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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
Promoting Improvement*



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*Providing Inspection Services for*  
**Department of Education  
Department for Employment and Learning  
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of a Survey**

### **Promoting Better School Governance in the Interests of the Learners**

**Inspected: 2004-2005**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 Good governance is a key feature of school improvement and effectiveness. The recruitment of governors, and training to assist them to understand and discharge more effectively their increasing management roles and responsibilities, have taken on a new importance with the introduction of the Education Reform Order, Local Management of Schools (LMS) and the increasing emphasis on raising achievement in teaching and learning. The Department of Education (DE) is undertaking currently a review of school governance in Northern Ireland (NI) with the purpose of “Promoting and Improving School Governance in the Interests of the Learners”. In this context, DE asked the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) for support and evidence-based advice in order to inform its deliberations and recommendations on policy. This survey<sup>1</sup> report presents the Inspectorate’s contribution to the review; it is based on the evidence from a sample of approximately 50 inspections during 2004-2005, on follow-up case-study visits to a small number of schools where the Inspectorate had identified good practice, and on attendance at a sample of training sessions for governors, organised by Education and Library Boards and by the Regional Training Unit, on Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) for principals and governors. In addition, discussions were held with the Lead Officers with responsibility for the co-ordination of all aspects of governor training and recruitment across the five Education and Library Boards.

1.2 Although the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have a legislative remit to provide governor training across all schools in NI, irrespective of management type, attendance at the training is not mandatory. Each ELB provides discrete training for schools in its area, as set out in its annual programme. A recognised Lead Officer in each ELB has the responsibility for the co-ordination of all aspects of governor training and recruitment. These officers, along with those colleagues from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) who have specific expertise across a range of areas, provide training courses for governors. The Lead Officers normally have other duties in addition to governance. Given the highly responsible and accountable role that governors play in schools and the critical importance attached to their training, the identification of an officer dedicated solely to governance matters would heighten the profile of governance and training.

Key issue to be addressed.

- There is a need to provide higher priority to governor support and training and to review the structure and level of staff resources; the possibility should be explored, within resource constraints, of identifying a dedicated officer with a clearly defined role and the specific responsibility to provide a quality service for governance.

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<sup>1</sup> The survey took as its focus the provision of governance training by the ELBs. On occasions, separate and distinctive courses are provided by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) for schools under their management; the former, for example, has provided sector-specific training on Catholic Education – Roles and Challenges; furthermore, it has published a range of materials to support various aspects of governance within their sector including ‘Partnership for Quality’ which contains practical guidance for Governors of Catholic Maintained Schools. RTU, on behalf of all the ELBs, also invites governors to certain courses on keynote issues (see reference to PRSD courses later in the report.)

## **2. THE ROLE OF THE INTER BOARD GOVERNOR GROUP (IBGG)**

2.1 The IBGG oversees governance related issues and comprises the Lead Officers from each ELB; representatives from the Regional Training Unit (RTU) and CCMS attend the meetings. Although neither RTU nor CCMS has any statutory role in the training of governors, they may contribute to training as appropriate (see footnote 1) and, given their particular functions, their presence at these meetings allows the sharing of ideas and insights. The group has several roles. Its main function, however, is to co-ordinate and plan a consistent and common approach to governor training across the five ELBs, and around five meetings are held each year at the Regional Training Unit (RTU) complex. The IBGG determines the focus of the support to be given to governors by the ELBs and reviews the nature and scope of the training. In addition, it provides a useful discussion forum for the exchange of information and the raising of important matters in relation to governance. The group has generated useful resources for governor training and has updated recently its Handbook for Governors.

Key issue to be addressed.

- There is a need to continue to explore the scope for inter-board co-operation in the interests of consistency and economy.

## **3. THE RANGE, SCOPE AND EXTENT OF THE TRAINING PROVIDED BY THE ELBS**

3.1 A comprehensive range of training courses dealing with important themes is provided. The training is held during afternoons or evenings in hotels or teachers' centres; helpfully, the sessions (to some of which principals are invited as appropriate) are normally repeated several times to ensure adequate coverage. In one ELB, for example, 35 governor training sessions were organised last year and between 600 and 700 governors participated. Another ELB reports that while the training is well-supported and held mainly in the evening, a number of primary school principals find evening training difficult to attend so the board offers some afternoon training. The courses often focus on key legislative changes, for example, Freedom of Information (FOI) issues or those related to the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order (SENDO). In one board, there have been repeated sessions on Financial Management, and consultation on the proposed LMS common formula funding scheme, Human Rights awareness and anti-bullying, and the Misuse of Drugs: Policy and Practice. Health and Safety and Child Protection matters are accepted as important topics also and they feature annually. Apart from the ongoing training, the ELBs have been involved in the recruitment and induction of new governors due to the imminent re-constitution of Boards of Governors in January 2006.

3.2 An ELB course on Freedom of Information (FOI) attracted 87 governors and 66 principals; participants appreciated the guidance offered on handling requests, knowing the difference between FOI and the Data Protection Act, and the advice they received on note taking. A large number of principals and governors (147) attended training on Human Rights and the development of an anti-bullying policy. Follow-up evaluations of the training,

carried out by the Lead Officer, highlighted the usefulness of raising the awareness of important legal issues and it was helpful that strategies for promoting good behaviour were included. Other well-supported courses included Finance Management Training which focused on the management of school budgets and was attended by more than 60 principals and governors.

3.3 A wide range of specific issues, as distinct from training, has been dealt with in recent years. These include: Selection and Recruitment, Resource Management, Controlled Integrated Status, the operation of LMS, Budget Analysis, Employment issues, Grievance Procedures, Disciplinary action, advice on hearings and investigations, Performance Management and Premises Management.

3.4 The ELBs engage a range of specialists to contribute to the training, including those from the RTU. In addition, a number of CASS officers with expertise in Child Protection, Health and Safety, and the role and responsibilities of the chairperson and vice-chairperson of a Board of Governors, provide specific courses for interested parties. Furthermore, an induction programme is offered for all new governors.

3.5 Although the ELBs provide a comprehensive range of general training courses for governors and at times respond to requests for advice from individual Boards of Governors, the support provided is, in the main, general. The model of training adopted does not always take sufficient account of the distinctive circumstances of individual schools, although one ELB provides support specifically tailored, for example, for governors of schools in financial difficulties; this good practice needs to become more widespread.

Key issue to be addressed.

- The general training for governors needs to be supplemented by support which is more customised and specific to meet the needs of individual schools.

3.6 There is an increasing emphasis on training for governors on topics related to the employer's function, including courses on appointments, grievance procedures, handling redundancies, harassment and school finance. While all of these themes are important, governors, and consequently schools, and ultimately their pupils, would benefit from courses dealing with the school improvement agenda and self-evaluation matters, including issues such as target setting, bench-marking and development planning.

Key issue to be addressed.

- There is a need for more training related to school improvement issues.

#### **4. ATTENDANCE BY GOVERNORS AT TRAINING**

4.1 There is mixed practice in relation to the notification given to governors to attend courses. Most ELBs list, on their website, the annual programme of courses. In some ELBs, governors receive a personal invitation, while in others, all correspondence with governors to attend training is through the school, and not with individuals. Attendance at training by governors, however, is variable. In one ELB, for example, to ensure maximum awareness, information about course content, venue and dates is sent to individual governors at their home address; notification is also sent to all schools and details of the yearly programme are

furnished to all governors and schools. Another ELB reports that the governors of several schools have an excellent attendance record. However, despite the large initial acceptance for courses, a major, ongoing problem is the high rate of non-attendance at the courses organised; often up to one-third or more of governors do not turn up on the day. In one ELB, invitations to governors are sent directly to the schools, each receiving ten copies of training events to be distributed to governors by the Principal. This ELB has also invested in an ICT module specifically designed to record attendance at governor training and to include names, addresses and interests. It is hoped that this system will provide schools with an updated print-out containing a record and a current audit of their governor training.

Key issues to be addressed.

- Measures need to be taken to address the poor attendance at governor training.
- Greater use should be made of ICT for administrative purposes.

4.2 Although all ELBs maintain a record of course attendees, the format and detail of this vary. In one ELB, a full and complete database of attendance by governors from controlled and maintained schools is kept. Another ELB records the course attendance but does not maintain an overall profile of courses attended by individual governors or schools. The extent of the training needs of governors in each school and its analysis have not been carried out sufficiently rigorously by the ELBs. In the ELB where the highest proportion of Irish-medium (IM) schools exists, it is reported that attendance at governor training by this sector is low. The ELB has considered organising a whole day to training IM governors to deal with the range of discrete issues which apply to that sector and this would be an appropriate and positive response to attempt to ameliorate the current situation. Presently, there is no recognition or certification given to governors who have attended governor training or a series of courses. One ELB, however, is considering the introduction of accreditation for governors.

Key issues to be addressed.

- There is a need to raise the profile of governor training, perhaps through a recognition system, in order to improve attendance.
- Although there is some good practice, overall, the ELBs need to monitor more closely the level of attendance and keep better records of attendance at training by governors and to quantify more fully the uptake.
- The ELBs need to make better use of ICT in order to establish and maintain an up to date database of governors, their skills and the training attended.
- Measures need to be taken to address the lower attendance at training sessions by governors from the Irish-medium and the grant-maintained integrated schools sectors.

4.3 Governors are encouraged by ELBs to attend courses in which they have a specific interest or responsibility. Principals attend some of the courses along with their governors (usually with the chairperson and/or the vice-chairperson) in cases where there is an agenda of important common interest; on most occasions, though, the governors have separate training sessions. Most ELBs provide some training for principals and governors together, in

order to ensure commonality of experience and a shared agenda for improvement, as well as to inform discussion and to promote team building and good working relationships; this is proving a useful approach in many instances. Often, areas for development are highlighted in individual schools arising from an inspection report - for example, Child Protection, or areas pertinent to school staffing such as job-shares and appointments.

## **5. THE NATURE AND FOCUS OF THE TRAINING**

While ELBs attempt to provide training at a level suitable for all participants, the depth of detail required varies among governors. In one ELB, for example, no prior knowledge is assumed and the training offered is not differentiated in any way. The responsibility lies with the applicant to determine if the course is appropriate. Similarly, in another ELB the basis of the seminars for the governors starts from the viewpoint that they have a limited knowledge. At times, and appropriately, the nature and depth of the training are reviewed for the second session after feedback from the first session; materials are sometimes modified and different emphases placed on aspects of topics.

Key issue to be addressed.

- The prior knowledge and expertise of governors should be taken more fully into account at training sessions.

## **6. THE USE OF THE ELB WEBSITES TO PROMOTE THE GOVERNOR TRAINING PROGRAMME**

The websites of several ELBs contain a section on governance which supplements the information available elsewhere. The scope and helpfulness of these web-entries vary. In one instance, for governors who may have missed training sessions, the presentations and handouts are downloadable and available. One ELB website has a section dedicated to governance but the full training programme is not listed; the site is not always up-to-date and some of the information is not relevant. The website of another area board is particularly helpful, and contains presentations placed on site after training sessions, leaflets relating to governor training and newsletters for governors published once per term. At the time of writing, the website of one of the area boards was not current. The ELBs should consider further the potential of ICT as an integral aspect of governor training.

Key issues to be addressed.

- There is a need for a common, up to date website dedicated to the promotion of better governance in NI. This site could include a folder compiled by the partner employing authorities, 'Advice for Governors', containing the key policies and legislation forming a valuable resource for governors.
- Greater use should be made of ICT for governor training.

## **7. AREAS REQUIRING FURTHER TRAINING**

7.1 With the introduction of the Northern Ireland scheme for PRSD in September 2005, governors will have increased responsibilities in schools, and, in effect, their role as line managers to school principals will be strengthened. The objective of the PRSD programme is the promotion of a high performance culture for NI schools linked to an effective staff development culture. One of the main priorities facing the ELBs is the need for training related to PRSD, and RTU is providing training on their behalf. The ELBs have been working closely in organising conferences and in addressing issues in relation to the PRSD full scheme and its implementation. For some ELBs, PRSD is the current concern and no additional governor training will be provided until the programme of PRSD training is completed. At the time of writing this report, there has been a series of conferences for school leaders and governors as part of the programme for implementing the new scheme.

7.2 Governors, as reviewers of a principal's salary, now have new and significant responsibilities. Designated governors, for example, as part of the PRSD requirements, will have the specific duty to observe and evaluate certain aspects of the principal's work. Concern has been expressed by principals and governors about the time demands of this task and of the level of understanding of the reviewer to make objective judgements on the principal's performance.

7.3 The ELBs report that the induction and recruitment of new governors due to the reconstitution of Boards of Governors for January 2006 together form a key priority. The emphasis will be on the responsibilities of the governors and building relationships with the principal, staff and parents. Also, there are issues for training related to SENDO, the requirements of DE Circular 2003/13, "Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order" and suspensions and expulsions.

7.4 In addition, there is need for training for the Classroom 2000 (C2k) Financial Management (FMS) module (a critical issue in the light of the recent NI Audit Office report), school development planning in line with the statutory requirements, Human Rights and the Misuse of drugs.

## **8. THE QUALITY OF GOVERNOR TRAINING**

8.1 Inspectors observed two major conferences on PRSD for governor reviewers and principals, which were organised by the RTU. The delivery of these courses was the responsibility of both retired and serving primary and post-primary school principals. The aim of the conferences was to give governors and principals an overview of the PRSD scheme and to demonstrate how PRSD can make a significant contribution to school development. In addition, the key elements and main implications of this new scheme were explained in detail in order to enable governor reviewers to carry out their responsibilities and fulfil their new role.



8.2 The conferences attracted a large number of participants with representatives from the Controlled, Maintained and Grant-maintained integrated sectors. The sessions had a clear structure and the course objectives were identified clearly at the outset. The presenters were knowledgeable about the content and were highly confident in their delivery. Opportunities were taken to address specific queries as they arose during the presentations. The courses dealt comprehensively with the principles and management of PRSD and outlined clearly the procedures, time-scale, scope and roles and responsibilities within the scheme.

8.3 The training model employed was a varied combination of presentations, workshops, case studies and plenary sessions. A good rapport was established between the presenters and the participants. To support the training, RTU officials had prepared a useful booklet containing an outline of the course content, including the timing of each activity, as well as copies of the presentations and details about the workshops; this proved subsequently to be a valuable reference in schools. The aim of the conferences was to increase awareness about PRSD, and this was achieved largely in both instances. However, the responses of both governors and principals differed from one conference to the other. In one ELB the participants were more positive and less apprehensive about managing the scheme; in the other, there was disquiet when it was learned that the new scheme may involve classroom observation of teaching by governors and expect them to make informed comment on it. Governors were concerned that with only one training session (however useful) and a supplementary booklet, they were ill-equipped and lacking in sufficient guidance to cope with the impending roll-out of PRSD. The course presenters coped very well with the challenges raised by members of the audience but did not succeed in allaying governors' concerns about performing this sensitive role (which is salary related for principals and vice-principals).

8.5 In anticipation of the new arrangements relating to PRSD, one ELB held a separate training and development session on rigorous target setting, the gathering of evidence and the use of success criteria. The aim of the course was to support governors and principals in the setting of challenging and 'SMART', performance objectives. This practical course provided clear guidance and set out explicitly the important stages, roles and responsibilities for all those involved in the PRSD process. Attendees had the opportunity to work in groups organised by phases and they were supported well with useful handouts outlining the key features of PRSD.

8.6 However, PRSD has not been the only theme for recent courses, for example, one ELB organised a course on 'Drugs: Guidance For Schools' which was attended by around 40 governors and principals from Controlled and Maintained schools. This training was presented by an officer from the ELB's CASS and a member of the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI). While the course programme set out an appropriate range of key issues to be addressed, the content was too ambitious; important aspects were rushed or not addressed at all. Overall, the course raised the participants' awareness of different types of drugs and the law relating to the handling and use of illegal drugs, but the key aspect on school procedures in relation to policies, practice, roles and responsibilities was less effectively addressed. It was stressed by the organisers that this meeting was an awareness-

raising exercise and was a precursor to a series of meetings for principals and teachers when procedures would be examined at length. From this perspective, a much reduced and less detailed content would have been better for this session. This generic course was being presented for the fifth and last time over a two-week period; there was no substantive evidence that the structure had been modified, or the amount of content adjusted in light of previous experience or from feedback from participants.

8.7 Another ELB course, this time on ‘Resource Management’, attracted eleven governors and principals. Important recommendations from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) were highlighted appropriately in relation to the strategic role played by the governors in monitoring more effectively the school budget. A detailed explanation was provided of the Common Formula Funding arrangements and the new mechanism used by DE for determining individual school budgets. The Lead Officer stressed that all future meetings of Boards of Governors would include an update on financial matters. In order to ensure productive discussions, the governors would receive monthly financial statements in advance of their meetings. The training was characterised by the sound financial management advice given to both governors and principals regarding the prudent handling of school budgets. There was a suitable emphasis on early corrective action to be taken in cases where the forward projection of enrolments signalled a decline. The participants were advised to act early in order to minimize later budgetary problems.

8.8 Participants were informed that the ELB intends to implement the C2k Resource Management System, a more sophisticated and modern electronic method of data interchange and transaction, already in use elsewhere. This computerised financial system is designed to facilitate the planning, allocation, monitoring and control of each school’s LMS delegated budget. It has the capacity and functionality to provide governors across all the ELBs with accurate, up to date financial information and reports on budgets, commitments and actual expenditure to support effective financial management; it will enable schools to carry out more effectively their day to day finance functions, and discharge more efficiently their LMS responsibilities; it has the potential also to assist schools to become more cost effective and efficient in their financial management.

Key issue to be addressed.

- The variation in the quality of training for Boards of Governors needs to be reviewed; the IBBG has a valuable contribution to make in this context.

## **9. EVIDENCE OBTAINED FROM THE INSPECTORATE’S MEETINGS WITH BOARDS OF GOVERNORS**

9.1 On the first day of each school inspection in NI, the Reporting Inspector (RI) and the Deputy RI meet with the Board of Governors. The main purpose of the meeting is to afford an opportunity to the RI to seek the governors’ views on the wide range of issues affecting the life and work of the school; the governors’ comments are taken into account as part of the inspection. During the course of 2004-05, the Inspectorate used a questionnaire to record and collate the views of the governors of more than 50 primary and post-primary schools, about their perceived roles and responsibilities, including the support and the training they received.

Below is an analysis of the findings.

## 9.2 FREQUENCY OF BOARD OF GOVERNOR MEETINGS

On average there were six meetings during the course of the 2003-04 school year. In a small number of instances there were significantly more meetings when major issues such as an amalgamation of schools or multiple appointments were being considered. The minimum reported number of meetings was three.

## 9.3 SUB-COMMITTEES

All schools reported that they conducted business using a structure of sub-committees; a salary sub-committee exists in all schools in the sample, often as part of the remit of a finance committee. Other common sub-committees include those for appointments, pastoral care and child protection, health and safety, complaints and appeals. Meetings are held as appropriate and recommendations of all the sub-committees are ratified by the full Board of Governors.

## 9.4 SCHOOL GOVERNORS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR KEY FUNCTIONS

All Boards of Governors identified the following as key features of their roles and responsibilities.

- **Appointments, Promotions and Redundancies**

The clear guidance on procedures and additional advice readily available from the employing authority generally results in straightforward, if time-consuming, business. One chairperson commented that support staff appointments tend to be more difficult as applicants are usually drawn from the local community and those who are unsuccessful often find the disappointment hard to accept. Whilst the procedures for dealing with redundancies are very clear, a majority of Boards of Governors involved in such procedures referred to the all-round emotional cost of invoking the process.

- **Pastoral Care (PC) and Child Protection (CP)**

Almost all governors reported that they discussed and ratified relevant policies relating to PC/CP issues, including discipline and drugs awareness. They are aware of the need for the vetting of all adults associated with their schools and the imperative of efficient record keeping. The extent and influence of relevant training vary; in the best practice, the majority of the governors of an individual school had attended an ELB training session, and at the subsequent governors' meeting, had discussed the issues raised and the procedures required. In addition, they received regular updates from the Principal on any on-going issues or cases involving their school. In one instance, the governors of a school reported that they had received no external training and that they had been made aware of their key role and responsibilities by the Principal.

- **Finance**

All Boards of Governors are aware of the delegated budget arrangements under the LMS procedures and many have set up finance sub-committees (at times with an accountant or bank official as a key member). The extent to which income and expenditure are monitored varies. Almost all governors rely on the Principal to provide details of the school budget; in an example of poor practice, one chairperson stated, 'we know if we're in the black or the red and that's about all.' In a further example of poor financial management, a two teacher school, with a 20% over-spend, was still employing two additional part-time teachers and had made no projection of the school's end-of-year financial state. In the best practice, a small number of sub-committees received, and analysed closely, the monthly ELB financial print-outs, and, in conjunction with the Principal, drew up short, medium and long term spending plans. Such plans may result in a reduction or increase in part-time, temporary or permanent staff or in the purchase of key resources. A chairperson reported, 'we can account for our budget, down to the last penny.' Another chairperson stated, 'we strive for budget balance or a small surplus, if at all possible.' Many governors referred to the difficulty of working to an imprecise budget due to falling or fluctuating enrolments.

Key issue to be addressed.

- The ELBs need to monitor more closely school budgets to ensure that effective financial management is carried out by Boards of Governors.
- **Open Enrolment, Admissions, Retentions, Suspensions and Expulsions**

Almost all Boards of Governors are aware that there are set procedures to deal with these matters and generally they rely on the Principal to provide guidance as appropriate. The sanctions of suspensions and expulsions are used very infrequently in the primary phase.

- **Accommodation, Health and Safety (H&S) Issues and Resources**

All Boards of Governors are aware of and vociferous about accommodation deficiencies and health and safety issues. Almost all carry out an annual inspection of the premises and, in the best practice, this review is led by a governor with an interest and training in such matters. Generally, they report that the employing authority responds promptly and positively to Health and Safety issues. Deficiencies in accommodation are addressed less consistently.

- **Links with Parents, Other schools and the Community**

All Boards of Governors stressed the vital place their schools hold within the community, and this was stated very emphatically in small rural schools. They reported that the parents very much support the school and, as governors, they show their solidarity through attendance at school events, fund raising and shared

membership of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA). The governors value the links established with other schools, especially those of a cross-community nature. Almost all Boards of Governors prepare an annual report for parents and conduct an annual meeting.

To a lesser extent, Boards of Governors are involved in the following activities:

- **The Drawing up and Ratifying of School Policies**

While almost all governors report that they are aware of the existence of school policies, both curricular and general, a large majority state that the policies tend to be presented to them by the Principal and ratified after a general discussion on the content. One chairperson stated: ‘we have sight of the policy before signing it off’. A small number of Boards of Governors stated that they are not mere ‘rubber-stampers’, but do have input into policies – usually presented to them at draft stage – and then they ratify formally after any amendments are made. Some Boards of Governors have formed a curriculum sub-committee to evaluate whole-school policies and guidance.

- **Standards, Bench-marking and Target Setting**

All governors understand the need to include external assessment outcomes in the annual report to parents. In the primary sector, generally, greater cognisance is taken of Transfer Procedure results as a measure of standards, rather than end-of-Key Stage (KS) outcomes. In almost all schools, governors are not familiar with benchmarking against schools of comparable size or free school meals (FSM), and with the exception of a very small number of schools, they are not involved in the setting or monitoring of targets.

- **Performance Indicators Linked to the Salary of the Principal and Vice-Principal**

While the majority of Boards of Governors acknowledge their role in determining the salary of the Principal and the Vice-Principal, only a small number set and reviewed annual performance indicators. One chairperson stated, ‘the number of items on the school development plan (SDP) decided the level of the Principal’s salary’. A number of governors referred to the challenge of the forthcoming arrangements for PRSD and the link to salaries.

## 9.5 THE INVOLVEMENT OF GOVERNORS IN THE SCHOOL’S PROGRAMME FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is little evidence to show that Boards of Governors are involved in, or aware of their school’s programme for improvement.

- **Drawing up and Monitoring the SDP and Associated Action Plans**

A majority of governors have been made aware by the Principal of the SDP but they are not involved in devising it; only a small number scrutinise and monitor the progress of the relevant action plans. One Board of Governors stated that they persuaded the Principal to make the SDP less ambitious. In another example, the chairperson was particularly interested in the school's performance and the targets for improvement and ensured that this was a regular agenda item.

- **Awareness of Outcomes and Bench Marking of External Assessments**

While there is an increasing use of assessment data for management purposes in schools, very few governors are informed about benchmarking trends in relation to free school meals and school size bands; they lack knowledge as to whether their school is maintaining and evaluating its performance against recognised benchmarked data. In the occasional good practice, the governors of a grammar school had a good knowledge of results at pupil level and at departmental level, and monitored appropriate targets for improvement; on the other hand, in another post-primary school, there was no awareness of benchmarking or any detailed analysis of results either at pupil or departmental levels. Governors were consistently unaware of the internal assessment processes such as standardised scores, but had some awareness of the school's reporting arrangements.

- **Knowledge of the School's Self-Evaluative Process**

Governors were also unaware of the processes (where they existed) used by the schools to self-evaluate provision and standards of achievement. One chairperson stated that he knew the school was doing well by enrolment trends, demand for places and comments from parents. One school embarked on Investors In People (IIP) following the suggestion of a governor who had worked through the process in his job.

## 9.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT OF GOVERNORS

Almost all governors stated that they had received training in a variety of appropriate topics and that the training was considered consistently to be valuable in enhancing their awareness and understanding of important issues. However, there are a number of concerns and challenges emerging from an analysis of the evidence obtained from the Inspectorate's meetings with Boards of Governors. Further and more focused support for governors is required in the following areas in which issues are becoming increasingly technical. The ELBs will need to assist individual governors to become better equipped to address the following challenges with improved confidence:

- their growing involvement in and contribution to the school's programme for improvement;
- the effective financial management of schools, and, in particular, in the circumstance of falling enrolment;
- the requirements for PRSD and SDP;

- the effective management of human resource matters, including redundancies and teacher welfare;
- the use and availability of on-site advice to support governors in determining essential and enhanced criteria for the selection of candidates for interview thus helping to reduce the inordinate amount of time spent on appointment procedures;

In addition, measures need to be taken to ensure the recruitment of new governors with appropriate skills and a willingness to add to those skills, given their increasingly challenging role.

## 10. CASE STUDIES OF SCHOOLS WHERE A COMBINATION OF FACTORS HAS LED TO GOOD PRACTICE IN RELATION TO GOVERNANCE

### Case Study 1

**This case study highlights the important role played by the Board of Governors in promoting and sustaining school improvement and in setting high standards for all the children within the school community.**

In an inner city primary school, there is a proactive and dedicated Board of Governors whose members take their responsibilities very seriously and have the interests of the school and community at heart. They provide different levels of support, from hands-on practical assistance to strategic support. Various governors, for example, work in the school on a voluntary basis, helping out with the younger classes or contributing to school productions by organising costumes or accompanying children on school trips. One governor is helping with introducing library automation and management software into the school library.

The governors have visited Reading Recovery (RR) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) sessions. They are informed by the Principal of the standards and attainments of the children; they are keen that the standards improve further, and that the children continue to be supported and challenged in their work. Information and data on the end of KS results, standardised scores and Transfer Procedure tests are analysed at meetings. The school's performance against schools of similar size and free school meals is discussed and is included in the Annual Report to the Parents.

Good working relations and mutual respect exist among the governors and the Principal; this relationship is based on trust. The Principal is considered to be the 'steward'. School business is conducted in an open and transparent manner. A flow of good quality information to the Board of Governors is ensured, and a series of checks and balances are in place. The Principal briefs the governors well, both incidentally, through the chairperson calling regularly into the school, and, formally, through the documents made available to the full Board. Clear communications are seen as essential and all governors are kept informed at the same time in order that the main issues are dealt with immediately by all governors.

The appointment of new staff, especially ensuring suitable appointments, is the most time consuming and challenging aspect of the work of the governors in this school. They are prepared to spend as much time as required on this. These governors express their sense of pride and privilege to be associated with such an excellent school.

## Case Study 2

**This case study highlights the important role played by a skilled chairperson and the effective use made of governor sub-committees.**

The governors of a large primary school had carried out their standard requirements and duties formerly expected of them, including their involvement in appointments, the approval of annual budgets and the inspection of the premises. With the appointment, however, of a new chairperson with a background in education, the focus of their work changed radically. School business was managed more efficiently; governors' meetings were chaired very competently and educational matters were addressed more comprehensively.

Regular contact was made with both parents and teachers; the chairperson attends and speaks at parent information evenings each September and there is regular attendance at school events by governors. The governors now know the class teachers better than was the case formerly, and they acknowledge the school's achievements; they became more involved in school life, were much more aware of their roles and responsibilities and adopted a very proactive approach to school matters.

A structure of sub-committees, using the interests and expertise of members, was established. An accountant, for example, sits on the finance and salary sub-committee, its responsibilities include the setting of annual performance criteria for the Principal and Vice-Principal, drawn from the SDP. They meet with the Principal and Vice-Principal at the end of the school year to consider evidence of performance. The Finance sub-committee monitors closely general budget matters including staffing, due to the need to manage a reduction in teaching staff in recent years. The chairperson is fully aware of the school's spending projections and examines the monthly budget statements.

A curriculum sub-committee meets every two months. It receives policies at first draft stage for discussion with the Principal, discusses and suggests amendments as appropriate; these are then presented to the full Board of Governors for ratification. The 2005/06 SDP identifies the need to involve further the governors in the school's improvement agenda; this will include a detailed analysis of assessment data, the tracking and targeting of the performance of individual children and having a knowledge of the Education Plans (EPs) of the children who have special educational needs.

Members are very responsive to governor training opportunities; they attend specific topics as appropriate and they provide comprehensive reports to the full board. Preparation for the requirements of PRSD is being addressed currently. Support and guidance from the ELB and CCMS are invaluable and much appreciated. Regular meetings between the Principal and chairperson ensure that all relevant matters are kept to the fore. In addition, the Principal, the chairperson and other interested governors respond to all consultation documents received from DE; their draft response is presented to the full Board of Governors for any additional views.



### **Case Study 3**

**This case study examines the process of governance carried out by an enlarged and proactive Board of Governors in a post-primary school dealing with auditing public examination results.**

Although the full body of the governors meets four times annually, a management committee or what the chairperson described as the 'engine room of the Board of Governors', comprising nine members, meets on a monthly basis. The management committee contains a wide variety of professional expertise and carries out the vast majority of the work. The members are well informed; in a spirit of openness, the Principal shares a range of important papers with them. Under the leadership of the Principal, specific measures have been taken to encourage the governors to take a more proactive role in, for example, the analysis and discussion of the educational attainments and standards achieved by the pupils. The governors have worked alongside those with management responsibilities in the school to benchmark the school's examination performance and undertake an impact analysis of the results of individual subject departments. This exercise has assisted the school to measure added value, to determine its strengths and weaknesses and to plan for improvement. In addition, the Board of Governors has debated a number of important challenges facing the school, including the Costello and Tomlinson reports, and the proposals for the revised curriculum.

### **Case study 4**

**This case study highlights the benefits that can accrue for the children where the Principal and the governors work in 'partnership for quality.'**

The process of engaging the governors with shaping the vision and direction of the school commences with the selection process. The Principal encourages a range of parents with specialist expertise that could be beneficial to the school, to forward their names for nomination as governors.

As part of the school's drive to raise standards further, two of the three members of the school management team (SMT) attend all meetings of the Board of Governors. Their role is to advise on current classroom practice and on the key issues relevant to each key stage. In order to promote a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, the governors receive regular updates from the co-ordinators, in line with the priorities of the SDP. For example, the teachers of years 1 and 2 informed the governors of the implementation of the Early Years Enriched Curriculum, and the special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO) on the development of the Reading Recovery programme. The governors receive progress reports on the school's benchmarking data; they are trained in this process by the assessment co-ordinator, in order to provide a critical analysis base for the school. The governors act as a checks and balance mechanism for curriculum developments. They receive regular feedback on the initiatives, and in certain cases, they observe classroom practice for themselves, allowing them both to challenge constructively and to support school management. The Principal discusses with the governors Inspectorate publications, such as, 'Evaluating Schools' and 'Together Towards Improvement', as a means of assessing the school's provision and helping to embed a culture of best practice.

The Principal ensures that there is suitable in-service training (INSET) for governors. This is achieved in two ways, firstly, through their attendance at ELB courses and, secondly, in their use of publications by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). The Principal considers, with the governors, the Catholic vision for education and their role in promoting the successful governance of the school. Key areas for governance training identified by the Principal are related to the responsibilities of the sub-committee for appointments and recruitment and the Finance and Salaries committee. Another important area for INSET is that of Child Protection. The key outcomes gained from the training are disseminated to the governors who have the opportunity to report back to the full board in order to promote a transparency in the discussions.

## **11. SUMMARY OF AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

In order to enhance the management of schools in NI and to promote an enhanced quality of school governance, action should be taken in relation to the following areas for improvement.

11.1 A number of recruitment and induction issues should be addressed, including the need for:

- the recruitment of governors with a variety of professional skills and expertise;
- measures to be taken to enable small rural schools and schools in deprived areas to attract more governors;
- better access to quality induction programmes for new governors.

11.2 A number of training issues should be addressed, including the need for:

- the promotion of more consistently effective training as the means by which improvements in the standard of school governance may be delivered;
- greater use of ICT for administrative and training purposes and a common, up-to-date website containing relevant material to support governors;
- less general and more customised types of approach to the training of governors;
- specific training to support the governors in those schools facing declining enrolment and the associated challenges related to staffing;
- the provision of advice to governors to enhance further their skill and confidence in managing the process of appointments;
- measures to address the poor attendance at governor training;
- an exploration of the possibility of certification for those undertaking governor training.

11.3 The following issue related to school finance should be addressed. There is a need for:

- schools and Boards of Governors to manage their budgets increasingly effectively, and for the ELBs to promote more efficient financial management.

11.4 A number of issues related to the development of a more strategic management and decision making role for school governors should be addressed, including the need for:

- the increased involvement of governors in school improvement matters, for instance in the monitoring and review of school performance data and target-setting, and in strategic planning to address the standards of the pupils' attainments;
- the increased capacity of governors to offer support and constructive challenge when appropriate and to provide checks and balances on all aspects of the work of the school;
- for governors to temper their reliance on the school principal for guidance with a willingness to make informed judgements and to offer their own advice and insights.

## 12. CONCLUSION

12.1 A majority of Boards of Governors are aware of external examination outcomes, but very few are directly involved in comparing benchmarked data and in setting targets. There is very little awareness of the processes used by schools to monitor pupils' progress, and only in a small number of schools is there an understanding of and involvement in the school's strategy for improvement.

12.2 If Boards of Governors are to embrace important areas related to teaching and learning, standards and outcomes, improvement and self-evaluation, they are, generally, insufficiently equipped as yet to do so. Governors will require comprehensive training in these specific areas to give them the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to demonstrate good governance in the core business of the school, that is in improving provision and raising standards of achievement for learners.

12.3 Almost all governors make reference to the good working relationships and mutual respect that exist between them and the Principal, and, appropriately, they see this as a critical, necessary condition for effective governance. Many also appreciate that there needs to be openness, honest debate and sharing of important information and knowledge among all those involved in a school; they undertake, with confidence and success, the well-established roles, such as appointments, property management and links with parents. The area of financial management is less secure, with only a minority of governors involved in overseeing expenditure and income on an ongoing basis. While most Boards of Governors ratify school policies and at times the SDP, only a small minority discuss and amend the original documents and monitor their implementation.

12.4 The breadth of knowledge expected of a governor is substantial. Many public-spirited individuals are willing to give generously of their time and expertise in order to work

unstintingly for the good of schools, and ultimately learners, throughout NI. Many governors bring particular skills which strengthen the leadership of schools and contribute to their sense of community. Most also demonstrate, without fail, a strong commitment to their schools and to children and young people – such a commitment provides a promising foundation on which to build.

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