

# Are we in Governance becoming more popular with Ofsted? **A Tale of Two Ofsteds** By Geoffrey Hackett

- “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Charles Dickens

There is no doubt today that governance is being featured more in the effective running of schools than for many a year. There is a clear call for Governors, Trustees and Executive to be more rigorous in their challenges and to be a little more “professional” about how they set about their duties. These duties are clearly defined in the DfE Governance handbook but have we read the new handbook or any Governance Handbook recently because they do change over time. The next few paragraphs are from the front pages of the latest Handbook March 2019 full version available [www.surreygovernance.org.uk](http://www.surreygovernance.org.uk) When you’ve read these extracts there are two extracts from recent Ofsted reports you will find them most revealing about the work you do in governance.

## 1. **Effective Governance**

### 1.1 **The purpose of governance**

1. The purpose of governance is to provide confident and strong strategic leadership which leads to robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance.

2. All governance boards, no matter what type of school or how many schools they govern, have three core functions:

- **Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;**
- **Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and**
- **Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.**

### 1.2 **The key features of effective governance**

3. Boards must be ambitious for all children and young people and infused with a passion for education and a commitment to continuous school improvement that enables the best possible outcomes. Governance must be grounded in reality as defined by both high-quality objective data and a full understanding of the views and needs of pupils/students, staff, parents, carers and local communities. It should be driven by inquisitive, independent minds and through conversations focussed on the key strategic issues which are conducted with humility, good judgement, resilience and determination.

4. In our rapidly developing education system the range of organisations being governed is more diverse than ever – ranging from single small primary schools to large MATs governing numerous academies. Regardless of the scale or nature of the organisation being governed, the features of what makes for effective governance remain the same. They are common across the education sector and share their fundamental principles with governance in the charity and business sectors.

5. Effective governance is based on six key features:

**Strategic leadership** that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.

**Accountability** that drives up educational standards and financial performance.

**People** with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.

**Structures** that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

**Compliance** with statutory and contractual requirements.

**Evaluation** to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

From looking at some recent Ofsted reports it soon becomes obvious that the role, of governance is being taken far more into account in judging the outcome than it was a few years ago. In the areas of leadership and safeguarding the contribution and challenges of governance can make a big difference to the outcome for your school. So you may want to ask a few questions of yourself and your colleagues and compare the extracts of two Ofsted reports on governance below.

After you may wish to fully read the DfE Governance Handbook and the new Ofsted inspection hand books and guides for September 2019 then promise yourself and your colleagues that you will keep yourself informed as to governance trends and requirements something which can be helped by regular visits to the **SGA** website [www.surreygovernance.org.uk](http://www.surreygovernance.org.uk) .

Not just for a quick scan but reading some of the training, bulletins and news it contains for this simple reason - it could make all the difference between an outstanding result and inadequate outcome. The difference between you being recognised for a job well done or condemned for being ineffective. And yes you are a volunteer it even cost you time and money to undertake the job but that will count for nothing if Ofsted is not happy with your performance. Surely if you volunteered you want the satisfaction of at least maintaining and preferably improving education by your contribution.

This does not mean you can't be cheerful, enjoy what you do, relax, smile, be kind, considerate and compassionate as long as you are

professional, collaborate, cooperate and communicate with those around you, then you can. Likewise all your colleagues can gain tremendous satisfaction and gratification from good governance after all when you volunteer you deserve to be successful and satisfied, with a job well done; to leave a smile on everyone's face including your own. So; -

Are you governing well?

Are you challenging well?

Are you rigorous about your inspection of headteachers, leadership and data?

Are you relentless in your inquisition of performance?

Are you diligent on safeguarding?

Are you focused on the outcomes for children and the community?

Are you thorough about value for money?

Don't let your own or others self-importance get in the way, don't let Headteachers, leaders or any member of the school stop you or distract you from doing your duty by the children in the school. When you get an answer, check it out and if you are not happy keep asking until you are. Because if you are not rigorous and challenging you could, rather than being the kind nice and friendly person you think you're being to your school's hard working staff, in reality be your school's biggest enemy. Of course you can smile, you should be considerate, helpful, avoid conflict and work harmoniously with everyone in the school be a facilitator and a supporter but don't accept anything at face value and always reassure yourself that you are getting the straight and accurate information and if not be in no doubt about condemning inaccuracy or evasion, as long as you are not distracting the staff from doing their job the school is ultimately accountable through the leadership to the governors for all performance criteria.

How accountable well here are some extracts from two recent Ofsted reports on schools centred round governance, leadership and safeguarding there are no names but they are both from the same county and from very similar demographic areas.

## **First Example**

### **Extract of an Inspector's report on school 1**

Leaders and governors have responded well to the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. The standard of writing has improved across the curriculum. The most able pupils are challenged in mathematics. However, many of the initiatives to raise pupils' understanding to a higher standard are new and have not yet had time to have an impact on the proportion of pupils working at this level.

The governing body is committed to developing the school further. The governors have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the school's priorities for development. They understand the importance of raising pupils' achievement. Governors challenge staff effectively to make sure that they do this. Your regular meetings with governors keep them well informed and ensure that they are able to challenge leaders effectively to make the right improvements to the school. The governing body makes sure that the school's use of extra funding has a positive impact on pupils' well-being and progress.

Parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, value the dedicated way in which the staff team supports pupils to make good academic and social progress. Parents have a high regard for the breadth of the opportunities that the school provides. One parent's comment, typical of many, captured this in recognising that the school is 'a special place with an inclusive policy that has seen our

children develop friendships with others across the academic spectrum, incorporating those with learning difficulties and disabilities'.

*Safeguarding is effective.*

You have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. All the required checks on staff and volunteers are carried out and recorded carefully. Leaders, governors and staff undertake regular and up-to-date training on child protection and safeguarding issues. All staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities to ensure pupils' safety and well-being. You reinforce important messages about safeguarding through staff meetings and meetings of the governing body

### **Result a good school remains a good school**

## **Next example**

### **Extract of an Inspector's report on school 2**

Safeguarding arrangements are not effective. Leaders and governors responsible for safeguarding have not ensured that statutory requirements are met. The oversight of safeguarding procedures by senior leaders and designated safeguarding leads has been weak. There were six different issues identified during the inspection that could have put pupils at risk of harm. Governance is ineffective. Over time, governors have not challenged leaders. As a result, governors were not aware of the many safeguarding issues identified during the inspection. Governors have not ensured a coherent strategy for the use of pupil premium funding. They have not closely monitored the impact of this spending or of the use of other additional funding on pupils' progress.

The governing body has not provided impartial support or challenge to school leaders. Governors do not challenge leaders about

standards, teaching or behaviour. They take information at face value rather than assuring themselves of its validity. Governors did not discuss or approve the latest safeguarding policy, nor did they scrutinise the pupil premium strategy before it was published.

The governing body has not ensured that the school complies with statutory regulations, for example by ensuring that the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) is a qualified teacher.

Governors are unable to set the vision and strategic direction of the school because they do not have the opportunity to discuss, shape or review policies. Instead they are informed by leaders when policies are available to be read.

### **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. Inspectors found shortcomings in six areas of safeguarding practice. As a result, pupils could have been placed at risk of harm. The areas of concern are: recruitment checks are not carried out in line with the requirements in the latest statutory guidance (Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018) before staff start work correct procedures are not followed when taking pupils off roll when they could potentially be a child missing education insufficient checks and risk assessments of alternative provision providers before placing pupils there and then not checking the attendance of pupils at alternative providers every day the safeguarding policy is out of date, does not identify the designated leaders for safeguarding correctly and contains inadequate arrangements for whistleblowing poor recording of physical interventions, which does not include any kind of debrief for the staff member or pupil the use of unofficial exclusion

through flexible attendance at school, home education agreements and part-time timetables that potentially put pupils at additional risk of harm when they are not in the school. There are clear deficiencies in the oversight of safeguarding by the designated lead. During the inspection, leaders took appropriate steps to put right where possible the issues identified on day 1 of the inspection. However, further issues of concern were identified later in the inspection. Governors are unaware of, or had been given the wrong information about, many of these issues. Due to weaknesses in governance, they had not checked things for themselves or challenged leaders about their decisions

### **Result an outstanding school goes to inadequate**

#### **Ofsted recommended the following:**

- 1. An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.*
- 2. An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.*

At **SGA** we know that Governors are a conscientious community of people volunteering to make a difference to benefit every child in the county. Please don't let them or yourself down by not asking, challenging, verifying, collaborating, cooperating, communicating and acting with rigour to improve education. Even in your outstanding school ensure you are rigorous about governance so that it stays outstanding.