

Performing Governance & Knowing Our Schools



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Governor Role: Core Functions

Core functions connected to the governor role include:

- Setting the vision and strategic direction of the school
- Holding the Head to account for educational performance
- Ensuring financial resources are well spent

Robust process & framework for setting priorities, creating accountability & monitoring progress

Knowing & Improving the School

Presented as major themes underlying this role

Focus on data analysis, committee meetings, reports, school visits & having clear boundaries between what is strategic & what is operational.

Training activities - I now know how to read RAISE online reports, data dashboards & examine different information

BUT in what ways do I know the school

Performing the Governor Role

Different experiences & expertise have helped me perform this role

- A teacher (within a university)
- A researcher in education (specific area)
- Fully committed & care about my school & I've spent many hours working there (time constraints)
- Even a part qualified accountant

My expertise is always limited in comparison to those with specialist knowledge within education

Raising the Question 'In what ways do I know my school'

Knowing Your School

Not a criticism of the Head, SMT, or governing body - some excellent examples of governance & leadership

Reflects the difficult task put at the door of a well-intentioned set of volunteers like ourselves who wish to contribute to the successful running of our schools

Schools & Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Growing use of KPIs linked to mission statements, priorities & long/short term goals (school improvement plan)

- Often in numerical, measurable & temporal form (5 A*-C GCSE results – ↑ 2% this year & ↑ 5% in 3 years)
- Direct our attention to what will be assessed & how progress or impact will be evaluated.

Problems Setting & Applying KPIs

- Unrealistic
- Unattainable
- Too broad/vague or too specific & restrictive
- No clear lines of accountability
- Irrelevant
- Lacking perceived value to specific individual or groups
- Untimely
- Not clearly understood
- Costly or under-resourced (time & resources to apply & report on KPIs) when compared to perceived benefits

Knowing the School & KPIs

Directing our attention to specific key priorities in a quantifiable form can also:

- Neglect those aspects which are not measurable
- Ignore other contextual & qualitative issues
- Produce certain unintended effects & consequences

Problematic

- Tight link between quantitative KPIs & specific rewards/penalties
- Limited appreciation of the qualitative & contextual information that lies beyond numerical measurements

Numbers can be very captivating & convincing

Metrics, Simplifications & Accountability

Metrics & Measures can still be valuable

BUT care should be taken when considering the impact of this process on the everyday practices of teaching & learning & process of leadership & governance

Education trainer - *define your mission statement in a tweet (fits the category of short & concise) – but can 140 characters capture the different aims, goals & priorities*

What is lost when ‘knowing the school’ becomes overly reduced & simplified into figures & statements without these living & engaging in the local context

Ways of Knowing: Tropical Forest in Fiji

Scientists used data, metrics & devices (GPS) to find & gather information about plants/environment

Locals - knowing & viewing the forest by walking barefoot (& other ways of engaging in their worlds)

By joining together & sharing different (local) ways of knowing & engaging with their surroundings, the scientists discovered new species & experienced more creative engagements with the flora and fauna

“A donkey rider needs to feel the heat of the ground”

West African saying

While Governors may feel different kinds of heat -
difficult to appreciate how teachers feel on the ground -
priorities, policies & strategies pulling them in different
directions

Leaders & Governors may have to make tough decisions,
but can we become more aware of the different impacts
and/or unintended consequences

Will asking more questions & listening to different answers
help with this process of knowing

Ways of Knowing & Governing

Walk barefoot around the school – but are there ways of going beyond the data, committee meetings & reports to **engage more creatively in the process of governing?**

Balance the needs of pupils, teachers & the community alongside ***external pressures & forms of accountability measures?***

Transformations & Changes in Education

Many changes in governance, accountability, funding, curriculum, assessment & approaches to teaching & learning

White Paper (2016) academies by 2022 & removing the requirement to have elected parent governors

LA maintained schools under pressure to become academies & existing academies are concerned about joining or establishing a MAT before 'it's too late'

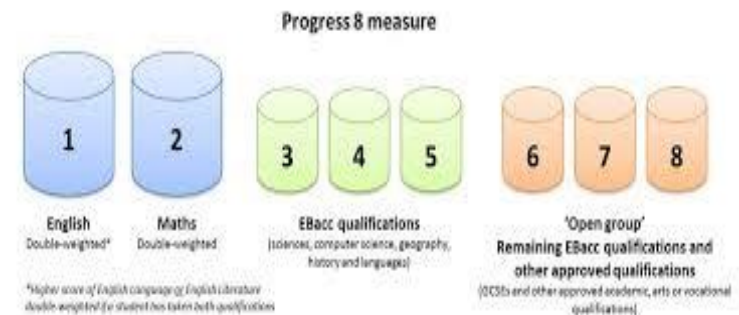
Schools seen as under performing or failing under even more pressure to perform in line with external accountability measures

Outcomes, Ofsted & League Tables

White Paper - Shift from inputs to outcomes - proposal to focus more on outcomes measures & less on Ofsted judgement on teaching quality

Leading to more concerns over a factory style system of 'teaching to the test' - rather than developing the creative, critical & analytical thinking of our pupils.

Controversy over new league tables - Progress 8 formula & how new metrics constrain the curriculum via Ebacc 'buckets' of accountability



Finance, LEA Support & MATs

Slippery Financial Slope - underperforming (low ratings) – If parents send their children elsewhere = less funding

Less LEA support (advisors, finance, IT, HR)

Increasing levels of competition, reduced budgets & more standardised & outcome based accountability - making it harder for schools & governing bodies to work together in a positive way

MATs - sharing roles & expertise - many costs merging schools (both financial and non-financial) & Trustees/ Governing Bodies may be situated at a distance – again problems of knowing the school via outcome measures

Some Concluding Thoughts

We all feel the pressure to *perform 'well'* in the current climate of reform & transformation. But how can we find ways of governing differently & what are the barriers to effective governance?

How can we think creatively about the governor role within the current system **AND** can we encourage new ways of knowing, governing and managing our schools that go beyond the current constraints?

In the words of the RSA, how can we have the 'Power to Create' to ensure that we can work together to create a great educational system and excellent opportunities for all children within our schools

Some Questions to Consider

In what ways do you know your school?

What does knowing & improving the school mean to you & your different stakeholders?

How are KPIs set & used within your school? How are you involved in the setting of these KPIs or school improvement plans?

How do external outcome measurements impact on the setting of priorities within your school & how do they direct your attention to specific aspects?

Do certain aspects fade into the background with the attention directed to certain forms of data, outcomes & performance measures?

How can we develop creative ways of going beyond the data, numerical evidence and committee reports & find others ways of knowing, experiencing & making sense of what matters within our school?

Should all schools become academies?

Should the requirement for parent governor representation on governing bodies be removed?