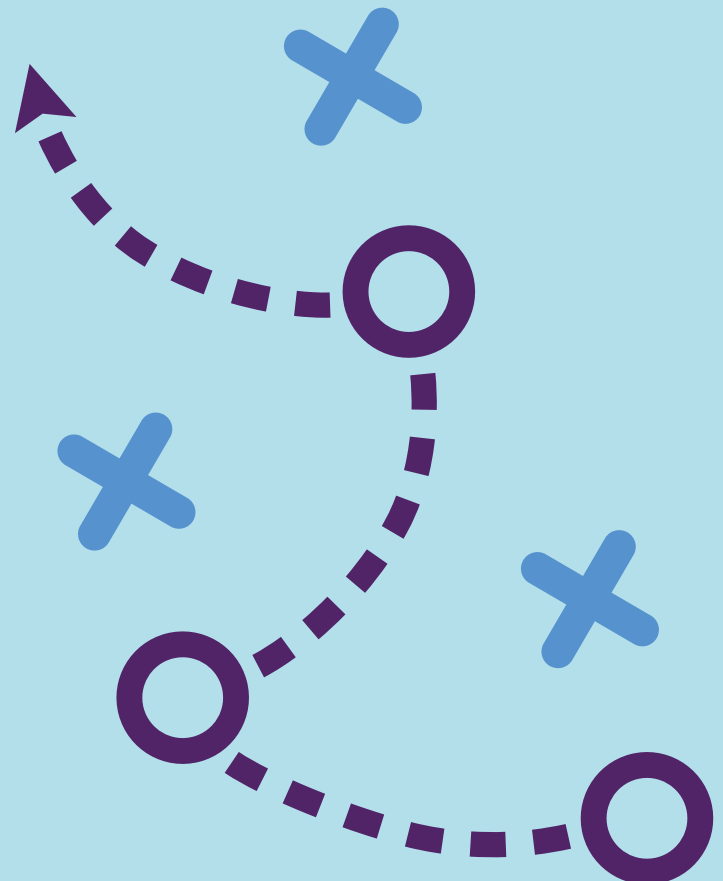# Being Strategic
A guide for governing boards and school leaders

Improving governance and outcomes for pupils in schools and academy trusts

October 2020

Definition of terms used in this guide

Governing board

Governing bodies in maintained schools and trust boards in academies. In multi academy trusts (MATs), boards may choose to delegate some of their responsibilities to a regional or academy level committee, often termed a local governing body

Executive leader

Employed to take day-to-day responsibility for the performance of a school, or group of schools. Includes headteachers, executive headteachers and chief executives (CEOs)

Mission

Declaration of school/trust core purpose. Normally remains unchanged over time

Values

A principle that guides our thinking and behaviour

Ethos

The characteristic spirit of a community as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations

Culture

The way things get done in the school/trust

Vision

what pupils will leave the school knowing, being and having done

Strategy

Sets out the priorities needed if the school/trust is to achieve its vision

Operational

Day-to-day delivery of the agreed strategy. Responsibility of the executive leader

We use the word 'schools' to include academies (including free schools). However, academy trust boards and academy committees are not covered by all the same regulations as maintained schools, and there may be some differences in relation to the precise procedures. An academy chair may need to check their trust's funding agreement, articles of association and any schemes of delegation to be certain whether a particular provision applies equally to them (these three documents are what we refer to as academy documentation). There are, however, few significant differences in practice between chairing an academy board and a maintained school and where those are likely to occur we highlight the difference.

Foreword

Welcome to this updated guide to being strategic, jointly developed by the National Governance Association (NGA), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT).

We hope that the guide will serve as a valuable resource, which encourages governing boards and executive leaders to work together to set a strategy for their organisation and monitor progress within an annual cycle.

The guide remains centred in the governing board's first core function: to ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. It describes how mission, values and culture relate to strategy and why it is important for governing boards to be aware of the culture and climate in their school or trust.

For too long, schools in England have been subjected to a high-stakes, punitive accountability system based on a narrow set of data. It has never been more important for those governing and leading our schools to move beyond these externally imposed measures, to think strategically about what is important for their pupils, and to hold themselves to account for what matters most.

We hope you find this guide helpful. Please visit www.nga.org.uk/contact-us to share any feedback you have.

Emma Knights OBE

Chief Executive
National Governance Association

Geoff Barton

General Secretary
Association of School
and College Leaders

Paul Whiteman

General Secretary
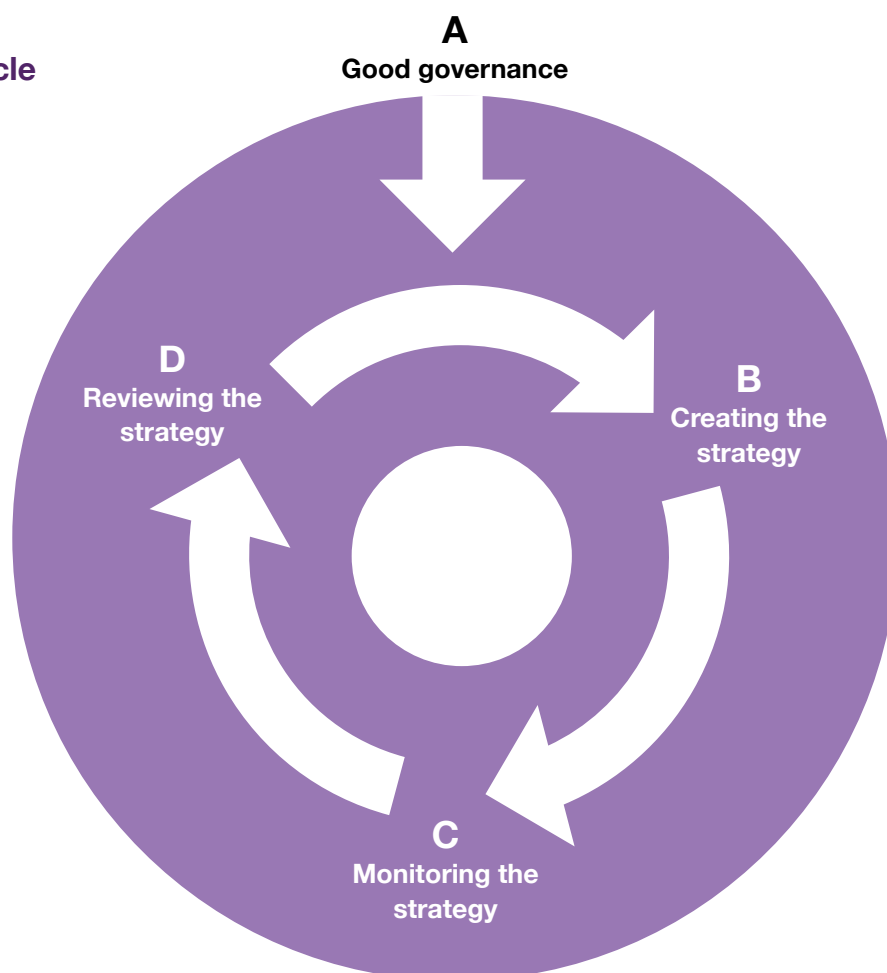National Association
of Head Teachers

Why a guide to being strategic?

Governance is a key part of a successful school. Every governing board, no matter the type, educational phase or size of the organisation, has four core functions:

1. ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

2. holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils and the performance management of staff

3. overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

4. ensuring the voices of stakeholders are heard

Although the Department for Education's (DfE) Governance Handbook includes the first core function, it contains little information on how to fulfil this function well and create a strategy. This document provides leaders and those governing at all levels in a school or trust with a robust framework that they can use to set a strategy for their organisation and monitor progress within an annual cycle.

The annual strategic cycle

A
Good governance

D
Reviewing the strategy

B
Creating the strategy

C
Monitoring the strategy

Good governance

Good governance = Ethical governance + Accountable governance + Effective governance

The DfE's Governance Handbook and Competency Framework for Governance, provide guidance on the duties of governing boards and advice on the skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to be effective.

Ethical governance

Governing boards and school leaders must act in the best interests of children and young people. As guardians of the organisation's ethos they must be willing to challenge any unethical behaviours or decisions. The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education provides the principles to support ethical decision-making and challenging unethical behaviour.

Governing boards should have a code of conduct and adhere to the Nolan principles of public life: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. A model code of conduct is available from the NGA Knowledge Centre at www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre.

Accountable governance

Accountability has a vital role in the schools system but it can lead to stress and anxiety for some teachers, leaders, governors and trustees; the fear of inspection, of a single bad results year, the fear of the school being made to convert to an academy. Accountable governance should be viewed by governing boards and school leaders not as something to be feared, or a blame game, but rather analysing what isn't working and then fixing it, collaboratively.

Governing boards should lead the way on engaging stakeholders as a fundamental part of good governance. Governing boards and school leaders should look outwards to their communities to whom they are accountable. This means listening to the voices of stakeholders (parents, pupils, staff, local employers and the wider community).

Effective governance

NGA's eight elements of effective governance are a good starting point for ensuring that a board successfully carries out its responsibilities.

An effective board has:

1. the right people round the table

2. an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the governing board

3. good chairing

4. professional clerking

5. good relationships based on trust

6. knowledge of the school – the data, the staff, the parents, the children, the community

7. a commitment to asking challenging questions

8. the confidence to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people
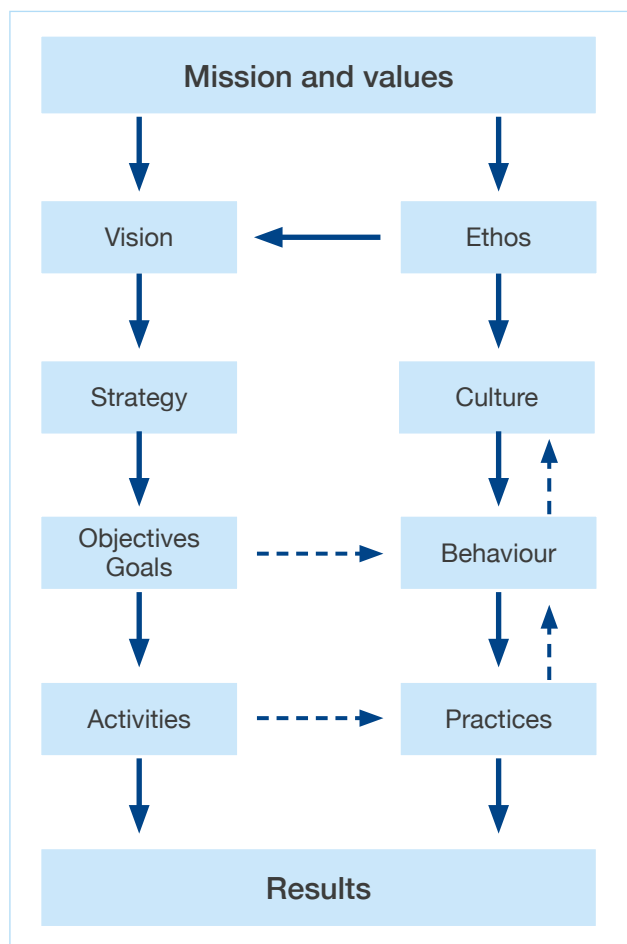
The respective roles of strategic governance and operational management

The purpose of governance is to provide confident and strong strategic leadership which leads to robust accountability, oversight and overall effectiveness. Governance is strategic, and management is operational. This distinction between governance and management needs to be clearly understood by all, so that governors and trustees are not asked to, and do not try to, involve themselves in day-to-day management. Collaborative strategic planning between governing boards and school leaders helps to embed the understanding of respective roles and keep conversations focused and effective. This is explained further in guidance What Governing Boards and School Leaders Should Expect from Each Other.

The governing board should concentrate on matters related to strategy and school improvement and leave internal organisation, management and control of the school/trust to the senior executive leader, unless there is good reason to intervene.

Mission, values and vision

The underlying mission and values for the school should influence thinking and conversations between governing boards and school/trust leadership teams that create the vision and precede strategy development.

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Mission

The mission is a brief, powerful, written declaration of an organisation's core, legal purpose that normally remains unchanged over time. What does the organisation exist to do? The mission of most state schools and trusts (i.e. what they exist to do) will be very similar and rooted in their legal framework for advancing education and learning for the public benefit. Also, the broader purpose that the school/trust serves to help young people understand the world they live in, their culture and others, and develop the wherewithal to live fulfilled lives and contribute positively to that world.

At faith schools, the mission will be guided by founding principles, beliefs and denominational standards.

A clear mission statement brings clarity and fundamental meaning to a strategy for improvement.

Aren't mission statements and vision statements the same thing?

No, the mission statement defines the organisation's reason for existing, whereas the vision statement focuses on what the organisation will look like in the future, describing what pupils will leave the school knowing, being and having done.

Values

Governing boards foster the values that guide thinking and behaviour in the school/trust. Values should underpin the culture, strategy, policies and procedures as well as being a reference point for decisions.

There isn't a set rule on how many values you might need but keep in mind that you will want everyone to know and remember them, so the more concise you can be the more likely that will happen. There is no need to set values every year, but it is good practice to reaffirm them when discussing vision, culture and strategy.

The values should also be communicated and understood by everyone in the school community, or communities served by the school/trust. This can only happen if the values themselves are developed through a collaborative process that reaches out to all stakeholders and includes them in the conversations, which develop a shared understanding.

Values should encompass the Nolan principles, and those set out in the Framework for Ethical Leadership, but also others that are particular to the school. They may help to distinguish a school from others. As a MAT is a single organisation, all academies within the MAT should have shared values.

Some questions to consider are:

- Do your values speak to every member of the school community?

- How do your values serve to protect people from being discriminated against?

- Do your values encourage and promote respecting differences?

- How do your values provide people with a sense of belonging in the school/trust?

- Are all of your decisions and actions consistent with your values?

- Where can you find your values best represented?

- Can you think of any instances in which you fell short of your values?

Vision

The vision should, in a few sentences, describe what pupils will leave the school knowing, being and having done.

The vision's aim should be to continuously improve, and make the experience of the school the very best it can be for pupils, parents and staff. Projecting forward a few years, what specific goals do you want the school/trust and its pupils to have achieved? There is no need to rewrite the vision annually, but it is good practice to review it.

Is your vision:

- Based on your shared values?

- Ambitious but achievable?

- Open to new opportunities?

- Descriptive of what the pupils will have achieved in the broadest way – in terms of attainment, progress and being prepared for the next stage of their education?

- Reflective of the views of pupils, parents and staff?

- Agreed by the governing board?

- Communicated to the school community?

- Non-negotiable when it comes to establishing a collective identity and strategic approach for schools in your trust?

Vision and the curriculum

Governing boards must ensure that the school has a broad and balanced curriculum, which promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Having a clear and explicit vision, which is communicated and has pupil progress and achievement at its heart, will help to drive a curriculum that is broad and balanced.

The vision should inform discussions between governing boards and school leaders about their curriculum and the educational experience pupils receive. The quality of education judgment, which is at the heart of the education inspection framework, focuses on what young people learn through the curriculum, rather than depending on data.

The vision for a MAT

The vision for a MAT encompasses all the schools within it. Schools within a MAT benefit greatly from having clarity over the extent to which they can retain a sense of unique character and what the non-negotiables are. When senior leaders and those governing at local level understand the role they play in achieving the trusts vision, there will be a positive impact on the success of the trust of which the schools are part. Giving time and attention to the way the trust board engages with leadership and governance promotes 'buy-in' at local level. This is explained further in the NGA publication Moving MATs Forward: the power of governance

Creating the strategy

A strategy document sets out how an organisation's vision will be achieved

Creating the strategy should be a collaborative exercise undertaken by the whole governing board, senior executive leader and the senior leadership team during a dedicated strategy day. You should decide how you are going to involve others and all ideas, approaches and opportunities should be considered.

When determining a strategy, consider the challenges, risks and barriers. What does your organisation need to prioritise in order to overcome those challenges and barriers and to mitigate the risks? How will you know the vision has been achieved?

When creating your strategy document

The following broad approach can be applied in all governing structures

1. Start with your vision.

2. Identify an improvement priority for achieving each aspect of the vision (but try not to have more than six improvement priorities in the strategy document).

3. Outline what success looks like for each improvement priority, in the long term and the short term. When determining what success looks like, it is important to consider outcomes that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART). Some examples of high-level outcomes and evidence to consider are in the tables included in the monitoring section of this guidance.

4. Involve stakeholders across the school or trust.

5. Outline the governing board's monitoring arrangements.

6. Try and keep it succinct.

From strategy to implementation

The strategy document must be approved by the governing board, and each improvement priority must be supported by appropriate budget and staff resource.

Resourcing the strategy

Integrated Curriculum and financial planning (ICFP) is a management process that both supports strategy implementation and helps schools/trusts plan the best curriculum for their pupils with the funding they have available. It can be used at any phase or type of school and can provide a consistency of approach in schools across a MAT. The three basic planning principles of ICFP are the education/curriculum priorities, operating costs and income. If the education/curriculum priorities and operating costs consistently exceed the income, then spending should be prioritised to ensure longer term sustainability.

NGA, ASCL and NAHT offer a range of support and development opportunities for leaders and governors on adopting an integrated curriculum and financial planning model.

Managing risks

Effective risk management helps ensure strategic priorities and improvement plans for a school/trust are maintained or met. Risk management is not an isolated activity, but a continuous cycle central to monitoring the school's/ trust's ability to meet its strategic priorities. Academy trust boards must secure effective risk management through the maintenance of a risk register; however, this is good practice for all boards. The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) risk management guidance for academy trusts includes a framework for managing risk which is suitable for all types of school. NGA also provides guidance and training for governing boards to support their understanding of risk management www.nga.org.uk/managing-risk.

The operational school improvement/development plan

The senior executive leader will then create an operational plan to lay out the actions needed to deliver the strategy, either at school level or trust-wide as appropriate. The operational plan should provide details on how each priority will be turned into reality – this may be called the school development or improvement plan. The strategic objectives of the organisation should also link to the performance management objectives of the senior executive leader.

Monitoring the strategy

Evaluating progress and assessing impact

The governing board and the senior executive leader should agree the detailed arrangements for monitoring the strategy, along with the data and information used to evaluate progress and assess impact. This should be referred to in the strategy document.

It is important that governors and trustees think clearly and strategically about what data and information they want and need to receive from school leaders. Ask yourselves:

- What is important to know about how the school/trust is performing against the outcomes in the strategy document?

- How is this balanced against the demands on leaders, both in terms of their overall workload and the information and data they provide to external bodies (local authorities, the Education and Skills Funding Agency, etc.)?

Examples of the information and evidence boards can use to monitor the strategy are included as an annex to this guide.

Delegating responsibility for monitoring the strategy – the role of academy committees

Academy committees, sometimes known as local governing boards, have a crucial role in monitoring improvement priorities for the whole trust and for schools within a trust. The specific nature of that role will vary, however in all cases it should be clearly explained in a scheme of delegation (SoD) published on the trust's website. A clear SoD will avoid duplication of monitoring roles within the trust, strengthen lines of accountability and remove confusion over where responsibility lies. NGA has published guidance relating to schemes of delegation to help trust boards decide the best governance structure in their context www.nga.org.uk/MATs/New-Model-Schemes-of-Delegation.

Measure what you value

The choice of what to measure should be guided by your values and vision, as outlined in the school strategy.

Not all improvement priorities are quantitative and some of the most important outcomes will not lend themselves to simple quantitative measurement. One example is improving the mental health and wellbeing of pupils, which could be monitored through a combination of reports from teachers, pupil voice surveys or less direct measures such as how often children are absent from school. Naturally occurring evidence, such as the information obtained from a well-planned school visit or a response to a challenging question, should also be considered.

However, be conscious of the limitations of any measurements, both quantitative and qualitative, and ensure that they are not given undue weight.

Using the senior executive leader's report

NGA is clear that there should be a termly report on the progress the school/trust is making and that this should be written and circulated at least a week in advance of the governing board meeting. Many governing boards use their SoD or delegation planner to help them prioritise what is reported against the key decisions they need to make during the year. Some boards take this a step further and develop a scheme of business – broken down into terms. This should dictate the agenda for each board meeting and ensure that senior executive leaders have a clear steer on what information the board is expecting at each crucial stage of the academic year.

The key elements of a senior executive leader's report are:

- contextual information such as numbers on roll and any significant changes to the organisation of the school/trust

- an overview of the progress made towards meeting the priorities in the strategy document including the headline data (progress, attainment, behaviour, attendance, etc) that underpins and supports the assessment

- an assessment of the progress made towards meeting the priorities in the strategy document; ie an evidence-based RAG rating of each priority

- an assessment of current resources that includes the identification of any issues; eg revenue and expenditure against forecast, staff structure, performance, recruitment, retention, and wellbeing

- matters of compliance such as safeguarding, financial and audit requirements
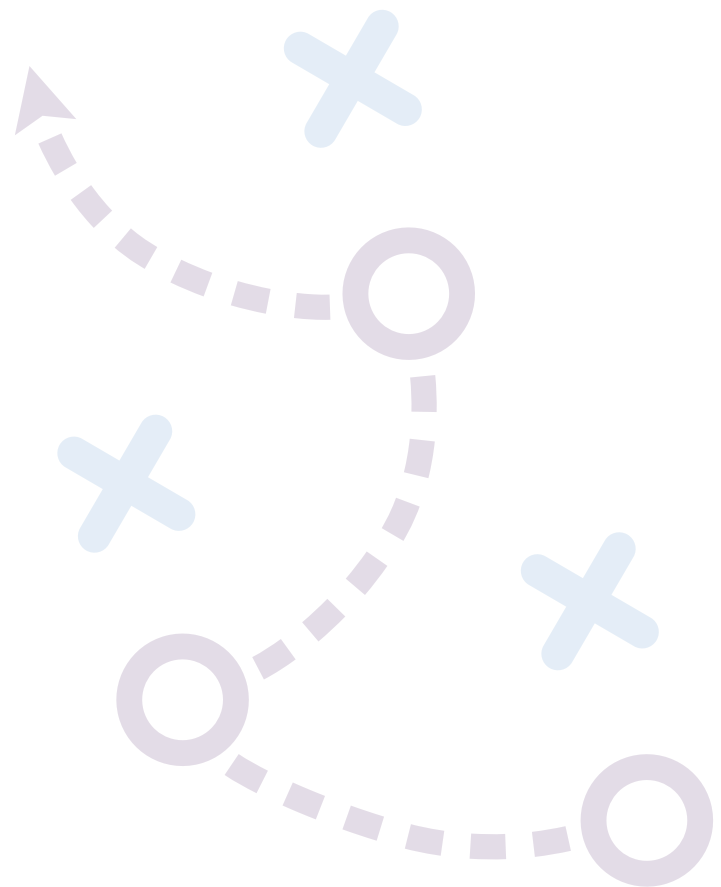
Using data

It is important for the governing board to have access to all the data it needs to monitor outcomes in the strategy document. To make the most of data the board should do its best to ensure that:

- the data is the most recent available

- it is presented in a clear format that the board understands

- it contains the right level of detail – detailed enough to tell the board what it needs to know, but not so detailed as to make it difficult to read

- there is enough knowledge and skills on the board to interpret it without relying on senior leaders to do this for them

Department for Education (DfE) guidance Understanding your data: a guide for school governors and trustees refers to seven data "themes" to use as an evidence base when discussing the performance of the school/trust. They include attainment and progress data, which reflects the type and phase of the school, for example key stage 2, key stage 4 progress and attainment. Guidance and information is also available to help boards analyse the data that the DfE reports in the school and college performance tables and in the analyse school performance (ASP) service. Boards can request a 'governor' account from their DfE Sign-in approver which allows access to the ASP.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to collecting evidence from at least three different sources to verify what the board is told by the senior executive leader. It is a familiar approach to collecting information, but the actual information collected, and how it is done, varies hugely from school to school. When all sources have been used; this will provide the evidence for further questioning and challenge. The extra sources may conflict with or qualify the senior executive leader's report, enabling governors/trustees to test, challenge and determine the actual position. While inspectors will not use internal data to form their judgments under the current inspection framework, they will set about the process of gathering first-hand evidence of how pupils are performing and what they feel about the school. Therefore, it is important that those governing gather and understand this evidence.

Reviewing the strategy

Review the strategy annually to evaluate progress towards the vision

When carrying out the annual review of the strategy, it is recommended that governing boards and senior executive leaders first step back, look at the bigger picture and ask the following important questions:

1. Does our vision look forward three to five years, and does it include what the children who have left the school will have achieved?
   Trust boards will also want to reflect on how this is understood by each of its academies, how they contribute to it and how academies that join the trust are engaged in vision and strategy development.

2. Have we agreed a strategy with priorities for achieving our vision, with measures against which we can regularly monitor and review the strategy?
   Trust boards will also want to reflect on how the strategic priorities drive the governance structure, activities and agenda setting at all levels of the trust.

3. How effectively does our strategic planning cycle drive the board's activities and agenda setting?

Adapted from the questions for the governing board and trust board to ask itself documents available from the NGA www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre.

Looking at the bigger picture provides valuable context when it comes to evaluating the strategy in detail and asking questions relating to:

Improvement priorities
- Have/are the improvement priorities being met?
- If not, is there a valid reason for this?
- What support and challenge should we put in place to ensure the priorities are met?

Adjustments to the strategy
What adjustments need to be made to the strategy within its three-to-five-year lifespan following the review?

What are the resource implications and how should they be addressed?

Unpredictable/external factors
Has something unforeseen changed the landscape in which the school/trust is working?

Did we identify and mitigate for this through risk management process?

What can we learn that will benefit the school/trust in the future?

Working towards long-term sustainable improvement
Is the focus on achieving the vision and implementing the strategy hampered by the focus on day-to-day issues?

How can we change the culture and create the opportunity to focus on activities linked to long-term sustainable improvement?

Relationships and culture
Are working relationships and the culture in the school/trust contributing to improvement priorities in the strategy being met?

How do we know this?

Have we acted on feedback received?

Can and should we do more to support leaders to improve culture, wellbeing and working relationships?

Reviewing the vision and strategy at the end of its lifespan
Is there time and space allocated within the board's schedule of work to review this vision and strategy after three to five years?

How should we involve the pupils, parents and staff in this process?

Academy committees
As is the case with monitoring, academy committees can have a crucial role in evaluating progress towards the vision and the strategy in detail. Again, the specific nature of the role should be explained in the SoD.

The impact of culture on strategy

Make time to discuss the culture of the school/trust and its impact on the strategy

Culture – the way things get done around here – is what makes a school or trust unique. It is influenced by the mission and values, and influences behaviours and practices. Therefore, it is also a crucial component of implementing a vision and strategy that leads to long-term and sustainable success.

The DfE governance handbook says:

> **The board should foster a common culture, values and ethos across the whole organisation, ensuring it is reflected consistently in both its policies and its practices.** 🙿

The culture of the school/trust may have developed over many years and might not be perceived in the same way by everyone. This is important to remember when integrating new schools successfully within a MAT.

The culture might also be affected by a change of senior leadership. However, if it truly comes from the values and ethos it should stand the test of time and foster an environment where ethical virtues are embraced and everyone can achieve their full potential.

It's important for the governing board to be aware of the culture and climate – the way things feel in the school/trust. To understand this, the governing board must make sure they hear from the school's staff and stakeholders. This has often been overlooked by governing boards not wanting to confuse the lines of management.

How does culture impact on a strategy?

Strategy is implemented through the effort and contribution of individuals striving to improve. A positive culture enables this to happen because:

■ It will help attract and retain the diverse range of people needed to implement the strategy – people are more likely to be attracted to working for and with the school/trust if they can feel and relate to the culture on a daily basis.

For instance, how they are encouraged and supported to succeed, how appreciated and trusted they feel, how they see others being treated and whether equality of opportunity is evident.

■ It helps to build engagement with stakeholders – collaboration and engagement flourishes in a culture based on a clear mission (purpose), where people know that their views, suggestions, ideas are actively sought and listened to. This in turn helps to build a diverse range of narratives to inform decision-making.

■ It impacts on motivation – positivity towards the school/trust, individual roles and contribution affects motivation as much as the pay and conditions offer does.

What impacts on culture in a school/trust?

There are a multitude of factors that positively influence culture, which school leaders and governing boards can take, model and adapt through their respective roles. Amongst the most significant are:

■ humanity, compassion and self-compassion – an overriding concern for the wellbeing of the school community in all its aspects

■ modelling openness, transparency and an approach that is non-judgmental

■ setting clear expectations of performance and accountability

■ encouraging and enabling professional growth through autonomy, CPD and learning

■ balancing challenge with support (eg manageable workloads)

■ positively showing support and appreciation

■ being sensitive to diverse views and other narratives (play to people's strengths)

■ leading by example

All of these characteristics are underpinned by effective communication: placing an emphasis on listening as much as explaining, clarifying and endlessly reaffirming the key messages that allow culture to develop through a shared understanding and 'buy-in'.

The more positive the culture and climate the school/trust creates, the more likely its strategy is to succeed.

Links to useful documents and resources

The NGA Knowledge Centre is the essential information hub for governing boards. It contains a wealth of guidance and practical resources needed to improve governance and govern effectively.

What governing boards and school leaders should expect from each other – Joint guidance from the National Governance Association (NGA), the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Institute of School Business Leaders (ISBL).

Governance Handbook and Competency Framework for Governance, DfE

Academies Financial Handbook, ESFA

Education Inspection Framework, Ofsted

Support available from NGA

NGA Learning Link offers flexible e-learning to help governors, trustees, chairs and clerks develop their governance skills and knowledge. Learning link includes an e-learning module on strategy development, which looks at the process of developing an ambitious vision and strategy.

NGA's team of knowledgeable and experienced governance consultants provides bespoke support for governing boards. Whether you are looking for an

external review of governance, facilitation of an away day event, training and development aligned to your school or trust's governance structure, or very specific work such as an investigation or mediation, our carefully recruited, trained and quality assured team is here to work with you.

Support available from ASCL

ASCL is the professional association for all senior leaders. It welcomes members from all phases and supports those working in all senior leadership roles. The ASCL Leadership and Governance Zone has a wide range of information and advice relating to leadership, organisation and management across all phases.

Support available from NAHT

NAHT supports and represents school leaders working in a number of different areas of the education sector, including headteachers, deputy and assistant heads, school business leaders, special educational needs coordinators, virtual school heads and leaders of outdoor education centres. NAHT also provides bespoke advice on key structural matters, school performance measures and quality assurance.

Annex: Strategy outcomes and sources of evidence

The following are examples of high-level strategy outcomes. There is information about why each is important, together with examples of the evidence governing boards could use to monitor them. Note that some examples apply to all phases of education, while others are specific to primary or secondary.

Outcomes that relate to the curriculum, teaching and learning

Developing a broad and balanced curriculum

The curriculum that reflects the vision for the school/trust should be balanced and broadly based. It should also promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school(s) and of society; and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The governing board plays a key role in ensuring that the school's curriculum offer is "broad and balanced". It should evaluate how the curriculum meets the needs of pupils in their school and provides them with the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life.

Examples of evidence:

- Curriculum-related policies
- Headteacher reports
- Governing board Q&A
- Pupil and parent surveys
- Talking to pupils
- School website for subjects on offer (secondary)
- Governor school visits (these must be well planned and are not teacher observations – visit NGA's Knowledge Centre for more information)

The range of extra-curricular activities offered and participation in them

Governing boards should also take an interest in, and evaluate, the multiple opportunities offered to pupils outside the formal curriculum. These might include arts, music, sport, dance, voluntary work, clubs, etc.

Extra-curricular activities are enriching and help pupils to develop the confidence and skills to succeed in their learning and in life. They are a vital component in ensuring wellbeing and academic success.

Examples of evidence:

- Variety of extracurricular activities on offer and quality of facilities
- Participation in extracurricular activities across different groups of pupils
- Talking to pupils
- Pupil and parent surveys

Implementing the curriculum through quality teaching

Teaching and learning is implementation of the curriculum. Whilst it is not the role of the governing board to judge the quality of teaching, it should monitor what is being done to enhance the teaching of the curriculum and the appropriate use of assessment.

All teachers should receive high-quality relevant continuing professional development (CPD). Governing boards should evaluate how this aligns with the curriculum, pupils' progress, attainment, teachers' appraisal and pay progression.

Examples of evidence:

- Pupil progress and attainment data

- Headteacher reports, including anonymised feedback from lessons observed and the appraisal process

- Discussions with curriculum and subject leaders

- Information on staff with relevant teaching and specialist qualifications

- Information on the uptake of general and specialist CPD

- Feedback from pupils on their learning

- Feedback from staff on their CPD and support for teaching

The impact of the curriculum on pupil progress and attainment

A well-constructed and well-taught curriculum will lead to good results. It's important that the governing board ensures that this is the reality in its school/trust by monitoring the standards that pupils reach (their attainment) and their achievements over a period of time (their progress).

The outcomes of statutory national curriculum tests and teacher assessments are the attainment points. Using and interpreting the data available to measure the progress pupils make between these points and then comparing it with the progress made by pupils with similar attainment will help governing boards to evaluate the impact of their school/trust curriculum and the extent to which priorities in the strategy are being met.

The collection of data and its analysis must be proportionate. Time spent collecting and analysing data can be burdensome, placing additional workloads on school leaders, staff and governing boards.

Examples of evidence:

- The school's internal assessment and tracking data

- KS2 performance in the core subjects (primary)

- Progress 8/ Attainment/English Baccalaureate (EBacc) secondary)

- Distribution of GCSE/A-level points across individual subjects (secondary)

- Progress against appropriate measures (special schools)

- ASP

- Fischer Family Trust data

- DfE performance benchmarking data

- Governing board Q&A

Outcomes that relate to the learning environment and pupil welfare

The safeguarding culture

The governing board and school/trust have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, according to the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE).

Regardless of specific priorities, the culture of safeguarding should influence the school/trust's strategy. The governing board should continually monitor and evaluate the extent to which this is evident in the safeguarding policies and procedures; the arrangements for identifying and supporting pupils who are at risk; the process for referring and seeking appropriate support for those at risk; and for managing safeguarding allegations.

Examples of evidence:

- Safeguarding policies and procedures

- Headteacher reports that include anonymised information about incidents and referrals

- Reports received from the designated safeguarding lead

- Information on the relevant training staff receive and how this is kept up to date

- External validation from a school safeguarding adviser, peer review from other schools, etc.

- Governor school visits (these must be well planned and are not safeguarding inspections – visit NGA's Knowledge Centre for more information)

- Talking to pupils

Disadvantaged pupils and the Pupil Premium

The DfE's definition of disadvantaged refers to pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium; however, the governing board and school/trust leadership team should consider a definition of disadvantaged pupils in the context of their school/trust. For example, there may be a focus on pupils who have had little access to technology, those who have experienced loss, pupils from BAME communities and looked-after children.

An effective school- or trust-wide strategy for supporting disadvantaged pupils should help ensure that the barriers to their educational achievement are both identified and removed. It is crucial, therefore, that governing boards understand what is consistently preventing pupils from achieving their full potential (eg behaviour, attendance, support outside the classroom.) and then ensure that resources are targeted on the right pupils and in those areas.

Examples of evidence:

- Headteacher reports

- The Pupil Premium strategy document

- Pupil progress and attainment data

- Governing board Q&A

- Pupil and parent surveys

- External research

- Talking to pupils

- Governor school visits (these must be well planned and are not teacher observations – visit NGA's Knowledge Centre for more information)

Behaviour

Pupil behaviour has a significant impact on the learning environment. Challenging behaviour disrupts teaching and learning and consequently pupils' achievement.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes is one of four areas for which Ofsted makes a graded judgment and is a barometer of school culture. Routinely monitoring and evaluating the implementation of policies designed to promote good behaviour and prevent all forms of bullying amongst pupils, should provide the governing board with assurance that the expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct are commonly understood. It should also demonstrate that they are being applied consistently and fairly.

Examples of evidence:

- Headteacher reports, including information on incidents of bullying
- Staff, parent and pupil surveys
- Governor school visits (looking at implementation of behaviour policy)
- Talking to pupils
- Number of behaviour-management incidents (eg exclusions, detentions, etc)
- Amount of authorised/unauthorised absence
- Recognition and tracking of positive behaviour through school reward schemes

Pupil wellbeing and resilience

Children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural and social wellbeing are, on average, more engaged in school and have higher levels of academic achievement, both during school and in later years. The government's new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum will make mental health and wellbeing a compulsory part of pupils' education in primary and secondary school.

When developing their strategy, governing boards should consider the whole-school approach to mental health. When monitoring and evaluating their strategy it's important for governing boards to be able to recognise how pupils are taught about the importance of looking after themselves and their brains, how staff are trained and supported to identify symptoms and signposting pupils and families for support.

Examples of evidence:

- Policies relevant to RSHE
- Provision and access to mental health services
- Pupil and parent surveys
- Pupil and parent focus groups
- Anonymised reports from pastoral staff
- Pupil absence data and behaviour data

Outcomes that relate to the learning environment and pupil welfare (cont'd)

Preparing pupils for the next stages of life

The board's strategy and monitoring should reflect the role of schools in giving pupils the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the future.

All state-funded secondary schools, including academies and free schools, have a statutory duty to "secure access to independent careers guidance" for their students aged 13–18.

Schools must also "ensure that there is an opportunity for a range of education and training providers to access registered pupils during the relevant phase of their education for the purpose of informing them about approved technical education qualifications or apprenticeships".

Examples of evidence:

- Information, advice and guidance on careers delivered to pupils based on the Gatsby Good Career Guidance Benchmarks
- Pupil exit interviews
- Options available for next stage of education (secondary)
- Destination data for pupils up to three years after leaving and numbers of students who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) (secondary)
- Proportion applying for degree programmes at universities (including elite universities), vocational programmes at colleges and apprenticeships (secondary)

Outcomes that relate to staffing and resources

Staff wellbeing and morale

The culture of the organisation and the board's strategy should promote (and not undermine) a healthy working environment for all staff. A healthy working environment contributes towards attracting and retaining quality staff who are the school's most important resource.

When monitoring and evaluating the wellbeing and morale of staff, governing boards are advised to pay particular attention to how workload is assessed, supported and the action taken to reduce excessive workload. The DfE Workload Reduction Toolkit includes materials to help governing boards and trustees to support workload reduction in their schools and for themselves.

Examples of evidence:

- Staff surveys
- Staff absence data
- Staff turnover
- Feedback from teacher exit interviews
- What support is available to staff and feedback on the support offered

Resources

Strategy and resource are inextricably linked, and each improvement priority must be supported by appropriate budget and staff resource.

Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent is also one of the governing board's core functions. Ensuring the effective use of resources will allow the school/trust to give pupils the best education possible on a long-term basis.

School business professionals make a significant contribution towards the effective leadership and management of schools and trusts, including the management of financial resources. It is important that governing boards understand the specific remit of the school business professional's role as it applies to their school or trust and how to best utilise the information and support that they can provide.

Examples of evidence:

- Headteacher report that includes headline financial data and budget projections
- Financial benchmarking data
- Reports from the school business manager/senior executive leader
- Schools Financial Value Standard report (maintained schools)
- School management resource tool (trusts)
- Reports from auditors (internal or external)
- Measures of how money is prioritised and the impacts of spending
- Information on the school estate (buildings and grounds)
- Reports on Pupil Premium spending and impact

Wider stakeholder engagement and feedback

Ensuring the voices of stakeholders (parents, pupils, staff and the wider community) are heard and considered is fundamental to developing an effective strategy. It is also considered to be the fourth core strategic function of governing boards.

Developing a good relationship with parents, carers and the local community helps to build a collective purpose that benefits the school/trust in many ways.

Ofsted also uses responses to Parent View when making inspection judgments and will consider how effectively the governing board engages with parents

Examples of evidence:

- Parent surveys
- Feedback on Parent View
- Feedback mechanisms
- Press and social media coverage
- Information on the number and nature of complaints received
- Applications and admissions data
- Level of participation in community and voluntary activities at the school
- Engagement with local employers and speakers *(primary and secondary)*
- Number of pupils gaining work experience at local businesses *(secondary)*