

Review of Governance

Supporting school self-evaluation and improvement

Accurate school self-evaluation is key to successful school improvement planning. Knowing your starting point will enable you to appropriately prioritise areas for improvement with measurable targets and clear outcomes. This axiom will remain true whatever school inspection framework prevails and is also fundamental to achieving successful and cohesive school leadership – everyone working together to the same ends. This review is designed for governors and headteachers to support accurate school self-evaluation. It aims to give you the confidence that, whatever specific goals you are working towards and whatever standards you need to prove, your priorities are the right ones and you are therefore focusing your time and energy in the appropriate areas to achieve success.

School: Newtown Primary School	DfE no: 2029
Babcock Associate: Jane Lucas	Date of visit: 11 June 2015
Headteacher: Ruth Jones	Chair of Governors: Jenny Lloyd

	Evidence/Comment	RAG
1. The Governing Body		
1.1 There is a full or nearly full complement of governors and there are no long standing vacancies. A balance of skills is considered when appointing community governors and associate members. New governors attend training and there is a clear induction process for them.	Since reconstitution the governing body has had a couple of resignations and is continuing to focus on recruitment. Skills audits have been carried out and there has been some success using these to recruit skills to the governing body. However, there are a significant number of governors from the education profession and the next governors who are recruited should balance this. New governors attend training and an induction for new governors is in place. It is important that this is fully followed through with new governors.	A
1.2 The governing body is an effective, well organised team and there is a high level of commitment. There is a commitment to training and a culture self-improvement. Governors understand their role and lead by example.	Overall this area is sound. There is a high level of commitment shown by the team as a whole, although there is also evidence (recorded elsewhere in this report) that the workload is not sufficiently evenly spread across the team. The team's training record is good.	G
2. The Leadership of the Governing Body		
2.1 The leadership of the governing body is effective. The governing body is well chaired and the chair has received training and support for the role. The chair is well supported by the vice chair and there are other governors taking a leadership role on the governing body.	The current chair of governors has put a significant amount of time and energy into developing the governing body and this has had a positive impact. She leads by example, is well trained and committed to the school and to the role. Other governors provide support for her; however this is not translating into a strong succession plan (see 2.3 below).	G
2.2 The headteacher takes an active role in supporting and developing the governing body.	The headteacher works proactively with the governing body to support and develop its practice. In particular the strong relationship between the headteacher, chair of governors and clerk to governors has been very productive in improving practice.	G
2.3 There is clear succession planning for the future leadership of the governing body.	The chair has made it clear that she intends to step down from the role; however the governing body has not secured a replacement for her. Evidence suggests that the chair currently undertakes too many of the tasks that are the overall responsibility of the governing body and that the governing body is over-reliant on her. This is a high priority for the governing body to focus on to ensure that improvements in the practice of the governing body are sustained.	R

3. Strategic Role		
3.1 The governing body is committed to undertaking a strategic rather than an operational role. It ensures that its members understand what this means and the headteacher commits to supporting the governing body working strategically.	Overall evidence suggests that the governing body is focused on strategic matters. Minutes show occasional 'dives' into operational and 'non-governor' matters, however these are well managed at meetings and do not dominate meetings to the detriment of a clear strategic focus for the governing body. The headteacher is clear about the appropriate focus of the governing body.	G
3.2 The governing body ensures clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction and communicates high expectations and ambition.	There is evidence to support the involvement of the governing body in the school's vision and ethos. The governing body clearly has a strong desire for the continued success of the school. It is important that the governing body reflects on whether the high expectations is has are translated into challenging questions and actions and practice across the whole team.	A
3.3 The governing body understands the school's strengths and weaknesses and the priorities for improvement in the school improvement plan and focuses its time and attention on these matters.	This is an area of growing practice and confidence. Significant changes are now in place for governors to monitor school improvement priorities. It is important that all governors own this area of their work and are involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's improvement priorities.	A
4. The Governing Body Supports and Challenges		
4.1 The headteacher and governors work together in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for the children and young people in school. The relationship is one of openness, mutual trust and respect, working together for a common purpose.	The relationship between the headteacher and the governing body is clearly positive, respectful and good-humoured. The headteacher is clear with governors about the school's performance and this will enable them to continue to improve their practice.	G
4.2 Governors support the headteacher and other school staff but systematically challenge the school by actively monitoring and evaluating the progress of the school improvement plan during the course of the year, asking questions, seeking information, setting targets, considering data and other information as appropriate. There is a strong culture of rigorous performance management throughout the school.	Governors are strongly supportive of the headteacher and minutes show that they are asking questions. As mentioned in 3.3, the rigour of monitoring school improvement priorities is improving and there is a clearer pathway for this to happen. Questioning could be further improved to ensure there is consistent challenge of key changes, for example a recent change to staffing structure did not show questioning by governors in minutes.	A
4.3 Governors visit the school to build relationships with school staff, to learn about the school and to gather information to aid with their monitoring role.	There is evidence of governor visits to school and reports show that there is a clear focus on school improvement. Linked to other comments, the involvement of all governors in visits will further improve the practice across the whole team.	A

5. The Governing Body Ensures Accountability		
5.1 The governing body robustly holds senior leaders to account for the performance of the school including the quality of teaching and learning and the deployment of resources. The headteacher reports to the governing body via written reports which provide governors with key information and data and are circulated to governors ahead of meetings. At the meeting the reports are discussed and any further questions arising are addressed.	There is evidence that the governing body holds the headteacher to account and this has been an improving area of practice. The headteacher reports termly to the governors in writing with verbal interim reports. RAISE data is discussed at full governing body meetings and there is evidence of other data that comes to governors via the headteacher's report. Governors ask some questions relating to data at meetings but this could be strengthened to ensure that the governing body consistently demonstrates high expectations in relation to pupil progress.	A
5.2 The governing body itself is reflective on its own practice, has a high profile and publishes clear information about itself to parents and staff.	The current chair, supported by the clerk to governors has initiated excellent practice in this area. The information available to parents from the governing body is useful and the report from governors an example of excellent practice.	G
5.3 In partnership with the school staff, it seeks the views of parents through appropriate consultation.	The governing body has a clear involvement in parental feedback and is keen to know what parents think. Plans are underway for a questionnaire before the end of term and there is a link to Parent View on the school's website.	G
5.4 The governing body oversees the financial performance of the school and makes sure its money is well spent.	The budget is set at full governing body meetings and the resources committee has responsibility for monitoring the budget half termly. Linking spending to school improvement outcomes is important so it is important that governors who sit on resources are also fully involved in the monitoring of the school improvement plan.	G
6. Clerking Arrangements		
6.1 The governing body has appointed an appropriately qualified clerk who has a contract, a job description and sufficient hours to undertake the role. The clerk clerks all meetings of the governing body. The clerk receives support and has an annual appraisal. He/she attends training and keeps him/herself up to date.	The quality of clerking is excellent. The clerk is clear about her role and provides active support to the governing body, not only in administration but in supporting their development. She has received an appraisal and attends training.	G
7. Meetings		
7.1 The governing body has an appropriate pattern and number of meetings.	The full governing body meets six times per year and additionally when required. The two standard committees meet half termly and the pay committee meets as required to discharge its functions.	G
7.2 Meetings are effective and productive because they are well chaired, run to time,	Evidence from minutes suggests that overall meetings of the governing body are well run	G

strategic in content and approach and focused on school improvement.	and productive. As mentioned above, there is evidence of occasional matters being raised by governors which are not really relevant but these do not distract the governing body from its core focus.	
7.3 All governors contribute, time is used efficiently, decisions are made and actions agreed with named people taking responsibility for following up actions after the meeting.	Meetings are lively and engaged with governor participating, agreeing actions and making decisions. Actions are recorded and tracked. Deadlines for actions could be usefully introduced to ensure timely completion of actions. As discussed during the review, the chair needs to ensure that actions are evenly distributed throughout the governing body according to areas of interest/responsibility and that they are followed through.	A
8. Workload Management and Delegation		
8.1 There is an annual cycle of governor business and a policy review cycle in place and both of these are up to date and provide a clear framework for the governing body's business.	The chair and the clerk to governors worked together to set up an annual cycle which underpins the work of the governing body. The clerk keeps it under review. The policy review cycle is in place and ensures all policies are kept under review.	G
8.2 There is a clear programme of delegation to committees and/or individual governors, clearly recorded in terms of reference which are agreed annually by the governing body. All governors are clear about where decisions are made and those decisions made on behalf of the governing body are clearly reported back but not gone over again.	The governing body has sensibly introduced half termly meetings of committees which dovetail well with half termly full governing body meetings. There is no evidence of substantial duplication. On the review day the potential benefits of moving governors between committees to ensure even distribution of skills was discussed.	G
8.3 The workload is distributed equally amongst governors and governors have clear areas of interest and/or responsibility.	This area has been highlighted as a priority because the chair of governors is taking on too much of the workload and, although this has enabled improvements, it is not sustainable in the long term and will not support successful succession planning (link to 2.3).	R
9. Information and Paperwork		
9.1 The information produced by the governing body is of a high quality.	Information that was seen on the day and in advance on the website is high quality.	G
9.2 Agendas are clear, informative and explicit and circulated, with supporting papers, seven days before meetings. Minutes are well written and provide evidence of the governing body undertaking its role and responsibilities. They are circulated within two weeks of meetings.	Agendas provide an excellent plan for each meeting. The clerk works hard to ensure papers go out on time. Minutes are informative and sufficiently detailed, including initials of those asking questions. They provide good evidence of the governing body fulfilling its role and responsibilities.	G
9.3 The clerk maintains an efficient filing system of all documents relating to governing body business.	The clerk has introduced a very efficient system of information storage. All papers are clearly organised in marked files and can be easily located.	G

RAG Rating:**Red** = Action required immediately**Amber** = Less urgent action required/ Action underway but not embedded**Green** = No action or minimal change required**Questions for consideration by governing body:**

What do we need to do to secure the leadership of the governing body?

How do we ensure that the whole team is fully involved and has ownership of the school's key priorities for improvement?

How do we further develop confidence to challenge the school to improve and communicate high expectations?

Next Steps:**What do we need to do to secure the leadership of the governing body?**

1. Ensuring successful leadership succession starts at recruitment. The governing body needs to ensure that completed skills audit inform any recruitment decisions so that the team builds a diverse range of skills. Analyse the completed skills audit forms to let the parent body know what skills and experience are needed in advance of the next parent governor election and further develop the skills audits to include training audits for new and existing governors.
2. Ensure induction is followed through by new governors and provides strong grounding.
3. Suggest that the current chair, headteacher and clerk deconstructs the role of chair and vice chair with governing body and identifies all tasks and roles that currently fall to the chair or vice chair 'by default' and be clear that these are responsibilities for the governing body and not the chair of governors.
4. Use developing leadership grid suggested by the Governor Advisor during the review to identify aspirations for leadership and then:
 - Put in place succession planning working party to take forward
 - Identify skills and experience needed for leadership
 - Identify training needs
 - Give aspiring leaders experience of chairing role.

How do we ensure that the whole team is fully involved and has ownership of the school's key priorities for improvement?

1. Use recent positive experience of governor involvement with monitoring to focus on involvement with other key areas.
2. Utilise lead governor roles to undertake tasks that need completing.
3. Review where key information and engagement on the school's improvement plan takes place and ensure that there is sufficient focus at full governing body meetings so that all governors have detailed knowledge and understanding of the plan, the school's key priorities and progress towards meeting criteria.
4. Ensure all governors are part of planned visits programme and carry out visits to school as part of monitoring and evaluating school improvement plan.
5. Consider some change of membership of committees to provide opportunity for governors to gain experience in other areas and to spread the experience of education professionals on the governing body more widely.

How do we further develop the confidence and the understanding to challenge the school to improve?

1. Ensure full and active engagement in headteacher reports, termly data and other key strategic decisions at full body meetings. Consider building in 5 or 10 minutes in pairs or threes at the start of item on the agenda focused on the headteacher's report for governors to discuss report/data/progress on school improvement priorities and identify questions before going into full team discussion.
2. Develop generic questions for governors to ask at meetings and on visits which focus on impact and progress.
3. Ensure governors are known to staff and that staff understand the role of the school governors.

Additional Suggestions:

Add deadlines for actions to minutes to ensure easy tracking and ensure timely completion.

Contact:

If you have any questions about this report please contact our Helpline at Governor Support on Tel: 01392 287314, or email us on ldp-governorsservice@babcockinternational.com. Thank you.