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Twenty questions: Key questions every governing board should ask itself

Reviewing board effectiveness is good practice and self-review is one of the main methods that governing boards use to monitor and improve the quality and impact of their governance.

The below questions were developed by NGA, The Key for School Governors and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Education Governance to support governing board self-review.

Those governing in a multi academy trust (MAT) should refer to twenty-one questions for MATs.

Governing Boards are encouraged to

- allocate sufficient time to the process of self-review
- make these questions an integral part of review and reflection on current practice
- adapt the questions to cover all aspects of effective governance in their context
- use independent, expert support and facilitation to make the process effective
- draw upon guidance and training provided by NGA and a range of other organisations to support development and strengthen governance

Governing board effectiveness

Right skills: do we have the right skills on the governing board?

1. Have we completed a skills audit which informs the governor specification we use as the basis of governor appointment and interview?

Effectiveness: are we as effective as we could be?

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2. How well do we understand our roles and responsibilities, including what it means to be strategic?
3. Do we have a professional clerk who provides legal advice and oversees the governing board's induction and development needs?
4. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing board conducive to effective working?
5. How do we make use of good practice from across the country?

Role of the chair: does our chair show strong and effective leadership?

6. Do we carry out a regular 360° review of the chair's performance and elect the chair each year?
7. Do we engage in good succession planning so that no governor serves for longer than two terms of office and the chair is replaced at least every six years?
8. Does the chair carry out an annual review of each governor's contribution to the board's performance?

Vision, ethos and strategy

Strategy: does the school have a clear vision and strategic priorities?

9. Does our vision look forward three to five years, and does it include what the children who have left the school will have achieved?
10. Have we agreed a strategy with priorities for achieving our vision with key performance indicators against which we can regularly monitor and review the strategy?
11. How effectively does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing board's activities and agenda setting?

Engagement: are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?

12. How well do we listen to, understand and respond to our pupils, parents and staff?
13. How do we make regular reports on the work of the governing board to our parents and local community?

14. What benefit does the school draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

Effective accountability

Accountability of the executive: do we hold the school leaders to account?

- 15. How well do we understand the school's performance data (including in-year progress tracking data) so we can properly hold school leaders to account?
- 16. Do governors regularly visit the school to get to know it and monitor the implementation of the school strategy?
- 17. How well does our policy review schedule work and how do we ensure compliance?
- 18. Do we know how effective performance management of all staff is within the school?
- 19. Are our financial management systems robust so we can ensure best value for money?

Impact: are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?

- 20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing board's contribution been to this?