teachers been properly trained in this area, or is it just an ‘add-on’ to their other duties?

Governors and trustees should be monitoring behaviour and bullying. Your headteacher should share relevant (anonymised) data with you – this could be a standing item in the headteacher’s reports. Such updates should include information about the actions being taken to resolve incidents of bullying, and the governing board should be proactive in supporting and challenging these accordingly. It is useful to look at attendance figures – if certain students are frequently absent, could this be due to bullying? You should also consider gathering independent data, for example by seeking the views of pupils, parents and staff via surveys.

For more guidance on how to deal with bullying, see the NGA website.

Ellie Howarth is NGA’s research and information officer
The self-improving school

David Weston looks at the importance of continuing professional development

The quality of a school can never exceed the quality of the teaching, or so goes the aphorism. Given that a governing board’s number one priority for a school is a high quality of education, it must follow that the number one focus should be constantly improving the quality of teaching. However, CPD (continuing professional development) is too often merely an afterthought which means that governors are missing one of the biggest levers at their disposal to help a school.

Effective development

Research has shown that when teachers are being developed effectively, pupils have better attainment, greater enthusiasm for their subjects and increased levels of self-confidence. Staff members also gain confidence and self-belief.

Effective development entails staff collaborating over long periods of time, planning lessons together and observing each other’s practice. This works best where small groups of teachers identify specific pupil learning issues that are of concern, are able to clearly articulate the ideal outcomes and then design and refine lessons which help achieve these. This is known as an enquiry approach to professional development.

A great example of this approach is Lesson Study. In this process, a small group of teachers (typically three) focus on two or three pupils, plan a lesson and predict these pupils’ reactions to each activity. They then observe the lesson together, focusing on the pupils, with a short interview process at the end. Finally, they take all of this information into a post-lesson meeting, where they compare observations with their predictions and discuss what this means for future lessons. This sort of process works particularly well when the group is supported by a more experienced practitioner and/or where they are able to read relevant research and advice.

CPD is too often merely an afterthought

Unfortunately, studies have shown that in most schools teachers spend most of their professional development time passively listening to lectures or courses. These tend to be one-off, flash-in-the-pan pieces of input that are soon forgotten and rarely have any long-term impact. This lack of impact is rarely picked up as only a tiny minority of schools attempt to evaluate the effect of their development programmes on pupil outcomes.

You need the right information to monitor the professional development programme. Here are some questions you might think about asking, along with a few suggestions of where to seek this information.

• How much money is being spent on the full variety of CPD activities? What are the plans to increase this? Evidence: budgets, discussion with the bursar/business manager.

• How much time is allocated for staff to engage in professional learning? What are the plans to extend this? Is time allocated for all staff, including non-teaching staff? Evidence: staff timetables, discussion with the CPD leader, conversations with staff.

• Do CPD activities have specific pupil outcomes associated with them? Is the impact of each activity being evaluated upon these outcomes? Evidence: school self-evaluation forms, CPD monitoring documents.

• What is the programme of CPD activities for the year? How long is each CPD focus being sustained for – are these one-off activities or long-term approaches? Evidence: school CPD plans, records of the previous year, conversations with staff.

• How is the school ensuring that it is engaging with quality providers? Is it strategically comparing courses and consultancy on a national database (such as GoodCPDGuide.com)? Evidence: CPD policy, conversations with CPD leader.

• What steps is the school taking to ensure that up-to-date, evidence-based approaches to teaching are being actively sought and embedded? Evidence: senior leaders, conversations with staff.

• Is every member of staff (including non-teaching staff) being proactively supported in their career development? Evidence: conversations with staff/surveys.

• Are appraisal and mid-year reviews used with all staff to discuss specific development needs and set a personal development objective? Evidence: reports from senior leaders on performance management.

• Does every member of staff feel supported and constructively challenged? Do they feel trusted and valued? How are school leaders ensuring that top-down quality assurance processes aren’t hindering a culture of professional learning? Evidence: conversations with staff, senior leaders.
The focus of professional development is also important. All too often we find that school leaders are prioritising the preparation of their teachers to give ‘Ofsted-ready’ performances. This can result in a very top-down management approach where teachers are monitored to within an inch of their lives instead of receiving the trust, support and constructive challenge that typify excellent schools. Moving away from this type of thinking requires a profound mental shift and a concerted effort from all leaders, but has huge potential benefits.

**Resourcing**

If a school is serious about prioritising effective professional development then leaders need to put their money where their mouth is. They also need to ensure there is enough human resource to enable senior leaders to allocate sufficient time for collaboration and professional learning.

Traditionally a CPD budget catered for one-off external courses. However, there are a broad range of activities that need to be properly resourced:

- external courses, conferences and meetings – ticket cost plus travel/subsistence
- consultants, coaches
- professional development books and access to knowledge databases
- cover for lessons to allow class teachers the time for planning, collaboration and training
- professional subscriptions, e.g. subject associations
- contribution towards the cost of academic study, e.g. at masters or doctoral level
- professional qualifications, e.g. Leading Practitioners, National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership
- CPD audit (e.g. National Teacher Enquiry Network Audit, CUREE Skein, IoE CPD Quality Mark)

*If a school is taking teacher development seriously, it should be spending at least 1% of total salary costs*

Your school budget may have an allocated sum labelled as ‘CPD’, but do check which of the above activities would be expected to come out of this. If a school is taking teacher development seriously, it should be spending at least 1% of total salary costs (for teaching and non-teaching staff) on the above CPD costs, and looking to spend well above that level as soon as possible.

**Allow enough time**

Time tends to be the biggest issue. Teachers, in particular, have their time very tightly directed so it is even more important that collaboration time is built into schedules.

At secondary level there is an increasing trend to modify the timetable so that staff have one or even two hours of dedicated collaboration and professional development time every week. This often occurs at the end of the day at the same time every week, although some prefer to use mornings and ask students to arrive later.

**RESOURCES**

The Teacher Development Trust runs a schools CPD network with annual membership which includes an audit against our best practice framework, an online portal with guidance and advice, and conferences and school-to-school partnerships to support continuous improvement. Other organisations which offer CPD audit services are CUREE and the Institute of Education.

Whenever schools (leaders, teachers, governors) look for external courses and consultancy, it is important that they compare different providers and seek the highest quality provision that is based on the most effective practices. The Teacher Development Trust runs http://GoodCPDguide.com which is a Trip Advisor for CPD containing several thousand courses, events, services and resources from several hundred providers. You can also download a free CPD quality framework at http://TDTtrust.org/

At primary level this approach is less common. Instead, some schools timetable pupil activities led by external staff (e.g. sport, music, art, assemblies) at a regular time each week to give teachers dedicated time for professional development.

However time is found, it is vital that it is used well. Teacher enquiry approaches (such as Lesson Study) along with regular mentoring and coaching should take up a significant amount of the time. There should be plentiful opportunities for co-planning of lessons and peer observation (as distinct from performance management observation). Lectures, talks and external courses do have a role to play in ensuring that practitioners are up to date, but staff need at least twice as much time again after such opportunities to work on embedding and sustaining new ideas.

**Ensuring quality**

As with all governance, a variety of sources should be used to gather information. Governors should expect information from the senior leadership team, but should also make time to examine professional development plans and speak to a variety of staff.

You need to consider whether CPD should be one of the school’s strategic priorities and may want to consider having a named governor who is responsible for overseeing the school’s approaches to professional development. This governor could be the chair of the committee which covers staffing, possibly resources, and can arrange conversations and visits to speak to the CPD leader as well as other staff. It is also helpful to get an external audit of the school’s approach and ensure that the school is connected to leading practice in this area.

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David Weston is chief executive of the Teacher Development Trust. He is a primary school governor and a former secondary school teacher.
Now that Raising 

The Participation Age (RPA) is fully in place, there's a spotlight on schools promoting participation in post-16 education and training, and renewed attention brought to reducing NEET (not in education, employment or training) statistics. The need to develop the aspirations of all young people as they begin considering their post-16 education and training options is central to meeting the challenge of achieving full participation of 16-18-year-olds.

While recent statistics show that the participation rate of 16-year-olds has risen since last September, new concerns have started to emerge about the number of students dropping out of sixth form or college.

The risk, it seems, is that RPA could simply shift the NEET challenge on to older and potentially harder-to-reach age groups. In addition, schools will soon be under new scrutiny with Progression Measures coming into force from 2016. These will give visibility of students' progress from GCSE to age 18 – with schools and colleges being held accountable for getting their students into good jobs, further study or apprenticeships.

Greater autonomy

On top of that, there is a greater autonomy for schools, with about 60% of all secondary schools either functioning as academies or on track to become an academy. While this has brought certain freedoms and flexibilities, the need remains for schools to work with their local authority (LA), particularly on provision planning to ensure there's a sufficient range and scale of education courses and training programmes available for their students.

The need remains for schools to work with their local authority

They also need to fulfil their shared duties: ensuring student participation, progression and delivering the September Guarantee to secure enough suitable education and training places for 16-18-year-olds.

The impact of these reforms is not simply focused on school management and reporting, they firmly underline the importance of students making the right choices at 16. It is even more critical when we appreciate that for many, if not all, students making their post-16 choices is the first time they are asked to make important decisions about their future.

Many young people feel confused because they're not sure what to do. It can be a big challenge. Students not only need information and advice, they need support to help them choose well. Teachers have a unique perspective and knowledge of their pupils; which is why they remain key influencers of year 10 and year 11 students as they move towards an important transition point in their education.

Schools, their teachers and adviser services play a critical role in encouraging students to explore what's available to them, and to help them make the best possible decisions. This includes guiding students to consider the longer term effects of decisions they make now, and to appreciate that there are often different pathways to a variety of careers.

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear that tackling RPA head on is a national educational concern. It requires solutions that serve the needs of learners – giving them the information and advice they need to make informed decisions, and making the application process easier. It is also essential to give schools, colleges and LAs the tools they need to keep track of students' progression.

Ultimately, the most important thing for schools is to ensure that their learners find an opportunity and next step that's right for them – whether that means A-levels, BTECs, apprenticeships or traineeships. As governors, you have the opportunity to steer your school's agenda on post-16 progression, and to set a positive precedent on effective RPA management – something that will ultimately stand your school in good stead for the foreseeable future.

UCAS PROGRESS

UCAS Progress is a national service for GCSE students, offering access to comprehensive, independent and trusted information as they search and apply for post-16 training and study. UCAS Progress also supports those working with students, giving teachers and advisers dedicated tracking tools, as well as the reports, insight and data needed to fulfil their statutory obligations.

The service is free for students and for schools, offering learners, teachers and advisers a range of post-16 transition support including classroom materials, user training, access to a searchable database of 5,800 post-16 providers and 100,000 courses, as well as an integrated application system.

www.ucas.com/progress

Gina Bradbury is head of UCAS Progress
The Goldsmiths’ Grants for Teachers provides an opportunity for teachers and headteachers to undertake a project of their choice, in UK or abroad, aimed at enhancing their personal and professional development. The Grant forms part of the long-term commitment of the Goldsmiths’ Company to support teachers and headteachers in the United Kingdom.

Grants will cover travel, accommodation, materials costs, etc, up to a maximum of £3,000.

In addition the Goldsmiths’ Company will pay a maximum of £2,000 supply cover to your school”

For guidelines and further details visit our website: www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk/charity-education/education/ or apply to: The Deputy Clerk, The Goldsmiths’ Company
Goldsmiths’ Hall, Foster Lane, London EC2V 6BN

DON’T DELAY – APPLICATIONS MUST BE IN BY
1 DECEMBER 2014

Are you ready for Anti-Bullying Week?
‘Let’s stop bullying for all’ 17th – 21st November 2014

• Disabled children in primary schools twice as likely to be severely bullied
• 8 out of 10 children with learning difficulties are bullied
• 90% of parents of children with Asperger Syndrome say their children are bullied

THIS MUST STOP. We need your help to stop the bullying of all children and young people.

Free campaign pack and resources available at: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/anti-bullying-week
Free training for teachers and other professionals: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/the-project/free-training

Join us. Donate to us. www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/get-involved
On 1 September 2014, the new framework to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) came into force in England and Wales under the Children and Families Act 2014 and the new SEN Code of Practice. The reforms place new legal duties on the governing boards of all state-funded schools and adapt the school’s working practices to the new way of working based on a central theme that children and young people must be the focus of the support.

**SEN Information Report**
The most immediate concern is the need for the governing board to prepare, and publish on the school’s website, a SEN Information Report. This must have been available from 1 September 2014. The report sets out in practical terms the approach which the school will take towards supporting children and young people with SEND.

The report should bring together the school’s approach and policy framework into one document. The legislation and Code set out over 15 specific issues which the report must cover and the expectation is that it will be kept under review and updated to reflect any changes in practice or procedure that impact on provision at the school.

One issue which must be covered is how the governing board evaluates provision at the school. The reports also feed into the ‘local offer’ which local authorities must publish (from the same date). This provides an area-wide picture of SEND support services.

Other duties have been imported from the old SEN framework established under the Education Act 1996. Schools must still have a SENCO who is responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision within the school and schools must support inclusion and ensure, as far as possible, that SEND pupils engage in the activities of the school alongside pupils who do not have SEND.

Underpinning the provision of the additional support for SEND pupils is the best endeavours duty on the governing board. This means doing everything to ensure support is secured to meet a child or young person’s SEN. How schools approach meeting this duty is further detailed in the SEN Code.

The starting point will be quality classroom teaching and using evidence of less than expected progress to provide interventions to support the child. The class teacher remains responsible for the child’s progress but will receive additional support from the SENCO, relevant external specialists and the parents. The latter need to be involved at all stages of SEND support and will provide the school with holistic evidence about the child.

**Children with Medical Needs**
The support duty has been extended to pupils with medical needs and specific provision must be secured by schools to support such pupils. While the school will be able to access specific guidance on the new duty, governing boards may wish to consider their support for a whole range of additional needs to ensure the school is complying with its legal responsibilities.

The duty is about doing everything possible to support the child in the school environment.

Best endeavours will also encompass requesting Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments where necessary and requesting additional funding from the LA’s High Needs block. The duty is about doing everything possible to support the child in the school environment and that could encompass taking steps to force other agencies to act.

Many of the new duties are operational in nature and will not directly impact on the governing board. However, it remains the role of the governing board to ensure that the school is run in accordance with the relevant legal frameworks in a way which provides the best outcomes for pupils.

Governing boards will need to keep a close eye on the SEN framework and ensure that their school is meeting its requirements. Clearly, preparation, publication and review of the SEN Information Report will provide an update for governors on the school’s approach but it will also be necessary to consider whether more regular updates are required.

**Central role**
Governors have a key role in ensuring schools play their part in supporting all pupils and have the ability to focus resources on those areas with greatest need. Provision for all vulnerable pupils (SEND, pupil premium, medical needs etc) needs to be central to school development and governors have a central role in ensuring that provision is appropriate.

Richard Freeth asks: is your school compliant?
Support for difficult pupils

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Exercising influence

As part of our work to improve school governance, NGA aims to influence government and opposition policy.

We do this both by reporting the experience of governing boards across England and expressing the voices of governors, and by providing expert analysis and advice.

We sit on a wide range of stakeholder groups at the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE’s Education Forum is a confidential discussion forum for a range of representative groups, both trade unions and employer representatives. Although it grew out of the previous government’s partnership on workforce issues, in its new incarnation it tends to cover the full schools remit. A sub-group focuses on how to reduce the bureaucratic burden on schools, but I am not convinced it has achieved this aim.

Advisory Group on Governance

The DfE has also had for many years an Advisory Group on Governance (AGOG) with some of the same members as the Education Forum as well as a few more, including the Independent Academies Association, Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association (FASNA), National Coordinators of Governor Services, Local Government Association (LGA), Association of Directors of Children’s Services, Catholic Education Service, National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and Ofsted.

As a forum to raise issues of general principle and detail affecting school governance, it allows the DfE to keep members informed of national policies affecting governing boards and their role in promoting high standards of educational achievement, but also aims to assist them in promoting best practice and developing national initiatives concerning training, supporting and recruiting school governors.

Although NGA is a small organisation, we like to think we punch above our weight.

It tends to meet once a term with rather long agendas, so the DfE is trying to arrange an additional meeting to discuss more effective oversight of schools in the light of Trojan horse. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) also has an advisory group with a similar membership which meets twice a year to help shape their programmes for governance. Although originally only concerned with development and support for chairs, it now covers clerks. The Education Funding Agency (EFA) also holds a stakeholders’ meeting to which we belong.

We are involved with a range of DfE specialist consultation groups:

- School and Academy Funding Group (SAFG) and its sub-groups (Early Years and Efficiency)
- Capital consultative group (of the EFA)
- Admissions (to evaluate how the School Admissions Code is operating)
- The so-called Quartet on teachers’ pay and conditions (NGA, ASCL, NAHT & LGA as employers)

EAF, attended by Gillian Allcroft, our policy manager, is the most frequently held, often monthly, perhaps because creating a fairer school funding system is the most complicated of our policy areas.

Evidence

We also attend large numbers of ad hoc meetings. The most important is our termly meeting with Lord Nash, parliamentary under-secretary of state for schools with responsibility for governance, at which over the past five terms we have discussed pretty much everything governance.

We give evidence to relevant select committee enquiries and annually to the School Teachers’ Review Body (STRB). And of course we meet other partners without the government or other politicians; the most important of these are our regular meetings with NAHT and ASCL at which we compare and debate our standpoints, and have published the much used What Governing Bodies Should Expect From School Leaders and What School Leaders Should Expect From Governing Bodies.

Ofsted has for the last couple of years supported NGA in getting...
information out to governors, in particular through our regional conferences (see p28 for the most recent) and Mike Cladingbowl will be speaking at our annual conference on 15 November. We have also had conversations with a number of Ofsted senior officials on our concerns, particularly with the ways in which inspectors approach conversations with governors.

We were pleased to see the removal of the reference to classroom visits by governors from their latest guidance, but we still see sentences in Ofsted reports praising governors for understanding the quality of teaching from their visits to classrooms.

I'm sure I do not need to explain to our loyal readership that the former is not governance – it is wholly wrong to be monitoring the quality of teaching directly ourselves (see p6). So why don't our inspectors understand this basic tenet of governance?

Furthermore while some governors have been praised for visiting schools on a weekly basis, others doing this have been put into special measures for crossing the operational line.

It appears from both the published Ofsted reports and feedback from governors that inspectors tend to fixate on specific subjects – last year it was understanding RAiSEonline, pupil premium and performance related pay. This year, post-Trojan horse, safeguarding is likely to be a top subject. These are all important topics, but don't get to the heart of governance: are governing boards carrying out our three key functions? At my recent meetings with Sean Harford, Ofsted's national director of school policy, we covered this as well as a range of issues, such as the flexibility needed with timing for governors to speak to inspectors and the governance of federations and multi-academy trusts.

Although the guidance is helpfully in the public domain, the training inspectors receive is not and NGA has been offering to contribute to that training for a couple of years. This has not been taken up, but I now have a date in my diary to speak to all the senior HMIs.

Working out the cause and effect of influence is extremely tricky

We are pleased to be able to supply a voice for governance at such a variety of groups, but does this make any difference? Working out the cause and effect of influence is extremely tricky, and small changes have to be celebrated. More emphasis by government ministers and opposition spokespeople on the training and development of governors is to be welcomed while we continue to make the case for mandatory training.

Additions to the DfE’s handbook suggested by NGA help us to convince the sector, including Ofsted, of our understanding of strategic governance as opposed to operational management.

Although NGA is a small organisation, we like to think we punch above our weight and, moreover, we are strongly independent. You, our members, fund us and bequeath us this independence. We choose to support the government of the day when we agree it is on the right lines, but do not when we believe it to be mistaken. The first step is to have discussions behind closed doors, but when persuasion fails we need to move on. For example, for more than six months we have been having detailed discussions with the DfE and NCTL about the fact that the criteria and assessment process for National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) are not always producing the correct results. As the very first organisation to lobby for NLGs and then having advised on the process and been involved in designation, we were concerned by many reports coming back to us from members about the varying quality of NLGs.

We had thought we were making progress. However personnel at the NCTL changed a number of times over the summer, and we were somewhat surprised to see that a new round of applications was being opened at the beginning of October using the same criteria.

Continuing discussions
We will of course continue our discussions and perhaps changes might be made for the following cohort in 2015 so that once again we can be enthusiastic proponents of the scheme set up to provide experienced mentors for chairs of governing boards.

As we write the annual report for our members for the AGM on 15 November, we of course consider how effective we have been in our lobbying work, if that hasn’t become a dirty word. By the time you receive this edition the conference may well be full but do check if you want to be involved. This year we are also offering members the chance to attend a linked event the day before, organised jointly with British Educational Leadership, Education and Management Society (BELMAS) – see the website for more details.

Emma Knights is NGA chief executive

by Emma Knights

www.nga.org.uk

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The first speaker was Helen Storey, Ofsted’s senior HMI for Yorkshire, Humber and the North East. Helen began by thanking the delegates for the contribution they make to the region’s schools and emphasising that, despite the challenge from their inspection role, Ofsted appreciates the time and effort governors dedicate to school improvement.

Helen gave an overview of the changes to Ofsted’s inspection framework which came into force in September, some of which had arisen from inspections of the Trojan horse schools in Birmingham. She emphasised that governors have a key role to play in ensuring that their schools prepare pupils for life in modern Britain and that children are safeguarded against potential threats such as extremism. Discussion centred on the importance of governors understanding the context of their school and community, so that they can focus on the risks that pupils face and ensure that robust strategies are in place to manage these risks.

Ofsted has an increased emphasis on the compliance of schools’ websites. For example, schools are required to provide the pupil premium impact statement. Helen also suggested that a majority of governing boards were missing an opportunity to use the website to publicise their work, engage with the community and recruit new governors.

Helen shared some of Ofsted’s findings on good governance and the barriers to it: “analysis of the most effective schools shows that there is robust challenge to senior leaders by governors who know the school well, but who also have a secure grasp of their basic duties”.

Governors are best placed to enable rapid and sustained improvement when they gather information about their schools independently of the headteacher’s report, engaging with the opinions of parents, carers and pupils, and have sufficient training to interpret and scrutinise the necessary data. Effective governing boards identify their training needs, assess
The impact of their actions, and keep pace with events and changes occurring within their school and the education sector more widely.

Lack of information, clear strategic focus, or the necessary skills and knowledge were among the most frequent characteristics of less effective governing boards. Helen stressed that where external reviews of governance were recommended they should be carried out in a timely manner and give sharp recommendations to improve effectiveness.

Ofsted expects governors to be able to demonstrate the link between performance and teachers’ pay. Helen advocated a strategic approach to ensuring performance management is done effectively: knowledge of pupils’ progress helps governors to make confident judgements about the quality of teaching (see p6) and decisions about pay should be informed by these judgements.

Delegates debated just how involved they as governors needed to be and how this related to the school’s financial position (for further information, see NGA’s Knowing Your School briefing). Helen also recommended that CPD for teaching staff and the evaluation of its effectiveness should form part of governor scrutiny (see p20).

Balanced relationship
A correctly balanced relationship between the head and the governing board is crucial. One member asked what could be done in a situation where the headteacher’s lack of understanding of the governance role limits access to information. Helen recommended drawing on external resources, such as partnerships with other schools or local support. A member highlighted the importance of a strong local governor association, with his own group running training sessions specifically for headteachers to gain a better understanding of governance.

Making good use of the pupil premium
Philip Baumister, speaking on behalf of the DfE’s pupil premium (PP) team, began by outlining the gap in educational attainment for disadvantaged children: the gap in 2013 was 17.7 percentage points by the end of year 6 rising to 26.9 percentage points by the end of year 11. He presented findings from the most recent PISA test highlighting the Scandinavian success in lowering the attainment gap.

The expenditure on PP has been rising since 2011 with £2.5 billion allocated in 2014/15: £1,300 for each eligible primary-aged child and £935 for those in secondary school. More funding is being provided at an early age because evidence suggests that early intervention is most effective.

Philip then presented figures which showed that, since the funding was introduced in 2011, the national attainment gap had already closed by 2.1 percentage points, but there is much variation between schools and there’s still a lot of work to do. Generally London is doing better by disadvantaged pupils than the rest of the country. However, although the DfE gives schools complete freedom to spend their pupil premium, this did not mean that it can be used to ‘plug’ holes in a school’s budget and Ofsted will hold a school to account for how well it raises the attainment of PP pupils against the national average.

Independent review
Philip recommended the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Toolkit to learn more about effective ways to spend the pupil premium (GM May 2014 p14) and he encouraged governors to consider their schools becoming involved in projects to measure the impact of interventions. He also suggested the governing board could commission an independent pupil premium review to identify effective and ineffective action in closing the attainment gap.

Finally, Philip presented effective ways to spend the pupil premium. He stressed the success of the Summer Schools Programme and its positive effect on pupil confidence. Examples of good practice can be found on the websites of Park Junior Primary School and Goffs Secondary School. Both have previously won the DfE’s Pupil Premium Awards.

The conference concluded with a presentation by the NGAs policy manager, Gillian Allcroft, on the importance of governing boards having a clear strategic vision and concentrating on strategic, rather than operational, activities.

The governing board can commission an independent pupil premium review

CHANGES AND CHALLENGES
The Governors’ Association throughout Hull and East Riding (GAiHER) recently hosted a seminar entitled ‘Changes and Challenges’. We were delighted to welcome Mil Vasic, Hull LA director of children, young people and family services, and Kevin Hall, East Riding LA director of children, families and schools.

The directors outlined their statutory duties for, among other things, school improvement, the PREVENT Strategy, safeguarding, looked-after children and planning school places. They also talked about the administration of the Direct Schools Grant, recent changes to the curriculum, the service they provide for governing bodies and the funding available for meeting all their responsibilities.

The similarity of the comparatively low levels of central funding to both authorities and the funding available for meeting all their responsibilities caused some surprise.

This seminar was offered free to all governors in both LAs, whether members of GAiHER or not, and was the first hosted and funded by GAiHER. We hope it will become an annual event.

Vince Barrett, GAiHER communications manager, www.ga-ther.org
Most people understand what a grievance is – it’s where an employee has a problem, complaint or concern relating to their employment which they make to their employer.

So what exactly is whistleblowing? Public Concern at Work, a charity set up to raise awareness of whistleblowing, defines it as a worker telling their employer, a regulator, customers, the police or the media about a dangerous or illegal activity that they are aware is happening through their workplace. ‘Worker’ has a very wide definition and covers agency workers, subcontractors, self-employed and more or less anyone who provides a service.

Raising awareness
The main difference from a grievance is that normally the person blowing the whistle isn’t personally affected but is trying to raise awareness of a problem in the system. So, for example, an allegation that the person is being bullied is probably going to fall within the grievance policy rather than the whistleblowing one, while an allegation of financial mismanagement by a senior member of staff would likely come within whistleblowing legislation.

Often the person raising the issue will want it kept in confidence. This is understandable, and as far as possible such a request needs to be acceded to, but it also needs to be communicated both in the policy and by senior leaders that this won’t always be possible, especially where a full investigation is necessary. If something were to end up at a court or tribunal it is very unlikely that the details could be kept confidential.

One of the most important aspects of whistleblowing legislation is that it provides protection to workers from victimisation because of making the disclosure.

Due to a decision in a case that blurred the lines between a grievance and whistleblowing, meaning that workers could use whistleblowing legislation if an individual had a contract dispute, the law was changed last summer to include a public interest test. In theory this means that to be classed as whistleblowing, the worker making the disclosure must reasonably believe that it is in the public interest. That doesn’t mean that it has to be, just that the worker reasonably believes on the facts that it is in the public interest. ‘Public interest’ isn’t defined in the Act so we’re waiting to see how the courts and tribunals will interpret it.

Why is it important?
If you haven’t looked at your policy in a while, or don’t have one, now is a good time to think about it. Under the recent changes, employers may be held vicariously liable for employees who victimise whistleblowers. The Public Interest Disclosure Act also removes the restrictions on compensation for unfair dismissal at the employment tribunal if the dismissal was because the person made a protected disclosure.

There are obvious reasons to ensure this is part of the culture of an organisation: it can help prevent mismanagement in the first place, but having clear reporting lines can also help prevent staff feeling the need to go to the media about an issue (with the reputational damage that it creates) and allows you to handle it in house.

The key to any policy is to ensure that it isn’t overly legalistic and it is clear that if a worker makes a disclosure they won’t be maltreated because of it. For this reason it’s not only important to have a clearly written policy that explains to staff how to blow the whistle, but that this is effectively communicated to them.

NGA advises

**Checklist**

- Ensure that your school has a whistleblowing policy that is up to date and makes clear what whistleblowing is and how it fits with grievances.
- Be clear about confidentiality – this will be kept if possible but in some circumstances where a full investigation is needed or the case ends up in court it will not be.
- Get senior management backing as they will be managing the policy on the ground – it’s in the interest of everyone that issues are sorted early.
- Offer training to senior staff. Employers often get into trouble when they don’t recognise what whistleblowing is and what a protected disclosure looks like.

**Gold Members**

Gold members of NGA can get advice on any of the issues raised here, or anything else, by emailing gold@nga.org.uk

Philip Wood explains the difference between a staff grievance and whistleblowing
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HCUKonline.com
Leadership, Capacity Building and School Improvement: concepts, themes and impact
By Clive Dimmock
Routledge, £32.99

This is the fifth in the series on Leadership for Learning – exploring the connections between educational leadership, policy, curriculum, human resources and accountability. The book covers leadership, capacity building and school improvement. These have an impact on all schools, the implication being that interaction between the first two will lead to the third. However all three concepts are very difficult to pin down.

The first section attempts to conceptualise and contextualise school leadership. The key working definition of leadership is that “it is a social influence process aimed at building capacity by optimising the use of resources to achieve shared goals.” This invites questions about how the goals are determined and shared, what kind of capacity is to be built and what kind of social influence applied.

The remaining two sections attempt to address these questions. There is recognition that the quality of school leadership is sometimes measured in terms of outcomes (e.g. test results) and sometimes in terms of processes (what the leader actually does) and these are not always in harmony.

In terms of capacity building it is claimed that the capital of a school comes in three components: intellectual capital, organisational capital and social capital. These are all influenced by the leader’s personal qualities, by the context of the school and by what are called leverage strategies (new methods of teaching and learning).

The book has very little to say about governors and governing boards. This is strange since one of the most important functions of the governing board is the appointment of a headteacher. It is also strange in view of the recent remarks of the chief inspector that some governing boards are failing their schools in the quality of leadership they provide.

Many governing boards are desperate for guidance on how they can recognise a potentially good leader and distinguish them from a poor one. Unfortunately, this is not the book for such guidance.

Dennis Fox, Notts Association of Governors

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As with other professional roles, it is imperative that clerks are annually appraised. However, the results of the NGA and SOLACE survey of clerks carried out earlier this year (GM May 2014 p28) found that approximately half of clerks have no annual appraisal. It is difficult to see how the effectiveness of a clerk can be measured if they are not regularly appraised, nor how s/he will develop in the role.

In terms of the procedure, NGA believes that clerks should be appraised by their employer. Those employed by the school should be appraised by their line manager, with input from the chair of governors, via the appraisal form used for other support staff at the school. The chair’s input into the process is important as having worked closely with the clerk over the past year, s/he will provide valuable insights into how the clerk has carried out their duties.

Self-employed clerks should be reviewed formally in the same way; the chair or vice chair may want to do this. For clerks who also have another role in the school their performance as a clerk will need to be looked at independently of their other role.

**Objectives**
The annual appraisal process allows the school to evaluate the work of their clerk against objectives set the previous year, as they would with other staff; to identify areas for improvement; set new objectives for the coming year; and discuss training and development opportunities. As with other staff, progress against objectives should be reviewed halfway through the year.

An annual appraisal should give the clerk a clear sense of direction as well as a chance to discuss their role and ensure that they are covering all aspects of clerking. The appraisal is also an opportunity for the clerk to voice any issues they have about their role and suggest ways the governing board can work more effectively with them. It should be a dialogue and one which leads to a pay recommendation. Many clerks are underpaid and an appraisal is a good time to reconsider the appropriate pay for the role and this particular post holder.

The clerk’s performance over the past year should be looked at in conjunction with their job description. If your clerk does not currently have a job description one is available on the Clerking Matters section of our website.

A comprehensive appraisal will also help clerks and their employers determine whether current conditions relating to pay and hours need amending.

**Clerks employed by the LA**
Clerks employed by the local authority (LA) should be annually appraised by their line manager at the LA who should include any feedback they have received from chairs and headteachers. We contacted a number of LAs to ask them about the process they use to appraise clerks. Of those that responded most do not have a formal appraisal system specifically for clerks. However, many do appraise clerks in line with the process they use for other LA staff, incorporating some feedback they have received from chairs and headteachers.

A few LAs go further and proactively canvass the views of headteachers and chairs; sometimes via an annual survey. Whether or not the LA has surveyed them before the clerk’s appraisal, the school should evaluate the performance of their clerk annually and feed this back to the LA. Although it is unlikely that they will be able to affect outcomes such as pay, it will give the governing body the opportunity to decide if the clerk remains suitable for them.

Rani Kaur explains how important this is for both clerk and governing board.

An appraisal is a good time to reconsider the appropriate pay for the role and this particular post holder.

Rani Kaur is an NGA advice officer.
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**INSPIRING GOVERNORS**

Mark Gardner reports on the first regional Inspiring Governors event

**WHEN TWO WORLDS MEET**

**Inspiring the Future** is a free and easy way for schools, colleges and volunteers from the world of work to connect. It has been developed following extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders – employers, education, government, third sector and intermediaries – and of course the NGA.

Volunteers from apprentices to CEOs, archaeologists to zoologists, pledge just one hour a year to volunteer in a state school or college near where they live or work to talk to young people about their job and career route.

Teachers and volunteers are connected through a secure website, selecting people who best meet the needs of their students from a range of sectors and professions. At the heart is volunteers talking informally about their job, career and their educational route. In addition, volunteers can select a number of areas of expertise that might be of interest to students – e.g. apprenticeships, enterprise, maths, financial literacy, languages, engineering and technology.

Nearly 16,000 people from 4,000 companies have already volunteered and more than 75% of state secondary schools have signed up, as well as more than 1,000 primary schools.

**More than 1,200 people have already signed up**

Nick Chambers introduces a new form of volunteering

The system also allows people to indicate if they are willing to be governors and lets chairs of governors contact them for an exploratory chat.

More than 1,200 people have already signed up. To access the volunteers in your area that have indicated their interest in becoming a school governor, register on www.inspiringthefuture.org.

Nick Chambers is director of the Education and Employers Taskforce

Nearly 16,000 people from 4,000 companies have already volunteered and more than 75% of state secondary schools have signed up, as well as more than 1,000 primary schools.

This event was held at Murray Edwards College in Cambridge. The keynote speaker, Lord Nash, parliamentary under-secretary of state for schools, said the opportunity to influence the life chances of young people is a “triple-win situation” for employers, schools and individuals.

He called on local employers to support staff to volunteer to be a school governor, adding he has tried hard to give the topic of effective governance greater prominence in public discourse and at government level.

Lord Nash was joined by Ian Buss of Lloyds Bank and Rachel Nicholson of KPMG who both pledged their organisation’s support for the Alliance, and spoke about the support they give to their own employees when becoming a school governor, including time off to attend meetings and greater recognition of the professional benefits to be gained.

Ms Nicholson added that since KPMG doesn’t “make things” in the traditional sense, there is a greater emphasis on developing people and knowledge, which is why volunteering to govern in schools is a critical element of KPMG’s business strategy.

Mr Buss reiterated that businesses benefit from the professional skills of those individuals who volunteer to be governors: “When you look at the skills to be gained in what is a non-executive director role, that opportunity is rare. This goes much deeper than corporate social responsibility.”

**Wide support**

The Inspiring Governors Alliance (GM Jul/Aug 2014 p8) was set up to celebrate and promote the importance of high quality school and college governance and is now supported by a wide range of organisations, including the DfE and the Education and Employers Taskforce. This event was organised by school training and support charity, Eastern Leadership Centre.

To find out more go to: www.inspiringgovernors.org.

We want to hear about your experience of working with local employers.

Contact mark.gardner@nga.org.uk.

Mark Gardner is assistant to NGA’s chief executive

Nick Chambers is director of the Education and Employers Taskforce

More than 1,200 people have already signed up

**Mark Gardner**

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Health champions

The Royal Society for Public Health's Level 2 Certificate in Youth Health Champions trains students aged 14-18 to act as ‘health advisers’ to their peers. Students explore the causes and consequences of unhealthy behaviours and how to provide help and support to anyone engaged in activities that might damage their health, including smoking, unhealthy diets and alcohol misuse. The cost per student is £45.

www.rsphealth.org.uk/youthhealthchampions

Closed circuit

In a recent survey of 2,733 people 56% said that CCTV cameras should be installed in school classrooms, if the situation demands it. Just over half said teachers should be given the option of body cams if they feared for their safety.

www.cctv.co.uk

Joint purchasing

While the vast majority of respondents (87%) to the second annual National School Procurement Survey believe their school could save money by purchasing collaboratively with other schools, few believe they have the in-house expertise or designated individual to do so.

www.incensu.co.uk

Balls to bullying

In the run up to this year's Anti-Bullying Week (17-21 November) Gareth Thomas, the 100-times-capped former Wales rugby skipper and leader of the Balls to Bullying campaign, has been visiting schools to work with pupils on building resilience and self-confidence. He also spoke of his own experience of being bullied at school.


Digital divide

In a recent survey 65% of primary schools and 54% of secondary schools said they were under-resourced in WiFi connectivity. A significant number also reported that they were under-resourced in broadband provision (42% of primary schools and 31% of secondary schools). At the same time, the number of computers in use in UK schools is expected to increase by 50,000 units in primary schools and 92,000 units in secondary schools and ICT budgets are also expected to grow during 2014/15 by 5.5% to an average of £14,450 per primary school and by 9% to £64,400 in a typical secondary school.

www.besa.org.uk

Speak out!

Jack Petchey’s “Speak Out” Challenge! was created, in partnership with The Speakers Trust, to encourage young people in year 10 to develop public speaking skills and build their overall confidence. The Challenge includes a series of workshops to help entrants develop their speeches and delivery. The 2014 programme is now open.

www.speakoutchallenge.com

Reading crisis

By 2025 one and a half million children will reach the age of 11 unable to read well unless urgent action is taken, according to new research. The gap between the strongest and weakest readers is equivalent to seven years of schooling and disadvantaged children are the worst affected. Charities including I CAN and Save the Children, Teach First, NAHT, the National Literacy Trust, teachers, parents and businesses have come together to form Read On. Get On, with the aim of ensuring that by 2024 every 11-year-old is a competent reader.

www.readongeton.org.uk

Joint purchasing

While the vast majority of respondents (87%) to the second annual National School Procurement Survey believe their school could save money by purchasing collaboratively with other schools, few believe they have the in-house expertise or designated individual to do so.

www.incensu.co.uk

Publication scheme

Under the Freedom of Information Act every public authority, including state funded schools, must have a publication scheme that is approved by the Information Commissioner’s Office. The scheme must set out your commitment to make certain items of information routinely available, such as policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, annual reports and financial information. The Information Commissioner’s Office has updated its model publication for schools to use as a template.


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Lessons from NGA consultancy

Key priorities

Clare Collins explains the importance of identifying your key priorities for school improvement

Those governing boards that have made time to develop a clear vision for their school (GM Sept 2014 p38) that sets out what the children should have learned in three to five years’ time will be well placed to identify a range of priorities to focus on to ensure that their vision is realised.

By identifying these priorities, the governing board is well equipped to make decisions on a budget plan and a staffing structure which will support the work needed to ensure these priorities can be addressed.

However, too often governors do not have such a clear vision, therefore they find it hard to identify top-level priorities. The temptation then is to focus on the tasks listed in the school’s operational action plan, often referred to as the school development plan (SDP) or the school improvement plan (SIP). As you would expect with an operational plan for an organisation as complex as a school, this often runs to many many pages, with many actions identified for staff to undertake. And for those of us who have not taught, some of it can be in language we do not understand as it makes reference to processes, programmes and resources that we are not familiar with.

Senior management tool

Unsurprisingly, governors usually find monitoring the school’s operational plan unwieldy and problematic, even if reported on an exceptions basis with tasks being RAG (red/amber/green) rated. This is because it is not fit for purpose as a governance tool; it is a senior management tool. Senior leaders should monitor progress against the SDP and report exceptions to the governing board. Governing boards do not need to see the full management document.

So without a focus on a few carefully selected, relevant priorities, governors are not well placed to monitor how well their strategy is working. Consequently when we work with governors, it becomes evident that we need to focus not just on ensuring clarity of vision and ethos, but also ensure that just a few key priorities, maybe a maximum of six, are identified.

Too often governors do not have such a clear vision

How do we identify the key priorities?

The narrower the vision, the easier it will be. For example, a vision which states that by 2018, all children will make exceptional progress may lead to a priority for developing the curriculum and a priority for improving the quality of teaching, the outcome being exceptional progress as measured by national testing.

But a vision that states that all children will make exceptional progress and be ready for the next stage of their education may lead to those same priorities but also one for developing the children’s resilience. Add to this an ambition to provide a learning environment that is fit for purpose and you need a priority for building development. We are already up to five priorities without having considered the ways in which the school will work with others.

Having decided on a set of key priorities, before it allocates valuable resources to the work involved in addressing each one, the governing board needs to be assured that there will be some impact, that this investment will yield results, be it in learning or resilience or buildings. Each priority must be measurable, with an expected impact identified against which we can track the progress being made. This is easy for the values that are already measured such as attainment and progress, but how do we measure how well children are prepared for the next stage of their education?

Having determined the expected impact for each priority, these can become the key performance indicators against which the school’s success in achieving its vision will be measured. They should be broken down into termly measures so that the governing board can monitor if the strategy is on track. Because there are not too many priorities, governors can hold the information in their heads and retain a clarity of purpose in their quest to ensure that the school’s vision is realised.

Clare Collins is lead consultant for NGA’s consultancy and training service. For a facilitated session on creating a vision with strategic priorities for your school or other consultancy, contact Clare at clare.collins@nga.org.uk

Clare Collins
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