

## Introduction

We are committed to raising the standard of education in the city, increasing the number of schools that are judged good or better and improving attainment and wider educational outcomes for Portsmouth's children and young people. Our vision for education is articulated in the city's school improvement strategy – *Effective Learning for Every Pupil* – which makes clear the importance of school governance in securing this vision when it says, 'Governors are key people in the school system and good governance is important to having an outstanding school.'

The Effective School Governance Strategy takes forward our objectives in relation to strengthening the role of governors and the way in which they are selected, trained and supported in this vital role.

Improving the effectiveness of school governance requires a partnership approach and joint working between the local authority, Portsmouth's schools and governing bodies and other key stakeholders across the city, in particular the business community. While Portsmouth City Council has taken the lead in developing this strategy, it has been informed by ongoing debate and discussion with existing governors, headteachers, clerks to governing bodies, strategic leads for education in the city (including councillors) and members of the business community.

As a result of this partnership approach to developing it, the Effective School Governance Strategy is intended to provide a framework for everybody involved in improving school governance (and school improvement more widely) in Portsmouth.

The action plan identifies work that is required in the short, medium and long term. Our immediate priority is to reduce the number of governor vacancies, which we will achieve by undertaking targeted recruitment. Strengthening induction practices across the city will help to ensure that new governors have the training and support they need to quickly gain confidence and effectiveness in their new role. We will also work to strengthen the voice of governors in the city and explore ways of recognising and celebrating the important work that governors do. In the longer term we will take action to:

- Identify and share best practice and explore the opportunities that cluster working may offer school governance.
- Ensure greater consistency across governing bodies in relation to the role and responsibilities of school governors and how these differ from those of other school leaders including headteachers.
- Promote regular and effective use of governing body self-review to identify areas for improvement.
- Support governors to access the training they need to be effective including understanding school data and asking appropriately challenging questions of the school's leaders and managers.
- Further engage the business community with school governance and promote the benefits of supporting staff to become school governors.
- Ensure that all governing bodies are supported effectively by clerks, headteachers and other key partners including the local authority.

Reflecting the current education landscape in Portsmouth, our efforts will be largely focussed on the governing bodies of maintained schools in the first instance. However, whether pupils attend a maintained or academy school, our priority is securing the best educational outcomes for the children of Portsmouth and as such we will work with the city's academy schools (and their sponsors or providers) in relation to effective school governance and fully engage them as key partners in the delivery of this strategy. We will similarly work with free schools as they emerge (although there are none in the city at the time of writing).

## **Why does Portsmouth need an effective school governance strategy?**

Effective school governance is crucial if Portsmouth is to achieve its ambition to improve the quality of schools, attainment and wider educational outcomes for the city's children and young people. The city's school improvement strategy - *Effective Learning for Every Pupil* - articulates the significance of governance, saying 'Governors are key people in the school system and good governance is important to having an outstanding school.'

Ofsted shares the view that there is a relationship between effective school governance, the quality of leadership and management and the quality of provision and pupil achievement, but has identified this as an area for improvement for the city. In a letter to Portsmouth's Director of Children's Services following a focused Ofsted inspection undertaken in February 2013, the South East Regional Director of Ofsted noted that the need to improve the quality of leadership and management – including governance – was a common theme in the recommendations arising from the six individual school inspections.

Governance was not considered effective in either of the schools judged by Ofsted to be inadequate, with the inspection report noting that governors in one school lacked sufficient oversight of the quality of teaching over time and why leaders' work to secure good teaching had been unsuccessful. In the other school, the inspection team recognised that the governing body understood the school's weaknesses, but did not challenge school leaders effectively enough.

In one of the two schools found by Ofsted to require improvement, governance was judged good, but in the other the inspection team reported that the challenge levelled at the school by its governing body was not strong enough to impact upon improving pupils' achievement (due to insufficient understanding of school data, the strength of school leadership, teaching and pupils' achievement).

The governing bodies in both of the schools judged good were found by Ofsted to be effective, with the inspection reports noting in one school that governors 'use the training they have received from the local authority to interpret national data and refine their skills in challenging the school to maintain and further improve pupils' progress.' In the other school, the inspection team found that governors 'are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they make regular visits to the school to check on how new initiatives are working.' Again, the report notes that governors have benefited from local authority training on a number of topics, including how to review performance data on pupils' progress.

During the period 3 September 2012 to 13 November 2013, a further 22 maintained schools were subject to a school inspection by Ofsted. A review of the inspection reports sees a consistent message emerge: good governance (which again wasn't only found in good schools) was characterised by knowledge of and involvement in the school; ability to understand and interpret data; effective challenge and support; and regularly accessing training and other support from the local authority. Conversely, where issues were identified with governance, these were around the ability to challenge and hold school leaders sufficiently to account and understand and interpret school data.

Further analysis of school governance in Portsmouth is at Appendix 2.

## **Why is effective school governance important?**

The governing body is part of the leadership in a school and the importance of effective school governance becomes evident when we consider what school leaders and managers (including governors) are responsible for.

A school's leaders and managers are responsible for driving school improvement - articulating an ambitious vision for the school, holding high expectations of all pupils, staff and themselves and facilitating good educational attainment by:

- Developing high-quality teaching.
- Providing a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils (including those with Special Educational Needs) and enables them to make progress in their learning such that they can fulfil their potential.
- Supporting pupils' learning and progress in literacy and numeracy (as the foundations for learning across the curriculum).
- Promoting the values and behaviours that will support pupils' learning.
- Engaging parents to support their children's development (educationally and more generally in terms of values and behaviours).
- Ensuring the safety of their pupils.

To achieve this, all school leaders and managers should know the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this knowledge to drive further improvement.

It is important to note here that the governing body is not responsible for the day-to-day management of the school or the operational aspects of school improvement (e.g. lesson observations<sup>1</sup>, staff appraisals and objective setting etc.) The governing body provides strategic leadership, with responsibility for challenging senior leaders and holding them to account for the school's performance and ensuring the financial stability of the school.

Reflecting the increased focus on the effectiveness of a school's governing body, governance has recently been the subject of a Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> Although attending lessons to gather information about the school at work has been cited by Ofsted in its report 'School governance: Learning from the best' as an example of best practice in relation to effective school governance - with the caveat that clear protocols are required to ensure that the purpose of undertaking such a visit is understood by both school staff and governors.

Publishing its report in July 2013, the House of Commons Education Committee concluded that 'governing bodies perform a critical role in school leadership but...vacancies continue to be an issue for many [of them].' It also found that the quality of governance in many schools across the country is inadequate. To address these issues, the Committee made a number of recommendations on how the effectiveness of governance might be improved across four broad areas: the recruitment and retention of governors; governor effectiveness; the relationship between the governing body and headteacher; and new models of governance.<sup>2</sup>

## What is effective school governance?

Ultimately, the effectiveness of a school governing body will be evidenced by the outcomes it helps to secure - namely, school improvement, increased attainment and improved educational outcomes more widely. However, in reaching a judgement on the quality of school governance, Ofsted measures a governing body's performance against a number of criteria. Meeting these criteria will indicate that the governing body is supporting the school on its journey to achieving these outcomes (even if it may not yet have arrived) and can therefore be judged effective.

Under the current arrangements for school inspection<sup>3,4,5</sup> inspectors will consider whether governors:

- Carry out their statutory duties.
- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching.
- Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
- Understand and take sufficient account of pupil data, particularly their understanding and use of the school data dashboard.
- Are aware of the impact of teaching on learning and progress in different subjects and year groups.
- Are challenging and supporting leadership in equal measure.
- Are providing support for an effective headteacher, or whether they are hindering school improvement by failing to tackle key concerns.
- Are transparent and accountable, including in terms of governance structures, attendance at meetings, and contact with parents and carers.
- Understand how the school makes decisions about teachers' salary progression
- Performance manage the headteacher rigorously.
- Are failing to perform well and contributing to weaknesses in leadership and management.
- Are ensuring that the school's finances are properly managed.
- Play a role in deciding how the school is using particular funding e.g. Pupil Premium.

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<sup>2</sup> Great Britain. House of Commons Education Committee. (2013) *The Role of School Governing Bodies*. London: HMSO

<sup>3</sup> *Subsidiary guidance* (110166), Ofsted, 2013; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/subsidiary-guidance-supporting-inspection-of-maintained-schools-and-academies>

<sup>4</sup> *School inspection handbook* (120101), Ofsted, 2013; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-inspection-handbook>

<sup>5</sup> *The framework for school inspection* (120100), Ofsted, 2013; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/framework-for-school-inspection>

## **How will we improve the effectiveness of school governance in Portsmouth?**

In developing the actions that will improve the effectiveness of school governance across Portsmouth, we have consolidated information from a number of sources.

A local perspective on the issues that need to be addressed in order to improve school governance was arrived at by working with key stakeholders (including a working group of governors, headteachers and clerks representing all phases and special schools; the Schools Strategy Board; and the Education Group of Shaping the Future of Portsmouth) to understand their perception of the barriers to effectiveness. A summary of this work can be found in 'Key issues for Portsmouth'.

The action plan and the outcomes that improving school governance will secure were further informed by an Ofsted report - *School governance: learning from the best*<sup>6</sup> - that showcases examples of highly effective governance that is strengthening leadership and contributing to improved outcomes. The report includes what is being done by the 14 outstanding schools visited by inspectors for the purposes of the report, along with individual case studies for each school. Acknowledging that there is no single model of success, the report identifies the key characteristics of effective governing bodies (see Appendix 3).

The recommendations arising from the Parliamentary Select Committee inquiry into the role of school governing bodies were also taken into account in developing the action plan, particularly in relation to greater engagement with employers (both as a source of governors and a means of securing additional support for governing bodies).

Finally, as an action arising from this strategy, we will look at what other local authorities are doing to improve the effectiveness of school governance and identify best practice that could be replicated locally.

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<sup>6</sup> *School governance: Learning from the best* (100238), Ofsted, 2011; <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-school-governance-learning-best>

## Key issues for Portsmouth

- 1) Recruitment and retention
  - a) Governor vacancies - whether there is a genuine shortage of governors that is leaving governing bodies with skills gaps and a lack of capacity or whether the high number of governor vacancies is a function of outdated constitutions, the fact remains that 15% (n. 137) of existing governor positions in the city are currently vacant<sup>7</sup>.
  - b) Securing the right skills and attitudes - effective school governance is dependent on having governors with the right set of skills and a willingness to accept the challenges of being a school governor (including the time commitment involved and the need to undertake training to improve their skills where necessary). Governors need a strong commitment to improving schools and educational outcomes for the children that attend them.
  - c) Providing clarity about the role and responsibilities of governors - ensuring that governors have absolute clarity about what is required of them will help to ensure that prospective governors can make an informed decision as to whether the role is the right one for them. For existing governors, this clarity will help to ensure that the relationship between the governing body and the headteacher is based on a mutual understanding of their different roles and responsibilities, which Ofsted identifies as underpinning effective governance.
  - d) Barriers to recruitment - in developing this strategy a number of barriers to recruitment have been identified including the way in which information about governor vacancies is communicated; the time commitment required (particularly for people who work full time); a lack of support from employers etc. Although it may not be possible to remove all barriers to becoming a governor, there is scope to minimise or mitigate them.
- 2) Take-up of training - Despite nearly all of the city's governing bodies subscribing to the governor training service provided by the local authority (and feedback on the training delivered largely positive), it appears that more than half of the city's governors are not accessing training on a regular basis, with timely take-up of induction training for new governors particularly low.
- 3) Ability to understand and interpret school data - The ability to understand and interpret school data is key to understanding how a school is performing and where initiatives are working; it also underpins effective challenge of senior leaders. A lack of capability in this area has been identified by Ofsted.
- 4) Ability to hold senior leaders to account (effective challenge) - Using school data as evidence, governors need to ask challenging questions of school leaders in a timely and appropriate way. Again, this has been flagged by Ofsted as an area of concern.
- 5) Effective self-review - A governing body's ability to challenge itself and accurately identify its strengths, weaknesses and where skills gaps exist is essential to ensuring that it has the capability and capacity to govern effectively. Effective self-review enables a governing body to identify training needs and skills gaps and should inform any decision on reconstitution. The low take-up of training, together with the areas of concern identified by Ofsted and the low rate of reconstitution all suggest that the effectiveness of self-review by governing bodies in the city could be improved.

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<sup>7</sup> As at 27 November 2013 (Source: PCC Governor Services)

## Appendix A - Effective School Governance Strategy

- 6) Providing the right support - the role of school governor is a challenging one, but it should also be a rewarding one. Governors will be most effective, best able to meet the challenges of the role, deliver school improvement and derive personal satisfaction if they receive the right support. While some governors report feeling well-supported (both by the local authority, their governing body and - in some cases - peers from other governing bodies), more needs to be done to ensure that best practice is shared (particularly in relation to induction for new governors) and all governors in the city feel that they have the level of support they need to do fulfil their role. Work in this area will look at the support provided by:
  - a) The local authority - by Governor Services and the wider School Improvement Service in particular.
  - b) Headteachers
  - c) Clerks - The role of clerk is 'vital to the success of a governing body'<sup>8</sup> particularly in relation to ensuring that governing bodies fulfil their statutory duties and meetings are well-organised and efficient. Additional work is required to understand how effective clerking is across the city's governing bodies and what might be required to improve it.
  - d) The city's business community - in relation to supporting their employees to become governors (recognising the benefit that accrues to their organisation by doing so), but also support more broadly e.g. mentoring chairs, supporting governing bodies to undertake self-evaluation etc.
- 7) Timeliness of intervention where there are concerns about the effectiveness of a governing body - the local authority has already taken action to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays in removing a governing body and replacing it with an Interim Executive Board (IEB) when there's a clear need for intervention. As school governance in the city becomes more effective, the need for this level of intervention should diminish.
- 8) Efficient use of time - There is no question that becoming a governor is a significant time commitment, but there may be opportunities to make the practice of school governance more efficient to ensure that governors' time is used to best effect.

## Action Plan

The action plan at Appendix 1 is a live document that will evolve over time as initial actions are successfully delivered and additional areas of work are identified.

A suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that all actions will contribute to and (where appropriate) action-specific measures will be developed and agreed with Schools Strategy Board, which will be responsible for the performance management of the strategy and action plan (see 'Delivery of the Effective School Governance Strategy').

## Outcomes

Successful delivery of the actions arising from this strategy will secure a number of outcomes that together will see the effectiveness of school governance in the city improve. This will in turn contribute to delivering the school improvement strategy

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<sup>8</sup> Great Britain. House of Commons Education Committee. (2013) *The Role of School Governing Bodies*. London: HMSO, 26-28

## Appendix A - Effective School Governance Strategy

*Effective learning for every pupil* and improving educational outcomes for Portsmouth's pupils.

1. All governing bodies in Portsmouth have the number of governors they need in order to be effective.
2. All governors understand the value of training in relation to fulfilling their role and meeting their responsibility to improve educational outcomes for children in the city; have their training needs identified; and access the necessary training.
3. All governing bodies access their school's data and have the capability within their membership to understand and interpret it.
4. All governors have the knowledge, skills and confidence to ask challenging questions of school leaders.
5. All governing bodies and individual governors have the support they need in order to be effective.
6. All schools and governors in the city share a common understanding of the role and responsibilities of governing bodies and individual governors and how these differ from other school leaders (incl. headteacher) and observe their respective boundaries.
7. All governing bodies undertake regular and robust self-review and use the knowledge and understanding to strengthen governance and drive school improvement.
8. All governing bodies are supported by effective clerks.
9. Employers in the city are fully engaged in school governance and support their employees to be governors (recognising the value that accrues to their organisation by doing so).
10. Time is used efficiently to ensure that governors' contribution adds value and is of maximum benefit to securing school improvement and improved outcomes for pupils.

### **Delivery of the Effective School Governance Strategy**

Portsmouth City Council's Governor Services team will lead on delivery of the Effective School Governance Strategy on behalf of the local authority.

The preferred option for securing the ongoing involvement of governors in the delivery of the strategy and the further development of the action plan will be agreed with the city's Governors' Forum. A continuation of the Effective School Governance Working Group (convened to inform development of the strategy) is one option, but there may be others.

As part of its remit to review progress and the actions needed to meet the targets of the school improvement strategy - *Effective Learning for Every Pupil* - the Schools Strategy Board will also be responsible for the performance management of the Effective School Governance Strategy with the frequency of performance reporting to be agreed.



Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Task	Lead	Timeframe for delivery of action	Milestone(s) or measure(s)
<b>PRIORITY ACTIONS</b>				
<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All governing bodies in Portsmouth have the number of governors they need in order to be effective.</li> <li>All governors understand the value of training in relation to fulfilling their role and meeting their responsibility to improve educational outcomes for children in the city; have their training needs identified and access the necessary training.</li> <li>All governing bodies and individual governors have the support they need in order to be effective.</li> <li>Employers in the city are fully engaged in school governance and support their employees to be governors (recognising the value that accrues to their organisations by doing so).</li> </ul>				
1. Reduce the number of governor vacancies	1.1 Recruitment campaign for local authority governors aimed at general public.	PCC (Governor Services & Comms)	By end Spring term 2014	10 LA governors appointed to vacancies per term.
	1.2 Write to all headteachers and Chairs of Governors re recruiting to governor vacancies at their school. Incl. no. of vacancies and outline support that Governor Services can offer (incl. advice and guidance on the option to reconstitute).	PCC (Governor Services)	By end Jan '14	Reduction in the number of (non-LA) governor vacancies (Baseline: There are currently 107 vacancies across 50 schools ranging from 1 - 8 at individual school level)
	1.3 Write to all existing governors, encouraging them to promote becoming a school governor to family, friends and colleagues.	PCC (Governor Services)	By end Jan '14	

Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Task	Lead	Timeframe for delivery of action	Milestone(s) or measure(s)
	Provide information (incl. fliers?) on where interested parties can find information on how to become a governor.			
	1.4 Continue to work with the Education Group of Shaping the Future of Portsmouth to promote the benefits of becoming a governor to the business community and local employees incl. distribution of recently developed promotional material.	PCC (Governor Services) & Education Group	By end Spring term 2014	
2. Improve the quality and consistency of induction and training for new governors	2.1 Make it a requirement that all LA appointed governors complete induction training and reserve the right to remove LA governors who fail to do so.	PCC (Governor Services)	Ongoing from Jan '14	All newly appointed LA governors have completed induction training by 31 March following the academic year in which they started.
	2.2 Articulate the expectation that all new governors will complete induction training at the point of recruitment.	PCC (Governor Services - for authority governors) & schools (for all other governor types)	Ongoing from Jan '14	Significant uplift in the number of new governors completing induction training by 31 March following the academic year in which

Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Task	Lead	Timeframe for delivery of action	Milestone(s) or measure(s)
				they started (baseline 31%).
	<p>2.3 Encourage all governing bodies to offer an induction scheme for new governors to include as a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tour of school</li> <li>• School induction pack</li> <li>• Mentoring by existing governor for first year in role</li> </ul>	PCC (Governor Services), Headteachers and Chairs of Governors	Ongoing from Jan '14	Increase in number of governing bodies reporting robust induction practices as part of self-review.
3. Strengthen the voice of governors in the city	3.1 Explore establishment of Association of Governors - work with Governors Forum to understand how its remit/constitution might be refreshed to fulfil this function.	PCC (Governor Services & Strategy Unit)	By end Spring term 2014	
	3.2 Recruit Governor Champion with remit to support governing bodies and advocate for them.	PCC (Governor Services)	By end Spring term 2014	

Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Lead	Timeframe for delivery	Milestone(s) or Measure(s)
<b>SHORT TERM ACTIONS</b>			
Outcome: Delivery and performance management of strategy and ongoing development of action plan.			
4. Develop a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and action-specific measures (where appropriate).	Strategy Unit	End Dec '13	
5. Agree frequency of performance monitoring with Schools Strategy Board (SSB).	Strategy Unit	End Dec '13	
6. Identify what other local authorities are doing to improve the effectiveness of school government (specifically in relation to local areas for improvement) and identify best practice that can be replicated locally.	Governor Services	End of Spring term 2014	
7. Agree means of securing ongoing involvement of governors in delivery and further development of the action plan.	Strategy Unit	End Dec '13	
<b>MEDIUM TO LONG TERM ACTIONS</b>			
Outcome: All governing bodies in Portsmouth have the number of governors they need in order to be effective.			
8. Work with governing bodies to reconstitute where appropriate, using self-review to identify the needs of the governing body in terms of size (capacity) and skills (capability) to ensure its effectiveness.	PCC (Governor Services and wider School Improvement Service)	By end academic year 2013/14	
9. Review recruitment processes for all types of governor to ensure that they are robust, fit for purpose and (where possible) consistent.	PCC (Governor Services) and Working Group	By end academic year 2013/14	
10. Ensure that any barriers to the recruitment process are identified and removed.	PCC (Governor Services), Headteachers and Chairs of Governors	By end academic year 2013/14	
Outcome: All schools and governors in the city share a common understanding of the role and responsibilities of governing bodies and individual governors and how these differ from other school leaders (incl. headteacher) and observe their respective			

Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Lead	Timeframe for delivery	Milestone(s) or Measure(s)
boundaries.			
11. Create (and review annually) a standard role description for governors to be adopted by all governing bodies in Portsmouth that: a) Reflects Ofsted's criteria for effective governance b) Has school improvement/improved educational outcomes for pupils at its heart c) Provides absolute clarity about the different roles and responsibilities of the headteacher and governors d) Includes a list of core and desirable competencies incl. questioning skills and data skills	PCC (Governor Services) and Working Group	By Summer half term 2014	
12. Create a role description for LA governors to include their responsibilities to the LA and the LA's responsibilities to them.	PCC (Governor Services)	By Summer half term 2014	
Outcome: All governing bodies undertake regular and robust self-review and use the knowledge and understanding to strengthen governance and drive school improvement.			
13. Develop a common self-review toolkit (pegged to Ofsted's criteria for effective school governance), to include recruitment and induction, succession planning and audit of individual governors' skills.	PCC (Governor Services) and Working Group	By end academic year 2013/14	
14. Secure commitment from all governing bodies to undertake regular self-review (to be determined by individual governing bodies, but not less than once a year).	PCC (Governor Services and wider School Improvement Service)	From Jan '14	
15. Develop a programme of 'peer challenge' - working with volunteers from the business community who will act as a governing body's 'critical friend' and challenge their self-review to ensure that it is accurate.	PCC (Governor Services) & Education Group of Shaping the Future of Portsmouth	By end academic year 2013/14	

Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Lead	Timeframe for delivery	Milestone(s) or Measure(s)
Outcome: All governors understand the value of training in relation to fulfilling their role and meeting their responsibility to improve educational outcomes for children in the city; have their training needs identified; and access the necessary training.			
16. Review existing arrangements for undertaking audits of individual governors' skills to ensure they fit for purpose.	PCC (Governor Services) and Working Group	By end Spring term 2014	
17. Include an audit of individual governors' skills as part of the wider governing body self-review and use this to identify training needs.	Chairs of Governors/Training Liaison Governors	Ongoing	
18. Work with individual governors who are not accessing training to understand the barriers and how they might be overcome. Include this in training for Chairs and Training Liaison Governors.	Chairs of Governors/Training Liaison Governors	Ongoing	
Outcome: All governing bodies and individual governors have the support they need in order to be effective.			
19. Undertake a survey with all governors to establish support and training needs and understand the barriers to accessing training.	PCC (Governor Services)	By end Spring term 2014 and annually thereafter	
20. Use the evidence gathered to frame further actions to ensure support and training needs are met and barriers to training are removed.	PCC (Governor Services) and Working Group	By end academic year 2013/14 and annually thereafter	
21. Explore ways of taking forward work to create a community of governors using social media.	PCC (Comms) and Working Group	By end Spring term 2014	
Outcome: All governing bodies can access school data and have the capability within their membership to understand and interpret it.			
22. Ensure that every governing body has at least one (but preferably two or more) 'data champions' - individual governors who have a firm grasp on school data and can mediate on behalf of the rest of the governing body.	School governing bodies via self-review	Ongoing	
Outcome: All governors have the knowledge, skills and confidence to ask challenging questions of school leaders.			
23. Provide a package of support for governors who need to	PCC (Governor	By end academic	

Effective School Governance - Appendix 1 - Action Plan

Action	Lead	Timeframe for delivery	Milestone(s) or Measure(s)
improve their questioning skills to include training, but also peer support/mentoring, the opportunity to observe best practice and other resources (e.g. examples of good and bad challenging questions).	Services and wider School Improvement Service), Chairs of Governors/Training Liaison Governors	year 2013/14	
Outcome: Time is used efficiently to ensure that governors' contribution adds value and is of maximum benefit to securing school improvement and improved outcomes for pupils.			
24. Explore the opportunities that greater cluster working may offer to improve governing bodies' efficiency.	PCC (Governor Services and wider School Improvement Service)	By end academic year 2013/14	
Outcome: Employers in the city are fully engaged in school governance and support their employees to be governors (recognising the value that accrues to their organisation by doing so).			
25. Continue to work with the Education Group of Shaping the Future of Portsmouth to recruit members of the business community to supporting/troubleshooting roles.	PCC (Governor Services)	Ongoing	
Outcome: All governing bodies are supported by effective clerks			
26. Use the recommendations arising from the Education, Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel review of school governance to develop actions aimed at improving the effectiveness of clerking.	PCC (Strategy Unit)	By end Spring term 2014	

## **An overview of governance in Portsmouth**

As at March 2012, there were 900 governor positions across 65 schools in Portsmouth, with 771 individual governors. Of the available positions, 131 (15%) were vacant and the breakdown of vacancies suggests that parent governors are the hardest to recruit, with vacancies in this category accounting for 40% (n. 52) of all vacancies. Just over a quarter of the city's governing bodies had vacancies of 25% or more.

Governing bodies vary in size and membership and their composition will depend on when the governing body was established. Governing bodies that were established before 1 September 2012 (and have not varied their instrument of governance since that date) must have no fewer than nine governors and no more than twenty. Governing bodies of maintained schools that were established after (or have varied their instrument of government since) that date must have no fewer than seven governors - governing bodies of foundation and voluntary schools will have larger governing bodies due to the additional requirement to have partnership governors and foundation governors (in numbers to be determined by the type of school and the overall size of the governing body).

Because governing bodies are required to set out the total membership of the governing body (i.e. the total number of governors that make up the governing body) in their instrument of government, they are required to replace governors as vacancies arise, even if the departing governor has not left a particular skills gap and there is sufficient capacity amongst the remaining governors for the governing body to be effective.

Consequently, a high number of governor vacancies do not necessarily indicate a genuine shortage of governors - it may simply be a function of an instrument of government that has not kept pace with the changing needs of the governing body and no longer reflects what is required in order for it to discharge its duty to provide effective governance.

More work is required to understand (on a school-by-school basis) where vacancies represent a genuine skills gap on a governing body and where they are merely constitutional. Where vacancies are found to be a function of an outdated instrument of government, a governing body has (since September 2012) the option to reconstitute and replace its existing instrument of government with one that accurately reflects the needs of an effective governing body in relation to the number and type of governors that make up its membership (and undertake to review it regularly to ensure that it continues to be fit-for-purpose).

To date, five maintained schools in Portsmouth (all primary phase) have opted to reconstitute, although only in one instance has this seen an immediate reduction in membership of any significance. Following school amalgamation, a further two governing bodies have been established under the school governance constitution regulations introduced in September 2012. In total therefore, the governing bodies of seven maintained schools in Portsmouth are operating under the new constitution



that sets the minimum number of governors at seven (although the smallest newly constituted governing body has a membership of ten).

The majority of governing bodies in the city (80%) subscribe to the governor training service provided by the local authority, which includes e-learning to allow governors the opportunity to learn at their own pace and at a time to suit them. In the year April 2011 to March 2012, 200 hours of training were delivered by the local authority, of which 75% was centre-based (i.e. delivered at a training venue to governors from multiple governing bodies) and 25% was delivered in-house (i.e. to a single governing body at their school). This training generated a total of 581 attendances by 362 governors - less than half of the governors (47%) in post between April 2011 and March 2012.

Of particular concern in relation to training is the low take-up of local authority-provided induction training for new governors - by the end of March 2012, only 31% (n. 110) of governors new to the role in the 2010/11 academic year had attended all or part of the induction training offered to all new governors.

Reporting on its inquiry into the role of school governing bodies, the House of Commons Education Committee concluded that 'Too many governors have not had suitable training.' Whilst acknowledging the Government's view that training can be encouraged through Ofsted, the Committee recommended that if intervention by Ofsted does not prove effective, the Government should reconsider mandatory training for governors. However, in responding to the Committee's report, the Government has re-iterated its commitment to non-mandatory training for governors, saying 'Good schools don't need government to mandate training. Universal mandatory training risks being inappropriate for some and a barrier to recruiting for others.'<sup>9</sup>

To address this issue, there is a need to understand why a significant proportion of the city's governors appear not to be accessing the training that their schools purchase from the local authority. Additionally, there is a need to understand the extent to which schools are using other training providers or arranging their own provision and how the quality of this training is assured.

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<sup>9</sup> Great Britain. House of Commons Education Committee. (2013) *The Role of School Governing Bodies: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2013-14*. London: HMSO

## Key characteristics of effective governing bodies

In its report *School governance: Learning from the best*, Ofsted showcases examples of highly effective governance that is strengthening leadership and contributing to improved outcomes. The report examines the principles and practices of fourteen governing bodies judged outstanding and identifies some of the key characteristics of effective governing bodies, reproduced in full below:

- Positive relationships between governors and school leaders are based on trust, openness and transparency. Effective governing bodies systematically monitor their school's progress towards meeting agreed development targets. Information about what is going well and why, and what is not going well and why, is shared. Governors consistently ask for more information, explanation or clarification. This makes a strong contribution to robust planning for improvement.
- Governors are well informed and knowledgeable because they are given high-quality, accurate information that is concise and focused on pupil achievement. This information is made accessible by being presented in a wide variety of formats, including charts and graphs.
- Outstanding governors are able to take and support hard decisions in the interests of pupils: to back the head teacher when they need to change staff, or to change the head teacher when absolutely necessary.
- Outstanding governance supports honest, insightful self-evaluation by the school, recognising problems and supporting the steps needed to address them.
- Absolute clarity about the different roles and responsibilities of the headteacher and governors underpins the most effective governance. Protocols, specific duties and terms of reference are made explicit in written documents.
- Effective governing bodies are driven by a core of key governors such as the chair and chairs of committees. They see themselves as part of a team and build strong relationships with the headteacher, senior leaders and other governors.
- In eight of the 14 schools visited, governors routinely attend lessons to gather information about the school at work. All the governors who were interviewed visit their schools regularly and talk with staff, pupils and parents. Clear protocols for visits ensure that the purpose is understood by school staff and governors alike. Alongside the information they are given about the school, these protocols help them to make informed decisions, ask searching questions and provide meaningful support.
- School leaders and governors behave with integrity and are mutually supportive. School leaders recognise that governors provide them with a different perspective which contributes to strengthening leadership. The questions they ask challenge assumptions and support effective decision-making.
- Governors in the schools visited, use the skills they bring, and the information they have about the school, to ask challenging questions, which are focused on improvement, and hold leaders to account for pupils' outcomes.

### Effective School Governance - Appendix 3 - Key characteristics of effective governing bodies

- Time is used efficiently by governors because there are clear procedures for delegating tasks, for example to well organised committees. These committees have clear terms of reference, provide high levels of challenge and use governors' expertise to best effect. Systems are in place for sharing information and reporting back to the full governing body. This does not merely reiterate what has already been discussed in detail by the committee but focuses on the key points and decisions.
- The role of the clerk to the governors is pivotal to ensuring that statutory duties are met, meetings are well organised and governors receive the information they need in good time. Consequently, governors come to meetings well prepared and with pertinent questions ready so that they are able to provide constructive challenge.
- A detailed timeline of activities, maintained by the clerk and linked to the school development plan, provides a clear structure for the work of governors and ensures that their time is used appropriately.
- Governors in the schools visited, use their external networks and professional contacts to fill any identified gaps in the collective skills of the governing body.
- There are clear induction procedures for new governors which help them to understand their roles and responsibilities and ensure that best use is made of their varied skills and expertise.
- The governing bodies constantly reflect on their own effectiveness and readily make changes to improve. They consider their own training needs, as well as how they organise their work.