

LEADING THE WAY

IMPROVING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP



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John Cridland

FOREWORD



*Much has happened since the CBI launched **First steps: a new approach for our schools** in November 2012. The number of academies and free schools across England has continued to rise and the pace of reform of examinations and assessment has accelerated. But despite these changes, the main political parties still have different positions over the government's policy of decentralisation and devolution of power to schools.*

Let's be clear: decentralisation and delegation of controls to schools is absolutely the right approach – and should be extended to all schools across the UK. These freedoms are characteristic of many of the best school systems around the world and empower heads and teachers to deliver real improvements in the classroom. However, in this new education landscape, where schools have significantly more autonomy, the government must put in place proper safeguards to maintain and improve standards, enhance confidence and trust and ensure that the new freedoms are not misused or exploited.

This must include safeguards which promote excellence in our school leaders and encourage assertive and confident governing bodies – and this report sets out the reforms that we believe will help drive improvements in school governance and leadership.

These include a renewed focus on the importance of governing bodies and the need to recruit governors who are confident, assured and have wide ranging capabilities – exactly the sort of qualities that are abundant in industry.

The report also calls for the promotion of a culture of continuous professional development in the classroom and for current and future school leaders to have more exposure to, and more experience of, the business world.

As our *First steps* report made clear, there is no more important issue facing this country than education. The time has come for all of us – government, political parties, businesses and schools – to work together to deliver the step-change in education that we need and that our children deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Cridland". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Cridland
CBI director-general

Executive summary



The quality of leadership within a school is critically important to the outcomes for young people, with the push for improvement in every aspect of school life coming from the top. Too many schools are not performing well enough in this area, and we must take action to ensure that every school achieves the highest standards of leadership, with the right structures in place not simply to maintain standards but to continuously improve them. This report sets out the steps that can be taken to drive up standards of leadership and governance across the board to better secure the outcomes we want for young people.

Strong leadership and governance are essential for improving schools

Strong leadership and governance are key to ensuring successful education outcomes for young people. So we need to get them right. With the welcome moves towards increased autonomy for headteachers and schools, a strong support structure becomes even more important – and this structure includes the governing body.

Recommendations:

- Maintain progress on devolution of control to schools to empower headteachers and governors to deliver real and lasting change
- Ensure that the frameworks and structures in place support and encourage strong accountability. This must include a renewed focus on the importance of governing bodies.

School leaders need the right support mechanisms to deliver excellence

Schools and headteachers need robust support structures to help drive improvements. Leaders benefit from a clear framework within which to act, so that they can carry out their roles effectively and be properly held to account.

While the government's decentralising agenda is the right one, its potential is not yet being delivered and the focus must be on achieving the change to address this, not changing the plan.

The support needed is not retreat to increasing local authority control, but greater cooperation between schools, clear expectations of leaders, a focus on professional development and – crucially – more effective governing bodies.

Recommendations:

- There should be no increase in local authority control. This would be a step backwards, and will not secure improvements
- Ofsted should continue to focus more acutely on the quality of leadership and governance – making this a real priority
- There must be real movement on creating a culture of continuous professional development in schools, in particular for current and future leaders. In this context, the idea of a Royal College of Teaching deserves serious consideration
- Schools and governing bodies should recognise the value of school leaders having industry experience – there should be more interchange between the education sector and industry to ensure a better mix of skills, knowledge and experience in senior management teams in schools.



Good governance is about giving heads effective strategic guidance and challenge

Some schools benefit from a strong and effective governing body, but standards across the country are uneven. Action is needed to bring every governing body up to the standards of the best, then to push standards up further. Governing bodies must be clear of their roles and responsibilities, and their composition must be such that they are able to carry out these duties effectively.

Recommendations:

- The focus of governing bodies must be on strategic issues, and this needs to be clearly articulated to schools and headteachers as well as governors themselves
 - The composition of a governing body must revolve around skills and capabilities, and should not be too large as to impede decision making
 - Training and support should be available and encouraged for all governors.
-

Individuals and firms gain from school governorship

One of the prime reasons why school governing bodies are too often not executing their duties to a consistently high standard is the level of vacancies – not necessarily in terms of a specified number of governors, but in terms of the skills they need to operate well. There are currently not enough governors with the right skills and knowledge to perform the role effectively. This shortfall must be tackled as the role of governors is a valuable one with the benefits being felt not only by schools, but also by the individual volunteers and firms that they work for.

Recommendations:

- More needs to be done to attract individuals from business to serve as governors. This should involve a concerted effort from the government, from the education sector and from business. Given the particular importance of raising standards in primary schools, initial efforts should focus on attracting individuals from business to serve on the governing bodies of these institutions
 - The requirement for businesses to release their staff for governor duties should be extended to include academies and free schools as well as maintained schools
 - Senior ministers need to be more vocal in championing the role and importance of school governors.
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Sharing lessons between business and schools is helpful to both

There are clear and obvious similarities between school governing bodies and corporate boards, particularly in their key duties and in what constitutes good practice. We need to do more to spread the lessons and experience of effective governance between business and education.

Recommendations:

- Schools and businesses can learn from each other to improve their own operations, especially around board composition, rigour in holding to account, and succession planning. The links to – and lessons from – corporate governance in the private sector should be made more explicit.
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Introduction

Improving the quality of our education system is key to securing long-term growth in the economy. Raising the performance of UK schools to match the best in Europe could add more than one percentage point to growth every year. That would add up to £8trn to UK GDP over the lifetime of a child born today.¹

Last year the CBI published *First steps* – a comprehensive look at businesses' priorities for reform of the education system. The report made the case that successful outcomes for schools are about more than just exam results. Employers want young people coming out of schools who are rigorous, rounded and grounded. School leavers should have not only knowledge and skills but also those behaviours and attitudes that are vital to success in life and work (**Exhibit 1**). Effective devolution of control to schools, with good community and business engagement and a strong accountability framework, are all part of building an education system that can deliver the outcomes that we need.²

The quality of leadership within a school is a critically important driver of outcomes for young people, with the push for improvement in every aspect of school life coming from the top. We must take action to ensure every school achieves the highest standards of leadership, with the right structures in place not simply to maintain standards but to continuously improve them.³

The support that leaders need ranges from valuable professional development to effective challenge from governing bodies with the right mix of skills and knowledge.

And business, too, has a key role to play.

Industry experience of leadership and governance can provide valuable lessons and benefits for schools, especially during a period of change in the education system. The increasing devolution of power to schools means that school leaders have new freedoms and responsibilities – and, as a result, strong and effective governance is more important than ever. Without highly capable senior leaders and effective governing bodies to help them succeed, there is a real risk that many schools could flounder.

While the main focus of this report is on England, the principles are relevant to schools across the UK. The future of our young people is far too important for any of us to be complacent that our current arrangements for school leadership and governance have no scope for improvement. We must be more vocal in championing the role and importance of school leaders and governors and more focused in supporting them to deliver – not supplementing them, whether that is at local or national level.

“The quality of leadership within a school is a critically important driver of outcomes for young people”

Exhibit 1 Characteristics, values and habits that last a lifetime

The system should encourage young people to be	This means helping to instil the following attributes	Pupils will, for example:
Determined	Grit, resilience, tenacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish tasks started and understand the value of work • Learn to take positives from failure experienced • Work independently and be solutions focused
	Self-control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention and resist distractions • Remember and follow directions • Get to work right away rather than procrastinating • Remain calm even when criticised • Allow others to speak without interruption
	Curiosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be eager to explore new things • Ask and answer questions to deepen understanding
Optimistic	Enthusiasm and zest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participate • Show enthusiasm • Invigorate others
	Gratitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise and show appreciation for others • Recognise and show appreciation for their own opportunities
	Confidence and ambition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be willing to try new experiences and meet new people • Pursue dreams and goals
	Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and develop new ideas
Emotionally intelligent	Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find solutions during conflicts with others
	Respect and good manners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate respect for feelings of others • Know when and how to include others • Be polite to adults and peers
	Sensitivity to global concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of pressing global issues, and contribute to leading society internationally

Strong leadership and governance are essential for improving schools

SECTION 1

Strong leadership and governance are key to ensuring successful education outcomes for young people. So we need to get them right. Both individually and collectively they are integral to creating the schools that we want, equipping young people to thrive in a fast-changing world. It is right that headteachers should have more freedom to deliver improvements in their schools, but they also need a strong support structure within which to operate.

- **Improvement in education standards is driven from the top**
- **Decentralisation of control to school leaders is an important step in the right direction...**
- **...but strengthened governance is essential to making this work**

Improvement in education standards is driven from the top

The quality of leadership and governance within a school has a significant impact on the outcomes of education for young people. The evidence shows that more effective governance and higher quality leadership and management together have a positive effect on the quality of provision and on pupil achievement.⁴

To create the schools we want, with the best possible outcomes for all children, we therefore need both high quality leadership and strong, effective governing bodies that have the skills and abilities to deliver lasting change.

But too many schools are not performing well enough. In the 2011/2012 academic year, Ofsted found that the quality of leadership and management in a third of all maintained schools was not good enough (with 33% rated as either only 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate').⁵ We know the negative impact this can have on the quality of the education that young people receive.

The aim has to be:

- Firstly, to raise the standards of the poorly-led schools to match standards in the current high performers
- Then to increase standards of leadership and governance across the board.

Decentralisation of control to school leaders is an important step in the right direction...

Increased decentralisation of control to schools and headteachers is one of the central strands in the recent extensive reforms to the education system in England. In our *First steps* report, we set out the business view in support of this drive towards autonomy, arguing that it gives headteachers the freedom to lead and manage as senior professionals and allows teachers to focus on teaching.⁶ Research from the OECD and others supports this position. It shows that students perform better in schools that have greater freedom over what is taught and how students are assessed.⁷ The programme of decentralisation of control to all schools in England should therefore continue.

The changes to the school system, and in particular the growth in academies, will allow leaders greater scope to deploy teachers and resources in the best way that they see fit to foster improvement within their schools. These are sensible and welcome changes that require some other areas – including Ofsted – to change to support them.

“As the roles and responsibilities of school leaders expand, it becomes more important to ensure they have the necessary support, skills and challenge they need to be effective”

But as the roles and responsibilities of school leaders expand, it becomes ever more important to ensure they have the necessary support, skills and challenge that they need to be effective. While it is the leadership team that drives change and improvements within a school on a day-to-day basis, a capable governing body is essential to this. The role of governors is all too often under-valued and underestimated.

...but strengthened governance is essential to making this work

As an integral part of the devolution of power to individual schools, there must be a continual focus on building high-quality leadership capability and ensuring effective governance. Governors are at the heart of these processes.

The senior management team of a school, and in particular headteachers, play a vital and influential role in the education of every child. Their attributes, attitudes and capabilities set the tone for the school and shape behaviour and pupil outcomes.⁸ Ensuring successful educational outcomes depends on how these leaders fulfil their roles, and it is the task of governors to hold them to account for doing so effectively.

Steps towards increasing the freedom for headteachers to act are a welcome progression that will enhance effective management possibilities. But these are new and challenging responsibilities for those in school leadership roles. Delivering them successfully requires effective support and development. The support structure needed involves a number of key parties, including the governing body, the government, other schools and school leaders, and the community – and business as a part of the community.

The conduct of school governance needs to change to meet the demands of this new environment, with a newly energetic approach to ensuring the right people are in place on governing bodies. This in turn requires the accountability system to recognise the importance of leadership and governance, and encourage the behaviour we need.

A shift towards more narrative reporting from Ofsted that takes into account the wider culture and ethos of the school, and assesses the quality of leadership and governance more sharply in inspections, is crucial to driving positive change in the education system.

Recommendations:

- **Maintain progress on devolution of control to schools to empower headteachers and governors to deliver real and lasting change**
- **Ensure that the frameworks and structures in place support and encourage strong accountability. This must include a renewed focus on the importance of governing bodies.**



School leaders need the right support mechanisms to deliver excellence

SECTION 2

Schools and leaders need robust support structures to help drive improvements. Leaders benefit from a clear framework within which to act, so that they can carry out their roles effectively and be properly held to account for doing so.

We must build effective guardrails for school leaders that respect and encourage innovation and leadership. The risk at present is that devolution of power to heads lacks any such safeguards other than a narrow, centralising Ofsted framework, which can act against the independent leadership that we need. Better governance can help to supply that guardrail, if accompanied by Ofsted reform.

We choose to be 'glass half-full' about the progress of the government's decentralising agenda. Its potential is not yet being delivered, but our focus is on achieving the changes that will address this, not changing the plan.

The best kind of support is clearly not delivered by a retreat to increased local authority control but by greater cooperation between schools, clearer expectations of leaders, a sharper focus on professional development and – crucially – more effective governing bodies. Ultimately what really facilitates strong leadership in a school is a competent, skilled governing body that clearly defines the long-term strategic aims for the school and holds the headteacher to account for delivery.

- **Local authority control is not the answer**
- **Schools can learn from each other...**
- **...and Ofsted can support enhanced leadership and governance**
- **Headteachers must be supported in developing their skills throughout their careers...**
- **...including gaining experience in other sectors**
- **There are benefits for business too in offering experience**

Local authority control is not the answer

The decentralisation of controls to schools is a welcome policy that has meant a diminished role for local authorities, as resources and decision-making powers have increasingly been transferred to schools themselves. And this is a move in the right direction, as local authorities have too often constrained the ability of headteachers to lead and deliver positive change in their institutions.

Local authorities still have a valid role to play in some areas, for instance managing admissions, but the changing arena within which schools and headteachers now operate has made the role of the local authority much less relevant. Reinstating the type of local authority control of schools that prevailed in the past is not the answer to providing the guardrail that headteachers need, and would be a big step backwards. No two schools are the same and a one-size-fits-all approach is not the right one.

Support should instead come from other schools, from Ofsted and most importantly, from strengthened governing bodies.

Schools can learn from each other...

Co-operation between schools in sharing best practice is a valuable tool – learning from different experiences will help to drive standards up. Good leaders and headteachers know this. There are many examples of this happening (for example the Challenge Partners network⁹ or the Whole Education network)¹⁰ but this needs to be promoted more widely as a valuable activity and one on which school leaders are judged.

As the recent report from the Education Select Committee set out, such partnerships are important to a self-improving system and can offer benefits to all schools involved.¹¹



Much can be achieved through relatively informal arrangements, but the growing numbers of 'soft' and 'hard' federations of schools create more systematic mechanisms for spreading good practice, sharing experience and resources and setting benchmarks. Peer review in areas including headteacher performance management and lesson observation can be invaluable.

...and Ofsted can support enhanced leadership and governance

Ofsted has a crucial role to play in setting the parameters for what a successful leader looks like, and in assessing whether those qualities are being displayed in schools during inspections. This also supports governors in their role, as it helps them understand what they should be expecting from their headteachers, and the frameworks that they can put in place for the school to develop.

Accountability mechanisms across the education system drive behaviours in schools – and more rounded inspections by Ofsted that include assessing the quality of leadership will help raise standards in schools. Competent and capable leadership at all levels within the school has a clear positive effect on educational outcomes, and the accountability frameworks within which headteachers and senior management operate must support them in their roles.¹² More narrative reporting that looks at the culture and ethos of the school, when combined with the recent commitment from Ofsted for an increased focus on leadership, would send a clear statement of the importance of a more holistic outcome of education and the importance of strong headteachers.

The relevance of strong governance to outcomes is also underlined and emphasised by the updated Ofsted inspection framework which focuses more sharply on governance and how well school leaders are supported and held to account.¹³ This shift in the focus of inspections should continue to incentivise behaviour that will drive up standards in schools. Governors are responsible for the school – Ofsted should assess them as a first order priority, not an afterthought.

Headteachers must be supported in developing their skills throughout their careers...

Empowering school leaders through reforms to the education system means they are being tasked with a new, expanded set of responsibilities. As their role changes, so do the skills needed, and so should the capabilities and experiences that are demanded. It is therefore more important than ever that training and development should be available and taken up throughout the career of headteachers. Current and future school leaders should be encouraged by both the government and their governing bodies to take part in activities that will improve standards and outcomes for young people. We must create a culture of continuous professional development in the school environment.

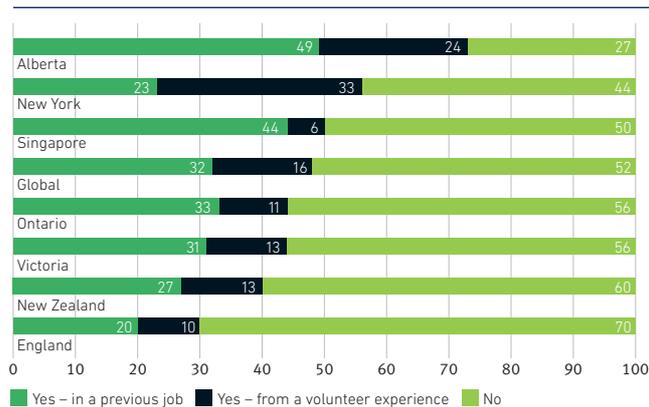
In this context, the idea of a Royal College of Teaching deserves serious consideration. Such a foundation could also help with re-engaging the profession – we need to invest in teachers as professionals.

Royal College of Teaching

The Prince's Teaching Institute is currently leading consultation of the education community on the idea a new member-driven College of Teaching¹⁴

Teaching is currently the one profession with no independent body to set standards. Yet, as this report makes clear, we are asking more and more of our teachers – in particular of our headteachers. In response to these growing expectations, the Prince's Teaching Institute has established a Committee of Teachers and a Commission of senior individuals to explore the merits of a new College of Teaching.

The aim of the College would be to set standards and support the development of a culture of rigorous professional development. The results of the consultation exercise will be published in early 2014.

Exhibit 2 Headteacher candidates with experience of leadership outside education (%)

...including gaining experience in other sectors

Engagement with a personal programme of professional development should form one element of the expectations against which school leaders are assessed. As part of this, all headteachers should be developing the skills to critically review the operation of their school – and learning from practice outside the education sector can help them to develop this capability.

Gaining wider experience would represent a big change for many school leaders: 70% of headteachers in England have no experience of leadership outside education (**Exhibit 2**). Other high-performing school systems have been more successful in bringing outside experience into education. In Alberta, Canada, for example, some 73% of headteachers have other leadership experience.¹⁵

As a result of successive reforms, a headteacher's role in many schools arguably now has more in common with that of the CEO of a small company than with the roles of class teachers in their own school – and their skills should develop to reflect this. Encouraging school leaders to gain leadership experience in industry will help to broaden their horizons, improve their understanding of the labour market and the modern workplace, and widen their knowledge of effective management practices, better enabling them to execute the changing demands of their role.

There are benefits for business too in offering experience

The benefits of a headteacher spending time in industry can be valuable not only to the individual and the school that they run, but also to the business in which they gain the experience. The skills and experiences gained, for example from working with young people or from delivering within a highly regulated and inspected environment, would be of direct relevance to many employers. Businesses should embrace opportunities where headteachers and other school leaders want to engage in this kind of professional development.

Providing these opportunities would be one of the most valuable contributions businesses can make to the shared goal of improving educational standards. The onus is on firms themselves to shape and offer these opportunities.

Recommendations:

- There should be no increase in local authority control. This would be a step backwards, and will not secure improvements
- Ofsted should continue to focus more acutely on the quality of leadership and governance – making this a real priority
- There must be real movement on creating a culture of continuous professional development in schools, in particular for current and future leaders. In this context, the idea of a Royal College of Teaching deserves serious consideration
- Schools and governing bodies should recognise the value of school leaders having industry experience – there should be more interchange between the education sector and industry to ensure a better mix of skills, knowledge and experience in senior management teams in schools.

Good governance is about giving heads effective strategic guidance and challenge

SECTION 3

Some schools benefit from a strong and effective governing body, but standards across the country are uneven. We need action to bring every governing body up to the standards of the best, then to push standards up further.

- **The purpose of governing bodies is clear**
- **The role of governors is a strategic one...**
- **...and the right composition of the governing body is important for effectiveness**
- **Governors need their own guidance and development support**

The purpose of governing bodies is clear

Governing bodies are responsible for the strategic leadership of schools. They should have a clear focus on three core activities:

- 1 Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- 2 Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils
- 3 Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.¹⁶

Each of these functions has a strong impact on the education outcomes for the young people in a school. It is therefore vital that the governing body can effectively carry out these roles – efficiently holding

those responsible to account for delivering the high-quality educational experience that all our young people need.

Due to the variety of functions that they are expected to undertake, a wide range of skills are needed on properly balanced governing bodies. Many of these are linked to – and often developed in – a business setting. For example, these include the ability to think strategically, understand and interpret balance sheets, human resources expertise and general management awareness.

There is, however, a set of core capabilities that must be shared by all members of the governing body. Most importantly, they need to understand the role of a governor and the nature of the functions they are expected to perform.

The role of governors is a strategic one...

Governing bodies have a role that is comparable to the board of a company. They are a place for supportive challenge to the school leadership, not a more empowered version of the parent teacher association. Their contribution to the leadership of a school is strategic, not operational.

Governance in primary schools

As we set out in *First steps*, getting education right at primary level is vitally important, particularly in supporting those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Poor quality primary education can widen the gap in levels of attainment already seen when young children start school – and this is not acceptable. Research also shows that the effectiveness of governance is linked more strongly to pupil attainment at primary level and that due to the smaller scale of operations there is more scope to effect change. This clearly highlights the importance of getting primary governance right.¹⁷

However, Ofsted found governance to be good or outstanding in only 55% of primary schools in the 2010/2011 school year compared to 64% of secondary schools.¹⁸

We need to focus on raising standards of governance in primary schools to ensure that educational outcomes are maximised for all children.

“*Smaller governing bodies are likely to be more effective at remaining strategic*”

The day-to-day operations of the school and implementing the strategy are the responsibility of the senior management team.¹⁹

This distinction between operations and strategy is not always understood and observed. Too often we hear examples of volunteer governors becoming involved in day-to-day school matters as opposed to retaining the strategic focus that they should have. Equally, there are instances of school leaders seeking to involve governors beyond strategic matters. A common example is pro-bono legal work being sought from governors who are solicitors or barristers.

Individuals should be free to offer this kind of help, and it should be welcomed – but this is not fulfilment of the governor role and guidelines should make this clear to all parties. This is not helped when government itself sends out mixed messages, such as the recent Ofsted recommendation that one governor with a business background should take responsibility for the provision of careers advice.²⁰ This not only blurs the line between strategic and operational activities – but also undermines the principle of collective responsibility which is fundamental to how governing bodies should operate.

A constant focus on core roles and responsibilities can help to ensure that governors are most effectively carrying out their function – the distinction between the definition of strategic framework and the implementation of change must be clearly and consistently recognised.

...and the right composition of the governing body is important for effectiveness

The composition of the governing body has a clear and direct effect on its ability to carry out its specified role, so getting this right is crucial.

The nature of schools means that they are accountable to a wide range of stakeholders, including parents and the local community – and there is merit in drawing governors from these stakeholder groups. However, range of representation is no guarantee of expertise – and governors need to work in the interests of the school, not in the interests of a particular group.

Most importantly, if a governing body is to function effectively as a strategic decision-making body that is able to hold school leadership to account effectively, it needs to give due weight in its make-up to those with knowledge or skills that will enable them to better carry out their duties.

The focus when recruiting must therefore be on ensuring the right mix of skills and knowledge, as opposed to prescribing specific roles or numbers of members. The rules around this have been relaxed in more recent legislation, in recognition that the existing specification did not necessarily result in the best governing bodies.²¹ Regulations introduced in September 2012 now allow governing bodies to be more flexible, with the focus shifted away from specific composition towards the skills and capabilities of the governors.²²

The reduction in the prescription for the minimum number of governors in particular is a welcome step, as smaller governing bodies are likely to be more effective at remaining strategic and tend to have better decision-making capabilities.²³ Having only seven posts prescribed will now give governing bodies more freedom to decide on their composition. It will allow flexibility to better ensure that each governor possesses the right skill set rather than simply filling a representational requirement. While it is important to ensure the capacity of the governing body is such that it can carry out its duties and that there is sufficient flexibility for bodies to appoint individuals to a range of roles, introducing a cap to set a maximum number of governors could provide a useful safeguard to prevent governing bodies from becoming unwieldy – a factor recognised in the corporate sector and highlighted in the UK Corporate Governance Code.²⁴

Allowing governing bodies greater freedom to determine their composition could encourage more rigorous self-assessment of the skills and knowledge that the board contains and the mix needed to perform their duties more effectively. While there are many excellent examples, there are still too many governing bodies that are not operating in the most effective way. This needs to be tackled.



Governance in academies

Governing bodies for some schools (including all academies) have a number of additional responsibilities related to their role as employers or charity trustees. However, DfE has asserted that these roles are aligned with and not contradictory to the core functions undertaken by all governing bodies.²⁵ Although the rules and frameworks that dictate behaviour may be different, the principles outlined in this report are equally applicable to all schools.

Governors need their own guidance and development support

The support and guidance provided by the Department for Education for school governors is a valuable tool, but it is not enough to ensure effectiveness.

Governor training can be important to ensure individuals have the knowledge needed to perform their roles effectively. This is particularly relevant for chairs. While recognising that all governors are volunteers, they have major, formal responsibilities that must be properly fulfilled.

Governors should be strongly encouraged and supported to develop the awareness and skills that they need – especially when they first come into post. There is also a case for chairs to conduct periodic reviews of contribution with individual governors. Training through peer mentoring especially has received broad support, with the model set up by the National College for Teaching and Leadership to support the development of chairs in the National Leaders of Governance programme providing a good example of how this might work.²⁶

The introduction of mandatory training for newly appointed governors in Wales earlier this year is something that should be monitored and assessed to determine whether there are benefits or lessons that can be learned and applied to England.²⁷

Recommendations:

- The focus of governing bodies must be on strategic issues, and this needs to be clearly articulated to schools and headteachers as well as governors themselves
- The composition of a governing body must revolve around skills and capabilities, and should not be too large as to impede decision making
- Training and support should be available and encouraged for all governors.

“Governing bodies are a place for supportive challenge for the school leadership – not a more empowered version of the parent teacher association”

Individuals and firms gain from school governorship

SECTION 4

One of the prime reasons why governing bodies are too often not executing their duties to a uniformly high standard is the level of vacancies – not necessarily in terms of a specified number of governors, but in terms of the skills they need to operate well. There are currently not enough governors with the right skills and knowledge to perform the role effectively. This shortfall must be tackled.

- **School governors play a valuable role...**
- **...with the benefits felt by businesses as well as schools**
- **More can be done to get the message across**

School governors play a valuable role...

Despite the fact that school governors represent the largest volunteer force, made up of some 300,000 volunteers, it is estimated that over 10% of posts are unfilled at any given time.²⁸

Existing literature on school governing bodies has tended to emphasise the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the work of governors as hindering the recruitment of volunteers. In order to attract the most capable individuals to the role and retain them, it is important that acting as a governor is seen as a valuable and worthwhile contribution to make.²⁹

Improving the profile of governance and the level of appreciation for the work that governors do is vital to securing these increased numbers of appropriately skilled volunteers. While the government clearly has a leading part to play in this, we believe that businesses also have an important role in encouraging and supporting their employees to act as school governors. One of the best ways to improve performance and make governing bodies more business-like is to attract more people from industry to serve as governors.

...with the benefits felt by businesses as well as schools

The benefits of becoming a school governor are not just felt by the school and its students, but also by the volunteers themselves, and their employer. The skills governors develop in the course of their school duties may stretch beyond those of their day-to-day job and expand their workplace skills.³⁰ Applying their knowledge and expertise in a different situation from the one they encounter in their regular course of work can help to develop problem-solving and other skills that they can in turn apply to their job.

There is a responsibility on businesses to highlight these wider benefits to staff to encourage participation and volunteering – as many already do. The experience gained can, and should, be seen as a valuable part of professional development, with a positive impact on an individual's ability to perform their workplace role.

The recommendation of the Education Select Committee that the legal requirement for businesses to allow time off for governors of maintained schools be extended to academies is a good one – and should be supported.³¹ As the number of academies grows, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that business remains incentivised to support employees becoming school governors – and this seems an obvious way to achieve this.

“School governors represent some 300,000 volunteers”

“Thirty-two percent of employers who have links with schools now have members of staff who act as governors”

Businesses have operated within the current framework without extensive difficulty, and the proposed extension is a viable and sensible move – and one we believe most businesses would support.

More can be done to get the message across

Many businesses already have members of their workforces involved in schools as governors. According to the CBI/Pearson education and skills survey, a third (32%) of employers who have links with schools now have members of staff who act as governors – drawing on their expertise to help schools and colleges to run efficiently and effectively.³² While this figure has increased over the past two years, the value of this role to both schools and businesses means that we should be looking to increase numbers further.

Business also supports initiatives such as *Inspiring the future* – a free service that matches business volunteers with state secondary schools. *Inspiring the future* recently added serving as a governor to its volunteering options, increasing awareness and visibility of this valuable role.³³

There is an important role for the government to play in raising awareness and appreciation of the work that governors do – and publicising the role is likely to boost the numbers of suitable volunteers. While DfE funds SGOSS, the specialist charity that recruits school governors, there is more to do in promoting and applauding the valuable contribution of this substantial volunteer force. If government is serious about improving performance in schools then ministers – at the most senior levels – must be more vocal in championing the role and importance of school governors.

The recent changes to legislation allow a lot of flexibility in school governance and the make-up of governing bodies. As the recent report from the Education Select Committee rightly recognises, no radical changes to the system are needed.³⁴ The essential area for progress is in the calibre and skills of those serving on governing bodies. Too many schools are still not performing well enough in this area and businesses can do more to help.

SGOSS

The DfE-funded SGOSS is one organisation that is making positive steps to filling vacancies on governing bodies.

SGOSS specialises in recruiting governors, and the online platform allows schools to advertise vacancies on governing bodies linked to the skills they require. By using their extensive database of volunteers and business and media contacts, they are able to find schools the right kind of volunteer.

Since founded, they have worked with over 2000 companies to recruit and place governors across England.³⁵

Recommendations:

- More needs to be done to attract individuals from business to serve as governors. This should involve a concerted effort from the government, from the education sector and from business. Given the particular importance of raising standards in primary schools, initial efforts should focus on attracting individuals from business to serve on the governing bodies of these institutions
- The requirement for businesses to release their staff for governor duties should be extended to include academies and free schools as well as maintained schools
- Senior ministers need to be more vocal in championing the role and importance of school governors.

Sharing lessons between business and schools is helpful to both

SECTION 5

There are clear and obvious parallels between the roles and responsibilities of school governing bodies and those of corporate boards, particularly in their key duties and in what constitutes effectiveness. We need to do more to spread the lessons and experience of effective governance between business and education.

- **School governing bodies and industry governance share common ground...**
- **...but the practice tends to diverge**
- **There are lessons to be shared between both parties**

School governing bodies and industry governance share common ground...

There are a range of features of effective governance that apply in any context, whether in education or in business. There are clear parallels between the ways in which governing bodies set strategic direction and hold school leaders to account for delivery of educational outcomes, and the activities of corporate boards in developing a business vision and evaluating senior executives on its achievement (**Exhibit 3**).

...but the practice tends to diverge

Holding to account is a key function for both governing bodies and corporate boards, but too many school governing bodies are not offering an appropriate level of support and challenge to headteachers, resulting in less than fully effective governance and leadership. Making explicit links with corporate boards and learning from industry practice here gives just one example of how school governance could be widely improved.

There are lessons to be shared by both parties

Schools could also learn from the experiences and practices of industry, particularly in terms of board composition, succession planning and effective performance management.

Exhibit 3 Key features of effective governance

Key activities for school governing bodies ³⁶	Actions of effective corporate boards ³⁷
Understanding the school including pupil attainment, progress and behaviour, and teaching quality and staff development.	Making well-informed and high-quality decisions based on a clear line of sight into the business.
Setting the strategic direction for the school – championing values and ethos, setting priorities for improvement and considering academy status.	Developing and promoting collective vision of the company’s purpose, values and behaviours.
Commissioning action on improvement targets and strategies, allocation of resources and monitoring progress.	Providing direction for senior management.
Performance management of school leaders including holding the headteacher to account and ensuring financial probity.	Creating the right framework to help directors meet their statutory duties.
Checking that they are fit for purpose – clarifying their role, reviewing ways of working, ensuring necessary skills.	Thinking carefully about its governance arrangements and embracing evaluation of their effectiveness.

The relationship between the chair of the governing body and the headteacher of a school is often compared to that of a corporate board chair and chief executive – a positive working relationship is vital to success in both cases. Guidance for school governors highlights the importance of close partnership between chairs and headteachers while retaining distance to allow headteachers to operate effectively.³⁸ This can be directly compared to the guidance provided on board effectiveness that highlights the need for the chair to develop productive working relationships with the CEO while respecting executive responsibility.³⁹ The importance of an effective chair of a school governing body cannot be over-emphasised. Individuals should draw on corporate experience and guidance to ensure high standards and positive outcomes.

There is also a need to highlight the benefits of limiting the opportunities for reappointment of both governors and chairs in order to support the flow of new volunteers, to minimise the risk of 'group think' and of governors becoming too close to the senior management team, and to encourage effective succession planning – all benefits well understood in business.

The move towards ever-increasing autonomy for schools and the associated transfer of resources and controls means that schools are acting in a more business-like manner in order to operate effectively. Spreading understanding of business practices, particularly around governance, can increase innovation and effectiveness and help to drive up standards. Schools and governing bodies should be more open to ideas and contributions put forward by governors from business backgrounds –including new governors.

Recommendations:

- Schools and businesses can learn from each other to improve their own operations, especially around board composition, rigour in holding to account, and succession planning. The links to – and lessons from – corporate governance in the private sector should be made more explicit.
-



Recommendations

The evidence shows the importance of strong and effective leadership, so this should provide a focus for action. Development of the knowledge and skills that headteachers need to foster improvement in their schools should be constantly encouraged and supported by the government, and facilitated by businesses when the opportunity arises.

Governing bodies must have the skills they need to operate effectively, and a clear understanding of the role that they are expected to perform. There are some obvious problems faced by governing bodies, but there is a part for business to play in helping more to operate at the highest possible level – through encouraging and supporting employee volunteers, and through sharing their own experiences of corporate governance.

The increasing importance of effective leaders and governing bodies is reflected in the updated Ofsted framework for inspection, which has a much sharper focus on the quality of governance within a school.

Inspectors now not only look at how well school leadership promotes improved teaching, but also how effectively governors perform their core task of holding senior leaders to account for all aspects of school performance.⁴⁰

The policy of decentralisation has increased the importance of improving leadership and governance in schools. The answer is not more local authority control, but a commitment to increasing the skills and capabilities of governing bodies and headteachers, and smarter accountability measures from Ofsted to drive the improvements that we need.



Summary of recommendations:

Maintain progress on devolution of control to schools to empower headteachers and governors to deliver real and lasting change.

1

Ensure that the frameworks and structures in place support and encourage strong accountability. This must include a renewed focus on the importance of governing bodies.

2

There should be no increase in local authority control. This would be a step backwards, and will not secure improvements.

3

Ofsted should continue to focus more acutely on the quality of leadership and governance – making this a real priority

4

There must be real movement on creating a culture of continuous professional development in schools, in particular for current and future leaders. In this context, the idea of a Royal College of Teaching deserves serious consideration.

5

Schools and governing bodies should recognise the value of school leaders having industry experience – there should be more interchange between the education sector and industry to ensure a better mix of skills, knowledge and experience in senior management teams in schools.

6

The focus of governing bodies must be on strategic issues, and this needs to be clearly articulated to schools and headteachers as well as governors themselves.

7

The composition of a governing body must revolve around skills and capabilities, and should not be too large as to impede decision making.

8

Training and support should be available and encouraged for all governors.

9

More needs to be done to attract individuals from business to serve as governors. This should involve a concerted effort from the government, from the education sector and from business. Given the particular importance of raising standards in primary schools, initial efforts should focus on attracting individuals from business to serve on the governing bodies of these institutions.

10

The requirement for businesses to release their staff for governor duties should be extended to include academies and free schools as well as maintained schools.

11

Senior ministers need to be more vocal in championing the role and importance of school governors.

12

Schools and businesses can learn from each other to improve their own operations, especially around board composition, rigour in holding to account, and succession planning. The links to – and lessons from – corporate governance in the private sector should be made more explicit.

13

Footnotes

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“The quality of leadership and governance within schools has a significant impact on education outcomes for young people”

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