NAO

National Audit Office

IMPROVING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

A GUIDE FOR
SCHOOL GOVERNORS

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

School governing bodies exist to help their school deliver the best possible standard of education to all pupils. They are one of the largest volunteer workforces, and around 300,000 people currently serve as governors of the 23,000 maintained schools in England. School governing bodies have a vital role in supporting school leaders and managing school performance while providing accountability to the local community.

The National Audit Office has reported on school performance and has seen the substantial contribution that governing bodies can make to improving and maintaining standards. This guide has been prepared as a reference tool to help governors to identify and tackle the issues that we have found to be important to school performance.

The guide is divided into 13 themes, each theme setting out:

■ key questions for governing bodies;

■ facts and figures that give an insight into what's happening across the country; and

■ good practice.

May 2006

The National Governors' Association (created by the merging of the National Governors' Council and the National Association of School Governors) commends this guide to school governors. The Association is the national representative body for school governors, providing information and guidance for governing bodies on good practice and on education policy. It consults its members and represents the views of governors at national level, and works with many partners to produce publications to help governing bodies carry out their responsibilities.

National Governors' Association
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CONTENTS

GOVERNING BODY

Questions to consider

1   Does your governing body have enough members to fulfil all its responsibilities effectively?

2   Governors bring diverse skills and experience to the table. Has your governing body identified its current strengths and any additional skills it should look for in future governors?

3   Do all governors participate in appropriate training events?

4   Has your school nominated a governor to undertake the Safer Recruitment Online Training?

5   Does the Chair of Governors meet regularly with the headteacher (i.e. at least once a month)?

6   If yours is a good school with an effective governing body, have you thought about sharing your expertise with other schools in your area?

Facts and figures

Skills and experience in the following areas are useful to governing bodies.

- Strategic planning
- Decision making
- Project management
- Team working
- Financial management
- Human resources
- Communications and marketing
- Law

- Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
- Buildings and maintenance
- Basic understanding of statistics
- Theories and methods of teaching
- Key areas of the curriculum
- Behaviour management
- Special needs

Good practice

- Guidance for governors and legislation outlining governors' roles can be found online at **www.governornet.co.uk**

- Free professional advice is available from GovernorLine on 0800 0722 181. **(www.governorline.info)**

- Most local authorities provide written guidance, ad hoc advice and formal training for governors.

- The Safer Recruitment Online Training package is strongly recommended for the headteacher and governors - for information and to register visit **www.ncsl.org.uk/saferrecruitment**

SCHOOL LEADERS

Questions to consider

1   Do you assess the headteacher's performance each year by reference to the school's progress against its published and internal targets?

2   Is your headteacher developing the leadership skills and team work of senior staff to help improve school performance and make it easier for a new headteacher to take over?

3   When recruiting a new headteacher, do experienced governors assess the candidates with the help of knowledgeable and experienced officers of the local authority?

4   When appointing deputy headteachers and other senior staff, does the school consider candidates' potential for becoming a headteacher?

Facts and figures

- A former HM Chief Inspector of Schools reported that 'the importance of high-quality leadership cannot be over-estimated' (*Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 1999-2000*).

- According to research conducted for the National College for School Leadership, schools need to recruit a headteacher on average every seven years.

- All first-time headteachers are now required to hold the National Professional Qualification of Headship or to have secured a place on the programme. By January 2006, some 14,500 people had graduated from the programme and 8,800 were on the programme.

- Most headships are advertised between January and March, for posts to be filled in September. During the school year 2004-05 around 11% of maintained schools advertised for a new headteacher. The proportion of schools having to re-advertise a post before making a permanent appointment has been increasing, but most recovered schools surveyed by the National Audit Office considered that improvements in leadership and management were making a major contribution to school improvement.

Good practice

- The TeacherNet website has an *'A to Z' of school leadership*, with links to legislation and best practice where applicable **(www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/)**

- The National College for School Leadership **(www.ncsl.org.uk)** runs training courses on leadership and management and has published interim findings of research into good practice in headteacher recruitment (*Leading Appointments*) – the final report will be published in September 2006.

SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

Questions to consider

1   Effective self-evaluation by schools is a key tool for school improvement. Ofsted provides an electronic form for schools to use to record the results of their self-evaluation. Is your school's self-evaluation form up-to-date to aid school performance monitoring and Ofsted inspection?

2   Have governors reviewed and approved the completed self-evaluation form?

3   Have you taken into account the views of parents and pupils?

4   Have you identified how self-evaluation has improved your school?

Facts and figures

- In 2005 the National Audit Office conducted a survey of schools that had recovered after a poor Ofsted report (schools that had moved out of 'Special Measures' or 'Serious Weaknesses'). In this survey, 62% of headteachers stated that before the Ofsted inspection the school had not expected a negative outcome.

- Ofsted reported on school self-evaluations in 2004 (*Improvement through inspection: an evaluation of the impact of Ofsted's work*), and found that:

  - 12% of schools scored themselves lower than Ofsted

  - 36% of schools scored themselves the same as Ofsted

  However, more than half of schools were over-optimistic:

  - 41% of schools scored themselves one grade better

  - 11% of schools scored themselves two grades better

Good practice

- A blank self-evaluation form can be downloaded from the Ofsted website. The website also provides advice on completing the self-evaluation, including focusing on outcomes for pupils, being analytical (not descriptive) and being clear about actions the school is taking to improve.

- Ofsted suggests that schools update their self-evaluation forms at least once a year.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS

Questions to consider

1   Do all teachers feel supported and valued by governors and management?

2   Do governors know the reasons why teachers leave the school?

3   Does the school set and monitor a programme of Continuing Professional Development for teachers?

4   In secondary schools, do the governors know the extent to which subjects are taught by non-specialist teachers?

Facts and figures

- In January 2005, there were 432,000 teachers in maintained schools.

- Around two-thirds of teachers are women. Nearly half are aged 45 or over.

- There are shortages of teachers in some subjects, such as mathematics, science and modern languages.

- Excessive staff turnover is expensive, increasing the cost of recruitment and supply teaching, for example.

Good practice

- Governors and management must take full account of the effects on staff morale when implementing workforce reform **(www.remodelling.org)** and introducing the new Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (*Review of the School Staffing Structure: Guidance for Schools in England* which is on the TeacherNet website).

- Recruitment Strategy Managers are available in most local authorities to advise schools on recruitment issues.

- Small gestures can have a positive impact on retention. For example, you could ensure refreshments are provided when staff have to work late.

TEACHING AND CURRICULUM

Questions to consider

1   Is your school offering a balanced curriculum with an appropriate range of academic and vocational subjects?

2   Does the governing body receive regular information from heads of departments and other curriculum leaders?

3   Is there regular observation of teaching staff, including feedback, with the results reported to governors?

4   How does the school address the need for improvement in any areas and how does it ensure good practice is shared?

Facts and figures

- Schools must teach in accordance with the National Curriculum **(www.nc.uk.net/)**.

- Within the framework of the National Curriculum, schools are free to plan and organise teaching and learning in the way that best meets the needs of their pupils.

- In 2004-05, Ofsted found teaching to be good or better in 74% of primary and 78% of secondary schools, and unsatisfactory in 3% of primary and 5% of secondary schools.

- The Department for Education and Skills recommends that Newly Qualified Teachers be observed in the classroom every half term.

Good practice

- The National Curriculum in Action website illustrates standards of pupils' work at different stages and in a range of subjects **(www.ncaction.org.uk)**.

- Governors can learn from observing teaching, but should remember they are not there to judge teaching quality. The curriculum (or equivalent) committee of the governing body should use the results of monitoring and observation to assess the school's progress.

MANAGING STAFF SICKNESS

Questions to consider

1   Does your school monitor trends in staff sickness?

2   Is staff sickness above or below average?

3   Does the school have a policy in place to support teachers who are sick?

4   Does the school have a policy in place to support supply teachers?

Facts and figures

- On average teachers had 5 days of sickness absence in 2004. Around half of teachers had no absence at all.

- The Department for Education and Skills has calculated that schools spend £383 million a year on agency supply staff.

- Ofsted inspectors can choose to observe any teacher, whether qualified or unqualified, permanent, temporary, trainee or supply.

Good practice

- The Teacher Support Network is a charity that provides practical advice and emotional support to teachers (**www.teachersupport.org.uk**)

- Self-study materials for use in the professional development of supply teachers are on TeacherNet (**www.teachernet.gov.uk/supplyteachers/**)

- The National Audit Office, with the Institute of Work Psychology and the Institute for Employment Studies, published *Current Thinking on Managing Attendance: a short guide for the professionals* (**www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/04-05/040518_researchpaper.pdf**)

PUPIL SATISFACTION

Questions to consider

1   Are your pupils happy in school?

2   Does your school have a school council to represent the views of pupils?

3   Do pupils have the opportunity to give both written and oral feedback?

Facts and figures

■ Ofsted regards pupil satisfaction as a barometer for the overall quality of a school. In 2005 Ofsted published a paper *Pupils' satisfaction with their school* which found that pupil satisfaction rates were high:

Inspectors' judgements of overall satisfaction of pupils	Percentage of primary schools inspected	Percentage of secondary schools inspected
Highly/very satisfied	93	81
Satisfied	7	15
Dissatisfied	0	4

■ Teaching quality has a big effect on how pupils feel about their school. In the majority of both primary and secondary schools, good teaching resulted in high levels of satisfaction. Pupils in secondary schools are less tolerant of unsatisfactory teaching than primary school pupils.

Good practice

■ Listening to pupil needs (i.e. school council, prefect system etc).

■ All teaching staff should make themselves accessible to parents.

■ Pupil satisfaction survey, possibly using the Ofsted form (*What do you think about your school?*) available from the Ofsted and GovernorNet websites.

PUPIL ATTAINMENT

Questions to consider

1   Does your school have a culture of high expectations and achievement?

2   Is the attainment of individual pupils monitored regularly?

3   Does the school have a range of annual attainment targets that stretch pupils and staff and, in setting them, does the school refer to the annual guidance issued by the Department for Education and Skills?

4   Does the governing body monitor progress towards targets and know the reasons why progress exceeds or falls below these targets?

5   Are subject and year groups' specific strengths and weaknesses identified?

6   Are plans made to address weaknesses and are they followed up?

7   Do school leaders and governors use and understand a variety of performance data, including Ofsted's Performance and Assessment (PANDA) reports (replaced by RAISEonline from July 2006)?

Facts and figures

- The Department for Education and Skills published the following figures for national attainment in English primary and secondary schools in 2005. The table shows percentages of pupils achieving certain attainment targets:

Primary

Key Stage 1, Level 2 or above	%	Key Stage 2, Level 4 or above	%
Reading	85	English	79
Writing	82	Maths	75
Maths	91		

Secondary

Key Stage 3, Level 5 or above	%	Key Stage 4, GCSEs and equivalent	%
English	74	5 or more A* to C grade GCSEs	56
Maths	74	5 or more A* to C grade GCSEs	44
Science	70	(including English and maths)	

Good practice

- Among headteachers of recovered schools that the National Audit Office surveyed, 98% of those who responded considered that internally generated data was very useful or useful.

- The Department for Education and Skills provides a facility (RAISEonline from July 2006) to help schools set targets by identifying the progress achieved by similar pupils in the best performing schools (**www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ performance**).

PUPIL ATTENDANCE

Questions to consider

1   Does your school give a high priority to managing attendance?

2   Does the school have a written attendance policy?

3   Do you compare authorised and unauthorised absence rates to the national average and to the rates at other schools in your area, as well as looking at your school's trends over time?

4   Do you work with the local authority on tackling the underlying causes of persistent absence of individual pupils or groups of pupils?

Facts and figures

- Total absence in English schools has fallen every year since 2000-01, though unauthorised absence has been increasing. There is a wide range of absence between schools.

- National figures for the percentages of half-days missed by pupils due to absence for 2004-05 are:

	Authorised absences %	Unauthorised absences %	Total absences %
Primary schools	5.0	0.4	5.4
Secondary schools	6.6	1.2	7.8

- In 2004-05 Ofsted judged that a fifth of schools inspected had unsatisfactory attendance.

Good practice

- The National Audit Office's report *Improving School Attendance in England* (2005) identified a range of good practices, including 'first day calling' of parents, electronic registration systems, regular monitoring of attendance information, and reward schemes. A summary report was sent to all schools in July 2005 and is available on the National Audit Office website.

- Schools have discretion to allow holidays in term time, but they should consider the impact on the child's education and the extra work that absence can create for teachers.

PUPIL BEHAVIOUR

Questions to consider

1   Does your school have a home-school agreement, approved by the governors, and sent to homes for all parents to sign and return?

2   Does the school have an up-to-date behaviour policy (including anti-bullying) that pupils understand and that staff enforce where appropriate?

3   To what extent are lessons disrupted by poor behaviour?

4   Does the school consider all options for exclusions – fixed period and permanent, internal and external?

Facts and figures

■ National figures for exclusions per 1,000 pupils for 2003-04:

	Fixed period	Permanent
Primary schools	10	0.3
Secondary schools	87	2.5

■ Most common reasons for fixed period exclusions (2003-04):

Persistent disruptive behaviour	26% of exclusions
Verbal abuse/threatening behaviour against an adult	22%
Physical assault of a pupil	20%

■ Pupils with statements of Special Educational Need, pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and traveller pupils are disproportionately likely to be excluded from school.

Good practice

■ Most pupils feel safer and happier when behaviour policies are consistent and enforced throughout a school. Some schools find that regular visits by a police officer help to improve behaviour and attendance.

■ The Department for Education and Skills has a website *Improving Behaviour in Schools* **(www.dfes.gov.uk/ibis)**.

■ The *Report of the Practitioners' Group on School Behaviour and Discipline* offers advice to practitioners on the kinds of practical approaches which can work in schools.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Questions to consider

1   Do school leaders and other relevant staff members collectively have the financial management skills needed to manage budgets that extend over several years?

2   Are all components of the school budget being used efficiently and effectively?

3   Does the school leadership team meet regularly to discuss financial matters related to the school?

4   Does the school draw upon the financial expertise of its local authority where appropriate?

Facts and figures

- In the 2004-05 financial year, the average annual local authority funding to schools was worth around £3,300 per pupil.

- Under the Education Act 2005, from April 2006 schools will have multi-year budgets.

- The number of separate funding streams is also being substantially reduced.

- The Department for Education and Skills requires secondary schools to comply with its Financial Management Standard by March 2007, and local authority Chief Financial Officers to certify schools' compliance **(www.ipfbenchmarking.net/ consultancy_dfes_update)**.

Good practice

- School funding arrangements are explained on the Department for Education and Skills and TeacherNet websites.

- TeacherNet has a financial benchmarking tool to help prepare charts that compare income and expenditure profiles with those of similar schools.

- The National College for School Leadership runs training courses for bursars. There is information to assist schools with their financial management on the College's website.

- Consistent Financial Reporting is a framework of income and expenditure items and balances for schools' annual accounting returns. It is the basis for the financial benchmarking tool referred to above.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Questions to consider

1   Is the school environment safe, clean, well presented and fit for purpose? Do you have plans to improve any outdated buildings?

2   Does your school have a planned prioritised maintenance programme to keep the buildings in good condition?

3   Does the school have appropriate and well-managed ICT equipment?

Facts and figures

- *Building Schools for the Future* is a national programme to rebuild or renew all secondary schools in England over a period of 10 to 15 years; up to half of all primary schools are to be added to the programme. Governors are key members of project teams for this programme.

- The quality of a school building can be evaluated using the Design Quality Indicator for Schools, access to which can be purchased from the Construction Industry Council (see **www.dqi.org.uk/schools**).

Good practice

- *Building Bulletin 98: Briefing Framework for Secondary School Projects* sets out simple, realistic, non-statutory guidelines for secondary school buildings and grounds.

- The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency provides practical advice, tools and services to support ICT development, e-learning and management for people who work in or with schools **(www.becta.org.uk)**

- A school's reception area is usually the first area to be seen by visitors. Having examples of pupil work and celebrations of achievement in the reception creates a positive first impression and recognises pupils' efforts.

SCHOOLS IN THE COMMUNITY

Questions to consider

1   Does your school have good links with the local community?

2   Does the school have a good relationship with local authority school advisors?

3   Do parents get involved in the school, for example attending parents' evenings and assisting in classrooms and/or with school events?

4   Does the school place sufficient emphasis on marketing itself within the local community? (For example do you have a prospectus, website, welcoming reception area, open days, good contacts with the local media?)

5   Do pupils present a positive image, inside and outside the school?

Facts and figures

- The Department for Education and Skills is encouraging schools to collaborate through federations, which are groups of schools with a single governing body, formed under the provisions of the Education Act 2002.

- By September 2006 all secondary schools will have a School Improvement Partner (September 2007 for primary schools). These Partners (often people with current or recent headteacher experience) will act for the local authority and be the main conduit for local authority communication with the school. The School Improvement Partner will report to the headteacher, governors and local authority on self-evaluation, targets and priorities, and the kinds of support needed, and will advise governors on managing the performance of the headteacher.

Good practice

- The Parents Centre website **(www.parentscentre. gov.uk)** provides information for parents on how to help with learning. For example, there are tips on how parents can help pupils as they plan their homework and coursework and what to do when they seem to have difficulty keeping up at school and find the work difficult.

- A school which had gone into Special Measures federated with a nearby school, sharing an executive headteacher and other resources. The school made a rapid recovery, and Ofsted inspectors considered that the federation contributed powerfully to the turnaround.

ROLE OF THE NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament. We audit the accounts of all Government departments and agencies as well as a wide range of other public bodies, and report to Parliament on the economy (minimising costs), efficiency (maximising the ratio of the output from goods or services to the resources to produce them) and effectiveness (comparing actual outcomes to what was intended) with which Government bodies have used public money.

Our work does not question the merits of the policies, but assesses the way Government policies are implemented. We are totally independent of Government, and our work saves taxpayers millions of pounds every year.

The National Audit Office publishes around 60 Value for Money reports every year. These reports examine central government programmes and activities in order to assess performance, identify good practice and suggest ways in which public services could be improved.

Improving poorly performing schools, January 2006

This report examines: identifying poor performance and supporting schools at risk; turning round poorly performing schools; and how to sustain school performance after recovery.

Our recommendations include:

- The Department for Education and Skills and local authorities need to combine their efforts to identify schools at risk and intervene before they fail.

- To recover quickly, poorly performing schools need to give priority to improving school leadership and establishing a positive culture centred on teaching and learning.

- Poorly performing schools need an assessment of their potential to improve and a plan that minimises the number of 'pupil years' lost to a poor education.

- Ofsted should introduce a risk-based approach to selecting schools for inspection and for following up the progress of schools in Special Measures and with a Notice to Improve.

- More needs to be done to identify and tackle the barriers that discourage potentially suitable candidates from becoming headteachers.

This report can be found on the National Audit Office's website at **www.nao.org.uk/pn/05-06/0506679.htm**

FEEDBACK FORM

The National Audit Office and National Governors' Association hope that this booklet will provide a useful reference tool for governors. We would be pleased to have your comments on its usefulness, which you can send either by:

- detaching the following pages at the perforation and after entering your responses, folding the pages and sealing as indicated, so that the return address is outside, and posting them; or

- submitting your responses via an electronic version of the form available at **www.nao.org.uk/survey/governors/feedback.htm**

Please submit comments after discussion with your colleagues on the governing body: one form per school.

Name of person completing form:

School name:

School address:

1 Did you find the booklet useful?
- [ ] Yes, very useful
- [ ] Yes, of some use
- [ ] Not useful

2 Will you use it to help improve the way that your school operates?
- [ ] Yes, we will use it to a large extent
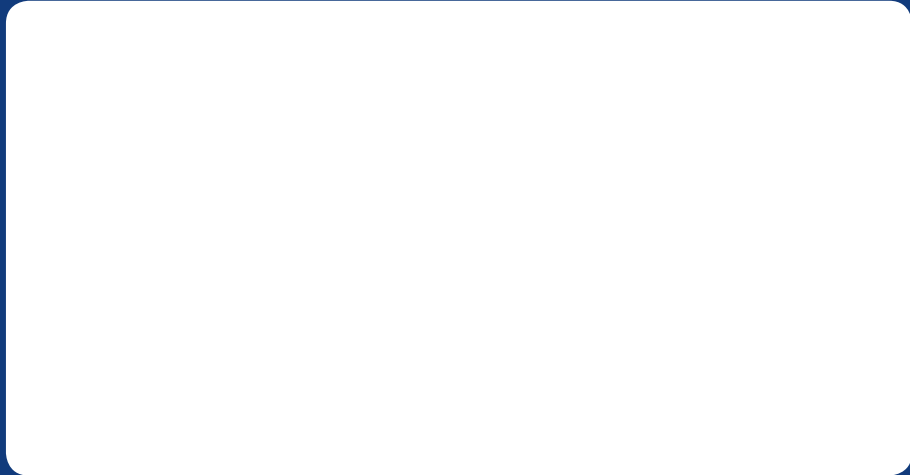- [ ] Yes, we will use it to some extent
- [ ] No, we will not use it

3 If yes, please tick the areas where you think this booklet - and any subsequent discussions within the governing body - are likely to lead to changes at your school.

- [ ] Governing body
- [ ] School leaders
- [ ] School self-evaluation
- [ ] Recruitment and retention of teachers

- ▪ Teaching and curriculum
- ▪ Managing staff sickness
- ▪ Pupil satisfaction
- ▪ Pupil attainment
- ▪ Pupil attendance
- ▪ Pupil behaviour
- ▪ Financial management
- ▪ School facilities
- ▪ Schools in the community

4   If you would like to make any further comments, please write them here:

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