

Governors and Ofsted

In 2009, I was one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and a Director for Ofsted. In that role, I was asked to speak to a meeting of the Dudley Association of Governing Bodies about the new 2009 Ofsted Framework. The meeting seemed to go well! Governors may not have agreed with all of the changes but they did appreciate the reasons why Ofsted had amended the framework in the way they did. However, their main concern was about the perceived lack of emphasis in the framework on the role of governors and the contribution of the governing body to school improvement. They felt that Ofsted were not acknowledging the importance of the roles and responsibilities of governors. These messages from governors were fed back and we now see a major shift. In the 2012 framework, governors are central to the judgement on leadership and management.

The leadership and management judgement now requires inspectors to make judgements about how well governors:

- ensure clarity of vision
- contribute to the school's self-evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses
- support and strengthen school leadership
- provide challenge and hold the headteacher and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety
- use performance management systems, including the performance management of the headteacher, to improve teaching, leadership and management
- ensure that financial resources are managed effectively
- operate in such a way that their statutory duties are met and priorities improved
- engage with stakeholders
- use the pupil premium funding and other resources to overcome barriers to learning, including reading, writing and mathematics.

The grade descriptors for leadership and management now include more about governors and governance. For example, in the "good" grade descriptors, three of the nine bullet points explicitly relate to the work of governors. These are:

- Key leaders and managers, including those responsible for governance, consistently communicate high expectations and ambition.
- Governors, or those in a similar position within the system, systematically challenge senior leaders. As a result the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement have improved, or previous good performance in these areas have been consolidated.

- Governors ensure the efficient management of financial resources. This leads to the effective deployment of staff and resources.

If governors are not carrying out their roles and responsibilities as they should, this could well lead to an inadequate judgement overall for the school. The grade 4 "(inadequate)" bullet point on governance states:

Governors are not sufficiently robust in holding the school to account for pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and the effective and efficient deployment of resources.

If this is found to be the case, leadership and management will be inadequate and, therefore, the school overall will be judged to require special measures. When leadership and management is judged to require improvement or to be inadequate, there is likely to be a recommendation linked to governance. This could include the recommendation that there should be an external review of the governing body.

This certainly 'raises the bar' for governors! They will still need to know about such things as admissions, attendance, buildings and health and safety. However, it also means that governors must have regular information about pupil attainment and progress, as well as the quality of teaching in the school. Not only must they have the information, but they should also question the information and know what the school is doing to secure improvements and the measurable impact, in terms of pupil progress or the quality of teaching, of the actions taken.

To do this effectively, governors need data that show the attainment of pupils at the end of the key stages but, more importantly, the progress that they have made from their starting points and how this compares with progress measures nationally. Ofsted have recently developed a website for governors which gives a brief summary of information from RAISEonline. This is a good starting point and means that governors have no excuse for not knowing how well pupils are doing! It is available on: <http://dashboard.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

In addition, governors need to know what progress pupils currently in the school are making and how the gap is narrowing between the achievement of different groups of pupils in the school, particularly pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs and pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. Good practice in schools is for pupil progress meetings to be held at least termly so that pupils who are not making expected progress can be identified and any additional support can be provided quickly. The school should be able to provide a summary of this current data for governors. In particular, governors need to know how well pupil premium funding is being used to accelerate progress. If pupils who are eligible for pupil premium are not making the same or better progress than other pupils in the school, it raises questions about how effectively governors are

managing the funding to ensure that it is being used to improve the performance of more vulnerable pupils.

A key function of the governing body is to ensure that there are robust procedures in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and for tackling underperformance. This includes the need to ensure that there is a coherent professional development programme in place that is closely based on identified need of staff and supports those at the early stages in their career. Governors also need to ensure that there are strong links between performance management, appraisal and salary progression. Governors may need to take advice to ensure that they are fully aware of what can and can not be done in terms of salary progression but, for example, teachers should not be going through the "Threshold" if they are not good teachers and making a significant contribution to school improvement.

As with previous frameworks, inspectors will ask to speak to representatives from the governing body during the inspection. Questions are likely to cover the following areas:

- what is happening in the school, and is the overall provision good - or not
- what is the quality of teaching
- how is performance management being used
- what is being done to recognise and reward good teachers
- what is being done to tackle underperformance
- how well do governors understand the data and the comparative performance of the school in relation to similar schools
- do governors have a handle on the budget, particularly the pupil premium and whether this is being used to close the gap for disadvantaged children
- how does the governing body ensure that governors are being professionally trained and developed?

Inspectors will also look at minutes from governing body meetings. You can be prepared by ensuring that governors' meetings include discussions of:

- key strengths and weaknesses in outcomes for all pupils and for groups, in particular for achievement and behaviour
- support and challenge for the performance of pupils:
 - supported through the pupil premium
 - who are disabled
 - who have special educational needs
 - evaluation of the impact of interventions on pupil progress.

Minutes should include evidence of:

- urgency in dealing with weak achievement and teaching
- challenge for weaknesses and any proposed solutions
- requests for timely evidence of impact, including data that governors can readily interpret
- discussion on allocating pupil premium funding and timely evaluation of its impact
- questions on money spent on intervention and evaluation of its impact
- questions on the impact of the deployment of teachers
- gaps for confidential sections (to follow up with headteacher regarding capability/disciplinary action) and, finally
- how the impact of their decisions will be evaluated.

So, governors got their wish to see more recognition of the contribution that governors can make to school improvement. I am now retired from Ofsted, but working as an additional inspector as well as being a governor for a school in Dudley. I talk to many governing bodies and most are doing a very good job – helping to make a difference for the pupils in their schools. As a governor myself, I understand what a responsibility it is and how difficult it can be at times to keep up with all of the information we have. However, it is a very important role and it is very satisfying when you feel that you are part of the school team, which is ensuring a good or outstanding education for pupils in their care.

Sue Barkway

[Sue was formerly Head Teacher at three local schools, becoming HMI in 2000. As a Director of Ofsted, Sue spoke at a DAGB event to governors three years ago and now works as an education consultant and is an additional inspector for Ofsted inspections. Significantly she is now also a local governor. We are most grateful to Sue for her contribution and for the support that she has given the Association].