



Northern Ireland
Audit Office

School Governance

A Good Practice Guide

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Foreword

The education system in Northern Ireland is complex with a number of different school types and managing authorities. However, the common factor is that every grant-aided school is managed by a Board of Governors that works alongside the school principal to ensure the best use of the school's resources and the best outcomes for learners.

Whilst the size and composition of a Board of Governors varies depending on a number of factors, including the type of school, the role of a governor carries with it a core set of statutory and other responsibilities.

It is essential that Boards of Governors are fully aware of their role and responsibilities and that they ensure there are effective governance arrangements in place within their school.

This guide is intended to provide useful guidance on best practice in school governance to those governors who give up their time freely to undertake this demanding role. Equally the guide should help encourage those interested in school governance to understand and enter into the role of a school governor.

Dorinnia Carville

Comptroller and Auditor General

4 July 2023



List of Abbreviations

CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
DE	Department of Education
EA	Education Authority
EOTAS	Education other than at school
ESaGS	'Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GMI	Grant Maintained Integrated
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NGA	National Governance Association
NI	Northern Ireland
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NIPSO	Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
PRSD	Performance Review and Staff Development
SDP	School Development Plan
The Order	The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986
VGS	Voluntary Grammar School

Part One:

Introduction

Introduction

- 1.1** Northern Ireland has a complex educational system, with a range of bodies involved in its management and administration.
- 1.2** Apart from 14 independent schools which receive no state funding, all schools in Northern Ireland are grant-aided. **Figure 1** shows the five types of grant-aided school and the managing authority for each type.

Figure 1: Schools and Managing Authorities within the Northern Ireland education system

School Type	Managing Authority
Controlled (including Controlled Integrated)	Education Authority
Catholic Maintained	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
Voluntary Grammar	Board of Governors
Grant Maintained Integrated	Board of Governors
Other Maintained	Board of Governors

Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

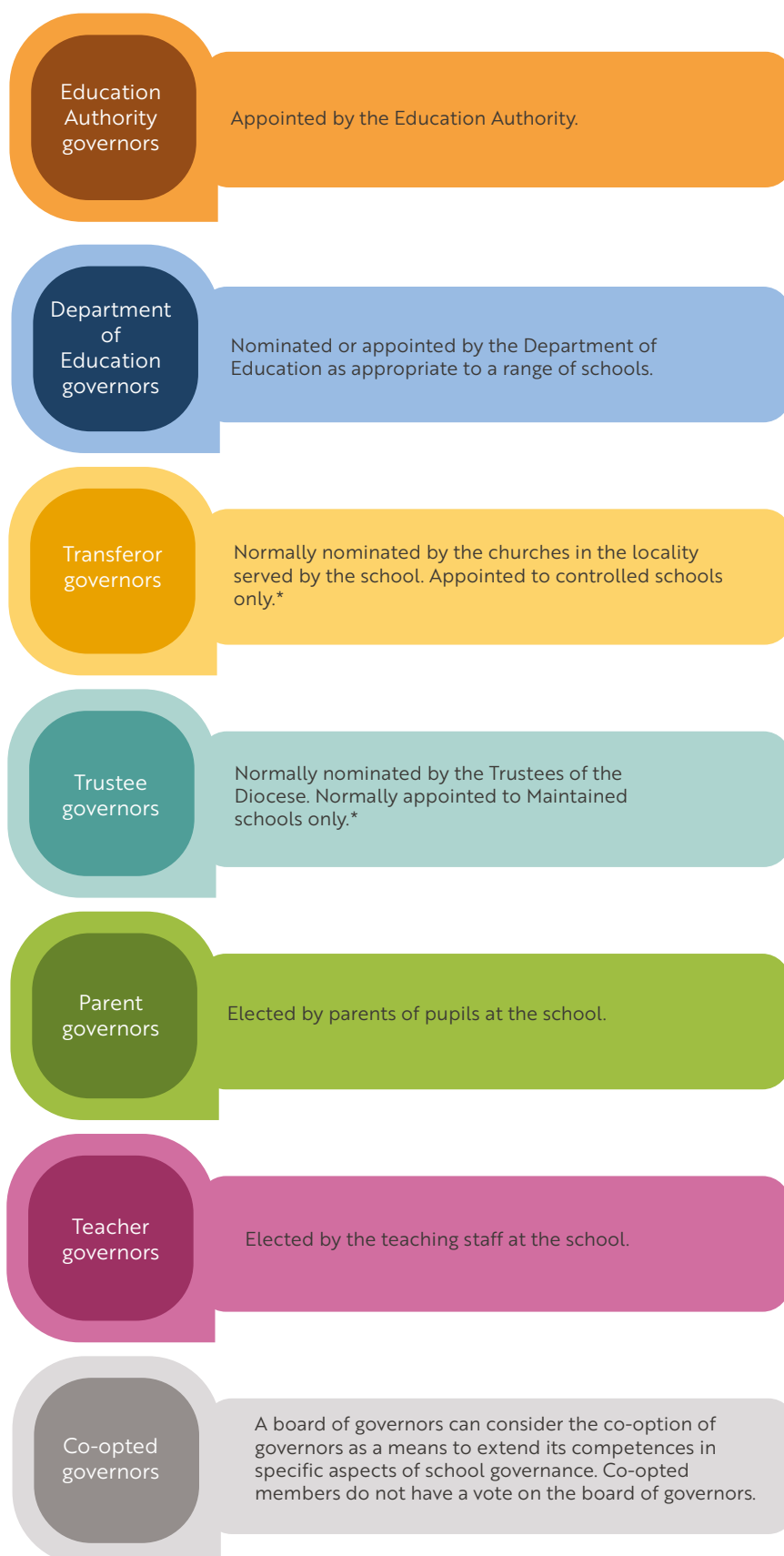
A Board of Governors

- 1.3** Regardless of the school type, every grant-aided school in Northern Ireland is managed by a Board of Governors that works alongside the school principal to meet the educational needs of the school's pupils.
- 1.4** Governors are the key strategic decision makers in schools and therefore have a vital role to play in improving and sustaining school and pupil performance and ensuring that resources are used well to give every child the best possible education.
- 1.5** There are currently around 11,000 school governors in Northern Ireland. The role of a governor is a voluntary position and brings with it various statutory responsibilities to ensure the best outcomes for learners.
- 1.6** Our guide is intended to offer advice to enhance and improve the effectiveness of governance within a Board of Governors, drawing on current guidance and best practice.

Composition of a Board of Governors

- 1.7** The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 (The Order), as amended by The Education (NI) Order 1997, and The Education Reform Northern Ireland Order 1989 set out the size and composition of the Board of Governors. The size of the Board of Governors varies from 8 to 36 depending on a number of factors, including the type of school and the percentage of capital grant received (see **Annex 1**).
- 1.8** The Order also states that “Except with the approval of the Department, no person shall at the same time hold office as a member of more than three Boards of Governors of grant aided schools.”
- 1.9** The legislation aims to ensure that the composition of each Board of Governors includes representation from each key stakeholder group, with the exception of co-opted members who do not have voting rights (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 2: Key Stakeholder Groups



* Controlled Integrated Schools will have both Transferor and Trustee governors

Source: Adapted from Membership Explained, Education Authority

Challenges

- 1.10** Accountability to the Department of Education (DE) or the Education Authority (EA) for public money, and for ensuring the best outcomes for learners, is placed on governors. This brings with it numerous statutory and other responsibilities, yet governors are unpaid, acting in a voluntary capacity. This can lead to several challenges, including:
- It is difficult for schools to establish and retain a diverse group of governors with the mix of skills and experience required;
 - The scope of duties expected of governors is complex, wide-ranging and increasing;
 - The time commitment required can discourage potential volunteers; and
 - There is a risk of nepotism, favouring relatives or friends for teaching positions.
- 1.11** In order to address the above challenges, a Board of Governors needs to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for effective governance of a school.

Effective governance

- 1.12** We published '[Board Effectiveness – A Good Practice Guide](#)' in June 2022 which highlighted effective governance practices for public sector Boards. There are many similarities between school Board of Governors and public sector Boards and we have drawn upon the practical advice contained in the Board Effectiveness guide in the preparation of this School Governance guide.
- 1.13** Our research has identified six key components that are essential for good governance and which allow a team of diverse, multi-skilled individuals to establish a highly effective governing team (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3: Six components of good governance

Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

1.14 Further details of the six components of good governance identified in **Figure 3** are set out below:

1. Getting the right people

Getting the right people from the outset means recruiting diverse individuals who possess the skills, experience and personal attributes required for effective governance (see **Part Two**).

2. Understanding the role

Understanding the role and responsibilities and undertaking training to keep knowledge up-to-date will provide governors with the best tools to effectively govern (see **Part Three**).

3. A strong chairperson

It is vital for the chairperson of a Board of Governors to be a leader who shows commitment, is motivated and focussed on achieving the best outcomes for learners, and promotes good practice (see **Part Four**).

4. Accountability

The Board of Governors must hold the principal and other school leaders to account and provide a robust challenge function to ensure that the right decisions are made (see **Part Four**).

5. Professional administration

The conduct of Board of Governors meetings, including decisions made and the reasons for those decisions, must be clearly documented, to demonstrate that the Board of Governors has acted in the best interests of learners (see **Part Four**).

6. Evaluation

A process should be in place for the self-evaluation of individual governors and the collective Board of Governors, to identify areas for improvement and the action required to address these (see **Part Five**).

1.15

The role of a school governor can be demanding but it is also rewarding. Effective governance allows governors to make a positive impact on the school and the outcomes for its learners. One of the key elements of effective governance is getting the right people around the table in the first instance. This is considered further in **Part Two**.

Part Two:

Getting the right people

Getting the right people

- 2.1 Given the wide range of Board of Governors responsibilities, it is essential that a Board of Governors is made up of a team of diverse, highly skilled and suitably experienced governors. This begins with appointing/nominating the right people from the outset.
- 2.2 The EA has identified a number of personal attributes of a good governor – see **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: What makes a good governor?



Source: [Why become a school governor?](#) Education Authority

- 2.3 The seven principles of public life, referred to as the Nolan principles, are at the core of good governance for any public organisation or body and are set out in **Figure 5**. As school governors are accountable for public money and ensuring the best outcomes for pupils, every governor should act in accordance with these principles.

Figure 5: The seven principles of public life

Integrity

Governors must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.



Openness

Governors should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.



Objectivity

Governors must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.



Accountability

Governors are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions with respect to public money and achieving the best outcome for learners, and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.



Leadership

Governors should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.



Honesty

It is expected that governors are truthful.



Selflessness

Governors should act solely in terms of the public interest without being influenced by personal preferences.

Source: Adapted from [The seven principles of public life, The Committee on Standards in Public Life, May 1995](#)

- 2.4** One way to raise awareness of the Nolan principles is to incorporate the principles in a school governor code of conduct (see **Part Three**) which would be distributed to, and signed by, governors annually. This will demonstrate governors' commitment to high ethical values and increase credibility with stakeholders.
- 2.5** Key factors that should be considered when forming a Board of Governors include:
- legislative requirements (see **paragraph 1.7** and **Annex 1**);
 - skills and experience; and
 - diversity

Skills and experience

- 2.6** School governors can bring a wide range of skills and competencies from their working and personal lives to the role. They are not required to have a particular professional skill set, just an interest in education, some free time and commitment to the role.
- 2.7** Whilst it is not necessary for governors to possess specific professional qualifications, having governors with a range of professional skills makes it easier for the Board of Governors to fulfil its statutory duties, demonstrate accountability for public money and ensure the best education and educational outcomes for children. The Department of Education has identified a range of professional skills and experience that are useful when operating a Board of Governors (see **Figure 6**).

Figure 6: Useful professional skills and experience for a Board of Governors



Professional skills and experience

- leading or managing people
- planning and organising
- experience of having attended and contributed to meetings
- change management
- involvement in recruitment processes and human resource management
- dealing with legal issues
- PR/marketing/social media
- the ability to understand financial information and reports
- the ability to analyse statistical/numerical information
- budget management experience
- contribution to problem-solving

Source: Department of Education

- 2.8** There is no expectation that an individual governor must be a qualified professional or that they will have all the skills listed above. For example, whilst an individual governor may not be a qualified professional, they may have experience running their own business for many years and as such have a well-rounded knowledge of financial, legal and human resource

management. The key point is that, collectively, a Board of Governors should possess the range of skills and experience required to ensure effective governance of each school.

- 2.9** It is not just professional skills that are required for a Board of Governors to be effective. Other skills and experience are just as valuable, such as interpersonal skills and experience supporting outcomes for children and young people (see **Figure 7**).

Figure 7: Other useful skills and experience for a Board of Governors



Interpersonal skills

- the ability to work as part of a team taking collective responsibility for decision making
- the ability to develop and maintain co-operative working relationships
- the ability to question, support and challenge
- effective communication skills, including tact and diplomacy
- the ability to maintain confidentiality when handling governance issues



Experience supporting outcomes for children and young people

- a commitment to improving education for all pupils
- working or volunteering with children and young people
- involvement with your local community
- knowledge or understanding of the education system in Northern Ireland

Source: Department of Education

- 2.10** Whilst representation from the local community is important to ensure that the Board of Governors is aware of issues impacting on pupils' learning experience, skills and experience of potential governors are equally important.

Diversity

- 2.11** Where possible, applications or nominations for school governor positions should be welcomed from all sections of the community regardless of background, religious belief, gender, disability, ethnic origin, political opinion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether or not they have dependants.
- 2.12** It is important to recognise and promote diversity on each Board of Governors when appointing/nominating or succession planning (see **paragraph 2.21** and **Annex 2** for how to use a Board Overview Matrix to help governors do this). With a diverse group of people on a Board of Governors, different viewpoints and perspectives can encourage change and innovation, leading to improvements in the experiences and outcomes for learners.

The Recruitment Process

- 2.13** How a governor is appointed or nominated depends on their governor category. Parent and teacher governors are elected by parents and teachers respectively. Foundation, transferor and trustee governors are nominated by representatives of the key stakeholders of the school, while DE and EA appoint general members of the public with an interest in education as education system governors.
- 2.14** Board of Governors of controlled and maintained schools are usually reconstituted every four years (or when required) or when members complete their term of office. Recruiting appropriate individuals to fulfil the role of a governor can be challenging as the role can involve a lot of responsibility for a voluntary position. As a result, demand for good governors can sometimes outweigh supply.
- 2.15** Where appropriate, it is best practice to promote governor vacancies publicly. This can be done through advertising, social media or by connecting with the local community through organisations or churches. It allows a wider pool of potential governors to be reached, increasing the likelihood of creating a more diverse Board of Governors with a wide range of expertise and avoiding the risk of stagnation.
- 2.16** During the appointment process, it is useful to be alert to any potential conflicts of interest that may exist, or are likely to arise, between governors, the principal and staff, so these can be managed from the outset.
- 2.17** It is important that the role of school governor and the time commitment required are made clear to potential governors during the recruitment process. Even the most enthusiastic and willing governor may be discouraged if they have not fully understood what is required before taking on the role.
- 2.18** Existing Board of Governors can direct potential governors to the DE and EA publication [Becoming a school governor, Department of Education and Education Authority, December 2020](#), supplementing this with any school-specific material and a realistic estimate of the time commitment required for that school.

Succession Planning

- 2.19** The term of office of voting and co-opted members is normally a specified period of not more than four years. However, '[Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019](#) allows for governors to be re-appointed for a further consecutive four-year term. Therefore, **it is strongly encouraged that all governors only serve two terms in office, that is, a maximum of eight years.**
- 2.20** Succession planning is about ensuring continuity within an organisation and, in the context of the Board of Governors, that:
- the size and composition of the Board of Governors complies with legislative requirements (see **paragraph 1.7** and **Annex 1**); and
 - new governors are recruited and existing governors developed to ensure that the collective Board of Governors always has the required skills and knowledge for effective governance.

- 2.21** Board of Governors may find it useful to use a Board Overview Matrix as part of their succession planning, which lists each governor, the date their term of office expires and their demographics, skills and expertise. Completion of a Board Overview Matrix, an example of which is included at **Annex 2**, will also aid identification of any skills gaps.
- 2.22** Boards of Governors should address any vacancies as soon as possible by arranging for elections to be held or by promptly notifying the managing authority or other body responsible for filling vacancies. The aim is to ensure there are sufficient governors available to make up the quorum required for decision making, in line with the scheme of management (see **paragraphs 4.28 to 4.32**).
- 2.23** In situations where a Board of Governors is fully replaced with new individuals, it is important that a robust handover mechanism is in place to allow new governors to quickly grasp the current issues facing the school. This can be done by providing each new governor with copies of minutes of recent meetings and the latest set of school accounts, together with the School Development Plan (see **paragraphs 3.12 to 3.15**).



Good Governance Recap – Getting the right people

- All governors should act in accordance with the seven principles of public life (the Nolan principles).
- Three factors should be considered when forming a Board of Governors:
 - legislative requirements;
 - skills and experience; and
 - diversity.
- Where possible, it is best practice to: promote governor vacancies publicly; identify potential conflicts of interest from the outset; and ensure the time commitment is made clear to all potential governors.
- Governors should only serve two terms in office, that is, a maximum of eight years.
- Completing a Board Overview Matrix will identify any current or potential skills gaps and aid succession planning.

Part Three:

Understanding the role

Understanding the role

Roles and responsibilities

- 3.1** A school governor is a voluntary position. Our discussions with governors and managing authorities revealed that governors had differing levels of understanding as to what was expected of them when they took up the role of a governor. Many did not realise that the role involved obtaining a good understanding of the school, as well as attending training and preparation time outside of meetings.
- 3.2** Details of the key roles and responsibilities of governors in Northern Ireland are set out in **Annex 3** and in the DE document 'Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019).
- 3.3** School governance should be manageable within 10 to 20 days per year, a benchmark borrowed from the wider charity sector (School Governance 2019, National Governance Association, 2019). This includes training time, meetings and performance of any other actions required. Governors should be aware of the time commitment that may be required prior to appointment.
- 3.4** There are several documents that can help governors understand their role and promote good governance:
- the school Scheme of Management (legislative requirements and statutory functions to be carried out by governors);
 - a governor Code of Conduct (expectations placed on governors and the commitment required from them); and
 - the School Development Plan (strategic plan for developing the school).

A Scheme of Management

- 3.5** Every school must act in accordance with a Scheme of Management. The scheme sets out the statutory functions to be exercised by the Board of Governors and the principal, as well as guidelines for managing the school. This can help provide clarity around the roles of the governors, the chairperson and the principal, and diffuse any frustrations caused by role uncertainty.
- 3.6** The Scheme of Management to be used depends on the type of school. The approved Schemes of Management that controlled schools and Catholic maintained schools must comply with are available on the respective managing authority websites. Model schemes are also available for other types of schools.
- 3.7** The Scheme of Management allows the Board of Governors to establish committees and to delegate some functions to a committee or to the principal. However, the functions that should not be delegated by the Board of Governors are outlined in **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: Functions which must not be delegated by a Board of Governors



The following functions must not be delegated by the Board of Governors:

- preparation and revision of the School Development Plan
- annual budget proposals
- school's financial plans
- levels of expenditure that may be authorised by a committee, the principal, or a bursar
- arrangements for the investigation of financial irregularities
- school's admissions criteria
- a proposal to change the status, character, or size of the school
- co-opting of governors and the appointment of parent governors
- appointment of the chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Board of Governors
- determination of staffing complements including the appointment, suspension, the cessation of a suspension, the dismissal, and the outcome of an appeal against the dismissal of the principal and teachers
- matters which relate to duties with respect to the curriculum
- provision and publication of information
- statement of general principles concerning pupil discipline
- annual report of the Board of Governors
- charging and remissions policies
- matters relating to the Board of Governors policy on the provision of education for pupils with special educational needs
- convening of Board of Governors meetings
- measures to be taken at the school with a view to protecting pupils from abuse

Source: Scheme for the Management of Controlled Schools, Education Authority, 2021 and Scheme of Management for Catholic Maintained Schools, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, 2005

3.8

The Board of Governors is required to operate in accordance with the Scheme of Management which reflects good management, practices and procedures. The principal should provide every new governor with a copy of the Scheme of Management for the school on their appointment ('Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019) and every governor must sign a declaration of their acceptance of the Scheme.

Governor Code of Conduct

- 3.9** Whilst there is currently no statutory requirement for a Code of Conduct, it is good practice for a Board of Governors to adopt a Code of Conduct which clearly sets out the expectations placed on governors and the commitment required from them to properly carry out their responsibilities. A Code of Conduct can encourage ethical behaviours and decision-making by promoting a common understanding and, should any difficulties arise, highlight the values that governors agreed to uphold when they took on the role.
- 3.10** A Code of Conduct is typically centred around the seven Nolan principles of public life (see **Figure 5**). Examples of the commitments which governors should agree to in a Code of Conduct are set out in **Figure 9**.

Figure 9: Code of Conduct Commitments



Code of Conduct Commitments

- Establishing the strategic direction of the school ✓
- Meeting statutory duties ✓
- Ensuring accountability ✓
- Ensuring financial probity ✓
- Ethical behaviours and decision-making ✓
- Confidentiality ✓
- Declaring any conflicts of interest ✓

Source: Adapted from Effective Governance for High Quality Education, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, April 2015

- 3.11** Where prepared, the Code of Conduct should be signed annually, ideally at the first meeting of the school year, to ensure that all governors are aware of it and agree to be bound by it.

School Development Plan

- 3.12** Articles 13 and 90(3) of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 require a Board of Governors to prepare a School Development Plan (SDP) which should be developed in accordance with The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. **This role cannot be delegated to a committee or the principal.**
- 3.13** The SDP should set the school's educational priorities, the main measures it will take to raise standards, the resources dedicated to these and the key outcomes and targets it intends to achieve.
- 3.14** The SDP should also provide a statement of the school's ethos and an assessment of any challenges and opportunities facing the school.

3.15 Rather than rolling forward previous versions of the SDP, the legislation states that, when preparing the SDP, the Board of Governors must:

- consult the principal;
- consider any guidance provided by DE, EA and, in the case of Catholic maintained schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS); and
- consider the findings of any inspection of the school.

Training

3.16 Each governor will have differing levels of knowledge, skills and experience. In addition, the environment within which governors operate is ever-changing. Consequently, training and development is essential to ensure that governors understand the role and continue to provide effective governance.

3.17 Although not mandatory, induction training is an integral part of building a strong Board of Governors to ensure that governors, including chairpersons, are aware of their roles and responsibilities from the outset and how to carry them out effectively. Therefore, it is important that induction training is undertaken on a timely basis.

3.18 It is useful for new governors to be provided with an induction pack specific to the school, containing, as a minimum, the items in **Figure 10**.

Figure 10: Board of Governors Induction Pack Checklist



An Induction Pack should include:

- information about the school, its staff, pupils, environment and the local community
- the Scheme of Management
- the School Development Plan
- the Code of Conduct (where prepared)
- copies of recent minutes to make governors aware of any ongoing issues

Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

3.19 With the exception of “The Safeguarding Role of the Chairperson and Designated Governor” training which is required once every term of office, all governor training is voluntary and individual governors are responsible for identifying their own ongoing training and development needs. The level of training being undertaken by governors varies across schools and individuals. By taking part in a governor self-evaluation process, governors can identify any areas for development and subsequently attend any relevant training courses. Further information on self-evaluation is included in **Part Five**.

3.20 The chairperson can play a key role in developing the Board of Governors as a whole by encouraging new governors to undertake induction training; circulating essential guidance for all governors to read and discuss; identifying gaps in knowledge through the evaluation process; ensuring governors attend training in areas where gaps have been identified; and monitoring the impact that the training has on the effectiveness of the Board of Governors.

- 3.21** The EA oversees the provision of training for all governors in Northern Ireland. Following the disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EA delivers its annual training and support programme for governors through an online portal and offers a wide range of courses including Effective Governance; Complaints Handling; Shared Education; Finance; Recruitment and Selection; Understanding Diversity and Inclusion; Employee Relations; and other courses specific to schools. Other education bodies may also deliver additional training.
- 3.22** In addition to the “The Safeguarding Role of the Chairperson and Designated Governor” training (see **paragraph 3.19**), the following training courses are highly recommended and it is useful for at least one governor on every Board of Governors to have attended them:
- The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (NI) 2016: Training for School Governors;
 - GDPR, Data Security & Personal Data Breach Management;
 - Planning for Sustainability; and
 - Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (2016) NI – The Role of Governors.
- 3.23** Inclusion of training and development as a standing agenda item on each Board of Governors meeting will ensure that it is considered on an on-going basis and that progress is being made against any training action plans.

Sharing Knowledge

- 3.24** Training and development does not have to be limited to EA training courses. It may also include reading updated guidance or sharing knowledge with other governors. It can also be beneficial for governors to look outside their own school for examples of how other Board of Governors have implemented good governance principles and practices.
- 3.25** Internal training, provided by either the principal or other governors, is a simple, cost effective way of circulating information, sharing knowledge and focussing on issues specific to the school. For example, if one governor is a local business person with experience in analysing financial information, they could provide a financial awareness training session for the other governors, to help improve decision-making about the school’s finances.
- 3.26** It may also be useful to appoint a longer serving governor to act as a mentor to each new governor, to provide support and help with any queries they may have.



Good Governance Recap – Understanding the role

- Potential governors need to be aware of their role and responsibilities and the time commitment involved (between 10 and 20 days per year).
- Every school must act in accordance with a Scheme of Management which sets out the statutory functions to be exercised by the Board of Governors and principal.
- It is good practice for a Board of Governors to adopt a Code of Conduct.
- The Board of Governors must prepare a school development plan. This function cannot be delegated to a committee or the principal.
- Training and development of a Board of Governors needs to be considered on an on-going basis.

Part Four:

The Board of Governors in operation

The Board of Governors in operation

- 4.1** Three of the six components of good governance identified in **Figure 3** are key to the day-to-day operation of a Board of Governors: a strong chairperson; accountability; and professional administration.

A strong chairperson

- 4.2** It is vital for the chairperson of a Board of Governors to be a leader who shows commitment, is motivated and focussed on achieving the best outcomes for learners, and promotes good practice. Therefore, it is important that care is taken when electing a chairperson.
- 4.3** At the first meeting of each newly-constituted Board of Governors the voting members should elect or re-elect a Chairperson and a vice Chairperson from among those governors who are not members of staff. Whilst the timescales for appointment of a Chair set out in schools' Scheme of Management may vary, re-election every two years would allow governors to seriously consider whether the existing chairperson remains the most appropriate for the position, and can encourage diversity and bring fresh ideas to the table.
- 4.4** The chairperson should be appointed based on their skills and experience as the best person for the job. When electing a chairperson, governors should consider the skills and qualities of each individual and carefully base their decision on this, rather than settling for someone who has been there the longest or who is most vocal. Our '[Board Effectiveness – A Good Practice Guide](#)' highlights the key characteristics of a good chairperson (see **Figure 11**).

Figure 11: Key characteristics of a good chairperson



The right motivation – The chairperson needs to be clearly and unambiguously focused on achieving the best outcomes for learners and success for the school.



Commitment and engagement – The chairperson needs to devote the necessary time and energy. Being a successful chairperson is much more than preparing for and running board meetings. A chairperson needs to maintain regular dialogue with the principal, have a presence in the school and connect with the senior leadership team, keep other governors abreast of developments and cultivate external relationships which provide useful links for the school. However, they need to be mindful of overstepping the boundaries of their role and becoming too involved in the day-to-day operation of the school.



Well-developed interpersonal skills – Being a chairperson is about leadership, not dominance. The chairperson needs to be able to build and motivate the Board of Governors, forge an effective working relationship with the principal that is simultaneously collaborative and challenging, and adapt their style to reflect the needs of different situations. Being a chairperson is as much about emotional intelligence as intellectual intelligence.



Effective operation of the board – The chairperson has a key responsibility for setting the right agenda (i.e. needs to ensure the Board of Governors spends its time on the right issues), managing the Board of Governors to enable collaborative and robust discussion of the issues, and summarising and synthesising the strands of discussion to determine a conclusion and an agreed set of actions.

Source: [NIAO Good Practice Guide - Board Effectiveness \(June 2022\)](#)

- 4.5** It is important that a chairperson is fully aware of their role and responsibilities, to ensure that their conduct and the decisions they make are in accordance with these. A strong chairperson will have good interpersonal skills and can build an effective team by ensuring that all governors are encouraged to participate fully in Board of Governors and committee meetings.
- 4.6** The chairperson is responsible for overseeing conduct at Board of Governors meetings and ensuring that meetings run in accordance with the Scheme of Management. They need to be well informed about relevant education issues, both locally and nationally, and share this information with other governors.
- 4.7** The chairperson should develop the knowledge, confidence and skills of all governors by sharing good practice and lessons learned, championing Board of Governors self-evaluation and taking action to address any issues identified.
- 4.8** The standard term of office for all categories of governors is four years (see **paragraph 2.19**). Consequently, there is a need for succession planning (see **paragraphs 2.20 to 2.23**) and conversations about who will succeed the current chairperson as soon as the Board of Governors becomes aware that the existing chairperson plans to vacate the position.

Accountability

- 4.9** A key function of school governors is to hold the principal to account for the quality of education and how the school's funds are managed. The development of an effective working relationship between the Board of Governors and the principal is vital if the school is to operate successfully.
- 4.10** Under the Local Management of Schools (LMS), schools receive a budget allocation calculated using the Common Funding formula. This budget allocation is delegated to Board of Governors and Principals to enable them to manage schools effectively by using the resources to meet the needs and priorities they have identified.
- 4.11** The delegation of financial and management responsibilities to Boards of Governors remains at the heart of LMS. The Board of Governors of each school should pay particular attention to the principles of good financial management, including:
- ensuring that expenditure is contained within the approved budget; and
 - that proper attention is paid to the efficient and effective management of all the school's resources and expenditure, capital assets, equipment and staff so that public funds are not put at risk and that value for money and other financial considerations are taken into account in reaching decisions and in their execution.
- 4.12** Whilst the Board of Governors determines how the school's financial budget should be allocated, the principal is responsible for day-to-day spending decisions and must ensure that proper financial records are kept and regularly presented to the Board of Governors.
- 4.13** Schools may raise extra funds through sponsorship schemes, voluntary contributions from parents and fund-raising activities. Schools are required to hold separate accounts for these non-public funds and the standard of accounting for and control of these funds should be as stringent as those required for public funds ('Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August (2019)).

- 4.14** Effective Boards of Governors need to know the school's financial position and make informed decisions regarding the use of resources and the allocation of funds to improve outcomes for pupils. This will also ensure that public money is utilised efficiently and in the best interest of the organisation (A Competency Framework for Governance, Department for Education, 2017).
- 4.15** Governance is most effective when governors understand and apply appropriately their challenge function, holding senior and middle leaders to account for the quality of learning and teaching and the outcomes attained (The Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18, The Education and Training Inspectorate, 2018). Therefore, governors should not simply "rubber stamp" the principal's decisions, but question and challenge the principal when appropriate, ensuring that they have obtained satisfactory information and documentary evidence to support decision making.
- 4.16** It is important that governors understand the distinction between governance and management. Governors are not expected to involve themselves in day-to-day management of a school but rather provide support and challenge to the principal and senior leadership team.
- 4.17** Board of Governors should ensure that clear expectations/targets have been set for improving the educational performance of pupils and that systems are in place to monitor performance against these targets.
- 4.18** Board of Governors should also ensure that the school has the right staffing and that a suitable performance management system is in place for the teachers and principal.
- 4.19** External accountability must also be considered, in relation to how the school manages relationships with third parties who have a role in holding the school to account. This includes ensuring governors are aware of the external scrutiny from educational bodies such as DE, EA or CCMS and the formal accountability involved.

Professional administration

- 4.20** The conduct of Board of Governors meetings, including decisions made and the reasons for those decisions, must be clearly documented, to demonstrate that the Board of Governors has acted in the best interests of learners.
- 4.21** **Figure 12** details the prerequisites for an effective Board of Governors meeting.

Figure 12: Prerequisites for an effective Board of Governors meeting



For a Board of Governors meeting to be effective:

- all governors must have an opportunity to contribute
 - a quorum must be present
 - minutes of the meeting must be taken, agreed at the subsequent meeting and retained
 - conflicts of interest must be declared and appropriately managed
-

Source: Adapted from 'Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019

Conduct of Meetings

- 4.22** The principal and the Board of Governors should ensure that meetings are well planned, at appropriate intervals, with manageable agendas and driven by school improvement priorities. The agenda and papers should be provided at least five days in advance of each meeting to allow governors time to prepare for the meeting.
- 4.23** The principal or a nominated deputy e.g., the vice-principal, should be present at all meetings. Governors and principals should have a mutual regard for work/life balance and ensure that meetings are arranged at a suitable time, with plenty of notice and, wherever possible, do not run longer than a pre-determined length of time.
- 4.24** Where there are large number of governors, the formation of committees, with appropriately skilled governors to deal with specific aspects of school governance, can help improve effectiveness and efficiency by reducing the length of time required at full Board of Governors meetings.
- 4.25** Committees, such as those for finance, audit, ICT, staffing or health and safety, should meet separately, carefully consider issues in further detail and make decisions within their delegated authority, as per the Scheme of Management. If decisions are outside the committee's delegated authority then the committee should report back to the full Board of Governors for ratification of the committee's recommendations.
- 4.26** 'Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019 requires Board of Governors to meet once per school term. However, they will often have to meet more frequently than this, with the timing of both full Board of Governors and committee meetings coinciding with deadlines for the decisions required on agenda items. For example, where governors wish to review and approve school accounts prior to an auditing deadline, they should arrange a meeting of the Board of Governors to facilitate this.
- 4.27** Where managing authorities do not provide a standard template, Boards of Governors should consider using the annual agenda template included at **Annex 4**, which sets out some of the key areas for discussion by the Board of Governors during each school term.

Quorum

- 4.28** In order for a Board of Governors meeting to proceed or decisions to be made, a quorum of members must be present. A quorum is the minimum number of governors that must be present at a Board of Governors meeting to make the proceedings of that meeting valid. The specific proportion of governors required for a quorum is normally defined in the school's Scheme of Management.
- 4.29** If, during a meeting, a governor has to withdraw due to a conflict of interest in relation to an agenda item, then that governor cannot be counted as part of the quorum. In such instances, the discussion and any decision in relation to that agenda item should be deferred until the next Board of Governors meeting where there is a quorum (which excludes the conflicted governor).
- 4.30** The need to maintain a quorum may impact upon the governor recruitment process. For example, if there are already a large number of governors related to staff, this can make achievement of a quorum difficult. This is especially true where they are related to the same member of staff and there is a disciplinary issue involving that member of staff.

- 4.31** Co-opting governors does not mitigate this issue as such governors do not have voting rights. Therefore, it may be necessary to try to appoint/nominate additional governors, within legislative guidelines, to help ensure that a quorum can be achieved at all times.
- 4.32** It should be noted that 'Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August (2019) advises that where a governor is absent from three consecutive meetings, or for six months consecutively, whichever is the greater period, the Secretary should report this at the next meeting of the Board of Governors. Unless the Board of Governors is satisfied that failure to attend was occasioned by illness or other unavoidable cause, the governor will be considered to have resigned and cease to be a member of the Board of Governors.

Minutes of meetings

- 4.33** The Order requires schools to maintain a record of minutes of Board of Governors meetings (and committee meetings). The Scheme of Management details what the minutes of each Board of Governors meeting should contain. A recommended format for the presentation of Board of Governors meeting minutes, typical agenda items and general protocols is included at **Annex 5**.
- 4.34** The Board of Governors is legally liable for all decisions and actions taken in its name by a governor (and the principal) or committees to which it has delegated functions ('Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August (2019)). Therefore, it is crucial that minutes of all Board of Governors meetings are documented, agreed and retained.
- 4.35** Minutes should be a complete and accurate record of what was discussed, any decisions that were made and the reasons for the decisions, as they can be made available to school staff or parents upon request and used to hold governors to account.
- 4.36** It is important that the minutes record when a governor has declared an interest and has withdrawn from the discussion of a particular agenda item. The minutes should include the time they left the meeting, the reason for withdrawing, and the time of their return.
- 4.37** Minutes of meetings will also play a part in a smooth transition where the entire Board of Governors changes at the end of a four-year term, or reconstitution, and there is no handover period with the previous Board of Governors. Good minutes will ensure that all governors are aware of current issues affecting the school and any ongoing issues such as staff performance matters or grievances. General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Freedom of Information requirements should be considered when preparing the minutes of meetings.
- 4.38** The minutes of any committee meetings should be brought to the next Board of Governors meeting for information ('Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019). This means the Board of Governors are fully aware of any decisions made by governors within the committee's delegated authority, which will help inform further discussion/decision making by the full Board of Governors.
- 4.39** Minutes should be circulated promptly after a meeting for consideration by all governors

and should be agreed, with amendments, at the subsequent meeting.

Conflicts of Interest

- 4.40** It is important that governors' private interests do not negatively impact on their role as governors and that they remain independent. Consequently, it is good practice that every school is aware of any perceived or actual conflicts of interest, that they have a conflicts of interest policy in place and that all conflicts are recorded on a register of interests, which is updated on an on-going basis.
- 4.41** Some examples of relationships that could create a perceived or actual conflict of interest are outlined in **Figure 13**.

Figure 13: What relationships could be a conflict of interest?



- Staff members (including the principal) who are relatives
- Personal relationships with staff members
- Having a child registered at the school
- Working for a company that supplies goods/ services to the school
- Close relatives that supply goods/services to the school
- Relationships with a managing or funding authority e.g. DE, EA or CCMS

Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

- 4.42** Conflicts of interest do not always create a barrier to appointment, however, all conflicts must be explored to ensure that the public can have confidence in the Board of Governors' independence and impartiality.
- 4.43** Governors should ensure that they declare any conflicts as they arise. They should also complete and sign a Declaration of Interest as required and keep this up-to-date in line with managing authority requirements.
- 4.44** The chairperson should be aware of any conflicts that have been declared prior to each Board of Governors meeting so they can be appropriately managed, for example, by inviting the governor, principal or other attendee to excuse themselves from the meeting when the matter in which they have an interest is being discussed or by ensuring that the conflicted individual does not receive papers relating to that specific agenda item.
- 4.45** If, during a meeting, a governor identifies a conflict of interest which they had not previously been aware of or declared, appropriate action should be taken to manage the conflict, including the Board of Governors considering whether it is necessary to excuse the governor from discussions of the matter concerned.
- 4.46** Conflicts of Interest, A Good Practice Guide, Northern Ireland Audit Office, 2015 provides further advice on recognising and dealing with conflicts of interest.

Complaints Handling

- 4.47** Recent years have seen an increase in complaints against schools and their staff. Investigating and responding to complaints about schools is the responsibility of each school's governing body. Therefore, the Board of Governors should ensure that the school has appropriate complaints handling procedures in place.
- 4.48** It is good practice to include a copy of the school's complaints procedures on the school's website so that all stakeholders are aware of them.
- 4.49** Governors should ensure that all complaints received by the school are recorded and are handled in accordance with the school's complaints procedures in terms of timeframes and correspondence and that the Board of Governors' actions and decisions are documented fully.
- 4.50** The Board of Governors should be provided with details of all complaints received by the school to enable them to identify trends and patterns and to target improvement.
- 4.51** In accordance with the Public Services Ombudsman Act (NI) 2016, the Northern Ireland Public Sector Ombudsman (NIPSO) may investigate a complaint made by a member of the public in relation to action taken by the Board of Governors of grant-aided schools. Unless there are special circumstances, NIPSO will normally only investigate cases where the person aggrieved has invoked and exhausted the school's complaints handling procedure.
- 4.52** In March 2023, NIPSO issued [Case Digest 02/2023, School Complaints, A guide to best practice when responding to complaints in a school setting, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, 2023](#). It provides an insight into the key issues which have arisen from complaints, giving an opportunity for learning and reflection.



Good Governance Recap – The Board of Governors in operation

- The chairperson of a Board of Governors should be a leader who shows commitment, is motivated and focussed on achieving the best outcomes for learners and promotes best practice.
- Governors should both support and challenge the school principal to ensure the best educational outcomes for pupils and use of school funds.
- The conduct of Board of Governors meetings, including decisions made and the reasons for those decisions, must be clearly documented, to demonstrate that the Board of Governors has acted in the best interests of learners. A quorum of members must be present at each meeting.
- Governors should ensure that appropriate complaints procedures are in place and that all complaints are handled in accordance with those procedures.

Part Five:

Evaluation

Evaluation

- 5.1** A key element of good governance is for a Board of Governors to assess its collective performance, and for individual governors to reflect on their own performance and contribution, on a regular basis.
- 5.2** There are a number of considerations as part of the Board of Governors self-evaluation process, as set out in **Figure 14**:

Figure 14: Board of Governors self-evaluation process



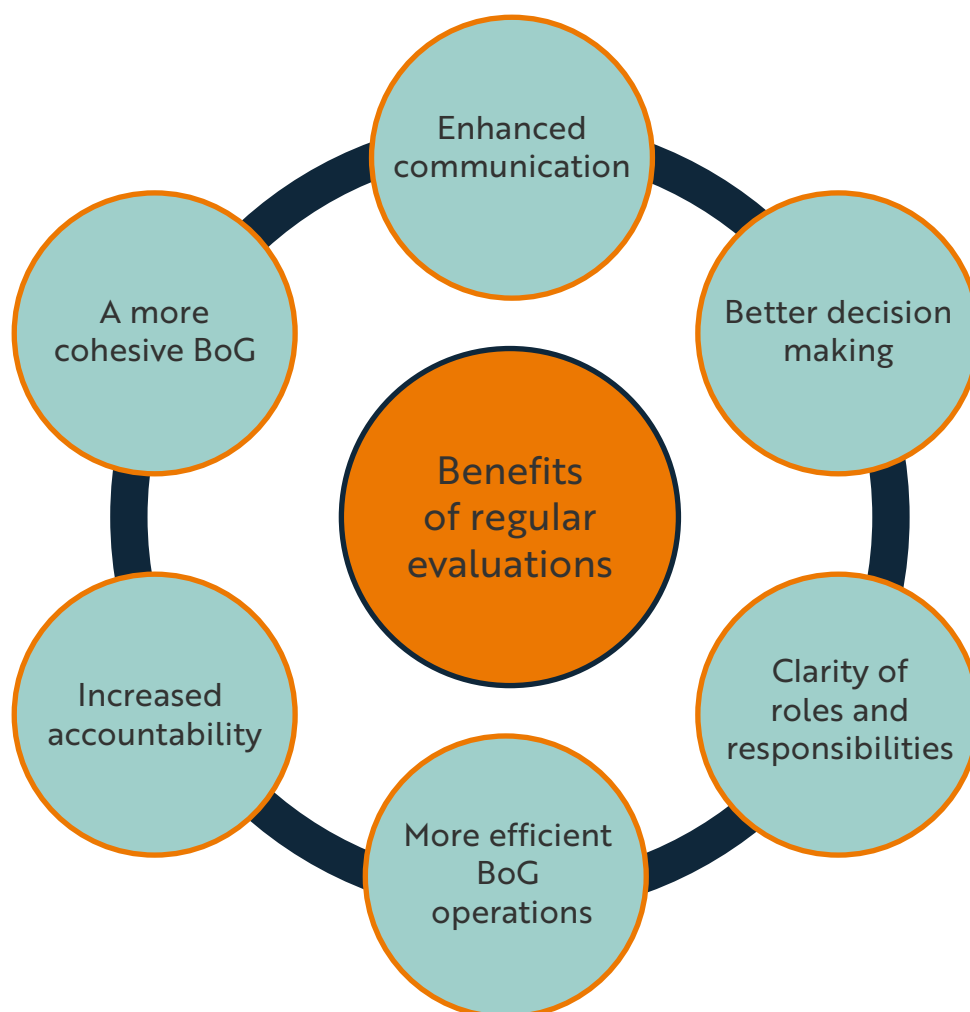
A Board of Governors self-evaluation process should:

- consider current practices
- identify positive impacts
- identify areas for development and actions required
- ensure compliance with statutory duties
- focus on improving the outcomes for learners

Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

- 5.3** In their most recent review of school governance in March 2022, DE Internal Audit recommended that Board of Governors carry out a self-evaluation of their performance at least once every four years and preferably in the first year after reconstitution. The results of the self-evaluation should be submitted to the DE if the school is within the Voluntary Grammar or Grant Maintained Integrated sector, and to the EA or CCMS if the school is within the controlled or maintained sector respectively.
- 5.4** There are benefits to be gained from more regular Board of Governors evaluations, such as an annual evaluation – see **Figure 15**.

Figure 15: Benefits to be gained from more regular Board of Governors evaluations



Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

- 5.5** All Boards of Governors can benefit from evaluation. The key purpose of an evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of governance and make improvements where required. There is no prescribed way to carry out evaluations. However, a good place to start is to look at governors individually, before considering the Board of Governors as a whole.

Governor Skills Check

- 5.6** It is good practice for Board of Governors to be aware of the skills and experience of individual governors to ensure the collective Board of Governors has the tools required to effectively govern the school.
- 5.7** A skills check can help each governor identify where they need to develop their knowledge and skills to deliver effective governance. Ideally, it should be completed at the beginning of each school year to inform training needs for the coming year. It should also be completed by any new governor joining the Board of Governors during the year.

- 5.8** A skills check should note the areas where governors feel confident and other areas where they need or want some further information or training. Alternatively, it can be a more formal process involving a specifically tailored checklist.
- 5.9** **Annex 6** provides a sample skills check for governors, involving a series of questions relating to the skills and experience required to govern a school, with governors rating how well they meet the criteria on a scale of 1 to 5. The skills check also provides governors with the opportunity to indicate any other areas where they would like to get involved in school governance.
- 5.10** The responses to the skills check can then be analysed by the Board of Governors to assign specific tasks to governors based on their key skills and to highlight areas where training and development of existing Board of Governors members is required. The analysis will also enable the Board of Governors to identify any skills gaps that need to be addressed by appointing, nominating or co-opting (non-voting) new governors.

Board of Governors Effectiveness Evaluation

- 5.11** A strong evaluation process includes a review of how the Board of Governors as a whole and its committees operate, the policies they have in place and how they are acting to ensure the best outcomes for learners.
- 5.12** Engagement from all governors will help get the most out of the process by ensuring that a variety of perspectives are taken into consideration. The chairperson has an important role in setting an example and encouraging participation, explaining the benefits of the process.
- 5.13** It is good practice for a Board of Governors to periodically assess its effectiveness against the principles in 'Every School a Good School' The Governors' Role, A Guide for Governors, August 2019. Neither DE nor the EA have specifically prescribed how a Board of Governors effectiveness review should take place. However, the simplest way is for the Board of Governors to use a self-evaluation questionnaire as a basis for discussion, to encourage challenge and as a means of documenting the process.
- 5.14** During its school inspections, the ETI team uses the 'Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework, Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Governance', September 2017 to evaluate the quality of the strategic and corporate work of the Board of Governors.
- 5.15** Whilst the use of the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is not mandatory for a Board of Governors, it includes effective practice examples and questions for Board of Governors to consider and discuss as part of the collective self-evaluation.
- 5.16** Use of the framework will help the Board of Governors identify strengths and weaknesses, areas for improvement and draw up an action plan to address these areas. An effective action plan should be outcomes-focussed and time bound, outlining the steps which need to be taken and assigning responsibility for each step to a lead governor.
- 5.17** Progress against action plans should be a standing item on the Board of Governors meeting agenda (see **Annex 4**) to ensure actions are implemented in an appropriate and timely manner to improve the outcomes for learners.
- 5.18** For an effective evaluation process, we would encourage a Board of Governors to **"TAILOR"** the process – see **Figure 16**.

Figure 16: Effective Evaluation Process

Sufficient **T**ime should be allowed for the process of evaluation.
All governors should be involved
Integrate the process into ongoing practice.
Look at a range of external sources for guidance
 Customise the Board's **O**wn specific evaluation questionnaires.
Reflect in the context of their own school.

Source: Northern Ireland Audit Office

- 5.19** An effective evaluation process can help the Board of Governors identify key priorities for delivering a positive impact on learning and teaching, and help prepare for ETI inspections. It will also demonstrate governors' commitment to fulfilling both their statutory and other responsibilities and send a positive message to school staff and parents.



Good Governance Recap – Evaluation

- Self-evaluation encourages governors to: consider their current practices; identify positive impacts; identify areas for development and actions required; ensure compliance with statutory duties; and focus on improving the outcomes for learners.
- An annual skills check for individual governors can help identify training, development and recruitment needs.
- A Board of Governors should carry out a self-evaluation at least once every four years and submit the results to DE if the school is within the VGS/GMI sector and the EA/CCMS if the school is within the controlled or maintained sector respectively.
- Board of Governors should **"TAILOR"** the self-evaluation process.

Annexes

Annex 1 (See paragraph 1.7)

Membership of school Board of Governors by governor category

In accordance with the provisions of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, amended by the Education (NI) Order 1997, the composition of Board of Governors is as follows:

Controlled Schools in Public Ownership	Number of Governors	Foundation Governors	EA & DE Governors	Parent Governors	Teacher Governors
Primary & Secondary	9, 16 or 24	4/ 9ths or 3/8ths Transferors	2/9ths or 2/8ths	2/9ths or 2/8ths	1/9th or 1/8th
Integrated Primary & Secondary	14 or 21	1/7th Transferors & 1/7th Trustees	2/7ths	2/7ths	1/7ths
Nursery, Grammar, Special	8,16 or 24	n/a	5/8ths	2/8ths	1/8th
Integrated Grammar	14 or 21	n/a	4/7ths	2/7ths	1/7ths
Schools in Private Ownership	Number of Governors	Foundation Governors (Trustees)	EA & DE Governors	Parent Governors	Teacher Governors
Primary & Secondary (Voluntary Maintained 100% capital grant)	9, 18 or 27	4/9ths Must include 1 parent	3/9ths	1/9th	1/9th
Primary & Secondary (Voluntary Maintained 85% capital grant)	10, 18 or 27	3/5ths or 5/9ths Must include 1 parent	1/5th or 2/9ths	1/ 10th or 1/9th	1/ 10th or 1/9th
Primary & Secondary (Grant Maintained Integrated 100% capital grant)	16 or 24	3/8ths	2/8ths	2/8ths	1/8th
Voluntary Grammar (100% capital grant)	9,18,27 or 36	4/9ths Must include 1 parent	3/9ths	1/9th	1/9th
Voluntary Grammar (85% capital grant)	10, 18, 27 or 36	3/5ths or 5/9ths Must include 1 parent	1/5th or 2/9ths	1/10th or 1/9th	1/10th or 1/9th
Voluntary Grammar (no capital grant)	13 or fewer 14 or more	1 parent Not regulated but must include 1 parent	0 0	1 2	1 2

The principal and co-opted governors are additional to the membership shown above.

Annex 2 (See paragraph 2.21)

Board of Governors Overview Matrix

Name of School - Board of Governors						
Governor:	Governor 1	Governor 2	Governor 3	Governor 4	Governor 5	Governor 6
Term expires:	30 June 2023		30 June 2024		30 June 2025	
Age (years)						
18-30	✓			✓		
31-40						
41-50			✓			✓
51-60						
61-70					✓	
71 and over		✓				
Sex						
Male	✓		✓		✓	
Female		✓		✓		✓
Ethnic group*						
White	✓					✓
Chinese		✓				
Irish Traveller						
Roma						
Indian						
Filipino						
Black African					✓	
Black Other				✓		
Mixed ethnic group			✓			
Other						
Areas of Expertise						
Administration		✓			✓	
Business Management						
Financial Management			✓			
Children's Services	✓			✓		
Education, Training or Development of children					✓	✓
Law / Legal Skills						
Leadership Skills		✓				
Human Resources						
Strategic Planning						
Health and Safety	✓					
Project Management						
Previous Governor Service			✓			
Community Relations and Community Based Work	✓			✓		
Other						
Personal Style						
Motivator	✓					✓
Leader		✓	✓		✓	
Good Communicator	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Strategist		✓			✓	
Team Member						✓

*Note: In relation to diversity, the example provided is ethnic group based on the guidance provided in [A Guide to Employment Equality Monitoring, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2022](#), however, community background, religious beliefs or disability could also be included.

Source: Adapted from [The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members, Second Edition, by Berit M Lahey. BoardSource, 2007](#) and [A Guide to Employment Equality Monitoring, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2022](#).

Annex 3 (see paragraph 3.2)

Roles and Responsibilities of a Board of Governors



Role of the School Governor

- Attend and participate in Board meetings to consider all aspects of school business such as financial reports, the conduct of examinations and assessments in the school, school development and performance, and recruitment and selection of staff. The Board of Governors meets as often as its business requires which could be once a month depending on the size and nature of the school and at a minimum of once per school term.
- Use their own knowledge, skills and experience in a new environment, combined with the abilities of other board members, to govern, challenge and support the school leadership to promote school improvement in the best interests of pupils.
- Promote good governance by joining committees, or working groups covering different aspects of school business, for example, finance, staffing, admissions, health and safety, curriculum, discipline, complaints and, for example, attending training and school functions and reading/preparation of documents and materials for meetings.
- Increase their knowledge about the school and the wider educational system within Northern Ireland through training, to gain a full understanding of procedures and guidelines which have been developed on various school issues such as child protection and safeguarding issues.
- Abide by the Seven Principles of Public Life – Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership. Governors also have a duty to ensure that the requirements of data protection and confidentiality are adhered to.
- Consider, declare and manage any conflict of interest, either real or perceived, which could question the impartiality of the Board.
- Remain in office for the full term (normally four years), although they may resign if they wish during the appointment.



Role of the Board of Governors

Governors are responsible for setting the strategic direction for the school and taking corporate decisions in relation to the statutory functions of the Board of Governors.

Example areas of responsibility include:

- Setting the school's vision, aims, plans and policies.
- Establishing and maintaining the school's ethos.
- Monitoring and evaluating school performance.
- Managing school funds economically, effectively and efficiently in line with published guidance.
- Curriculum planning, including examinations management and administration policy.
- Employment issues including selecting and appointing staff.
- Pupil pastoral care and protection issues.

Source: Becoming a school governor, Department of Education and Education Authority, December 2020

Annex 4 (see paragraph 4.27)

Sample Board of Governors' Annual Agenda



All Meetings:

- Declaration of any conflicts of interest.
- Approval of minutes of previous meeting.
- Chairperson's business.
- Review the school's financial position against budget.
- Report/Commentary from sub-committees.
- Report/Commentary from principal.
- Monitor pupil pastoral care and child protection issues.
- Progress against School Development Plan and action plans.
- Staffing Matters.
- Ad hoc issues as they arise.



Term 1 (September to Christmas):

- Review pupils' academic performance and learner outcomes from prior year and set expectations for the coming year.
- Review the school development plan and set an action plan to achieve it.
- Review enrolment and admissions criteria.
- Publish the "Board of Governors Annual Report to Parents."
- Governors should complete a skills check to identify their training needs for the year ahead.
- Staffing (including non-teaching staff):
 - Staff audit to assess if any staff changes are required.
 - Review of staff training and development needs.
 - Staff salary reviews.
 - Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) of principal and vice-principal.



Term 2 (Christmas to Easter):

- Review progress against the school development plan
- Begin recruitment and selection of new staff if required.
- Begin to implement redundancy process if necessary.
- Carry out an inspection of school building including an audit of health and safety and maintenance priorities.
- Review the school ethos and how it is promoted.



Term 3 (Easter to end of June)

- Examine internal and external data to evaluate school performance.
- Review pupils' academic performance and learner outcomes against expectations set at the start of the year.
- Assess progress of children who are underachieving, and the proposed strategies to address underachievement.
- Review progress against the school development plan.
- Review the school development plan and priorities for next year.
- Complete recruitment and selection process, if necessary.
- Complete redundancy process, if necessary.
- Review enrolment trends and admissions criteria.
- Review budget and discuss impact on next school year.
- Review the audit of school accounts.
- Evaluate your performance as a Board of Governors.

Source: Adapted from Effective Governance for High Quality Education, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, April 2015

Annex 5 (See paragraph 4.33)

Board of Governors Minutes Template

The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 requires schools to maintain a record of minutes of Board of Governors meetings (and committee meetings). To help governors comply with this statutory responsibility, we have prepared a template for the presentation of Board of Governors' Minutes. The key to effective minutes is getting the level of detail correct.

Name of School

Board of Governors Meeting Minutes:

Month, Day, Year, Time

Location

Welcome, Apologies and Announcements

Present: [Note who was chairperson and secretary]

Absent / Apologies:

Quorum present? Yes/No

Others present: [for example co-opted members or principal]

Note the arrival time of any late attendees or times when attendees left the room (if different to the start and end time of the meeting) as it is important to record who was there for each discussion and decision made.

Declarations of Interest

Note any declarations of interest and how they were handled. Where a member of the Board of Governors has declared an interest regarding an agenda item and has had to withdraw from the meeting, the minutes should record that the governor has withdrawn during the discussion of this particular agenda item, the reason for withdrawing, and the time they left and re-entered the room.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the previous Board of Governors meeting should be reviewed for accuracy and consideration of matters arising. They should then be approved as a correct record.

Chairperson's business

Brief and accurate summary of the discussion of the chairperson's business, including any actions to be taken.

Financial Report

Brief and accurate summary of the discussion surrounding the report, including any actions to be taken.

Policies

Where policies have been reviewed, the amended or new policy should be approved as adopted, otherwise any further actions to be taken should be recorded.

School Premises / Equipment

Brief and accurate summary of the discussion surrounding school premises and equipment, including any actions to be taken.

Staffing Matters

Staffing matters include the appointment of teaching staff/non-teaching staff; appointment of internal promotional posts; review of staffing and school management structure; and report on attendance management issues. A brief and accurate summary of the discussion surrounding these should be noted, including any actions to be taken.

Committee Reports

Brief and accurate summary of the discussion surrounding matters arising from committee meetings, including any actions to be taken.

Principal's Report

Brief and accurate summary of the discussion surrounding the report, including any actions to be taken.

Other Issues

Issue 1

Brief and accurate summary of the discussion surrounding the issue.

Examples of areas that may be included in the other issues section are:

- review of School Development Plan;
- review of implementation of PRSD within the school;
- review of the school ethos;
- review of annual report;
- any agenda items to be raised at the request of a governor;
- admissions criteria and their application;
- pupil absence reports; and
- annual parents' meeting.

Put all decisions in bold so they are clearly visible, for example;

The Board approved the recommendation (as per the summary of the paper under discussion).

Any Other Business

- Ad hoc issues for example upcoming events or activities.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Governors will take place on _____ at _____.

[Signature of chairperson and secretary]

Annex 6 (see paragraph 5.9)

Sample Governor Skills Check

Name of School - Governor Skills Check					
	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Not sure 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
1. I have previous experience on a school BoG					
2. I have previous experience on a Board outside a school					
3. I am/have been chair of a board or committee					
4. I have experience in developing a strategy					
5. I know the school's strategic priorities					
6. I can identify key risks and evaluate their potential impact					
7. I am aware of how the school is funded and what the funding is spent on					
8. I can interpret budget monitoring reports					
9. I understand how the school's curriculum meets the needs of all pupils					
10. I understand how the BoG engages with stakeholders – pupils, parents, staff and the wider community – and how this informs decisions					
11. I feel confident being part of the panel that conducts headteacher appraisal					
12. I know how to build the knowledge I need to be effective in my governance role					
13. I can build positive, collaborative relationships with members of my BoG					
14. I understand the strategic nature of the BoG's role and what governors and school leaders should expect from each other.					
15. I know what the BoG's core functions are					
16. I understand how the BoG delegates its work					
17. I feel confident being part of a panel to make decisions (such as on pupil exclusions or complaints)					
18. I know how the BoG meets its legal and compliance responsibilities					
19. I feel able to speak up if I am concerned about non-compliance and unethical behaviour					
20. I can identify when independent, expert advice may be required					
21. I know and empathise with the community served by the school					
22. I understand the legal responsibilities of BoGs in relation to equalities.					
23. I have influenced an organisation's culture of equality and diversity (through communication, challenge, awareness or developing policies and practices).					
24. I have knowledge, experience or training that will help me to promote diversity and inclusion.					
25. I can recognise and challenge behaviour, attitudes, policy and practice which go against the inclusive culture we want for our school.					
26. I understand how to use relevant data and insight to identify and resolve issues relating to inequality.					
27. Is there any support or training you would like to engage in?					
28. Are there any additional areas of the BoG's responsibilities which you would like to contribute to in the future?					
29. Do you have any additional comments?					

Reference List

Reference List

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