

GOVERNANCE REVIEW TOOL – Single Academy Trusts

1. Strategic leadership. <i>References: Governors' Handbook pages 14 – 16; A Competency Framework pages 8 – 13; Understanding your data.</i> Strategic leadership that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy through:		
Aspect	Recognised best practice constituting strong governance	What we need to do to strengthen our governance
1a: a clear and explicit vision for the future set by the board, in collaboration with executive leaders, which has pupil progress and achievement at its heart and is communicated to the whole organisation.	The vision statement is clear and has been developed in collaboration by the board and the executive leaders. It is a true vision statement providing a description of where the academy sees itself in 5 years' time ie a projection rather than a statement of what the academy stands for. Pupil progress and achievement is at the heart of the statement which has been effectively communicated to the whole organisation and to other key stakeholders via the website.	
1b: strong and clear values and ethos which are defined and modeled by the board, embedded across the organisation and adhered to by all that work in it, or on behalf of it.	The board has discussed and agreed the distinctive characteristics of the academy and the key values that underpin its work. The values are clearly linked to the behaviours (of pupils, staff and governors) that characterise the ethos of the school. The ethos and underpinning values of the school are monitored and form a part of the assurance work of the governing board.	
1c: strategic planning that defines medium to long-term strategic goals and development and improvement priorities which are understood by all in the organisation.	The chair takes a lead in working with the executive leadership in defining a set of strategic priorities and goals for the academy which the governing board uses to monitor the progress the academy is making and to hold the executive leadership to account. The priorities and goals are explicitly linked to data regarding the academy's performance. The priorities and goals are clearly communicated to ensure clear understanding across the academy.	
1d: processes to monitor and review progress against agreed strategic goals and to refresh the vision and goals periodically including at key growth or trigger points.	The governance plan identifies opportunities for the governing board to re look at the academy's vision and strategic goals to check that they are still appropriate given any external developments. Progress towards the strategic goals driving the work of the academy is reviewed regularly and the board holds the executive leadership to account in terms of this.	
1e: mechanisms for enabling the board to listen, understand and respond to the voices of parents/carers, pupils, staff, local communities and employers.	The board has a strong stakeholder engagement plan which is implemented effectively. The plan represents a proactive approach to consulting with and responding to the views of parents, carers, pupils, staff and other key stakeholders. The outputs from annual surveys of the view of staff, parents and pupils are fed into the board's assurance processes. The governing board considers the impact of board decisions on stakeholder groups and thinking about this is recorded in the minutes of meetings.	

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<p>1f: determination to initiate and lead strategic change when this is in the best interests of children, young people and the organisation and to champion the reasons for, and benefits of, change to all stakeholders.</p>	<p>There is strong leadership from the chair in relation to strategic change considerations. The board is presented with the information it needs to engage meaningfully in strategic change discussions. Considerations of the perspective of key stakeholders is uppermost in the mind of the board and the need for clarity regarding the benefits of any proposed change are thought through thoroughly.</p>	
<p>1g: procedures for the board to set and manage risk appetite and tolerance; ensuring that risks are aligned with strategic priorities and improvement plans; that appropriate intervention strategies are in place and risk management is embedded at every level of governance.</p>	<p>The principles of risk management are understood by the board. The board has a risk register which is used as a key tool for governance. The board reviews, on a regular basis, the risk management work of the executive leadership to ensure that it is robust. The potential risks associated with conflicts of interests are acknowledged and controlled. The chair takes a key role in the board's risk management work. The Board has discussed its 'risk appetite' and has recorded this in its risk management policy.</p>	
<p>1h: An informed decision on whether to form, or join a group of schools which is underpinned by robust due diligence and an awareness of the need to review the effectiveness of governance structures and processes as the size, scale and complexity of the organisation changes.</p>	<p>The chair provides strategic leadership in relation to considerations linked to the future direction of the academy. Options has been explored and supported by the provision of clear and objective information.</p>	

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2. Accountability. *References: Governance Handbook pages 18 – 26; A Competency Framework pages 14 – 20; Understanding Data.*

Accountability that drives up educational standards and financial performance through:

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2a: rigorous analysis of pupil progress and attainment information with comparison against local and national benchmarks and over time.	The board commissions information/data reports from the executive leader and has used the Understanding Your Data publication to help it to determine the most helpful content and format for these reports linked to pupil progress and attainment. The board is able to interpret the provided data/information - to spot trends and patterns and to make comparisons with available benchmark data for example – and use this to hold the executive leader to account. The board questions the executive leader on how the in-school assessment system is used to support pupils' attainment and progress.	
2b: clear processes for overseeing and monitoring school improvement and providing constructive challenge to executive leaders.	The board has a robust process for assuring that the school is making effective provision linked to: pupil behaviour management, safeguarding, provision for pupils with SEND, Health and safety, etc etc. The board has agreed the areas/aspects that it will focus its assurance work on, the information/data it will need and in what form from executive leaders plus any additional assurance related activities that it will undertake or commission from others. Good use is made of the Understanding Your Data publication. The board uses its assurance work as the basis for constructive challenge to executive leaders where appropriate. The Board has a set of key roles linked to assurance work (compliance and quality of provision) in reaction to SEND and safeguarding.	
2c: a transparent system for performance managing executive leaders, which are understood by all in the organisation, linked to defined strategic priorities.	The chair is confident to undertake the executive leader's performance appraisal and makes effective use of an external adviser. The executive leader's performance is evaluated in relation to the board's agreed strategic priorities and a set of associated key performance objectives. The whole board fully understands the process used to evaluate the executive leader's performance and, in broad terms the outcomes of the last review.	
2d: effective oversight of the performance, and the framework for the pay and conditions of service, of all other employees.	The board members are fully aware of the frameworks of pay and conditions of the employees. They provide strong scrutiny of the executive leader's recommendations linked to pay progression and ensure that pay progression is linked to performance. The board receives reports from the executive leadership about staff performance and is robust in its requirements to see that steps are taken to address any underperformance.	

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2e: a regular cycle of meetings and appropriate processes to support business and financial plans.	The board is fully involved in the strategic financial and business planning. Good use is made of the Using Data publication and the use of benchmarking data is a feature of the board's work in this area. The board ensures strategic financial planning is tightly linked to its agreed strategic priorities.	
2f: effective controls for managing within available resources and ensuring regularity, propriety and value for money.	The board has a robust system for assuring itself regarding matters linked to financial management and control. It receives regular reports in a form that all board members can fully understand and provides the required levels of scrutiny to secure full assurance. The board undertakes some independent assurance through its own first hand activity and/or through the use of agents. The board gives time to the consideration of value for money - especially in relation to dedicated grants eg pupil premium funding, but also to other aspects which it has decided to focus on. The board makes use of the Understanding Data publication.	

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3. People *References: Governance Handbook pages 29 – 40; A Competency Framework pages 20 – 21; Clerking Competencies.*

People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity who:

Aspect	Recognised best practice constituting strong governance	What we need to do to strengthen our governance
3a: understand the purpose of governance and the role of non- executive leadership and have all the necessary skills, as outlined in the Department's Competency Framework, to deliver it well.	The board has a clear collective understanding about the purpose of non- executive governance and how to discharge the responsibility effectively. The Competency Framework is used to review the collective skills set of the board and to help them to understand their roles in behavioural terms. There are no significant skills gap on the board in terms of the analysis provided by the Competency Framework.	
3b: include an effective chair and vice-chair with the ability to provide visionary strategic non-executive leadership.	The chair of the board is strong and meets the description of an effective chair in the Competency Framework in terms of knowledge, skills and effective behaviours. The chair has vision and a strong strategic outlook as well as being a good team leader and manager of meetings. There is a clear role description for the vice chair which includes more than stepping up for the chair in their absence.	
3c: are recruited through robust and transparent processes against a clear articulation of required skills which are set out in a role specification.	The board has a clear written recruitment policy and process which it has agreed. There are detailed role specifications – which make effective use of the Competency Framework – for the role of: Member, trustee; chair; vice-chair, committee chair, SEND trustee, Safeguarding trustee.	
3d: use active succession planning to ensure the board, and the whole organisation, continues to have the people and leadership it needs to remain effective.	A succession plan for the key governance roles is in place which is clearly linked to a training and development plan. The chair understands the critical importance of succession planning, training and development and is committed to making sure that they are in place.	
3e: employ a professional clerk to provide expert advice and guidance and to ensure the efficient and compliant operation of the board.	The board has the support of a professional clerk who has been on recent training linked to the Clerks' Competencies. The Clerk is being supported so that they have the full range of knowledge and are able to demonstrate the full range of behaviours described in the Clerks Competencies. The clerk is a member of a professional network to ensure that they are up to speed with current developments, nationally and locally and are aware of recognised governance best practice.	

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4. Structures. <i>References: Governance Handbook pages 41 – 55; A Competency Framework page 22.</i> Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities through:		
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4a: appropriate board and committee structures that reflect the scale and structure of the organisation and ensure sufficient and robust oversight of key priorities.	The board's committee structure is reviewed annually to ensure it is fit for purpose. The board is clear how governance functions are distributed and delegated to different individuals and committees and how decisions are made. The current arrangements work well and support strong governance.	
4b: clear separation between strategic non- executive oversight and operational executive leadership which is supported by positive relationships that encourage a professional culture and ethos across the organisation.	The separation between strategic non-executive and operational executive functions is clearly understood by all parties and is underpinned by positive, effective working relationships.	
4c: sufficient separation between members and trustees to provide objective oversight of the board's performance and decision-making	The trust has between 3 and 5 Members – none of them are trustees – who are clear about their role and how they discharge it. There is a clear mechanism in place for the Members to provide objective oversight of the board's performance and decision – making. The role of the Members is set out with clarity for third parties.	
4d: processes for ensuring appropriate communication (particularly to ensure transparency of decision-making) between all levels and structures of governance and to pupils/students, parents/carers, staff and communities.	The communication between all levels and structures of governance is clear and works well. The board effectively communicates the work it does and the impact it makes to key stakeholders. Its agendas and minutes are in the public domain.	

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5. Compliance. *References: Governance Handbook pages 57 – 120; A Competency Framework for Governance pages 23 – 24; Clerk Competency Framework Competency 1. pages 9 – 10, Competency 3. page 12.*

Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements, through:

Aspect	Recognised best practice constituting strong governance	What we need to do to strengthen our governance
5a: awareness of, and adherence to, responsibilities under education and employment legislation and all other legal duties.	The chair ensures that that board members can access appropriate training /briefing related to statutory compliance. There are high expectations of the clerk linked to the provision of high quality advice to the board regarding compliance matters.	
5b: plans to ensure that key duties such as safeguarding, inclusion, special education needs and disability (SEND), and monitoring and oversight of the impact of pupil premium, and other targeted funding streams are undertaken effectively across the organisation.	The assurance for trustees linked to these matters is robust and triangulated where appropriate. There is no reliance on reports from the executive. Governors linked to these aspects have accessed up to date and relevant training.	
5c: adherence to the requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook and the trust's funding agreement and articles of association	The board has made sure that a mechanism is in place to assure itself that the requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook, the trust's Funding Agreement and Articles of Association are adhered to.	
5d: understanding of, and adherence to, responsibilities under the Equalities Act, promoting equality and diversity throughout the organisation including in relation to its own operation.	The responsibilities of the board in relation to the Equalities Act are known, understood and taken seriously by the chair and by the board. The implications of the policy documentations are clearly thought through in terms of the relevant assurance monitoring and reporting processes.	

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6. Evaluation. *Reference: Governance Handbook pages 121 – 130; All sections of A Competency Framework for Governance and especially pages 25 – 26.*

To monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance, through:

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6a: regular skills audits, aligned to the organisation's strategic plan, to identify skill and knowledge gaps and which both define recruitment needs and inform a planned cycle of continuous professional development activity including appropriate induction for those new to governance or to the board.	Skills audits are undertaken at least annually with consideration of the knowledge, skills and effective behaviours identified in the Competency Framework for governance being taken into consideration. Audits are clearly linked to the requirements of governance generically and to requirements linked to the strategic plan. A clear and costed training plan is in place plus the resources to support it. The plan is clearly linked to knowledge, skills and behaviours audits and to the current gaps linked to securing strong governance. Succession plans are in place for key governance roles and strong induction arrangements support new trustees.	
6b: processes for regular self-evaluation and review of individual board member contributions and of the board's overall operation and effectiveness.	Self-evaluation of the contributions of individual's governors linked to the Competency Framework for Governance knowledge, skills and effective behaviours is in place. A robust and systematic annual review of the strength of governance, including a 360 appraisal of the chair is undertaken - linked to the Competency Framework for Governance, knowledge skills and effective behaviour expected of the chair. The School improvement Plan / Development Plan includes a 'Strengthening Governance' section which provides the details of the actions that will be carried out as a result of the annual review.	
6c: commissioning external reviews of board effectiveness, particularly at key growth or transition points, to gain an independent expert assessment of strengths and areas for development.	An annual consideration of the appropriateness or not, of commissioning a review takes place and the rationale for the decision which follows the discussion is clearly recorded in the minutes.	
6d: documentation which accurately captures evidence of the board's discussions and decisions as well as the evaluation of its impact and which complies with legal requirements for document retention.	Evidence of the work of governance and its impact is systematically gathered so that it can be synthesised and communicated to stakeholders via the school's website. Governors are mindful of not only what they do but also of the benefit it adds and use this mind-set to prioritise their work.	

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