Improving school performance

A guide for school governors

Introduction

School governing bodies exist to help their school deliver the best possible standard of education to all pupils. They are one of the largest volunteer workforces, and around 300,000 people currently serve as governors of the 25,000 mainstream schools in England. School governing bodies have a vital role in supporting school leaders and managing schools' performance, while accounting for the school's actions to the local community.

This guide was first published in May 2006 and was very positively received. Governors commented that they found it a valuable reference to help identify and tackle the issues important to schools' organisation and performance. This revised guide includes up-to-date information and draws your attention to findings from our more recent work in the schools sector.

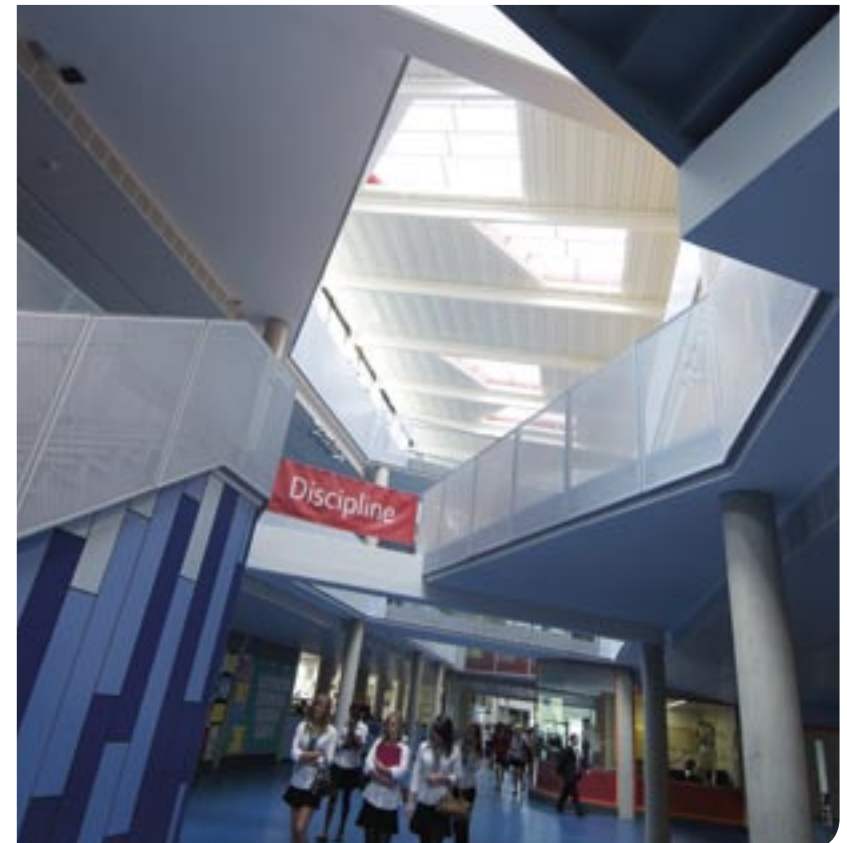The guide is divided into 13 themes. Each theme sets out:

● important questions for governing bodies;

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

● sources of further information and good practice.

The National Governors' Association, the national representative body for school governors, has approved this guide. The guide has also received Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark for clarity.

Crystal Mark 18183
Clarity approved by
Plain English Campaign

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Contents

Governing body

Questions to consider

1 The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Governing Body Decision Planner lists 85 different tasks that governing bodies have to perform. Does your governing body have enough members to carry out all its responsibilities effectively? Do all the subcommittees know exactly what they are supposed to do?

2 Governors bring a wide range of skills and expertise. Has your governing body identified its current strengths and any other skills it should look for in future governors?

3 Do all governors take part in appropriate training events?

4 Does the Chair of Governors meet regularly (at least once a month) with the head teacher to discuss 'nuts and bolts' issues, such as staffing or the local authority's educational priorities?

5 If you have a good school with an effective governing body, do you share your expertise with other schools in your area?

6 Does your governing body know what its and its school's responsibilities are in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act and related laws?

Facts and figures

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

- Strategic planning
- Decision-making
- Project management
- Teamworking
- Financial management
- Human resources
- Communications and marketing
- Law
- Information and communications technology (ICT)
- Buildings and maintenance
- Basic understanding of statistics
- Theories and methods of teaching
- Key areas of the curriculum
- Behaviour management
- Special needs
- Health and safety
- Governors can learn from observing teaching, but remember that they are not there to judge teaching quality. The curriculum (or equivalent) committee of your governing body should use the results of monitoring and observation to assess the school's progress.

Good practice

- For more guidance, visit the Governornet website at www.governornet.co.uk. You can also find the Governing Body Decision Planner, which gives details of the level at which certain responsibilities can be delegated.

See www.governornet.co.uk/linkAttachments/ ACF3EF8.pdf

- Free professional advice is available from Governor Line. Call 0800 0722 181 or visit their website at www.governorline.info

- Most local authorities provide written guidance, formal training, and advice when you need it.

- The 'quality mark for good governance framework' sets out agreed quality standards for governors.

See www.glmpartnership.org/governor_mark.html

School leaders

Questions to consider

1 Does your governing body and school leadership team share a common understanding of the strategic vision for the school?

2 Does your governing body assess the head teacher's performance each year by referring to the school's progress against its published and internal targets? Are their achievements praised enough? Do governors know the procedures to follow when a head teacher is underperforming?

3 Does your governing body consider the balance between the head teacher's work life and home life and review its own practices to help with the head teacher's workload?

4 Is your head teacher developing the leadership skills of senior staff to help build a strong team and make it easier for any new head teacher to take over?

5 Has your head teacher and leadership team assessed the mix of staff skills it will need to teach the Diplomas (secondary schools)?

6 Does your head teacher act quickly enough to deal with cases where staff are underperforming?

Facts and figures

- According to the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), schools need to recruit a head teacher every seven years on average.

- It is compulsory to hold or have a place on National Professional Qualification for Headship to be able to apply for a first headship in the maintained sector. From April 2009 all first-time head teachers must be NPQH graduates.

- Most headships are advertised between January and March, for posts to be filled in September. In 2007-2008, there were 2500 head teacher vacancies advertised in England and Wales. Of these, 101 in secondary schools (26 per cent) and 755 in primaries (37 per cent) had to be re-advertised.

Good practice

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

- The NCSL runs training courses on leadership and management and has resources to help governors find, develop and keep good head teachers.

See www.ncsl.org.uk/tlt-home/tlt-governors/tlt-governorstoolkit.htm

- In our 2006 report, 'Improving poorly performing schools in England', we found that initiatives to improve school leadership and teaching and learning made the greatest contribution to the recovery of schools that were previously performing poorly. The governing body also had to be prepared to support the head teacher to make hard decisions.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0506/improving_poorly_performing_sc.aspx

Evaluating schools

Questions to consider

1   Is your school prepared for an Ofsted inspection at short notice?

2   Ofsted considers it vital for schools to evaluate themselves. Is your school's self-evaluation form (SEF) up to date and ready for Ofsted's next inspection, and has it been reviewed and approved by the governing body?

3   From reading the SEF, do governors know how well the school is achieving the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes?

4   Does your governing body know how self-evaluation has actually improved your school?

5   Does your school make the most effective use of the evaluations from the local authority's School Improvement Partner?

6   Does your school consider its responsibility to justify its actions to people who have an interest in its work, such as parents and the community? Does your school communicate effectively with these people?

Facts and figures

- In 2007-2008, almost two-thirds of maintained schools Ofsted inspected were rated good or outstanding. 9 per cent of secondary schools and 4 per cent of primary schools were judged to be inadequate.

- In 2005, we carried out a survey of schools that had recovered after a poor Ofsted report (schools that had moved out of 'Special Measures' or 'Serious Weaknesses'). 62 per cent of head teachers said that before the Ofsted inspection, the school had not expected a negative outcome.

- A 2008 evaluation of School Improvement Partners found that 44 per cent of secondary head teachers and 25 per cent of primary head teachers felt the partner had been an important influence in changing the schools' approach to self-evaluation, though 28 per cent of secondary head teachers and 33 per cent of primary head teachers did not agree.

- The Government is planning to introduce a school report card, which aims to provide a clearer, more balanced and detailed account of each school's performance.

Good practice

- Ofsted has produced guidance on improving performance through schools' self-evaluation and improvement planning.

See www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Forms-and-guidance/Browse-all-by/Other/General/Improving-performance-through-school-self-evaluation-and-improvement-planning

- Our report, 'Improving poorly performing schools in England', highlights the main ways schools can continue their recovery from when they were underperforming. These include evaluating themselves regularly and honestly, and acknowledging and responding to weaknesses.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0506/improving_poorly_performing_sc.aspx

Recruiting and keeping teachers

Questions to consider

1   Does your school assess its short-term and long-term recruitment needs well in advance, with realistic expectations based on previous trends?

2   Are there proper procedures in place to check that a teacher who has applied for a job meets the relevant requirements and qualifications for that position? Has a nominated governor taken part in the safer recruitment online training programme?

3   When teachers leave the school, does your school gather information on their reasons for leaving, and assess and act on this information?

4   Are teaching staff encouraged to get advice or help if they need it (for example, from mentors or through counselling)?

5   Is your school open to requests from staff who want to work part-time or job-share?

6   Has the governing body planned how to manage the extra strain new projects (such as refurbishing school buildings or providing extended services) can place on teaching staff (for example, by providing cover for lessons, secondments and training)?

Facts and figures

- In January 2008, there were almost 435,000 full-time equivalent teachers in maintained schools.

- Over two-thirds of teaching posts are filled by women (over 80 per cent in primary schools), including nearly three-quarters of classroom teaching posts.

- There were, on average, 5.4 days' sickness absence for each teacher in the maintained sector during 2007.

- Newly qualified teachers may be eligible for up to £5,000 when starting teaching jobs in some subjects where there are shortages, such as mathematics, science and modern languages.

- From September 2009, the Government is introducing a programme designed to encourage more effective teachers to work in the most challenging secondary schools, including a payment of £10,000 in return for three years' service.

Good practice

- The Training and Development Agency for Schools' website has a Continuing Professional Development zone providing resources for school leaders and teachers.

See www.tda.gov.uk and www.tda.gov.uk/leaders/cpdzone.aspx

- Recruitment strategy managers are available in most local authorities to advise schools on issues relating to recruiting and keeping teachers.

- Safer recruitment online training is not compulsory but will help schools show that they have effective recruitment in place that helps make sure pupils are protected.

See www.ncsl.org.uk/managing_your_school-index/safer-recruitment-index.htm

- Teacher Support Network is a group of independent charities that provide practical and emotional support to staff in the education sector and their families.

See www.teachersupport.info

Financial management

Questions to consider

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

2   Do staff and governors have a shared understanding of their financial management roles and responsibilities?

3   Does the school have a realistic and affordable yearly budget which is consistent with longer-term financial plans and development plans?

4   Do governors provide effective challenge where overspending or excessive underspending is carried forward into future years?

5   Does the school keep proper accounting records through the year, and meet the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS)?

6   Does the governing body compare the school's financial performance with that of similar schools locally and nationally?

Facts and figures

- In 2006-2007 the average combined local-authority and school-based spending for each pupil in England was £4,700.

- In 2007-2008, schools in England underspent by a total of £250 million. 38 per cent of all schools fell into the Government's category of having excessive school balances (5 per cent above their yearly income for secondary, 8 per cent for primary).

- In April 2008, a Government review of the Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS), a statement of the characteristics you would expect to find in a school that is well managed financially, found that it is helping to provide a consistent and value-for-money approach to managing resources across schools.

Good practice

- FMSiS is supported by a toolkit that provides best-practice guidance on financial management and can be used to assess your school's position against the standard.

See www.fmsis.info/index.asp

- Teachernet has a tool that allows schools to compare their income and spending with similar schools.

See www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ schoolfunding/schoolfinance

- Through the Department for Children, Schools and Families, all schools are entitled to one day of free, tailored consultancy combining financial and educational expertise.

See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/vfm

- Our 2009 report, 'Financial management in the Department for Children, Schools and Families', provides a national overview of financial performance in the sector. It identifies a link between secondary schools that have overspent and poor performance.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/financial_ management_in_dcsf.aspx

Making learning attractive to pupils

Questions to consider

1 Does your school have effective processes in place to involve pupils in decision-making, such as a school council or pupil access to the governing body?

2 Do these processes represent the views of all pupils, including those from minority groups, those with learning difficulties and those who rarely ask or answer questions?

3 Has your school carried out subject audits to find out how interested and motivated pupils are in lessons and what particular things they like or dislike about the subject?

4 Do teaching staff have regular joint planning meetings to discuss what teaching and learning approaches work best across the curriculum to interest and motivate pupils?

5 Do subject co-ordinators gain access to, and keep up to date with, resources that are proven to involve pupils most effectively in teaching and learning?

6 Do teaching staff have enough training to understand how information and communications technology such as interactive whiteboards can best be used to making learning attractive to pupils?

Facts and figures

- A 2009 National Governors Association survey of 1,400 serving governors found that seven out of 10 governors are in favour of a greater 'pupil voice', including the role of pupils serving as associate members of governing bodies.

- According to a national survey of children across England and Wales in 2008, 81 per cent said that more fun and interesting lessons might help them to do better at school.

- In our 2008 report on primary mathematics, we recommended that the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and other national organisations better direct schools to the resources that are proven to involve pupils most effectively in mathematics learning. Our survey of secondary pupils found that the two main reasons for disliking the subject at primary school were that it was boring and there was no opportunity for practical or group work. The two main reasons for liking the subject were because they had a good teacher and did activities and games.

Good practice

- School Councils UK is an independent charity which promotes effective ways for pupils to take part at school. Its website provides training and resources designed to help develop effective pupil representation.

See www.schoolcouncils.org

- The DCSF produces good-practice guidelines on how to more effectively involve pupils from ethnic-minority groups.

See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities

- The National Strategies provides teaching resources aimed at involving pupils in, and improving their attitudes towards, maths.

See nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/97412?uc=force_uj

- BECTA, the Government's lead agency to promote using technology effectively in schools, provides guidance on how to make the best use of digital learning resources in and outside the classroom.

See www.becta.org.uk

Monitoring pupils' achievements

Questions to consider

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

2 Are your school's achievement targets, which the school leadership team and governing body agree with the local authority, 'stretching' enough for all pupils?

3 If your school is exceeding or not meeting the targets, are there clear reasons why?

4 Do governors and the school leadership team use, and make sure all teaching staff understand, the various sources of information on the school's performance, including Ofsted's RAISEonline reports?

5 Are the systems the school uses to monitor pupils' achievements effective both in identifying pupils who are working at relatively low levels as well as more able pupils who could move on more quickly?

6 Does the school identify subject and year groups' specific strengths and weaknesses and put action plans in place to tackle weaknesses?

Facts and figures

- The DCSF published the following figures for national attainment in English schools in 2008. The table shows rounded percentages of pupils achieving at least the Government's attainment targets.

Primary

Key Stage 1 Level 2 (provisional)		Key Stage 2 Level 4	
Reading	84%	English	81%
Writing	80%	Maths	79%
Maths	90%	Science	88%

Secondary

Key Stage 3 Level 5 (provisional)		Key Stage 4 GCSEs	
English	73%	5 or more A* to C grade GCSEs	65%
Maths	77%		
Science	71%	5 or more A* to C grade GCSEs (including English and maths)	48%

- The Government wants to increase the percentages of pupils who make at least two National Curriculum levels of progress in English and Mathematics at Key Stages 1 and 2, 2 and 3, and 3 and 4. In 2008, 59 per cent of pupils made two levels of progress in English between Key Stages 3 and 4 and 23 per cent did so in mathematics.

Good practice

- Our 2008 report, 'Mathematics Performance in Primary Schools: Getting the Best Results' identifies general best practice in raising pupils' achievement. For example, schools find that systems for monitoring pupils' progress work best when they are simple to use and regularly updated and compare class and year-group profiles against local and national expectations. The best systems also easily identify whether particular interventions by the school to try and raise pupils' achievement have proved successful.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/primary_school_maths.aspx

- The DCSF's target-setting website provides guidance to support the target-setting process at pupil, school and local-authority level. It has also produced a pamphlet, 'Assessing Pupils' Progress'.

See www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ts and www.nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/160703

Pupils' attendance and behaviour

Questions to consider

1   Does your school have a formal and up-to-date strategy for managing and improving behaviour (including tackling bullying) that pupils and staff understand and enforce?

2   Does your school have a strong school attendance policy with a code of practice that provides details of the aims, expectations and responsibilities of the school, parents and carers, and students?

3   Does your school regularly analyse information on behaviour and attendance – for example, comparing authorised and unauthorised absence rates to the national average and to the rates in other local schools?

4   Does your school work closely with the local authority, other schools, and parents and carers to tackle the main causes of more serious behaviour issues and persistent absence?

Facts and figures

- In 2006-2007, 8,600 pupils were permanently excluded from maintained schools, which represent 0.12 per cent of the number of pupils in schools (12 pupils in every 10,000).

- 'Persistent absence' refers to being absent for more than 20 per cent of the school calendar, whether these absences are authorised or unauthorised. The rate of persistent absence in 2007-2008 was 3.6 per cent.

- Pupils who are excluded or persistently absent are much more likely to underachieve at school and leave education by 16. They are also more at risk of experiencing other negative outcomes such as antisocial behaviour, crime, teenage pregnancy and drug and alcohol abuse.

- Our 2008 analysis of young people not in education, employment or training found that those who had left school at 16 or 17 were, when aged 14, more likely to have said that although they worked as hard as they could they felt lessons were a waste of time or boring.

- A 2008 survey of teachers found that only 35 per cent agreed that appropriate training is available for teachers who are struggling to manage pupils' behaviour.

Good practice

- The DCSF's Behaviour and Attendance programme is designed to develop teaching strategies which promote positive behaviour for learning. The programme's website provides resources such as good-practice guidance and case studies.

See nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/inclusion/behaviourattendanceandseal

- Our 2005 report, 'Improving school attendance in England', identifies a number of ways schools and local authorities can work together to achieve and maintain good levels of attendance.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0405/improving_school_attendance.aspx

The 14 to 19 curriculum

Questions to consider

1 Do governors have a full understanding of the school's involvement in the 14 to 19 programme and of your school's vision for all pupils to have access to the curriculum?

2 The 14 to 19 curriculum has consequences for your school's organisation and finances. Do governors know which local partners the school is working with to provide the Diploma qualifications, and how the local 14 to 19 partnership is progressing?

3 Local employers need to be fully involved so pupils gain effective experience of the world of work. Do governors know how well the school and the 14 to 19 partnership are doing at working with local employers?

4 If the programme is to be successful, improved information for pupils and their families on the educational options available is vital. Are pupils and their families well informed, and does the school support them to make the right choices?

Facts and figures

- The main aims of the 14 to 19 programme are to more successfully involve young people in education and training so all of them achieve worthwhile qualifications, and to more effectively relate education to modern employment opportunities and expectations.

- The Diploma qualification is the main change. 14 Diplomas offer general education and applied learning in different occupational areas (for example, engineering and retail). Three subject-based Diplomas in science, languages and humanities are planned.

- Schools will not be able to offer all Diplomas on their own. They need to work in local 14 to 19 partnerships to jointly offer all parts of each qualification to their pupils.

- By 2013, all young people aged 14 to 19 will be entitled to take any of the Diplomas. By this date, all schools must be in a position to offer all Diplomas through the local 14 to 19 partnership.

Good practice

- Our 2007 report, 'Partnering for success: Preparing to deliver the 14-19 education reforms in England' provides a detailed overview of the main risks for schools and 14 to 19 partnerships in delivering the new curriculum.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/preparing_to_deliver_the_14-19.aspx

- The DCSF has developed resources designed to give schools and colleges an overview of the 14 to 19 programme and help prepare for it. These include a specialist briefing session for your school, if you want one.

See www.14-19reforms.co.uk

- The Government's 'Directgov' website provides information for young people on the Diplomas.

See yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas

School building and refurbishment projects

Questions to consider

Planning

1 Does your school have a clear vision and detailed plan for how refurbishing or replacing school buildings and providing new ICT facilities will improve the education of your pupils and increase opportunities for the community?

2 How is your school getting pupils, staff and other people in the community to contribute ideas for improving teaching and learning in new or refurbished spaces?

3 Has a nominated governor and members of your school leadership team been on capital project training provided by National College of School Leadership or a similar body?

Contracts

4 Is your governing body clear about what it wants from the new school buildings and ICT facilities and how to communicate that to contractors bidding to do the work?

5 Is your governing body clear about the level of service the school needs from managed service contractors such as Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contractors, facilities management providers and ICT services?

Constructing the buildings and preparing to use them

6 Has your school planned how all the changes that will be needed to make the most of the new buildings and ICT facilities will be managed (for example, new ways of organising the curriculum, transferring staff, training to use new equipment, promoting use by the community)?

7 How does your governing body hold the school leadership team to account for achieving the expected benefits of the new buildings and ICT facilities and for limiting the risks?

Facts and figures

- The £55 billion Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF) aims to replace or refurbish all 3,500 secondary schools in England, with the vast majority completed by 2020. Nearly a third of all secondary schools are now involved in the programme.

- The targets are that 50 per cent of the school estate will be rebuilt, 35 per cent extensively developed, and the rest refurbished (refurbishment includes providing new ICT equipment).

- Unlike previous school-building programmes, BSF contracts are carried out area-wide by local authorities, and governing bodies will be asked to agree to a joint approach with the local authority and other schools in the area. Schools are funded by grants or PFI funding, typically through a joint venture called a 'Local Education Partnership'.

- The Primary Capital Programme aims to replace at least half of all primary schools by 2023. If a BSF Local Education Partnership has been set up, this might also be used to award contracts for the Primary Capital Programme.

- While the DCSF provides most of the funding for both programmes, schools and local authorities will need to spend some of their budgets for the ICT-managed service and building maintenance.

Good practice

- Our 2009 report on the BSF Programme provides a detailed review of the programme since it began.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/schools_for_the_future.aspx

- Partnerships for Schools, which has national responsibility for delivering the BSF, and the DCSF have published introductory guides on BSF and the Primary Capital Programme.

See the following websites:

www.partnershipsforschools.org.uk/documents/BSF_Guidance_Documents/BSF%20Introductory%20Guide%202008.pdf

www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/12293/Primary%20Capital%20Programme%202008-2022.pdf

- The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the government's advisor on architecture, has case studies of new school buildings.

See www.cabe.org.uk/education

- The Design Quality Indicator for Schools can be used to explore what users would like from a new building and to assess how far new proposals will meet those wishes. You can buy the online tool from the Construction Industry Council.

See www.dqi.org.uk/schools

Working with other schools

Questions to consider

1   Does your school have effective partnerships with other local schools (for example, do you share facilities or organise joint management groups with other head teachers)?

2   Has the governing body considered whether there would be benefits in forming a joint governance committee with another school or possibly becoming a formal federation with a single governing body?

3   In any of these partnerships, are all governors and school leadership teams clear about their commitments to each other?

4   Does your school have effective transition arrangements with other schools for pupils moving from primary into secondary school?

5   Does your school take part in good-practice networks among teachers in the local area, such as peer observations or teacher exchanges?

6   Is your school involved in a partnership with other schools to improve behaviour and persistent absence? If so, how do the schools measure the success of the partnership?

Facts and figures

- A 2007 evaluation of the school federation pilots found that four out of five Chairs of Governors were involved in the decision to become a federation but that both they and their governing bodies were less involved in developing the proposal.

- A 2008 DCSF survey of over 1,000 children making the move from primary to secondary school found that a significant minority (16 per cent) did not feel prepared when they changed schools.

- In a 2008 survey we carried out, a quarter of pupils in Years 7 and 8 said the maths they were currently learning was a lot harder than the maths they learned at primary school.

- Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships have been in place since September 2007, and most schools are now involved.

Good practice

- The DCSF's and the Innovation Unit's school federation websites provide background material and case studies on the various types of federation, from informal through to arrangements in place by law.

See the following websites:

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations

http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/education-experience/project-archive/federations-in-practice.html

- In our report, 'Primary Mathematics', we found that, in preparing pupils for the transition from primary to secondary education, 'bridging units' of work between Key Stage 2 and 3, induction and taster days, joint teaching and social events, and visits to schools by potential teachers improve the transition experience.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/primary_school_maths.aspx

Working with the wider community

Questions to consider

1   Does your school provide access to the core extended services for pupils, families and the community it serves? In providing these extra services, has the leadership team planned extra capacity to support the pressures on existing teaching staff?

2   Does your school know what effect the extended services it provides access to is having on the outcomes for pupils and their families?

3   Does your school have effective ways of involving families in their children's learning and development, including providing them with information they can understand?

4   Does your school make links with other children's service providers and other local organisations to improve learning and pupils' well-being?

Facts and figures

● All schools are expected to provide the core offer of extended services by 2010. This offer includes childcare (in primary and special schools), study support, sport and music clubs, access to specialist services, parenting support, and giving the community access to facilities. Schools are not expected to provide these services alone, or necessarily to deliver them on-site.

● At the start of 2009, over 15,000 schools provided the core offer, which represents around two-thirds of all maintained schools. An Ipsos MORI survey of 1,900 extended schools found that over half provided the services as part of a cluster of schools.

● In 2008, we found that 15 per cent to 20 per cent of adults do not have basic numeracy skills. Adult learning difficulties can sometimes limit schools' efforts to involve parents in their children's learning.

Good practice

● The National Governors Association has produced an extended services toolkit specifically for governors.

See www.nga.org.uk/uploads/ESGOVTK.pdf

● The Parents Centre website provides information for parents on how to help with learning. For example, there are tips on how parents can help their children plan their homework and what to do when a child is having difficulty keeping up at school.

See www.parentscentre.gov.uk

● In our 2008 report, 'Adult Literacy and Numeracy', we found that family literacy and numeracy programmes taking place at school have proved successful in involving hard-to-reach learners.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/skills_for_life_progress_in_i.aspx

Working with universities and higher-education institutions

Questions to consider

1   Does your governing body know how many pupils from your school progress onto higher education? Does your school know the reasons why certain pupils are less likely to do so and whether it may be partly due to their attitudes towards higher education?

2   Has your school developed strong links with local universities and other higher-education institutions? For example, does your school take part in university outreach activities, run compact schemes or have a one-to-one student-to-pupil mentoring programme in place?

3   For any higher-education activities the school does take part in, does the governing body know how many pupils take part, how they are selected and what they gain from their experiences?

4   Can pupils and their families gain access to suitable information and advice on higher-education options and the appropriate choice of school-level qualifications? Do teaching staff have an up-to-date understanding of the qualification routes into higher education?

Facts and figures

- The Government wants more young people to progress from school to higher education, particularly those from under-represented groups. It has a target of 50 per cent of young people progressing to higher education. The provisional figure for 2007-08 was 43 per cent.

- Low educational achievement, as well as low aims and expectations from pupils, parents and teachers, can all prevent pupils from considering higher education as an option.

- Higher-education institutions offer a range of outreach activities to schools and pupils to tackle misleading ideas about higher education and encourage applications, often through the national Aimhigher programme. The Government wants every secondary school to be linked with at least one university.

- Some schools have compact schemes with universities. These give special consideration to pupils' circumstances. Pupils who can show wider evidence of the potential to study successfully may be given lower entry qualification offers for certain courses.

Good practice

- Our 2008 report, 'Widening participation in higher education', provides an overview of the Government's efforts to encourage a wider range of people to apply to higher education.

See www.nao.org.uk/publications/0708/widening_participation_in_high.aspx

- The Government's 'Directgov' website provides information for young people on higher education.

See www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/index.htm

- The Aimhigher website contains information about the programme and its activities.

See www.aimhigher.ac.uk/programme/home

Roles of the National Audit Office and the National Governors' Association

We, the National Audit Office (NAO), scrutinise public spending on Parliament's behalf. We audit the accounts of all Government departments and agencies, as well as a wide range of other public bodies, and report to Parliament on the economy (limiting costs), efficiency and how effectively government bodies have used public money. Our work does not question the merits of the policies, but assesses the way government policies are put into practice. We are totally independent of the Government, and our work saves taxpayers millions of pounds every year.

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

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Email: enquiries@nao.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.nao.org.uk

The National Governors' Association (NGA) is an independent charity that supports and promotes good governance in schools. Working with a range of partners to help governors carry out their responsibilities, it provides information and guidance on good practice and education policy and runs national and regional events. The NGA also represents the views of its members at a national level.

National Governors' Association
Email: governorhq@nga.org.uk
Website: www.nga.org.uk

Feedback form

We and the National Governors' Association hope that this guide is useful for you. **We want to hear how useful you found it, so please send us your response electronically at www.nao.org.uk/governorsfeedback**

If you are unable to send a response electronically please send your written comments using the form below, after discussing this booklet with your colleagues on the governing body.

Please send filled-in forms to: Jonathan Mackay, National Audit Office, 151 Buckingham Palace Road, Victoria, London, SW1W 9SS.

Name:

School name:

School address:

1 How did you find the booklet useful? (Please tick.)

☐ Very useful

☐ Quite useful

☐ Not useful

2 Will you use it to help change the way that your school works? (Please tick.)

☐ Yes, I will use it to a large extent

☐ Yes, I will use it to some extent

☐ No, I will not use it

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

☐ Governing body

☐ School leaders

☐ Evaluating the school

☐ Recruiting and keeping teachers

☐ Financial management

☐ Making learning attractive to pupils

☐ Monitoring pupils' achievements

☐ Pupil attendance and behaviour

☐ The 14 to 19 curriculum

☐ School building and refurbishment projects

☐ Working with other schools

☐ Working with the wider community

☐ Working with universities and higher-education institutions

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