



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

School Governors: acting as a critical friend and the impact of governor training

This report was produced in response to a request for advice from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language in his remit letter to Estyn for 2022 to 2023.

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Report details

It concerns the work of governing bodies in maintained primary, secondary, all-age and special schools. It is focused on what makes a governing body effective.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, governors and headteachers in schools, local authorities and school improvement services.

Summary of main findings

- Estyn found that most governors are enthusiastic and understand their role, supporting and working collaboratively with the senior leaders in their schools. However, many do not hold their senior leadership to account well enough. Whilst most governors understand their role in challenging senior leaders, many do not effectively hold them to account for educational performance and in turn do not help drive school improvement. In addition, governors need to gather more first-hand evidence of how well their school is performing, as opposed to over-reliance on headteacher reports.
- Estyn found that, whilst most governors are involved in developing their school's vision, the majority do not fully understand that their work needs to support this.
- Estyn found that the quality of support and training provided to governors from local authority and regional support services varies too much across Wales. The mandatory induction training for all new governors is well-attended but some content is not relevant to all governors in their particular school's circumstances.
- Estyn found that many governing bodies do not effectively self-evaluate their performance against their school's targets and vision. Nor do they evaluate the effectiveness of the training they receive or audit their members' skills to

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identify strengths and skills gaps on the governing body.

- Estyn found that issues with recruiting governors are particularly acute in some rural areas, those impacted by financial inequality or poverty, and for Welsh-medium provision. In particular, many governing bodies do not fully represent the diversity of their communities and more needs to be done to ensure governors from all backgrounds are attracted to vacancies.

Recommendations for governing bodies and schools

1. Improve governors' ability to challenge senior leaders about all aspects of the school's work.
2. Ensure that governors have regular and worthwhile opportunities to observe first-hand the progress that their school is making towards meeting its priorities.
3. Undertake regular self-evaluation of the work of the governing body to identify strengths and areas to improve.
4. Evaluate the impact of governor training on their role as effective strategic leaders and identify future training requirements.

Welsh Government response

The Welsh Government will consider its 'offer' for governors, including guidance provided, taking advice from the governor support services in local authorities and regions on how we can best support governing bodies.

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Recommendations for local authorities and school improvement services

5. Evaluate the quality of their governor training more rigorously to make improvements where needed.
6. Collaborate to ensure greater coherence and consistency in high-quality training opportunities between different parts of the country.
7. Provide more effective support and advice to governing bodies to help them in their role as effective strategic leaders.

Welsh Government response

The Welsh Government will work with governor support services in local authorities and regions to support them to provide high quality, effective services for their governing bodies. We will continue to engage with the ADEW Governor Support Officers' group on a regular basis to ensure they have the information and support they need from the Welsh Government, and to hear and consider their suggestions for improvements, referring to external organisations and partners for their expertise where necessary.

Recommendation 8 for the Welsh Government

8. Update the guidance for local authorities on what to include in training for school governors on understanding the role of data in supporting self-evaluation and improvement in schools in line with national changes to assessment practices.

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Welsh Government response: accept

In June 2022, we published school improvement guidance which introduced a new way for the education system to work together to support schools in their improvement, build confidence in the system and retain a clear focus on supporting all learners to progress through their education.

In January 2023, we published '**Developing a new data and information ecosystem that supports the reformed school system in Wales**' report, which sets out recommendations for approaches to using data and information, in a way that will allow partners across the system to work together to support all our learners, irrespective of background, to fulfil their potential.

Building on the findings of this report, we will work with schools, including governors, local authorities and regional consortia, Estyn and our expert advisors to develop a new school improvement and information landscape which supports and enables schools to deliver the new curriculum.

The guidance for local authorities on what to include in training for school governors will be updated in line with the outcomes of this work.

Recommendation 9 for the Welsh Government

9. Produce information on the important role of parent governors to help encourage parents, particularly those from different ethnic minority backgrounds, to apply to become a parent governor.

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Welsh Government response: accept

The Welsh Government wants to see governing bodies reflect the diversity of their communities and encourage parents from all backgrounds to play a part in their local school. Working with key partners, we will engage with parents and communities and produce information to encourage more diverse and representative governing bodies.

Recommendation 10 for the Welsh Government

10. Create a competency framework to assist governing bodies improve their effectiveness.

Welsh Government response: accept in principle

The Welsh Government will explore with local authorities and regions to what extent their new national self-evaluation tool helps with assessing the competence strengths and gaps in governing bodies. If required, new guidance from the Welsh Government will be considered.

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