

Effective Governing Body Meetings

How does your governing body measure up?

The effectiveness and efficiency of the governing body and in particular its meetings, has a relevance in many areas, but most importantly in school improvement and governor retention and improvement. Governing bodies have a lot of business to cover, therefore prioritising and effective working practices play a key role.

It is good practice for all governing bodies to self review, the working practices and efficiency of meetings should feature highly on that review.

The contributors to effective governing body meetings are:

- Time management
- The head teacher
- The chair of governors
- The clerk
- All governors

Checklist – Effective Meetings

The checklist can be circulated to all governors at the beginning of the academic year as a quick review of governing body practice and procedure. Carried out as a 15 minute exercise, it can help to focus the working practices of the governing body.

In General:

- The 'Guide to the Law for School Governors' states that governing bodies must meet at least three times in the school year.
- The quorum for any governing body meeting and vote must be one half of the complete membership of the governing body, excluding any vacancies.
- The timing of governing body meetings should have regard to the work-life balance of school leaders attending meetings
- Equally school leaders need to have regard to governors' work and other commitments.
- Governing body committee structure – an effective committee structure according to clear terms of reference and reporting to the full governing body, ensures that business is not repeated.

The Clerk:

- The clerk should manage the business of the governing body
- Ensure that dates for Governing Body (GB) meeting are set by chair with governors for the year
- Set up contact details for all governors, preferably e-mail to ensure quick and easy communication with all governors
- Agenda agreed with chair of governors and head teacher at least 2 weeks in advance of GB meeting

- Ensure that agenda includes the relevant topics for that meeting eg/ election of chair and vice chair (Autumn term) and review of policies (throughout school year)
- Ensure that the agenda includes governor training – new governors, governors with extra responsibilities. Highlight training opportunities
- Agenda and any papers sent to all governors at least 7 days before GB meeting
- Ensure that any tabled papers are ready for the meeting and copied
- Receive and record any apologies for absence for the meeting
- Arrives promptly ready to prepare for the meeting
- Prompt governors to declare personal and pecuniary interest in relevant issues
- Records the minutes of the meeting and all decisions in a clear structure
- Provide information and advice, if required, on legal and procedural issues of governance

The Chair:

- Liaises with head teacher and clerk with regard to the agenda for the meeting, at least 2 weeks in advance
- Ensures section on agenda for any relevant correspondence or information from Local Authority or Department for Education
- Has met with the head teacher recently to discuss issues and prioritise business
- Reads and familiarises himself/herself with the agenda and papers before the meeting
- Starts the meeting on time
- Follows the agenda
- Regularly prompts governors to declare personal and pecuniary interest in relevant issues
- Facilitates and encourages discussion from all members of the GB
- Keeps all GB members on track and avoids distractions away from the agenda and decisions needed
- Ensures that discussions do not get heated or dominated by one person
- Seeks procedural advice on governance matters from the clerk if needed
- Reminds the GB members of the corporate nature of the GB, whatever the discussion, the decision is of the whole GB
- Reminds the GB members of the need for confidentiality
- Is firm over 'Any Other Business', only items previously submitted will be discussed
- Ensures GB meetings only last 2 hours. 2 and ½ hours is the maximum
- Finishes the meeting on time

The Head Teacher:

- Liaises with chair and clerk with regard to the agenda for the meeting, at least 2 weeks in advance

- Has met with the chair of governors recently to discuss issues and prioritise business
- Ensures that the room for the GB meeting is prepared
- Ensures some sort of refreshment for governors is provided – water, tea, coffee, biscuits
- Ensures that where possible, reports and papers are prepared & sent to the clerk to forward to governors at least 7 days before the meeting
- Limits the number of papers tabled for the meeting
- Limits the use of jargon and acronyms in papers
- Ensures relevant members of the senior leadership team attend the meeting

All Governors:

- Ensure the clerk has an up to date e-mail address
- Has awareness of and responds to training needs
- Read any papers circulated before the meeting
- Attend all meetings and arrive on time
- Send apologies to the clerk before the meeting if cannot attend
- Contribute to the discussions where relevant
- Avoid anecdotal distractions
- After debate, accept the majority view of the governing body
- Respect the confidentiality of issues raised

References, Additional Resources

(All these resources can be found on Bedford Borough Council website www.bedford.gov.uk >> education and learning >> school governors)

Bedford Borough Council, Governing body Toolkit
 BBC, Training & Development Handbook, Chairs of Governing Bodies
 BBC, Governors Code of Conduct
 BBC, The Clerking Paper