



Thought Leadership – Ethics and Values – Ensuring Clarity of Vision, Ethos and Strategic Direction



How many times do we stop and think about how we are, as a board or individual governor or trustee, effectively discharge the first core function of governance? We are all under additional pressures at the moment with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic changing the way we work and govern and perhaps this is the right time to reassess our values and what fundamentally matters. In this short think piece I pose some questions for you to consider – either individually or a whole board. You will have many other questions and these are merely some ‘serving suggestions’.

Ethics and Values: Key questions

Can you list your School's or trust values without checking? What do the words mean to you? Does everyone around the board table share the same values? Does it matter if they don't?

1. Was the school community involved in agreeing these values? When were they last reviewed?
2. Do pupils and students understand what these values mean? How do you know?
3. Do you refer to the School's values at meetings or during governor visits?
4. Are you confident all your decisions are taken in the spirit of the School's values? What evidence do you have?

Thinking about your board

1. What values do you attribute to your board's effectiveness?
2. Who is responsible for ensuring you are effectively living your values?
3. Where is the evidence recorded?

Quick Activity 1 – Features of Effective Governance

Look at the 6 key features of effective governance in turn and think about the behaviours you and the governors need to demonstrate to show effectiveness.

Strategic leadership that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.

1. Accountability that drives up educational standards and financial performance.
2. People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.
3. Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
4. Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements.
5. Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

Quick Activity 2 – Ethical Leadership

Look at the 7 definitions below and think about where you would expect to see these in action.

- A. **Trust:** Leaders are trustworthy and reliable. We hold trust on behalf of children and should be beyond reproach. We are honest about our motivations.
- B. **Wisdom:** Leaders use experience, knowledge and insight. We demonstrate moderation and self-awareness. We act calmly and rationally. We serve our schools and colleges with propriety and good sense.
- C. **Kindness:** Leaders demonstrate respect, generosity of spirit, understanding and good temper. We give difficult messages humanely where conflict is unavoidable.
- D. **Justice:** Leaders are fair and work for the good of all children. We seek to enable all young people to lead useful, happy and fulfilling lives.
- E. **Service:** Leaders are conscientious and dutiful. We demonstrate humility and self-control, supporting the structures, conventions and rules which safeguard quality. Our actions protect high-quality education.
- F. **Courage:** Leaders work courageously in the best interests of children and young people. We protect their safety and their right to a broad, effective and creative education. We hold one another to account courageously.
- G. **Optimism:** Leaders are positive and encouraging. Despite difficulties and pressures, we are developing excellent education to change the world for the better.

Think about...

- Have you a plan to review these principles as part of your school improvement and governance self-reviews?
- What do each of the words mean to you?
- Does your agenda or work planning cycle reflect your school values?
- What items do you think fall under the first core function?

References

[The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[ASCL - Ethical Leadership in Education: "Accountability is not enough; we have to do good"](http://ascl.org.uk)

[Framework-for-Ethical-Leadership-in-Education.pdf \(ascl.org.uk\)](http://ascl.org.uk) section on ethics and professional conduct