

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE****DRAFT INTEGRATED GRADE DESCRIPTORS**

(For the use of inspectors and schools)

**Grade descriptors for 'The quality of governance'**

The grade descriptors are exemplars only and not a prescriptive list of requirements for all schools. They should be used as a 'best fit' guide to help in identifying the appropriate grade.

**Excellent 1**

The governing body has a valuable range of expertise, with comprehensive induction arrangements and well-chosen training. The governors have a perceptive long-term strategic plan for the school's future and work closely with the head, bursar and members of the senior management team. They have a clear insight into the school and seek to ensure that its aims are fulfilled through the school development plan. They are well known at the school both at formal occasions and also through sampling the pupils' curricular experience. They monitor school policies carefully and exercise constructive oversight of academic standards and pastoral matters, including welfare, health and safety. They are committed to financial planning for the maintenance and development of accommodation, resources and the recruitment of high quality staff. They ensure that questions of suitability are scrupulously checked and that the central register is thoroughly maintained. They are a strong source of advice and support to the head and have effective mechanisms for evaluating the work of the head or other section managers who have delegated responsibility for compliance matters.

**Good 2**

The governors have a good range of experience in areas relevant to the school and a clear conception of its aims, together with the issues for its future development. They offer encouragement to the school to fulfil these aspirations. They are well informed by the head's reports, contact with the parents' association and the direct involvement in matters of welfare, health and safety. They are effective in discharging their responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation of the school development plan and the quality of school policies. They take an interest in educational standards and pastoral matters. They are well known in the school and visit from time to time to increase their understanding of its operation. They work closely with the bursar in matters of finance, accommodation and resources. They are well informed about their legal obligations and have proper oversight of them. They take care to see that capable staff are selected and appointment procedures are properly followed. The chair keeps in close touch with the head, providing valuable support with a broad perspective and useful contacts. Effective mechanisms are in operation for evaluating the work of the head.

**Sound 3**

The governors have a reasonable range of expertise. They have had training in aspects of welfare, health and safety and they are committed to maintaining the ethos of the school. They make useful suggestions for the school development plan and keep themselves informed about pupils' successes and results. They receive regular reports from the head and have other information on the school from personal contacts with parents. They are aware of their responsibilities and delegate them appropriately. They visit the school in connection with specific issues and some are known to staff and parents. They rely extensively on the head and bursar for the preparation of policies and procedures, and their monitoring is carried out by considering papers for formal meetings. They exercise sound financial control. The chair keeps in touch with the head and provides useful advice, particularly in matters of staffing and complaints.

**Unsatisfactory 4**

The governing body recruits members committed to the good of the school, but with little regard to variety of experience or training. It has made a brief analysis of the position of the school in the local community but without sufficient regard to possible future developments. The governors consider the school to be performing well, fulfilling its aims and in need of no more than light monitoring. Mechanisms for appraising the work of the head are informal and ineffective. They hold termly meetings and rely almost exclusively on the head for their understanding of the school. Being detached from the routine operation of the school, their meetings are essentially concerned with approving policies and documents presented to them, including the school development plan. Their contact with the staff at the school is formal and detached, and parents know little about them. They pay superficial regard to matters of welfare, health and safety, but undertake no effective monitoring. They have a hazy understanding of the requirements for appointments.





## **A JOINT UNDERSTANDING OF GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The Independent Schools Council (ISC) and its constituent Associations (AGBIS, COBIS, GSA, HMC, IAPS, ISA, ISBA and the Society of Heads) recognise the importance of effective governance based on best practice within member schools and have drawn up this Joint Understanding of Good Governance. The independent education sector has a justifiable reputation for excellence and the responsibility for governance of the highest standard rests with each independent school's legally-defined "proprietor", be it an individual or individuals, a corporate governing body or trust, or a company. The proprietor is the person or body responsible for the management of the school. The National Governance Steering Group has published a Code<sup>1</sup> which sets out six key principles of good governance with the purpose of assisting those with responsibility for governance to enhance their decision making, increase their accountability and enable them to provide strong leadership. While referring to the "board", the following key principles, adapted from the Code, are equally valid for all forms of governance in operation in Association schools.

An effective board (or equivalent) will provide good governance and leadership by:

### **1 Understanding their role and responsibilities collectively and individually in relation to:**

- their legal duties
- the stewardship of assets
- the provisions of the governing document (where applicable)
- the external environment
- the nature of the school

#### **and in terms of:**

- in conjunction with the Head, setting and safeguarding the vision, values and reputation of the school
- recognising and adhering to the appropriate boundaries between governance and management of the school
- overseeing the work of the school
- supporting staff, in particular the Head and Bursar, including performance management of the Head and Bursar
- ensuring the education, welfare and safety of pupils

### **2 Ensuring delivery of the school's purpose by:**

- ensuring that its aims (the charitable objects where applicable) remain relevant and valid
- in conjunction with the Head, developing a long-term strategy: agreeing the school development plan, operational plans and budgets; monitoring progress and evaluating results; and reviewing and/or amending plans and budgets as appropriate

<sup>1</sup> Good Governance: A Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector, second edition 2010 ([www.governancecode.org](http://www.governancecode.org))

**3 Working effectively both as individuals and as a team. The board will have a range of appropriate policies and procedures which will include:**

- a clear process for succession planning
- finding and recruiting new board members to meet the school's changing needs in relation to skills, experience and diversity
- providing suitable induction for new board members
- providing all board members with opportunities for training and development according to their needs
- and periodically reviewing their performance both as individuals and as a team

**4 Exercising effective control as an accountable body by ensuring that:**

- the school understands and complies with all legal and regulatory requirements
- the school maintains good internal financial management controls
- the board regularly reviews and identifies the major risks to which the organisation is exposed and puts in place systems to manage those risks
- delegation to sub-committees and staff works properly and that this delegated authority is properly supervised

**5 Behaving with integrity by:**

- paying due regard to the Nolan principles of public life<sup>2</sup>
- safeguarding and promoting the school's reputation
- acting according to high ethical standards
- identifying and managing conflicts of interest and loyalty
- maintaining independence of decision making
- and delivering impact that best meets the needs of the school (and the charity's objects where applicable)

**6 Being open and accountable through:**

- open communications, informing people about the school and its work
- appropriate consultation on significant changes to the school's operation or policies
- listening and responding to the views of all stakeholders with an interest in the school's work
- handling complaints constructively, impartially and effectively
- and considering the school's responsibility to the wider community, for example, public benefit

Note 1 : The Association of Governing Bodies (AGBIS) takes a lead in the promulgation of good governance practice throughout its member schools and is supported fully by the other associations in this aim. Each association also works with its own membership to promote good governance.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.public-standards.org.uk/Library/The\\_seven\\_principles\\_of\\_public\\_life.pdf](http://www.public-standards.org.uk/Library/The_seven_principles_of_public_life.pdf)

**GOVERNING BODY SELF-REVIEW**

**SCHOOL NAME:**.....

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN TO ..... AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

**COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY AND OPERATING AS A TEAM**

Area	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
The Governing Body sees the need to act as a team and to take collective responsibility for its decisions.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body ensures that the structure of governance is capable of providing the quality of information needed to exercise effective oversight of the School.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
Governors seek to attend the majority of meetings, they prepare effectively and contribute appropriately to discussion.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
Decisions are taken, recorded and actioned which properly reflect the consensus view of meetings.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
No significant decisions are taken outside Governors' meetings without specific, delegated authority.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body has a mechanism to receive and evaluate information from the Head and senior staff			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body, the Head and the Bursar work well together.			
<i>Comment:</i>			

**COLLECTIVE ASSESSMENT – VISION, STRATEGY AND COMPOSITION**

Area	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
The Governing Body has a clear, written strategic vision for the School which has been developed jointly with the Head and senior staff and is reviewed at appropriate intervals.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The School's Development Plan supports the vision, it is sufficiently specific			

Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools

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Area	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
and is reviewed regularly.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body is able to review the Strategic Plan and to change direction if necessary.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body has considered its composition, whether it has an appropriate range of specialist skill and whether the length of governors' term of office is appropriate.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
All governors are encouraged to be involved in succession planning.			
<i>Comment:</i>			

### COLLECTIVE ASSESSMENT – DUTIES OF CHARITY TRUSTEES

Area	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
The Governing Body knows and understands the Objects of the Charity and its duties as charity trustees.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body acts reasonably and prudently in all matters and takes advice when necessary.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body has in place effective control systems and procedures for safeguarding the assets of the Charity.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
Committees of the Governing Body have terms of reference which clarify any delegated power and their purpose and operation are well understood.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body regularly reviews the School's performance and achieves a wise balance between supporting the Head and senior staff and holding them to account.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body's understanding of regulation is sufficient to ensure effective oversight of management's compliance.			
<i>Comment:</i>			
The Governing Body keeps abreast of educational developments and is strongly committed to supporting governor training.			
<i>Comment:</i>			

## SELF ASSESSMENT

Area	Yes	No
<b>TIME</b>		
Are you able to:		
Devote sufficient time to the work of the Governing Body?		
Attend meetings regularly?		
Attend a good proportion of the important school events?		
<i>Comment:</i>		
<b>MEETINGS</b>		
Do you consider:		
You are adequately briefed before a meeting?		
You have sufficient time to read the briefing papers?		
The business considered is appropriate for governors?		
The discussion is at the appropriate level with a sufficient focus on strategy?		
Outcomes are clear and actioned efficiently?		
Meetings are well run and not too long?		
<i>Comment:</i>		
<b>TRAINING</b>		
Have you attended a training event in the last two years?		
Are there gaps in your knowledge which you wish to fill?		
<i>Comment:</i>		
<b>IMPROVEMENT</b>		
How can the Governing Body operate more effectively?		





## Effective governance for good schools

### Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself

Strong governance is essential for good schools. Yet we know that in too many schools, governing bodies are not effective or confident enough. The key role of governing bodies is to support and challenge headteachers in order to ensure pupils receive the best possible education; governing bodies also need support and challenge. We therefore set out to encourage governors to challenge themselves as the best governing bodies already do.

Together we came up with '20 questions for governing bodies' on which we consulted widely at the very well attended meeting of the All-Party Group on Education Governance and Leadership on 21 May 2012. We wanted to keep the challenges to one page in order to engage as many governing bodies as possible in a simple exercise to reflect on their practice. Governing bodies, especially those which are struggling, can be overwhelmed by too much irrelevant information and we did not want this to become a great big handbook on how to be effective which would be overlooked. Governing bodies have to use their limited time efficiently, and we offer these 20 questions to that end.

These questions should enable every governing body to challenge its own practice and, if the answers derive from a genuine discussion based on the evidence available, decide when and how improvements can be made. There are other resources available to help governing bodies improve.

They are **NOT** attempting to:

- cover every aspect of effective governance,
- give the answers – these can only be obtained from reflecting honestly and fully on current practice in comparison with others,
- replace the good guidance for governing bodies provided by a range of organisations.

While there are some magnificent governing bodies, there are also still some working in isolation without a good understanding of what constitutes effective practice or success. We are therefore suggesting that every school should engage with the '20 questions' and seeking willing organisations to commend them to schools. If your organisation is interested in endorsing and promoting them, please contact [education.governance.appg@nga.org.uk](mailto:education.governance.appg@nga.org.uk).

## Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself

### **Right skills: Do we have the right skills on the governing body?**

1. Have we completed a skills audit of our governing body?
2. Do we appoint governors on the basis of their skills, and do we know how to find people with the necessary skills?

### **Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?**

3. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?
4. Do we have a professional clerk and run meetings efficiently?
5. What is our training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?
6. Do we know about good practice from across the country?
7. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing body conducive to effective working?
8. Does every member of the governing body make a regular contribution and do we carry out an annual review of the governing body's performance?

### **Strategy: Does the school have a clear vision?**

9. Have we developed long-term aims for the school with clear priorities in an ambitious school development plan which is regularly monitored and reviewed?
10. Does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing body's activities and agenda setting?

### **Accountability of the executive: Do we hold the school leaders to account?**

11. Do we understand the school's performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?
12. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?
13. Are our financial management systems robust and do we ensure best value for money?

### **Engagement: Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?**

14. How do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff?
15. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?
16. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

### **Role of chair: Does our chair show strong and effective leadership?**

17. Do we carry out a regular 360 review of the chair's performance?
18. Do we engage in good succession planning?
19. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?

### **Impact: Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?**

20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing body's contribution been to this?